




Speech By
Jarrold Bleijie

MEMBER FOR KAWANA

Record of Proceedings, 18 August 2016

MOTION: BLACK LUNG DISEASE

 **Mr BLEIJIE** (Kawana—LNP) (6.22 pm): I support the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition to set up a commission of inquiry with respect to the re-emergence of black lung disease in the state of Queensland. I want to express some concern with respect to the amendment that has been moved by the government because, as I will explain in the next five minutes, there is quite a substantial difference between a parliamentary inquiry and the powers of a full commission of inquiry.

This issue of black lung disease should be above politics. This is the re-emergence of black lung disease in Queensland. I was industrial relations minister, sitting where the employment minister is, with the responsibility for workers compensation and, in my time in that role, my recollection is not one incident like this came across my desk and had to be dealt with. My concern is that, with the re-emergence of black lung disease, we will tend to have policy on the run in dealing with this issue. As more and more cases arise, WorkCover will change its policies, government will change its policies, but the best form of disinfectant is to let the sunshine in on this particular issue.

I see the merits of a parliamentary inquiry but, having established three commissions of inquiry myself when I was the Attorney-General, which included the Health payroll inquiry and the racing industry inquiry—and we have had the Barrett centre royal commission of inquiry recently under this government—I can say that there is quite a difference between a commission of inquiry and a parliamentary inquiry. With a commission of inquiry, you have the gravitas of a former Supreme Court or a retired District Court judge—or, in fact, a sitting judge, as Justice Cate Holmes was at the time when she presided over the flood commission of inquiry. Commissions of inquiry have the full powers of a royal commission. In fact, in Queensland, the only difference between a royal commission of inquiry and a commission of inquiry is, at the federal level, the name of the legislation. At the federal level, it is the Royal Commissions Act. In Queensland, it is the Commissions of Inquiry Act. The powers are the same. In fact, the Governor issues and signs the letters patent on behalf of the government. A commission of inquiry is protected under the Westminster tradition of a royal commission because the letters patent are issued by the Governor.

As I said, we are seeing the re-emergence of this issue. I understand all honourable members' sincere, genuine concern with respect to this issue, but I think that we ought not in the next five, 10 or 20 years time have policy on the run when dealing with more and more cases of black lung disease. Let us have a full royal commission, with the full powers of a royal commission, instituted by a former retired District Court or Supreme Court judge to work out a road map. Just like Carmody worked out a road map for child protection in the state of Queensland, let us get a road map on how to deal with the re-emergence of black lung disease in Queensland rather than in two years time seeing a lot of former coalminers having to get compensation.

A few nights ago, I was moved to hear Steve Mellor's story when watching the *7.30 Report*. Steve was caring for his sick father and then he was diagnosed with black lung disease himself. I think it is

pertinent that all honourable members read the story about Keith Stoddart, which appears today in the *Brisbane Times*. That article states—

Given the choice, former coalminer Keith Stoddart would have swapped his black lung diagnosis for cancer because at least then 'they may have been able to cut it out'.

We have people, as reported in the *Brisbane Times*, wishing that they had cancer rather than black lung disease so at least they can cut it out. As we have seen on the *7.30 Report*, I think there are issues with the industry, with the medical profession and with the union. A royal commission is not a blame game. It is not set up to find out who is at fault; it is to acknowledge the fact that black lung disease is in our miners across Queensland now, it is going to become more of an issue and we should jump on this opportunity to deal with it now. Let us find out how the re-emergence of black lung disease in the state of Queensland came about. I think the best way to do that is through a royal commission with the gravitas of a retired Supreme Court or District Court judge.

It is inevitable that parliamentary inquiries are political. When you have politicians involved in parliamentary inquiries, they are political. Let us get above that. Let us endorse a royal commission and have the gravitas of a former judge independently looking at this matter. Let us set a road map for the future in a bipartisan way so that we can help those affected by black lung disease.

(Time expired)