




Speech By
Lachlan Millar

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

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MINES LEGISLATION (RESOURCES SAFETY) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (3.28 pm): The shock that went through the communities and the families of mineworkers in Blackwater, Emerald, Springsure, Rolleston, Tieri, Dysart, Moranbah and Clermont was profound as we discovered through the media that coal workers' pneumoconiosis, or black lung, had re-emerged in Queensland. Since the rediscovery more than 20 miners have been confirmed to have the disease and 54 have been diagnosed with some form of mine dust disease. At the time my office assisted affected workers. I felt the department and the minister responded well in assisting those individuals and I do thank the minister for that. Even in those early days it was clear that something was deeply wrong.

It is no surprise to me that the subsequent *Black lung white lies* report found there had been a catastrophic failure at every level—at every level—not just in health surveillance but in the training and competency of the health workforce and even notification requirements; not just in the health and safety systems on site but in the requirements on which those systems were based and in the competencies of the officers who implemented systems on the mine site. As for compliance and enforcement—the government's direct responsibility—there seemed to be virtually none.

For years governments have coasted on the royalties earned by coal workers in mines in electorates like Gregory. In that time we have seen those Queensland workers given very little protection or support. One of the chief frustrations, which I share, is the slow response to the *Black lung white lies* report. Industry and mineworkers quite rightly feel that if you are going to present yourself as the party that cares for workers—that is the Labor Party—then you had better 'walk the walk', as the saying goes.

The *Black lung white lies* report, which was delivered in May 2017, recommended that the Labor government establish an authority in Mackay to oversee mine safety, hygiene, conduct medical research and training, and provide medical specialists to diagnose and treat mine dust diseases. More than a year after it was promised miners are still waiting for the Premier to come good on the commitment to establish a mine safety and health authority in Mackay. There has been funding for all sorts of other bells and whistles, like developing a phone app for fat dogs, but there has been no action for something that is needed to protect the right of every mineworker to a safe workplace. These issues are all critical to mining safety. These are the systemic issues that contributed to the catastrophe: lack of independent oversight of mine safety and hygiene, the lack of medical research and training, and the lack of access to medical specialists to diagnose and treat mine dust diseases. It is a betrayal of workers to promise action on these issues and then let a year pass with no action.

The LNP supports laws that will protect the legal right of mineworkers to a safe workplace. The LNP are hopeful that this bill is a step in the right direction to ensure that our miners have a safe workplace. I will support the bill, but not without airing a couple of concerns on behalf of my constituents in Gregory.

The Education, Employment and Small Business Committee recommended that the bill be amended to include the definition of 'contractor'. While the government has committed to working with industry and union stakeholders to address this shortcoming, it has not committed to making any such definition available. That is not surprising, given the size of the contractor workforce in our mines. Contractors in Queensland mines deserve the certainty of knowing whether they will be covered under these new laws or not. Where is the amendment to the bill which will solve this issue?

The committee also recommended that the minister consider amending the bill to require that senior executives on mine sites be notified on a confidential basis of relevant cases of reportable disease. This sensible transparency would allow them to ensure that risks to the health and safety of employees are at an acceptable level. Mine operators need this transparency so they can protect their workforce. Unfortunately, the government has not committed to delivering this amendment to the bill; however, it has made a vague commitment to look at it. Again we are being asked to take vague promises on trust and, I am sorry, but their track record in this regard is just not good enough. I must ask why mine operators cannot be given all the information available to assist them in reducing the chances of our miners developing black lung.

This legislation is the government's concrete response to the *Black lung white lies* report. The inclusion of the phrase 'white lies' in the title tells you that a big part of the problem was the lack of transparency between the government and key industry stakeholders including mine operators, the CFMEU and the Queensland public.

As a Bowen Basin MP, I do not feel that this legislation will leave me better informed in a timely manner about mine health and safety issues. I suspect that will be true for all other stakeholders as well. Black lung, white lies—indeed. Having said that, I do welcome the legislation and I commit to working hard to protect the rights of my constituents who work in the mines. To that end I will continue to advocate to the minister on their behalf to see that those issues which are still to be addressed are properly and publicly addressed. It is literally a matter of life and death, so we owe it to those workers and we owe them our best effort. As the MP for the seat of Gregory in the Bowen Basin, I have grown up with the mining industry all my life, I have friends and family who work in the mines and I think it is important that we get this right. Industry, stakeholders, unions and the government must get this right.

I would like to commend the chair of the committee, the member for Bundamba; the deputy chair and former member for Southern Downs, Lawrence Springborg; the member for Whitsunday, Jason Costigan; and of course you too, Mr Deputy Speaker, the member for Greenslopes, as members of that committee. I was very fortunate to be a stand-in on that committee when the deputy chair, Lawrence Springborg, had other commitments, so I got to hear firsthand some of the tragic stories. I was able to see how scared they were not only about coming forward but about their diagnoses. 'What's going to happen to me?' What was also heartbreaking were the partners, the wives, the mothers and the children. We have to get this right.

I commend the *Black lung white lies* report. I think it has shone a fantastic light on a very serious issue. This is an issue that we need to address in Queensland because my electorate—as well as the member for Burdekin's electorate and the member for Callide's electorate—are in the centre of the Bowen Basin. The mine industry is a fantastic economic generator for Queensland, but we need to make sure that our workers are safe. I call on the minister and the government to make sure that we get this right.