



Speech by

Hon. T. McGRADY

MEMBER FOR MOUNT ISA

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MINING AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Hon. T. McGRADY (Mount Isa—ALP) (Minister for Mines and Energy and Minister Assisting the Deputy Premier on Regional Development) (3.16 p.m.), in reply: I thank the three speakers who have participated in this debate. I thank the Opposition for its support for what we are trying to do here today. I was taking notes of some of the comments being made by the shadow Minister. Mr Deputy Speaker, in common with him, I would have been happy to have participated in a full-blown debate, but I respect the rulings that you have made this afternoon—and I think rightly so, too. The amendments are about three issues and this was not supposed to be a debate or a discussion about the whole of the Queensland mining industry.

I wish to make one observation. In the 50 or so minutes during which the shadow Minister spoke not once did he use the word "safety". This is what one of these amendments is about—safety in the mining industry. It is not about production at all costs. There would be no greater advocate for the mining industry than I in this place. I am not trying to throw bouquets to myself. While in Canada recently I had discussions with mining Ministers from around the world. During those discussions I could almost have closed my eyes and believed that I was back in Queensland. The impediments to which the shadow Minister referred with respect to native title or cultural heritage are not peculiar to Queensland; this is a global issue. It is a global problem, if we want to use that word.

Mr Schwarten: Especially in Canada.

Mr McGRADY: But it is not only an issue in Canada or the United States; I was flabbergasted to find out that there were native title issues in Finland. There are people in this State trying to make out that these issues are peculiar to Queensland. These are global issues. It is all very well to say that if we bury our heads in the sand it will all disappear, but it will not.

Mr SEENEY: I rise to a point of order. I take offence at the suggestion that that was the attitude that I took. I find that misrepresentation offensive, and I ask that it be withdrawn.

Mr McGRADY: I withdraw anything at all which the honourable member finds upsetting.

Some of my colleagues in the Queensland mining industry were running around for quite some time complaining about the legislation which the Beattie Government brought in with respect to native title. Today those same people—rightfully so, too—are running to Canberra and anyone who is prepared to listen to tell people what excellent legislation this is. And it is good legislation. The mining industry in Queensland certainly knows and understands that.

I want to be brief in my summation of this debate. Let me say that some of the comments that were made by the shadow Minister about doubts about the future of mining in this State are quite wrong. I have a great deal of confidence in the ability of this industry to grow stronger. The member for Burnett mentioned before that there is a doubt about the future of the coal industry. Members have to understand that, in the past 12 months, the Beattie Labor Government has given generation licences for some four new coal-fired power stations, which will take the amount of coal which would be required from 17 million tonnes a year to about 20 million tonnes a year. So there is no attempt by this Government to destroy the coal industry; in fact, quite the reverse is true.

The other point I want to make is that, when one travels around the world, particularly to Asian countries, one finds that Queensland has a tremendous reputation because, as the member for Burnett was saying before, not only do we have some of the best coals in the world, we also have the infrastructure which is as good, if not better, than that in any other part of the world. We do not have ships lining up outside the ports waiting to be filled or emptied. We have a very, very efficient infrastructure and, despite what some people from time to time try to make out, the industrial relations situation in our mines and in our ports is second to none. Sure, from time to time we have the little Boer Wars, but the perception that the Asians in particular have about Queensland and the Queensland mining industry is quite excellent.

As I said, I want to be brief, but I would also like to compliment the member for Gladstone for the comments she has made. She rightly raised the question of safety in the mining industry. There is no more important issue today than safety in this industry.

Mr Johnson: Hear, hear!

Mr McGRADY: That is right. There is no more important issue than safety. We simply cannot afford to have a mentality of production at all costs. Production is important; production is vital to the future of our industry, but so, too, is safety. As the member for Gladstone said and some other person said on television the other night, it behoves the industry to see the person going to work and that night being returned safe to his or her home. There has to be greater attention given to safety in this industry and, with all humility, I believe that the legislation which this Parliament carried late last year will go a long way to restoring or bringing safety into this industry.

My final comment on these amendments is in reference to explosives. We are asking for an extension of time for the existing Explosives Regulation. The result of the terrible and tragic accident that occurred a week or so ago is that it will allow us as a Parliament to consider what moves we need to take to try to ensure that those sorts of accidents do not happen again. Already we as a Government have made some changes to the way in which that particular industry is conducted. I would hope that in the time available to us we can really get involved as a result of these amendments, if they are carried by the Parliament. I welcome the Opposition to come along and have some input into how we can improve that part of the industry.

Mr Speaker, I would have loved to have been able to take another 23 minutes, but I am bound by the rulings that you gave to the member for Callide and the member for Burnett, so I will conclude my remarks. Just let me conclude by saying that the Queensland mining industry, whether it be the metalliferous side or the coal side or the other associated parts, in my opinion is in good health. There are some issues there which have to be faced, but we are no Robinson Crusoe. The issues that we are confronting here, whether it be native title, cultural heritage or anything else, are the same sorts of issues which are being confronted by the mining industry right across the globe. I thank all those members who participated in this discussion today. I thank them for the support that they have offered for these amendments.
