




Speech By
Deb Frecklington

MEMBER FOR NANANGO

Record of Proceedings, 24 August 2017

STRONG AND SUSTAINABLE RESOURCE COMMUNITIES BILL

 **Mrs FRECKLINGTON** (Nanango—LNP) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (3.22 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate of the Strong and Sustainable Resource Communities Bill 2016. This bill deals with the long-term legacy issues created by the former Labor government's decision in 2011—not very long ago—to allow two mines in regional Queensland to operate with 100 per cent fly-in fly-out workforces. This meant totally bypassing all of the local regional communities, local towns and local workers.

The only government in Queensland ever to approve and allow 100 per cent FIFO in Queensland was a Labor government. Only the LNP understands the importance of enduring partnerships between our regional communities and the resource companies—partnerships that have been forged through respect, sharing economic benefits, creating local jobs and business opportunities and operating sustainably. Only the LNP understands that there is no greater need for young people in our rural and regional communities than a job—a job that can provide the dignity and purpose of meaningful work. In terms of Queensland's youth unemployment situation, youth job losses have skyrocketed under this Palaszczuk government. Over 8,000 young Queenslanders lost their jobs in the past 12 months. In some parts of outback Queensland, youth unemployment nudges 60 per cent. These figures are completely and utterly unacceptable. We need to work harder to ensure these young people get jobs in rural and regional Queensland.

When in government, the LNP made it clear that we would never approve a 100 per cent FIFO resource project where it was located in the vicinity of a regional town. In clearly specifying that BMA Mines, Caval Ridge and Daunia could operate with up to 100 per cent fly-in fly-out workforce, the Bligh government ignored community views and set the company up to make extreme decisions that were not in the best interests of that region. Allowing 100 per cent FIFO for mines near regional communities was completely out of step with community expectations then and it is completely out of step with community expectations now.

Workers and their families should not be discriminated against because of their postcode. Labor's 2011 decision has allowed exactly that to happen. Guess what? Labor's bill on the table today does not do nearly enough to stop that discrimination from happening. The LNP's proposed amendments show that we back regional Queensland and we back jobs for regional Queenslanders. Our amendments will ensure regional Queenslanders get a fair go. Our amendments address the major concerns raised by a number of local governments and address a major concern from the union movement. We have listened to them.

This bill shows that the Palaszczuk government has abandoned the workers and now is pandering to the green groups to save its members' backsides, particularly those of the members for South Brisbane and Brisbane Central. The LNP is backing regional Queensland and putting regional Queenslanders first because it is in our DNA. Only the LNP truly understands rural and regional Queensland. A Labor government introduced this disaster to regional communities. Labor, the party

that is supposed to back the worker, is presiding over a jobs crisis in our regions. Youth unemployment in parts of Gregory, Warrego, Mount Isa and Cook is running at 57 per cent because of this do-nothing Labor government. Youth unemployment has more than doubled since this government took power.

Over half of all young people in outback Queensland who want a job cannot get one under this Palaszczuk government. That is a crying shame. In many other regions, like Townsville and Wide Bay, youth unemployment sits at around 20 per cent. Average unemployment in the areas represented by the members for Mirani and Mackay is running at 6.6 per cent under Labor compared to just four per cent under the LNP. It was 2.6 per cent less under an LNP government than under this incompetent Palaszczuk government. In Mackay, unemployment peaked in the last two years, under the Palaszczuk government, at eight per cent. It is a hard figure for them to swallow because, like the member yesterday, they drank the Kool Aid. Unemployment in the Fitzroy region is getting worse—

Government members interjected.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Those opposite laugh about it, but people out there are talking about what the Palaszczuk government is doing—that is, not supporting rural and regional Queensland. Some 2,900 jobs have been lost in the last year. Since Labor's election to government, some 3,900 jobs have been lost in the Fitzroy region alone. That region's unemployment rate is now 7.2 per cent. It has increased by almost two per cent under this incompetent government and has gone up almost one per cent in the last 12 months alone.

Under this government, unemployment in Townsville reached its highest level on record. Since Labor's election to government, some 7,500 jobs have been lost in the Townsville region. Under Labor, Townsville's unemployment rate reached its worst rate on record, 11.6 per cent. The current rate would be even higher if more than 7,000 people had not given up looking for work all together. The participation rate has completely plummeted under this Palaszczuk government's watch. The worker's party has abandoned the worker.

