Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

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CONTAMINATION FROM MOUNT LEYSHON GOLD MINE

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (9.52 pm): I bring to the attention of the House a recent potential environmental catastrophe involving a toxic cocktail released from the Mount Leyshon Gold Mine site into major creeks, rivers and tributaries near Charters Towers during the heavy rain on 15 January. The Mount Leyshon Gold Mine is owned by Leyshon Resources Ltd and has been inactive since 2001. Newmont Mining Corporation is responsible for all site maintenance and the site has not yet been rehabilitated. This is not a new argument. There have been reports of leakages since 2001, yet the EPA has done little in the way of pressuring the mining company to do a complete rehabilitation of the site to put an end to spillages once and for all.

The contamination came from the overflow of at least five of the mine's stormwater ponds and highly contaminated skats which flowed into nearby creeks, such as the Puddler, the Clarke, the Two Mile, the Seventy Mile and other tributaries and which then went into the Broughton River which flows into the Burdekin.

After the contamination outbreak, Newmont mining warned a small number of landowners in close vicinity of the site to get their livestock out of the creeks and to not drink the yet to be seen contaminated water. What the company failed to do was warn up to 100 families further downstream who rely on this water for all domestic, livestock and agricultural purposes that their water had the potential to be contaminated.

Most alarming is that the company advised the EPA on 16 January, yet the EPA was invisible for up to 20 days after the outbreak. It is unbelievable that families were drinking, bathing and swimming in water for up to 20 days after the EPA knew about the incident but it did nothing. During that period there were reports of children with stomach upsets and bird deaths—with dead plovers, doves, finches and galahs—and still families were never made aware of the contamination spill.

Reports from the EPA that it could not get through because floodwaters had cut access to the area were nonsense because there is a bitumen road right to the mine site. Access was possible within two days. The mining company immediately used a helicopter to assess the contamination spill. With Treasury's resources and the department's ability to access helicopters and four-wheel drives, I cannot see why the EPA found access to be such an insurmountable problem. The potential risk factor to human health should be a matter of urgency. I suggest that, if there had been reports of harm, disturbance or stress to the flying foxes, we would have had an army of EPA heavies swarming the town.

The minister also insulted residents by saying that they should not drink untreated water from flooding streams. I believe the minister has taken the advice of Brisbane bureaucrats and needs to get out of his subterranean existence and venture out into rural Queensland. Rural Queenslanders for generations have used untreated creek, river, rain and bore water and normally do not have access to town water. What they are not accustomed to is using contaminated water.

The EPA procrastination will never provide a true accurate reading of the amount of contamination in the waterways, as by the time EPA officers got out to test the water 20 days later a number of latter storms had flushed the contaminated waterways. The EPA must take a number of follow-up, independent water

analysis samples from along the Broughton, including the creeks and tributaries, to assure affected families that they do not need to fear a devaluation in their properties, that they can continue to use the water for their agricultural products and their livestock and that they will not be drinking or bathing in contaminated water. The EPA must support residents along the waterways and pressure the mining company to do a complete rehabilitation of the site to put an end to spillages once and for all.

Time expired.