



Speech by

Liz Cunningham

MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE

Hansard Tuesday, 16 October 2007

MINING AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (3.52 pm): I rise to speak to the Mining and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. Whilst there are no underground mines in my electorate—there are a small number of open-cut mines—I want to place on record my concern with regard to further changes to the mine safety inspection process. I am not saying that the changes are bad or good, but over the years we have seen changes in the administration and the authority of mine safety inspectors. There have been varied reactions to those changes. There have been those who have said that it has resulted in a diminution of the power of the inspector to be independent and to make assessments and speak openly about safety concerns, particularly with regard to underground mines. The underground mining industry is very unforgiving in terms of safety issues. Workers in the open-cut mining industry have some degree of future, if you like, if there is an incident, but in underground mines there is no room for error. Certainly, changes to mine safety inspectors and their powers should always be to increase the safety for workers in that environment rather than in any way compromise the independence of the Mine Inspectorate in relation to its work.

This legislation deals with a number of issues. The Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995 will be amended. I want to put on the record that in the coal industry generally workplace health and safety is an important issue, particularly in relation to coal dust. There is significant coal movement around Queensland on trains. There have been various calls over the years for coal loads to be either covered or to have dust suppression sprays applied, and I think that that is something that needs to be constantly under review by this minister and by the minister for transport in relation to potential workplace health and safety implications not only for the workers in the industry but also for people who live adjacent to railway lines. The minister's second reading speech stated—

The opportunity has been taken to include in the Geothermal Exploration Act 2004, the Mineral Resources Act 1989, the Petroleum Act 1923 and the Petroleum and Gas (Production and Safety) Act 2004 a power for the making of directions on how information is to be provided in forms and other material required under the legislation.

The directions will be published and will give certainty to industry as to how they do business under these Acts. The amendments will give legislative support to the directions, their publication and their enforceability.

For all of those involved in industries, the clarity and transparency of the process under which they operate is critically important. In my own electorate there have been a number of incidents, in particular at the Cement Australia limestone mine at Bracewell, where a section of the community that lives around that mine—the section of the community that has been impacted by that mine—would say that they find it really difficult to gain a firm understanding of the operational constraints and the operational framework of that mine on a yearly basis. I want to table a letter from David Smith, Brian Finlayson and Peter James, who are consultants to EEMAG.

Tabled paper: Copy of a letter, dated 21 September 2007, from D I Smith, Brian L Finlayson, Peter M James, consulting to EEMAG to the Hon. Craig Wallace MP, in relation to East End Mine, Groundwater Issues.

That letter outlines the concerns of those three consultants in relation to the process under the mining act. The letter is to the Department of Natural Resources and Water.

The element I want to touch on relates to the lack of consideration—the lack of information—available in the mining process with regard to impacts outside the mining lease. This legislation deals with the legislative framework of the operation of mines in part, and there have been other amendments to this legislation. However, it should never be forgotten that, irrespective of where the mine is—unless it is out west where there is no community, and I include in that rural industry as in grazing and other rural pursuits—mining does have an impact and it has an impact beyond the mine. Those people who are impacted have to have a process available to them that is transparent, that is able to be understood and that has directions to the mining operators that these landowners can have recourse to in relation to off-mine site impacts on their quality of life and on their properties.

This bill makes a number of changes to legislation, and I am certainly not about to go through all of them. But any changes that will make the operation of mines and the constraints on mine operations clearer and easier to follow will be welcomed.