Only the LNP recognises the importance of the resource industry to the Queensland economy. Indeed, the resources sector remains one of the LNP's six priority industries which will drive and strengthen our economy. We appreciate that the resources sector has invested billions of dollars to develop and operate long-term resource projects in our state. It is important that governments provide a stable and globally competitive regulatory framework. We have been very mindful of this in considering this bill. I know that the member for Callide and the member for Hinchinbrook will agree with me that the LNP is proud of our track record in supporting the resources industry. In government we worked hard to wind back the years of Labor's green tape and overregulation to help the resources sector in this state to be competitive at a time when it was most needed. The LNP believes a strong resources sector must be underpinned by thriving resource communities with infrastructure that affords regional Queenslanders with the same lifestyle and benefits as our urban counterparts.

The LNP's record stands in stark contrast to that of Labor governments past and present. The Palaszczuk government, and the Bligh government before it, treats rural and regional Queenslanders like second-class citizens by starving them of infrastructure investment. Earlier this year I saw the impacts of this neglect when I visited towns across the Central Highlands and the coalfields with my colleague the member for Burdekin, Dale Last, and the federal member for Capricornia, Michelle Landry. We met with local councillors, shopkeepers, small business owners and graziers in the communities of Glenden, Moranbah, Dysart and Clermont. These once thriving communities are now a shadow of their former selves due to the challenging coal prices. While locals mostly understand the commercial decisions made by mining companies to scale back operations during downturns, they are far less forgiving of this Labor government's absolute decimation of the statewide infrastructure budget and they were very, very loud and clear in their message to us that under this Palaszczuk government the region has been starved of infrastructure.

In its first budget this Labor government cut \$2 billion from the statewide infrastructure budget, effectively slashing infrastructure spending and leaving it to fall to its lowest ever level in Queensland. This government has such little loyalty to the communities that form the backbone of our regional economy that they have seen fit to spend billions of dollars less on infrastructure, hitting regional Queensland the hardest, where distance and isolation make roads, bridges, health and education infrastructure vitally important. Only the LNP believe in investing in our regions. The LNP understands how important an extra council road crew working on a local road upgrade can be to a small regional community. Investing in infrastructure creates the jobs that are sorely needed in the bush.

Mr Bailey interjected.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Those who sit in this chamber now and carry on have cut the guts out of regional roads funding. They have slashed the Royalties for the Regions program—absolutely slashed it. Only the LNP understand about investing in the regions. That is why when we were in government

we established the very successful Royalties for the Regions program to ensure our regional communities received their fair share of resource royalties. We understand that investment in regional Queensland creates jobs, boosts moral and creates a flow-on effect throughout regional economies. Between 2012 and 2015 the LNP Royalties for the Regions program invested in 147 regional community infrastructure projects.

A government member interjected.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: If you did not hear that over there on the other side—I hear a slight interjection—between 2012 and 2015 the LNP’s very successful Royalties for the Regions program invested in 147 regional community infrastructure road and flood mitigation projects with a combined value of more than \$790 million.

Dr Lynham: You’re delusional.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I will take that interjection from the minister. He said that I am delusional. Let me read out just some of the list. I do this for the minister because there is only one deluded person in this chamber right now and he is sitting opposite. There was \$20 million for the Blakeys Crossing Road project in Townsville; \$11 million for the Eidsvold-Theodore Road project; \$5 million for the Nogoa River upgrade in Emerald; \$5 million for the Roma levee project; \$9 million for the Collinsville to Bowen Road; \$8 million to the Arcadia Valley Road in the Central Highlands; almost \$13 million to the Kin Kora roundabout in Gladstone; \$6 million to the Marian water treatment plant; \$750,000 to build the Dysart medical centre; \$5.5 million to upgrade the Dysart water treatment plant; and even \$1 million to build a swimming pool in the tiny gulf community of Karumba.

