



Speech By
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MEMBER FOR TRAEGER

Record of Proceedings, 31 October 2018

MINES LEGISLATION (RESOURCES SAFETY) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (3.14 pm): I rise to make a contribution on the Mines Legislation (Resources Safety) Amendment Bill 2018. I want to go straight to the point. There are a lot of recommendations in the bill that I agree with, and there is a very strong basis for them. I acknowledge the heavy consultation that has been completed to enable this legislation to get to the House. There is one issue, however, and I think it is a very valid point. I have been approached by a small miner and they are concerned about the threshold of ventilation officer requirements for small miners, particularly in hard rock mining. The need for this in coalmining is very clear. There seems to be different parameters around hard rock mining compared to coalmining. There is a much different risk profile with all of those issues associated with respiratory problems and ventilation.

The burden of the ventilation officer would fit well into those larger organisations and larger mining companies that have that critical mass of staff so that they always have one registered ventilation officer. At any one time, they could have three or four on staff so that if one is on holiday or sick there is always another one available. It is different when a mine is reduced down to below that critical mass. There is a threshold of 10 working underground before the obligation kicks in. For under 20, there is some latitude for the site senior executive to provide a sign-off on the ventilation officer and they do not need to do the course. There are still pretty small mines that lack the capacity in many cases to meet those requirements.

I would like to put on record for the minister one of the suggestions that was made. With those smaller mines and the thresholds, the suggestion was that there be a quarterly, six-monthly or annual review of the ventilation network by a ventilation officer, mines inspector, hygienist or a high-level consultant. Division 2 of the regulation would state that the RA must include ventilation or a separate RA on ventilation only.

It is very welcome to see that the safety of these underground workers with respect to their respiratory risks is paramount. However, there is a point for some of those small miners where it becomes a large burden on their operations. It does not sound like much money, but they are saying that the course is around \$18,000 and a mining engineering course costs less than \$30,000. A pretty small mine with 10 executives on site would have to send three or four away to make sure they are on hand, and there is that revolving door in the office where they are trying to constantly train staff. It then becomes hard for them to try to reach those standards, and it might be achieved another way—putting more responsibility on to the site senior officer or the mine manager on site. Whilst I acknowledge that intent—and it is a very worthwhile intent—I think it needs to be looked at in terms of those smaller mines that will find it difficult to comply with that. They are just in that gap between the really small ones and the big ones. I do not think the bigger mines will have too many problems meeting those requirements.

I make a further comment that, although everyone in this House would be thinking very carefully about the safety of our workers underground and would be very concerned about them, we need to keep in mind that there is a threshold when we are passing this legislation. I was underground last week and up to my knees in water next to a jumbo operator named Grif. I have probably been underground

about five or six times. It became apparent to me that, although a lot of these workers understand the risk and we have come a long way with our underground safety, they do not like to be burdened with too much either because they are trying to do their job. It can get to the point where their minds are loaded with other finicky details and they do not have as much time to think about the other risks.

We always have to be careful to not load them up with too much more legislation and impositions. That is not really related to the ventilation officer issue. I just raise that in the House as a concern that we need to reflect on when passing new legislation regarding safety standards. Of course, we all want them to be safe but we do need to be mindful. The counterpoint to that is that workers underground have a whole heap of considerations—rockfalls, lighting and other safety procedures. If we load them up with too much it can start to be counterproductive.

I put that on the record for the minister. I hope that that can be watched and considered in the future. I think that would make for more robust legislation and be more suited to the broad range of participants in the mining industry, particularly the hard rock mining industry.