




Speech By  
**Craig Crawford**

**MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER**

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**COAL WORKERS' PNEUMOCONIOSIS SELECT COMMITTEE: REPORT,  
MOTION TO TAKE NOTE**

 **Mr CRAWFORD** (Barron River—ALP) (12.36 pm): One fact that came out of the investigation by the committee into coal workers' pneumoconiosis was that in 1984 there were 75 cases of black lung in Queensland yet in the very next year—1985—there were none. Each year after through until 2014 there were no cases reported. Nothing in 1984 or 1985 changed. Black lung just went away—as everybody thought: the industry thought, the insurers thought, the health departments thought, the governments thought. There seems to be one person in the world who did not follow that thought and he was Bob Cohen from the US, who has certainly given us quite compelling evidence that black lung never went away; that it was here all along.

As a committee, on the very first day of hearings it was very disturbing for us to hear the departmental officials say that, up until 2015, there had not been any cases. Yet within minutes we had WorkCover tell us that it approved a case in 2006, but it seemed as though no-one told anybody about it. We had departments that were not communicating with each other. We found that out on the very first day of hearings. The member for Southern Downs summarised the situation very well by calling it a train wreck. I totally agree with him.

From that moment forward, the committee found itself going down a series of rabbit burrows. Each time the committee went down one, it seemed to find more systemic problems across large parts of the industry. The more we went down the rabbit burrows, the more we found areas that we needed to examine. Certainly, the mining industry believed that black lung had gone. However, we noticed that most of the mines were very quick to adapt their procedures and put in play measures to try to reduce their dust emissions and also to try to get their staff appropriately screened. Obviously, the industry was quite alarmed about it and started to make changes. Certainly, we have seen some changes with some of the government departments.

We have had 30 years of a bungled mess that goes across the entire industry in Queensland. An issue that still has to be addressed in this industry is in relation to the X-rays. There are still departments and people out there who honestly believe that anybody can take a chest X-ray and as long as you are qualified to read a chest X-ray you can clear a miner of having pneumoconiosis. We know that to be completely untrue, but there are still some very senior people out there who somehow still believe that anyone who can read an X-ray can clear a miner of having pneumoconiosis.

Another issue is that miners do not know who to trust. They do not know whether they can trust their own doctors or the NMAs from their coalmines. They do not know who to go to. We found that there seems to be two people in the world they trust, and that is Bob Cohen and Bob Edwards, both physicians. We have here a very large systemic issue. It is across a range of departments. It is through WorkCover and the insurance industries, it is through the health industry and it is certainly in the department of mines. We have a Health Surveillance Unit, as the member for Southern Downs said,

that was basically a records processing unit. There are more rabbit burrows that we need to go down, in particular with the ports, loading facilities and maritime staff who are working in those facilities and even, possibly, the coal-fired power stations.

I trust our current minister to draft legislation in respect to this. I believe that he has the capacity. I do not believe that the issues that we are talking about here are a problem of this government. This has been something that has been going on for 30 years. I have full confidence in Minister Lynham to draft legislation. I leave it up to the House as to how it wishes to proceed on that matter.