The LNP delivered projects under Royalties for the Regions—projects that deliver for our communities, unlike the halve, slash-down, incompetent Palaszczuk government that was unable to deliver even a fraction of what we were able to deliver under the very successful Royalties for the Regions program. The LNP has promised to bring back that program: half a billion dollars to ensure regional Queensland gets its fair share of infrastructure. We have committed to extend its scope. Previously the Royalties for the Regions program under the LNP was open to all councils in regional Queensland, but a future LNP government will extend the program to other stakeholder groups in those regions. Rockhampton, Mackay, Townsville, Moranbah, Clermont and Emerald are all important hubs for resources activity and host critical export infrastructure and many resource industry workers and their families. They have been largely ignored by this Palaszczuk government.

As I mentioned, there are several significant failings in Labor’s bill that will mean regional communities will continue to miss out on the benefits of mining projects in their backyard. Labor’s bill will not prohibit 100 per cent FIFO workforces during the construction phase. It will give an unelected public servant the discretion to apply the 100 per cent prohibition on FIFO workforces during the construction phase, but it will not mandate this very simple principle. We have just heard the minister carry on like he is the saviour for regional Queensland by saying maybe they will let it happen through the construction phase. Why talk about it? Why not just do it? I look forward to the minister supporting my amendments that will come before the House.

Regional communities deserve better. They deserve certainty. Labor’s bill also does not mandate that a resource project proponent must consult with local communities through the social impact assessment process. Before I speak to the amendments the LNP is proposing to this bill, I would like to acknowledge the member for Warrego and the member for Gympie for their participation in the committee’s consideration of this bill. The amendment we will be moving reflects on their hard work, the LNP’s established position against FIFO and careful consideration of stakeholder views. I would like to acknowledge other regional members, including the member for Gregory who represented the LNP on related parliamentary inquiries and campaigned strongly for his electorate on this matter.

The amendments circulated in my name make two major changes to the bill. The first extends the prohibition on 100 per cent FIFO workforces to the construction stage of large resource projects to nearby regional communities. Under the current bill the application of the 100 per cent FIFO workforces during construction phase is only at the discretion of the Coordinator-General. It is not, as the minister said, just a matter of right. He has not put it in the bill so it is not mandated. That is why the opposition has circulated those amendments.

This important change will ensure that during a multiyear construction phase of resource projects, jobs will be awarded to locals, providing a positive flow-on effect to regional economies. It will make a big difference to communities that have seen large workforces imported during long durations for construction projects. Those communities have felt the social and physical impacts of those projects, without being able to share the benefits through local job opportunities, particularly for our young people.

The second change is that, when preparing a social impact statement, the proponents of large resource projects will be required specifically to consult with local communities within the local government area in which the large resource project is situated. Formalising a requirement to consult with specific local communities will ensure those communities have a say as the projects are developed.

Dr Lynham interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Stewart): Order! One moment, member for Nanango. Minister, your interjections are not being taken. I suggest that you cease.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Maybe he cannot see me properly from where he should be sitting. The LNP will be giving local resource communities a voice. On this side of the chamber we all know that that voice has been completely silenced under those opposite. These amendments to the bill go much further than those of the government to ensure that our regional resource communities are consulted and that local job opportunities are available during both the construction and operational stages of a resource project.

The Isaac Regional Council raised the fly-in fly-out issue with me directly as one of their biggest concerns. They are worried about the effectiveness of the bill to solve Labor's damaging legacy. The Isaac Regional Council wants the prohibition of 100 per cent FIFO to include the construction phase of a resource project, just as we are proposing in our amendments. The LNP has listened.

The Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union also believes that the bill is too narrow and agrees with the LNP's view that the 100 prohibition should be applied not only to the operational phase of the mine but also to its construction. I say this for the benefit of the minister: in its submission, the AMWU noted that while the bill includes a draft of a social impact assessment guideline, the process appears to be more focused on the impact of the large resource project on the nearby regional community and not on the impact, particularly the mental health implications, of FIFO employment on the FIFO workers themselves. Again, this issue has been left unaddressed by the Palaszczuk government.

The Electrical Trades Union supports the bill. The ETU also wants a 100 per cent prohibition for the construction phase of resource projects. If Labor really care about regional workers and regional communities, they too will support the LNP's amendments to ban 100 per cent FIFO during the construction phase of a project. Billions of dollars are being spent to construct resource projects. Thousands of jobs are created during that phase. Regional Queenslanders and regional communities deserve a fair go, but not just through the operational phase. Why not through the construction phase as well? They deserve to have a crack at those jobs.

