




Speech By
Hon. Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Record of Proceedings, 5 September 2017

MOTION

Coal Workers' Pneumoconiosis Select Committee, Report

 **Hon. G GRACE** (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations, Minister for Racing and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (6.15 pm): I rise to speak in support of the amendment to the motion wherein the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines has given an undertaking to provide by noon on 8 September a full government response to the report of the Coal Workers' Pneumoconiosis Select Committee.

I join those opposite in saying that I think the members for Bundamba and Southern Downs and the other members of the committee are doing an excellent job in looking at this issue. We all were surprised to see CWP return in the manner in which it has. This is a serious issue, and the minister has given an undertaking in his amendment that by 8 September a full government response will be given to parliament. I support that amendment. This issue is one with which members should not play politics. I take on board what the member for Whitsunday has said. One minute we talk about the bipartisanship between the chair and the deputy chair of that committee but in the next minute we see a grandstanding opportunity that really gains absolutely nothing. Compare that to what we gain when we work together.

The amendments to the workers compensation legislation that we debated the last time this House sat delivered the world's best WorkCover coverage for workers suffering CWP. That is what we achieve when we work together. That is what we achieve when the minister, members of the select committee and I work together to deliver the best outcome for workers suffering CWP. Without a doubt, the recent legislative amendments are some of the best in the world.

We acted very quickly. Last year I set up the stakeholder reference group following meetings with workers suffering CWP who were concerned at the manner in which WorkCover was dealing with their cases. The group was made up of workers, industry and legal professionals and government entities, including WorkCover and the Department of Natural Resources and Mines. This group reported with four recommendations and worked with the select committee on them. The select committee supported the four recommendations of the stakeholder reference group and added another: that WorkCover coverage should be extended to include all coaldust lung diseases. That is exactly what we did.

This government acted quickly. We brought in the legislation, we debated it in the last sitting of parliament and we now have from working together—and I acknowledge the support of those opposite—some of the best WorkCover coverage for those suffering workers. We acted quickly and in concert with the select committee; that is how we get things done.

The minister has committed to providing a full government response. We are working on some of the recommendations. My department is considering health and safety areas. We are expanding the scope from the mining health and safety act into normal occupational health and safety legislation. I am working diligently with the minister—and our departments are working together—to identify how we can harmoniously enact legislative changes to ensure that they are compatible and deliver the best outcome when it comes to workers suffering from dust lung diseases.

Grandstanding on this issue, trying to order people to do things, will not get us anywhere. This is a serious issue. We need a holistic, sensible approach to enable the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines and the chair and the deputy chair of the select committee to work diligently together to deliver the best outcome. All the grandstanding by the member for Whitsunday will deliver nothing. We will deliver an outcome that will be of benefit.

We all were surprised when CWP re-emerged. I believe that a number of governments were at fault in this respect. We now know what the select committee has found. The minister has given an undertaking that he will deliver a full response. We have already addressed the workers compensation issues. All workers, whether retired or currently working, will be able to obtain their full entitlements. I also add that the change that Labor made to remove the five per cent threshold in relation to common law means workers can also claim common law entitlements.