




Speech By
Dale Last

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

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STRONG AND SUSTAINABLE RESOURCE COMMUNITIES BILL

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (5.09 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate of the Strong and Sustainable Resource Communities Bill 2016 and to support the amendments as proposed by my colleague the member for Nanango. I note that the committee recommended this bill be passed. I am aware that the minister also proposes to move a number of amendments.

The issue of fly-in fly-out workers for mine projects has been the subject of much debate and I have no doubt will continue to be the subject of much discussion in the future. This bill before the House will certainly change the way that mining companies establish, maintain and operate their workforces. There is no question that if our mining towns are to survive changes are required to FIFO mines. With the recent changes to the electoral boundaries, the Burdekin electorate is now home to the majority of the coalmines in this state. It has truly become the economic powerhouse of the state, and I could not be prouder than to stand here tonight as the member for Burdekin and talk about an electorate that is widely regarded as one of the most diverse electorates in the state of Queensland.

I note the objectives of the bill are to ensure residents of communities in the vicinity of large resource projects benefit from the operation of the projects by requiring the owners of or proponents for large resource projects to prepare a social impact assessment for the projects, to employ people from nearby regional communities, not to discriminate against residents from nearby regional communities when employing for the projects and to prohibit certain activities including in situ gasification of coal and oil shale.

I can attest to the impact that a FIFO workforce has on some of our rural and regional communities. I have had the farcical situation in Collinsville where FIFO workers are prohibited from leaving their accommodation camp, which means these workers contribute absolutely nothing to the local economy of Collinsville. I have seen the planes land at Moranbah airport and the workers loaded onto a bus and transported out to the mining camp and I have seen that process reversed. If we are to have vibrant functioning mining towns, if we are to grow these communities, then we need the workers to live in those communities.

I am passionate about my rural towns and it pains me to see the decline that many of these communities are experiencing, communities like Glenden and Middlemount which have suffered massive reductions in school student numbers to the extent that in the case of Glenden the high school is now under serious threat of closure. I am now being contacted by parents expressing their concern at the quality of the education being provided to their children because of the dwindling numbers of students in the schools. That is not a reflection on the quality of the teaching staff in the schools—far from it—because in most cases these staff are going over and beyond their duties in order to provide the best possible education to the students who attend their schools. It is more about choice: choice of subjects, choice in sport, choice in arts and cultural pursuits and, most importantly, jobs.

There is no question we need a more effective balance of workforce accommodation arrangements for these mine projects, more community and stakeholder engagement, effective local business and industry content and enhancement of health and community wellbeing. I have been very

vocal in my calls for locals to be employed on large resource projects and to encourage FIFO workers to move into the local community if they choose. Many of these small communities are seriously hurting and the drain in population towards the coastal centres has taken a huge toll on schools, businesses and the general wellbeing of these communities. I see absolutely no reason why locals should not be considered for jobs in mine projects and they should be allowed to live in the community if they so choose. I was talking to a very concerned mother in Clermont six weeks ago who gave me the example of her son having to move his family to Brisbane because the local mine had stipulated all workers would be FIFO from Brisbane. This was a family who were more than happy to stay in Clermont and yet they have been uprooted and moved away from their friends, family and their community in order to meet company workforce requirements.

I note the issue of retrospectivity was raised during committee hearings. I would ask the minister to clarify this issue and the potential impact it may have on both local communities and mining companies going forward. Certainly there needs to be clarification on the transitional period for proponents to meet the 100 per cent FIFO restriction because, as members know, there are two coalmines with a 100 per cent FIFO workforce, namely Daunia and Caval Ridge—approved, I might add, by the Bligh Labor government.

I completely support the recommendation for a social impact assessment for large resource projects which will provide for community and stakeholder engagement, workforce management, housing and accommodation, local business and industry procurement and health and community wellbeing. Consultation is vital, particularly with local government authorities and community organisations because the commencement or, in fact, shutdown of a new coalmine can have substantial ramifications on a local community. Local government authorities and, indeed, state and federal governments all need time to plan and deliver the necessary infrastructure to meet the demands of a rapidly expanding population which can occur with the construction of a new coalmine. After all, you do not build schools, hospitals, police stations et cetera overnight and, as we all know, there are many facets that make up a vibrant community or, if I was to go back to the title of this bill, a strong and sustainable resource community.

The issue of what constitutes 'nearby regional community' is important when discussing the issue of local employment and the numbers and qualifications of potential employees available. Certainly I am a strong advocate for employing locals first because, as we know, there is a job crisis in the bush, particularly among our youth, and if we are to halt the population decline in our mining towns then we need to provide the necessary job opportunities to keep the people in those communities. More importantly, if we find families who are willing to live in a mining town we should be doing everything we can to retain them and support them to continue living in that community.

Furthermore, there needs to be a prohibition on local workers being forced to live away from home in camp accommodation. I have seen firsthand the impact on families that FIFO can cause when mine workers are away for extended periods, when these workers miss birthdays, anniversaries or they cannot be there when a loved one is sick. It is not an easy lifestyle. It is hard work.

I fully support the amendment to be moved by the member for Nanango to extend the prohibition on 100 per cent FIFO workforces during construction and operation for large resource projects proximate to nearby regional communities. As an example, QCoal has recently commenced construction of the Byerwen mining project 20 kilometres west of Glenden, a project that will employ 100 employees during construction and 300 during operation. There also needs to be an understanding that many of our mining communities have strong linkages to their nearest regional centre and lines on a map do not necessarily translate to availability of employees. Indeed, when one travels through the coalfields the tyranny of distance becomes a significant issue, with many employees travelling substantial distances to and from work.

In summing up, I support the bill before the House and the amendments that will be proposed by the member for Nanango. The LNP is backing regional Queensland and we are backing jobs for regional Queenslanders. I am passionate about rural and regional Queensland. I am passionate about all those towns that are struggling for survival and I make this pledge here today: that I will never give up in my quest to grow these communities and give all the residents who live in these towns the same opportunities, services and support as those enjoyed by our city cousins.