I am looking forward to hearing the contribution of the member for Mirani. This is his chance to show this House that Labor understands Central Queensland families. It is those families who have told me that they want this House to support the LNP's amendments so that regional communities benefit during the operational and construction phases of resource projects. On this side of the House, we are waiting with great anticipation to hear the valued contribution of the member for Mirani, who I am sure will back in those Central Queensland families and back in the amendments of the LNP.

We all know that the member for Mirani has been a vocal critic of this Palaszczuk government. We read it on his Facebook page. He is a vocal critic of this incompetent Palaszczuk government. However, the member for Mirani needs to take responsibility for Labor not understanding families in Central Queensland. They are families he was elected to represent in the Labor caucus. They are families he was elected to represent in this House. Today he will get the opportunity to support the LNP and support the families of Central Queensland. I know that the member for Burdekin, my good friend Dale Last, vocally supports people who live in that area. I look forward to hearing the contribution of the member for Mirani in relation to Central Queensland. I look forward to seeing his support for the LNP's amendments because we know that we are the only party—the only side of the House—that supports our regional communities. Let the member for Mirani not forget that it has only ever been a Labor government that supported 100 per cent FIFO in this great state.

We all know that, deep down, the member for Mirani knows that this bill does not pass the pub test. How can you prohibit something in operation but not support it in construction? It is another con that is going to cost Queensland. We all know of the crisis that the Palaszczuk government has launched this House into in the past couple of days. I now challenge the member for Mirani to stand in front of any pub in a mining community and defend Labor's position not to legislate a ban on 100 per cent FIFO during the construction phase of a project.

Dr Lynham interjected.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I have another 36 minutes. If the minister would like me to continue, I am happy to do so. For the benefit of those opposite, I repeat the reason we are standing in this House today, discussing this issue. Let us go back to why we are in this House discussing this issue today.

Ms Leahy interjected.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I take the interjection from the honourable member for Warrego: it is because of them. It is because of those opposite. Today we are in this House discussing this issue because we have had to deal with the long-term legacy issues created by Labor. They were created by a Labor government decision in 2011 to allow two mines in regional Queensland to operate with 100 per cent fly-in fly-out workforces, totally bypassing our local towns, totally bypassing our young kids and totally bypassing our communities in those regions. The Labor Party says that they support the worker. It has been proven here today that it is only the LNP that will support the workers of rural and regional Queensland, unlike the Labor government.

The LNP supports prohibiting underground coal gasification in Queensland so that the Cougar Energy debacle in Kingaroy is never ever repeated. Labor failed to protect regional communities by approving that UCG project. It was another Labor fail. On the table today we have a bill to clean up Labor's mistakes in relation to UCG. The Labor Party is responsible for the Cougar Energy debacle and the environmental vandalism that occurred at the Cougar Energy site in Kingaroy. I am pleased that this amending bill will bury that issue forever for my local community of Kingaroy. I can tell the House that the debacle that the Labor Party created in relation to UCG caused appalling stress for my local community. It was an issue that continued until the LNP was able to say 'no more', that never again would we allow that activity to happen.

The government has foreshadowed a number of amendments to its bill. Those amendments highlight the substantial holes and flaws in the original bill. I look forward to hearing what the minister has to say about those amendments during the consideration in detail stage.

On behalf of this side of the House, I conclude by again stating that it is only the LNP that understands rural and regional communities. It is only the LNP that stands by our workers. It is only the LNP that will stand up for rural and regional Queensland.

Government members interjected.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: It is obvious from the murmurings of those opposite that it is only the LNP that will stand up for our regional communities during the construction phase as well. These communities will be screaming out for a bite of cherry whilst that construction is happening. They will be screaming out and asking, 'Why can't my kid get a job in the resources industry that you are creating?' Those kids will be asking, 'Why can't I get a bite of the cherry?'

Honourable members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Nanango, one moment please. Member for Kallangur and member for Warrego, you will not have conversations and a debate across the chamber.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Nor with the Deputy Speaker.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: It is only the LNP that understands what is needed to ensure our regional communities and resource companies create partnerships that build stronger families, provide safe and livable communities and, most importantly, build the roads, dams and bridges that this great state needs.