




Speech By
Hon. Cameron Dick

MEMBER FOR WOODRIDGE

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MOTION

Coal Workers' Pneumoconiosis Select Committee, Report

 **Hon. CR DICK** (Woodridge—ALP) (Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services) (6.24 pm): I rise tonight to support the amendment moved by the Minister for State Development and Minister for Natural Resources and Mines. Safety at work is a human right. The financial and legislative capital we invest in developing the practices and regulatory framework that minimise preventable harm in the workplace is a measurement of our values. Earning a living should not mean risking your life. When a dangerous condition like pneumoconiosis, a malady we thought we had eradicated, re-emerges we are rightly alarmed and reminded that safe practice requires constant vigilance.

The resources boom has delivered a great dividend to Queensland, with coal the greatest benefactor. We owe a great debt of gratitude to those who toil to mine it, most particularly those whose work has enriched us all to their own personal detriment. The Palaszczuk Labor government has responded decisively to that challenge. Tonight I want to pay particular tribute to my colleague and my friend the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines for his critical leadership on this issue. As one of our state's leading maxillofacial surgeons the minister's hands and heart have saved and changed countless lives. As a leading clinician and as a man of deep compassion, few people know the impact a devastating and pernicious disease like black lung can have on a life better than Dr Lynham.

Indeed, from a health perspective I can advise the House that Queensland Health has been working with the Department of Natural Resources and Mines to develop strategies to deliver improved health outcomes for mineworkers. As a doctor, Minister Lynham knew that when this issue arose the best way forward was to commission a full and independent review to understand where the system had failed. The Monash review of the respiratory component of the coalmine workers health scheme has made 18 recommendations, 11 of which have been implemented, with the remaining seven underway. This is a set of solutions grounded firmly in science that will deliver real protections for our miners—actions by the minister, not words.

One of the most significant improvements to the scheme is the introduction of the dual read X-ray system. To date over 14,000 X-rays have been received to be read under the interim dual X-ray system. These X-rays are read once in Australia, sent to be read by B readers in Chicago, Illinois in the United States and then returned. This interim measure will remain in place until we are confident that the system we are establishing in Queensland will operate with the same rigour to protect our miners—action by the minister, not words.

I am also pleased to report to the House that just the other day the new X-ray imaging standards were finalised, mandating that certain techniques be used to capture appropriately clear images using the International Labor Organization four-grade standard. The Department of Natural Resources and Mines is currently in the advanced stage of evaluating tenders for the dual X-ray contract. In addition, the new spirometry standards currently being worked on by a collective medical group that includes members of the Thoracic Society will be finalised by the end of 2017—more action by the minister, not words.

A lot has been said about poor X-ray reading through this process. Queensland Health has just recently endorsed the clinical pathways for diagnosis of coal workers' pneumoconiosis. This was developed by the Coal Mine Dust Lung Disease Collaborative in conjunction with Dr Bob Cohen from the University of Illinois—more action by the government, not words.

In addition to this, nominated medical advisers will soon be required to undertake specific training to ensure they are appropriately trained to understand the specifics involved in health care and in the surveillance of mines. These nominated medical advisers are now also on a register managed by the Department of Natural Resources and Mines—more action by the minister, not words. Should they not fulfil their training requirements or not meet new standards, they will no longer be on the eligible list of NMAs that miners can visit for their medical checks. By mid-2018 an e-records health system will be completed for the management of Queensland miners' health records—more action by the Palaszczuk Labor government, not words.

The Palaszczuk government will always fight to deliver appropriate protection for Queenslanders in their workplaces. Labour must never be reduced to a unit of cost on a balance sheet but must always be measured in terms of human endeavour and the human vulnerabilities that comprise it. I thank the committee for its work and, in particular, the minister for his contribution to improving the safety of Queensland coalminers.