




Speech By  
**Bruce Saunders**

**MEMBER FOR MARYBOROUGH**

---

Record of Proceedings, 31 October 2018

### **MINES LEGISLATION (RESOURCES SAFETY) AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr SAUNDERS** (Maryborough—ALP) (3.20 pm): As a member of the Education, Employment and Small Business Committee, I rise to talk to the Mines Legislation (Resources Safety) Amendment Bill 2018. First of all, I would like to congratulate the chair of the committee who put a lot of work into this and also the secretariat, who organised the trips. I also congratulate the deputy chair and the fellow committee members from both sides of the House. I would like to say thank you to the minister and the departmental staff who briefed us very well. The minister was right across every question I put to him. I would like to put on the record my thanks to the minister for the help he personally gave me and also that of his office and the department. It was much appreciated.

I lived in Mount Isa for many, many years and I have a few friends who work in the mines, so I know the difference between hard rock and coalmining—soft rock. There is a difference. This legislation is long overdue. I have to agree with the member for Keppel. A lot of my friends are miners because I lived in Central Queensland and I lived in Mount Isa for a long time. My brother worked at Mount Isa Mines for many years. I have a lot of friends in the mining industry. I have to agree with the member for Keppel; I am yet to have one of them come and say to me that the LNP really looked after them. I cannot wait to go home and see my mate Scuba, who used to work in the mines. Scuba had a very tough time with the company. It did a lot of bad things to my mate and he is still recovering now. I would like to say g'day to Scuba as I know he is watching at the moment. Scuba, we are all thinking of you, brother. We know that he will get through that black dog, that tough time, and he will come out the better side of it. When I look at what has happened to Scuba, who complained about safety issues at the mines, I get quite emotional because he is a very good friend and I have known him for a long time.

When we did the tour I did not go underground for one reason. It was not because I was worried or anything like that. I believe that the committee members should have been treated the same way that the mines treat their workers. We should not have been treated any differently; we should have gone under and come up and showered in the same showers—everything else that a miner does. The committee was treated a little bit differently. I thought that, if we cannot be treated the same as the miners and the workers who go underground every day at the mine site, it was not for me. Without that we cannot get a true feel of what goes on in a mine. I know that other committee members did go underground, but I believe they should have been treated the same as the workers, including using their showers that I have seen in the mines.

The tour around Mount Isa Mines was like *deja vu*; it was like going back home, looking at the old mine site, catching up with a few friends on the telephone and talking about safety at the mines. It is imperative that we ensure that a miner goes home safe every day and goes to work safe and works in safe conditions. We are hearing from the other side that they have suddenly become the miners' friends, that they are the best friends of the miners. I do not think that is correct. As the member for McConnell said, it is only a Labor government that has brought in the safety measures for mines. A Labor government has looked after the men and women who go underground every day.

One of the things I was happy about—and I spoke to the minister about this—was the increased penalties. I can quote from the transcript of the hearing held in Mount Isa—and the member for Whitsunday said people in Mount Isa turned out. That is not correct. One of the reasons I heard from miners in Moranbah and Mount Isa when I was talking to them is that they were absolutely fearful of coming to the committee because, if it got out that they were there, their jobs could be in jeopardy. We know what happens—and I know because it happened to one of my best mates, whom I just mentioned. When he spoke up about safety issues on a mine he was driven out of the industry by the mining company. That is why people did not turn up in Mount Isa. I have spoken to a few friends and they said, 'We're not touching that with a barge pole, brother, because, if we are seen complaining about the mines, they will drive us out of the jobs.'

One of the things that came up—and this came from the AWU organiser in Mount Isa. I was questioning him about stiffer penalties for the mine management. I would like to put on the record that throughout the committee hearing I was one who said I believed in custodial sentences and I did not think we went hard enough. If someone dies on a worksite due to the mining company not doing the right thing or cutting back or workers fearing they will lose their job if they speak up about safety, jail is not good enough for management. That is one thing with which I had issue with the committee because I believe the custodial sentences should be put in place. The AWU organiser was a good bloke. He talked about the mines and what happens to miners when they speak up on the mine site. I asked him about the stiffer penalties. He said—

I think you also have to remember that there is a lot more money at stake with mining, so maybe the penalties should be adjusted relevant to the royalties that they bring in. That would also provide a higher level of accountability and responsibility. It is absolutely a driver. You have to look at that and think there are arguments for and against, but you also have to think to yourself: if they put a serious penalty in place and you are an SSE or you are a mine operator, are you going to deliberately go out there and shirk your obligation because the penalty is so severe? You are going to make sure you do your due diligence and you are going to make sure you have everything done properly, in my belief. For some people it would not matter what penalty you put there, because they are still going to operate the way they do and hope that nothing goes wrong.

That is a direct quote from the AWU organiser at the hearing. It was the same when we moved to the coal industry and talked to the CFMEU delegate. He was telling us that even contractors are a bit scared to speak up about some of the horrific conditions they are working in on the mine sites. It is the same thing: they do not get the text message. If they do not get the text message, they do not have a shift; they do not get called into work. We have to stop that. This mines legislation will go a long way towards stopping that. We have to get back to a fair go for our miners. I will back the CFMEU submission. To brother Smyth out in the coalfields, I say thank you very much. I had long conversations with him regarding this legislation and also the miners.

We have to go back and give workers a fair go in this country. We have to change the rules. We have to make sure that the workers in the mines are safe, that the air they breathe is safe and that the people who look after the ventilation equipment are competent. To all the miners I would like to say thank you. They do a marvellous job in trying conditions. It is not an easy job. It is a hard job. I say to them thank you. As I wrap up, I say thank you once again to the minister. He listened to my concerns. I had conversations with him about this as a committee member. Once again, like all the ministers in the Palaszczuk government, he listened to the concerns of the backbench. I commend this bill to the House.