Speech By

Dale Last

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

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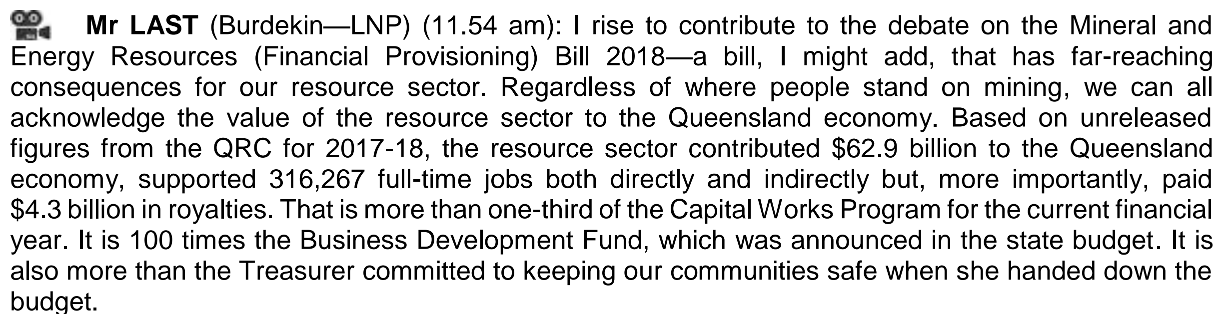
MINERAL AND ENERGY RESOURCES (FINANCIAL PROVISIONING) BILL



Mr LAST (Burdekin—LNP) (11.54 am): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Mineral and Energy Resources (Financial Provisioning) Bill 2018—a bill, I might add, that has far-reaching consequences for our resource sector. Regardless of where people stand on mining, we can all acknowledge the value of the resource sector to the Queensland economy. Based on unreleased figures from the QRC for 2017-18, the resource sector contributed $62.9 billion to the Queensland economy, supported 316,267 full-time jobs both directly and indirectly but, more importantly, paid $4.3 billion in royalties. That is more than one-third of the Capital Works Program for the current financial year. It is 100 times the Business Development Fund, which was announced in the state budget. It is also more than the Treasurer committed to keeping our communities safe when she handed down the budget.

This bill has highlighted a fundamental flaw in a unicameral parliament. Substantial amendments—in fact, 39 pages of amendments—have been made to this bill, which significantly change its intent and purpose. These amendments have not been considered by the committee, which makes a mockery of the committee process and its ability to appropriately scrutinise this bill. The committee reported on the original bill—not the amended bill. When we look at these amendments—amendments, I might add, that were given to me some 40 minutes ago—it becomes abundantly clear to us that there are substantial changes to the original bill. We are not playing a game of marbles here; we are talking about a $63 billion industry that is keeping this state afloat. I want to make it clear that I do not oppose the bill; I oppose the abuse of the parliamentary process. I oppose a government that fails to engage in an honest manner and I definitely oppose a government that claims transparency and then turns its back on being honest with the people of Queensland.

We have a Treasurer who has introduced significant amendments to this bill—amendments that opposition members have had very limited time to scrutinise. This bill was designed to provide financial and environmental certainty to the state regarding the resource sector. It was intended to ensure that that sector behaved responsibly and that land disturbed for the purpose of mining can sustain an appropriate use after mining is completed. Although the vast majority of resource companies do the right thing, there have been a small number of instances in which rehabilitation obligations have not been met. It is true that those failures, for whatever reason they occur, are an impost on the state and, therefore, an impost on all Queenslanders. If the proposed changes require all new projects to backfill final voids, the feasibility of many of them will be diminished.

This legislation certainly makes it much more difficult for new companies intending to enter the mining industry to start up. With financial contributions to the pooled rehabilitation fund linked to risk, it is likely that these new mines will be hit hardest by this legislation, particularly given that they will be required to provide a surety up-front. Do not get me wrong: if miners are not doing the right thing by the environment, if they are not undertaking rehabilitation that meets the standards set by both the government and the broader community, they should be made to pay. There is no place in Queensland for environmental vandals. However, that obligation needs to be balanced with an appreciation of our mining sector and the jobs and economic prosperity it provides to this state.

The spirit of this bill is supported by the Queensland Resources Council, the peak body for resource companies in this state. Those companies and the council acknowledge that the sector must be environmentally aware and ensure that mining sites are fit for use at the conclusion of mining. A mine site can never be rehabilitated to its original state. Tens of millions of tonnes of ore and overburden cannot be pulled out of the ground and then that area be returned to its original state several years down the track. However, where practicable and to the best of their ability, mining companies can rehabilitate these sites for other purposes.

I have seen some great examples of this in my travels throughout this state. I mention New Hope, which has done some fantastic work in rehabilitating its Acland mine. It now has a very successful grazing operation in place on land that was mined previously. Peabody Energy is doing some great work. Glencore is doing some great work. When I visit these mine sites and I talk to the respective mine managers, the first thing I ask them about is their rehabilitation of areas. I ask them if I can see firsthand what they are doing about rehabilitation. Certainly, when I travel throughout the state, and particularly given that most of the coalmines in Queensland are in my patch of the Burdekin electorate, I am seeing great examples of companies rehabilitating these mine sites to a stage where grazing activities et cetera can be reintroduced. For that they are to be commended.

Rehabilitating land that has been mined is expensive, time consuming and at times extremely difficult. We must achieve a balance in allowing our mining companies to sustainably mine for mineral resources whilst at the same time undertaking rehabilitation that meets community standards and expectations. Our community will support the concept of a pooled funds scheme for meeting unmet rehabilitation requirements. They will also support and demand responsible use of land and natural resources that benefits all of Queensland. The spirit of the bill is supported by those of us on this side of the House. We once again affirm our support of a resources industry that creates jobs and economic benefits for all Queenslanders while ensuring the best possible environmental outcomes. Above all, we support good government, we support public and industry consultation and we support transparency. This is where we differ from those opposite.

I have a particular concern with the public interest test. Can I say to the Treasurer, and recommend for her consideration, that the report should not be prepared by an external person or an organisation. For the sake of consistency and transparency, this process should be brought in-house, with staff employed within the department to carry out this task. As members would appreciate, the preparation of a public interest evaluation could involve the expenditure of substantial funds. I note the Deputy Premier, in her contribution, talked about the consideration of a rehabilitation commissioner and it may well be that that person oversees a unit within the department to undertake these public interest test evaluations. It is not just members on this side of the House who have those concerns. The Queensland Law Society has also expressed concerns with the powers afforded to the scheme manager and recommended oversight by the Queensland Audit Office.

This bill has the potential to ensure so many good outcomes and, as I mentioned earlier, is widely supported by the resources industry. We cannot let poor implementation lead to a bad outcome. This bill can provide a positive outcome for resource companies, for the economy and for all of Queensland, but in order to do that this government needs to address the issues that I have outlined here today. Those on that side of the House need to focus not on a good outcome but on the best possible outcome and the best possible outcome that can be achieved is through consultation and transparency. It is what the resources industry deserves, it is what the Queensland environment deserves and, above all, it is what 300,000 Queenslanders need to ensure a prosperous future.