




Speech By
Lachlan Millar

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

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MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

BHP Billiton Mitsubishi Alliance

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (11.48 am): On 1 September I attended a public meeting in Blackwater chaired by the member for Mirani, who is well known for his longstanding ties to the mining industry in the Bowen Basin coalfields. About 700 people attended the meeting, which was the result of an announcement by BHP Billiton Mitsubishi Alliance that they are going to outsource mobile maintenance and drill-and-blast operations at the Blackwater mine to Downer EDI. This will affect 306 positions, including 150 which are currently held as permanent employee positions. Each of these positions represents a Blackwater family—a dad or a mum with children—who not only work at the mine but are the very social fabric of this community.

They are also the local volunteer at the rural fire brigade, the junior rugby league coach of the Blackwater Crushers, the person behind the canteen at the many sporting grounds in Blackwater and the community leader who spends many hours to ensure that we have a P&F at our local primary and high schools in Blackwater. Each of these positions represent a Blackwater family, and the community is very uncertain and fearful of its future. This announcement is having an impact on small business confidence. Families in these towns shop locally at the supermarket, the hardware store, the auto-electrician and the tyre fitter, so it is not only affecting families but small businesses in Blackwater. Many of the people who live in Blackwater and work at the mine also have small businesses in Blackwater. They may be the local hairdresser, the local florist or they may have the local takeaway shop in those towns.

As a coalmining town Blackwater is fully aware of the need to create savings during this extended mining downturn; however, the emotional and social impacts of losing further jobs in the town cannot be overstated. I have met with BMA representatives, and they have assured me that they will make every effort to maintain confidence in the community and to either redeploy permanent employees or offer them voluntary redundancies; however, as this coincides with further extensions to mining camps for non-resident workers in the town, many at the meeting saw this as a trial run for casualisation of the mining workforce. When we have casualisation of employment in regional areas like Blackwater, it has a huge impact on those towns. Young people are unable to achieve the job security necessary to get a loan to buy a house and start a family, regardless of how good they are in their job or how hard they work.

With the downturn in the Bowen Basin we have also seen workers who are left without employment or their entitlements when mining contractors have gone into liquidation, as has recently occurred with one large firm affecting employees in Emerald. Of course, BMA and Downer are both companies of such sufficient size and stature that the current announcement need not be a concern, but we need to think carefully about whether this is an appropriate workplace practice in modern-day

Queensland, especially for regional Queensland and the mining communities throughout the Bowen Basin. These types of decisions shape the very people we are, the society we will become and the legacy we leave our children.