



Speech by
Jan Jarratt

MEMBER FOR WHITSUNDAY

Hansard Tuesday, 16 October 2007

MINING AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Ms JARRATT (Whitsunday—ALP) (3.58 pm): It is with pleasure that I rise to speak in support of the Mining and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. This bill amends a variety of acts in response to operational and administrative issues which have been identified in reviews undertaken at both departmental and industry levels. Just as the petroleum, gas and mining industries in this state continue to grow and evolve, so legislation must grow and evolve in order to protect the safety of workers and develop the regulatory system that underpins effectiveness and efficiency in these industries. The safety of workers in the mining industry must be a paramount consideration for government and mining companies. Mining, particularly underground mining, is a dangerous business in which a variety of variables can coincide to place workers in peril.

We were reminded of this just last weekend when a memorial service was held in Collinsville to commemorate the lives of 26 miners that have been lost in the nearby coalfields since coalmining began in the area in 1919. Those lost lives include those of the seven miners who died in 1954 and whose deaths became the driving force for a community who, united in grief, became determined that no more families should experience this trauma. I note and thank the minister for his attendance at that commemorative service last Saturday. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend owing to another function, but my thoughts were with the people of Collinsville on Saturday as they marked this particularly traumatic time in their lives.

The amendments contained in this bill which pertain to safety are mostly of a minor nature. However, safety is an incremental achievement that is built upon responses to the experience of those who work in the industry and those who are charged with maintaining a safe working environment. I expect that we will return to this place again in the future with further amendments as our knowledge grows and conditions change.

Coalmining is nothing if not a growing and evolving industry in the state. I remember in 2001, as the new member for Whitsunday, gathering around a table in Mackay with representatives of various government departments wondering just what we would do with all of those empty houses at Moranbah. At that stage Moranbah appeared doomed to become something of a ghost town. It was a serious issue that there were so many houses that were standing vacant out in the middle of what seemed at that point to be nowhere. Now, just the opposite is true and we are scrambling to deal with issues such as housing availability and skills shortages. It is a double-edged sword but it is much better to have this problem than the reverse.

Each year the mining and mineral processing industries contribute around \$1.45 billion in royalties to the state's economy. They provide direct employment for around 19,000 people. That is 19,000 people across all mining industries, but I understand that about 18,000 of those people work in the coalmining industry, both underground and open cut. It is estimated that mining related industries provide employment for another 65,000 Queenslanders, but it is hard to say how this figure can be limited. For example, in the Mackay-Whitsunday region around 250 companies provide some form of direct support to the mining industry. But each of these companies are supported by another level of service support, and so it goes on.

In fact, the economy of the entire region in one way or another is tied at this point to the coalmining activity.

I want to make reference to the issue regarding the granting of an extension lease at Xstrata's Wollemi mine, which has received media coverage over the past few days. The Premier was reported as saying that the government would deal with this issue through legislative action. Indeed, an amendment to the act has been circulated today. In doing so, we are hoping to provide certainty for both the mining company and the 190-odd employees who depend on this mine for their livelihoods. I certainly support this proposed action and would lend my support to any amendment that might be brought to the House today that secures the future of this mine and its workers.

I would have to say that Xstrata is a fine corporate citizen in the town of Bowen, where in the hinterland it operates mining ventures and also the coke works in the town of Bowen itself. Xstrata undertakes a community support program where every year it lends support to the community in various ways. I acknowledge that and thank Xstrata for its contribution. We would like to see more of that. Xstrata not only provides employment for the people of the region but also gives back in other ways. It adds value to the lives of everyone who live in the community.

I think it is important to note that it is possible to undertake a legislative remedy for the issues that we have just been discussing. Indeed, this remedy sets no precedent that would alter the existing approval process for any other future mine. I think that is an important point to make. Queensland's position as a reliable business operator in a competitive coalmining arena must be protected within reasonable bounds because, like it or not, our prosperity into the future is largely tied to the existence of our considerable mineral resources. We must act reasonably and responsibly to protect our reputation.

I also welcome the amendments in this bill to the Geothermal Exploration Act 2004, which will support geothermal exploration by allowing for extensions to exploration permits. This will allow permit holders further time to assess the resources and possibly apply for a production tenure. It is early days for the geothermal industry and many questions remain to be answered, such as whether or not this form of power generation will ever play a major role in energy production in this state. But I applaud the possibility that it provides and supports the development of this source of clean energy. Therefore, I commend this amendment and all the other amendments in the bill to the House.