




Speech By
Christopher Whiting

MEMBER FOR BANCROFT

Record of Proceedings, 31 October 2018

MINES LEGISLATION (RESOURCES SAFETY) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr WHITING** (Bancroft—ALP) (2.36 pm): I rise to speak in support of the bill that is before the House today. At the outset, I take issue with the inference or the statement that the government has been dillydallying or delaying with regard to the CWP findings. That is offensive, not only to both sides of the House but also to everyone who has contributed to this long-ranging reform. To say that we have dragged our heels on CWP is offensive. Frankly, it does not do justice to the work done by industry, the unions, the DNR and all the stakeholders who have been addressing these issues.

I point out to the member for Burdekin and the member for Whitsunday, despite all the hyperbole they have issued here today, that four reports have been handed down on these issues. All stakeholders have contributed towards their implementation. I point out that the Palaszczuk government has actioned 62 out of the 68 CWP Select Committee recommendations. I repeat: that is 62 out of 68. The remaining recommendations refer to administration arrangements and do not directly impact workers' health. We are committing to those.

Quite frankly, to say that we are dragging our heels on this is hyperbole. I question the kind of advice that the opposition is giving people about these issues, if that is what it is saying. If they do not want to make it about politics, they need to stop attacking members of parliament every time they open their mouths on this issue. They need to stop attacking the government. I suggest that if they want information, they should go to the minister, receive a briefing and listen to what the minister has said. I repeat: we have actioned 62 out of the 68 recommendations and the remaining recommendations do not relate to workers' health.

There are a couple of other issues that those in the opposition raised that I want to take issue with. They talked about the definition of 'contractor'. They said that we need to jump in, thrash about and lay down a definition of 'contractor'. The success of this legislation is dependent upon tripartite cooperation and consultation. That is a critical part of what we are trying to do.

The purpose of the Mining Safety and Health Advisory Committee is to conduct tripartite consultation. It has met twice since the committee handed down its report. The committee recommended that there be a definition of 'contractor'. We are going to give the advisory committee the time and space to actually examine the issue of the definition of 'contractor'. We want to make sure the committee comes up with the right recommendation. I think it is foolhardy to stand up in here and say that we need to thrash around and hand down a definition of 'contractor'. We need to let the experts do it.

One of the issues talked about related to the SSEs. The opposition has asked why the government is not prepared to have confidential worker health records handed over to employers. I think it is very basic. Anyone in this House would know that confidentiality needs to be maintained when it comes to medical records. Maybe these workers do not want their records handed over willy-nilly.

Medical records are personal to all of us, especially to workers in this area. The current arrangements do not preclude a worker affected by this disease disclosing their medical information to their employer if they so wish. Any legislation that would change that right to privacy around this very

personal matter should only be implemented once all stakeholders are on board. It is a very personal issue. We do not want to go down the path of telling people that they have to hand over their medical records.

The member for Burdekin raised specific concerns that dust levels have not been lowered by this government. He said that the minister had questioned the scientific evidence for doing that. The minister has consistently said that he will base reductions in dust levels on scientific evidence. He said he will be guided by Safe Work Australia's evidence based review. This is very important. His actions are going to be based on scientific evidence and guided by the experts in the field.

As an interim measure, amendments to the Coal Mining Safety and Health Regulation have been made to lower the respirable dust levels at coalmines from three milligrams per cubic metre to 2.5. That reduction will take place tomorrow. The government is committed to implementing all the outcomes of Safe Work Australia's review. We have listened to and acted on calls to come up with interim measures to make sure that coal workers are protected from harm. They are a few things I want to touch on in relation to what has been said in this debate already.

I now want to talk about the bill itself. This bill contains a comprehensive package of safety measures. We cannot underestimate the importance of these safety measures in mining. As we all know, it is an occupation that can be fatal. From talking to many miners, their safety and coming home at the end of the day is what preoccupies them. That is foremost in their minds. From talking to members of the miners union I know that safety is paramount. People think that it is all about long weekends and time off, but the thing that unites them all is safety—the ability to come home to their families at the end of the day.

I went out to the Oaky North picket line earlier this year to hear the story for myself and to find out what was going on. I pay tribute to my friends Geoff and Dennis who guided me and gave me a lot of information. I found the miners to be very respectful and disciplined. The amount of surveillance they have to endure is absolutely incredible. I have not seen that in a workplace before.

Their conversations always came back to safety. The activities of the mining union always come back to safety. They were affronted by anything that they thought would have left them exposed or left them in danger in the workplace. To them anything that lessens their bargaining power lessens their ability to implement safety. I pay tribute to all of the miners who have been dedicated to safety and the stakeholders involved in the many reviews. What they are doing is absolutely crucial to creating a Queensland that is safer for workers.

I applaud what is being done around ventilation, especially around making sure that the ventilation officers have the required competencies. Passing a practical exam is a great initiative. If they have to get training and a certificate of competency that will create a much safer atmosphere, quite literally, in those mines. I echo what Dr Brake said to the committee. When something goes wrong with ventilation it can be catastrophic. Not many occupations would have that issue.

I applaud the changes made with regard to entry powers and the implementation of a single safety system. All contractors and workers on site are under a single safety regime. That makes it much easier to understand. I notice that a lot of the contributors said that they applaud the initiative to increase the penalties under this act. The provisions include the obligation for reportable diseases being with the corporation officers.

I pay tribute to the member for Maryborough, who was relentless in reading through the committee's work.

Ms Jones: He is relentless at everything he does.

Mr WHITING: I take that interjection. He is absolutely relentless. He sent the signal that people who bring up issues on work sites should not be intimidated and should not be made to be quiet. They need to be supported. It is not a good situation if workers are afraid to speak out about safety issues for fear of retribution. I applaud the work he did in that regard. I applaud the committee. This is a great bill. I recommend it to the House.