



Speech by

**Shane Knuth**

**MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS**

Hansard Tuesday, 28 October 2008

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## **MINES AND ENERGY LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr KNUTH** (Charters Towers—LNP) (4.16 pm): In speaking to the Mines and Energy Legislation Amendment Bill I would like to raise issues that could have long-term implications for the future of the Queensland agricultural industry. The introduction of the Mines and Energy Legislation Amendment Bill follows an announcement by the Premier to declare a 20-year moratorium on oil shale exploratory and mining activities in the McFarlane deposit in the Whitsunday region. The government states that the reason behind this decision to enforce the moratorium is primarily environmental with concerns over the adverse effects oil shale activities would have on the Great Barrier Reef.

We all recognise the importance of the Great Barrier Reef, not only because it is environmentally unique but also because of the tourism that it generates. While this is supported, the provisions in this bill could also be used to protect prime agricultural land from mining. While the current government gets excited by the prospect of mining development in areas currently used for agricultural purposes, farmers are concerned at the lack of protection afforded these industries. Competition for land is one of the greatest threats to the future of the agricultural industry. The majority of prime agricultural land is subject to exploration permits, and mining development is changing the landscape of rural Queensland at breathtaking rates. In recent months the Minister for Mines and Energy has granted exploration permits in far-north Queensland for land currently used for agricultural purposes. Mining exploration permits extended over more than 300 square kilometres around Malanda, and dairy farmers are understandably concerned with these developments and the future protection and development of their industries. Farmers across the state are gobsmacked that the benefits of their ongoing contribution to the economic wellbeing of the state are less important than the finite and short-term contribution of the mining industry.

While we completely support the mining industry, it is not at any cost. We do not support the exploration of prime agricultural land to satisfy the corporate bottom line of the mining companies. Landowners are flabbergasted at the apparent bias towards the mining sector and are concerned that inadequate productive land will remain available for future food production.

I have a number of coalmines in my electorate. I opposed the coalmine that was about to be developed at the doorstep of Moranbah and likewise the coalminers opposed that. However, the state government supported it, I remind it, because it could see that \$18 million in royalties would come out of that coalmine right at the doorstep of Moranbah. We need to protect the people who have to put up with silicon dust and other hazards of mining, and we need to have a balance when it comes to prime agricultural land. The continued destruction of prime farming land will have a devastating effect on the long-term food supply, rural communities and the environment. If Australia is to play its part in the current global food crisis, we must put in place mechanisms to protect land currently used for agricultural purposes.