



Speech by

Andrew Cripps

MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

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MINES AND ENERGY LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr CRIPPS (Hinchinbrook—LNP) (4.43 pm): I rise to make a short contribution to the debate on the Mines and Energy Legislation Amendment Bill. One of the major issues that the bill deals with is the state government's proposal to prohibit exploration and development of the McFarlane oil shale deposit near Proserpine for 20 years. The explanatory notes accompanying this bill indicate that Queensland contains 94 per cent of Australia's known shale oil resources. As such, the state government's decision to intervene and prohibit the development of the McFarlane oil shale deposit for that period of time has significant ramifications for the future of Queensland in terms of its economic and industrial development.

The amendments in relation to the oil shale deposit near Proserpine put into effect the commitments made by Premier Bligh to implement a 20-year moratorium on the exploration for and mining of oil shale, the processing of oil shale or preparatory activities for mining of oil shale at the McFarlane oil shale deposit near Proserpine. This bill also proposes important and significant amendments to the Mineral Resources Act 1989 to introduce a power for the minister to reject applications for the grant, renewal or variation of mining tenements in the public interest and to introduce a power to impose conditions on the grant, renewal or variation of mining tenements in the public interest where those powers do not already exist under the Mineral Resources Act 1989.

These amendments are being proposed to give the current Minister for Mines and Energy the broad discretion required to implement the Queensland government's stated oil shale policy. The explanatory notes accompanying the bill indicate that these amendments about the oil shale deposit near Proserpine sail close to the wind insofar as breaching fundamental legislative principles is concerned, as the proposed moratorium for the McFarlane oil shale site affects the rights of the landowners involved.

The state Labor government insists that this amendment is necessary to implement the overriding public interest to provide certainty with regard to the impact of these activities on the environment in the Proserpine area. However, this public interest test will have much wider ramifications for Queensland than simply preventing the development of the McFarlane oil shale mining project near Proserpine for the next 20 years. The tension between competing land uses in Queensland since the mining boom has emerged as a pillar of Queensland's recent economic strength has recast the definition of what is and what is not a viable operation across the state, and it has forced many different stakeholders and communities, particularly in regional and rural areas of Queensland, to reconsider their priorities. In particular, in recent times a real quandary has emerged in respect of the competing interests between the economic imperative of the mining industry and the strategic and long-term capacity of countries to provide good quality food and fibre to its populations through the sustainable farming of prime agricultural land.

Circumstances have changed in recent years. Never before have the mining sector and the agricultural sector been in direct competition for land suitable and desirable for both mining and farming to the extent currently being experienced. The LNP opposition appreciates that, strategically, prime agricultural land is an extremely important asset to a community, to a state and to a nation. To that end, I am pleased that the LNP opposition has resolved, as indicated by the shadow minister for mines and energy, the member for Callide, that it will be the policy of an LNP government to utilise the amendments

proposed in this bill to provide the minister with the power to reject applications for the grant, renewal or variation of mining tenements in the public interest to protect prime agricultural land in Queensland.

Certainly the LNP believes strongly in the rights of landowners and titleholders to security. However, in these circumstances, governments need to act strategically and set priorities. Our prime agricultural land is a priority for the LNP, and the good quality food and fibre that our farming communities produce in Queensland are a strategic asset. The protection of that strategic asset is in the public interest.