




Speech By  
**Hon. Grace Grace**

**MEMBER FOR MCCONNEL**

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Record of Proceedings, 31 October 2018

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

 **Hon. G GRACE** (McConnel—ALP) (Minister for Education and Minister for Industrial Relations) (3.06 pm): I rise to support this legislation. My department—the department of occupational health and safety—and the mining safety area will be working very closely in relation to this legislation. We have already implemented some of the best workers compensation entitlements for sufferers of the terrible disease of coal workers' pneumoconiosis, better known as black lung, and we have also addressed many of the screening and safety aspects when it comes to these workers.

For those opposite to suggest that that is not in place is absolutely ludicrous. We removed the threshold to common law entitlements for workers. Had we not removed the threshold that was brought in by the previous LNP government, not one miner would have been entitled to common law damages under the workers compensation scheme. Under their scheme—because most of them have simple pneumoconiosis, which is a diagnosed part of black lung—not one of them met the threshold and not one of them would have received adequate benefits under workers compensation, yet they come into this House and spruik how much they support health and safety and entitlements for workers injured under this legislation. It is a joke to hear them.

**Ms Pease:** It is an insult.

**Ms GRACE:** It is an insult. You will find every miner rolling around in laughter hearing those opposite talk like this. We are the ones who bring in occupational health and safety that will help this industry. We are the side of politics that brings in workers compensation entitlements for those suffering from this terrible disease. Those opposite sit there shaking their heads about how terrible it is, but they then take away their entitlements. They come in here with forked tongue—

**Mr Nicholls:** Absolute rubbish!

**Ms GRACE:** 'Absolute rubbish' I am hearing from the member for Clayfield. I will take that interjection because he was the treasurer at the time who brought in the laws which brought in the threshold. Not one of them would have got common law damages. You do not like to hear it but they are the facts. Go and talk to those miners. They know exactly what you did over there, and it was this side of the House which fixed it up.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Kelly): Minister, direct your comments through the chair please.

**Ms GRACE:** I am happy to do that. I am happy to tell the member for Clayfield that it was our government that sorted that out in our first term. We reversed the draconian laws that they brought in with the common law threshold, and we were able to get that. Not one of those miners would have been paid any entitlement—not one of them—had it not been for the laws that this side brought in. Do not come in here crying crocodile tears, because you have absolutely no credibility in this area whatsoever.

Queensland's mining safety legislation is considered to be some of the best in the world, thanks to Labor, but we must ensure that it remains current. That is what this bill does. The legislation will deliver significant improvements to Queensland's mine safety and health regulatory framework for the benefit of workers in our coalmines, mineral mines and quarries. We are covering all of the industry.

Importantly, the bill will implement improvements to safety and health standards for mineworkers, including relating to coal workers' pneumoconiosis and other dust lung diseases, including silicosis. That is very important. I had to issue an alert in the manufactured stone benchtop cutting industry. That is a very aggressive form of silicosis, and this legislation will also cover those associated dust lung diseases should it prove to be necessary. There will be trained radiologists to detect these diseases. That was the issue in the past—the medical profession could not detect the diseases—and that let a lot of miners down.

My department is working towards developing the necessary regulations to improve health and safety in this area with codes of practice. We hope to have the stone benchtop manufacturing industry code of practice finalised as soon as possible. We have acted with great speed. I have also written to the federal minister, Kelly O'Dwyer, to alert the federal government to the seriousness of this issue and the need for a national response. I believe part of that national response has to be looking at what stone is coming into this country, how it is manufactured and how much silica it contains. It may end up being like the asbestos ban that we have. I might add that the federal government sat on a report on that for about 10 months—with Peter Dutton doing absolutely nothing about it—and building materials containing asbestos were coming into the country because of the federal government's slackness. We need to get serious about this issue and we may need to look at this further.

Workplace health and safety is important to every Queenslanders. Work related deaths and injuries have devastating impacts that extend well beyond the workplace. We know the impact that it has on the families that are affected. We are deeply committed to ensuring that Queensland has a robust workplace health and safety legislative and regulatory framework with health and safety systems in place. Unlike the LNP, which attacked workers, the Palaszczuk government is committed to ensuring workers are treated with dignity and fairness and are protected when they go to work. If they are injured, we are committed to ensuring they have the best entitlements in Australia under our very robust and relevant workers compensation system.

That is why legislative amendments to the workplace health and safety legislation were passed in the Queensland parliament in October 2017. Those amendments were not supported by those opposite. One of those amendments was the introduction of a new offence of industrial manslaughter. We were the first state in Australia to introduce that. If mine managers are not taking responsibility to ensure that their workers are not working with dust levels that cause black lung or coal workers' pneumoconiosis, we will come after them with industrial manslaughter if one of their workers dies as a result. We have also established an independent statutory office for workplace health and safety prosecutions. We are looking forward to working collaboratively with the department of mines in relation to that.

We have restored the status of codes of practice. The other side brought codes of practice down to guidelines—simple guidelines—and it was up to the employer whether they followed them or not. We have restored codes of practice as a required safety measure that must be followed unless other measures of equal or higher standards can be demonstrated. We also have provisions which support more effective health and safety representatives. It is so important that we have trained health and safety representatives in the workplace representing the workers. It is impossible to have an inspector in every workplace throughout Queensland every day of the week, so trained health and safety representatives are significant. I am proud that we are implementing a regime to ensure that they are trained and they represent the workers in their workplace.

With those few words, I am more than proud to support this legislation. Only Labor delivers for workers when it comes to occupational health and safety and workers compensation, regardless of what we hear from those opposite.