




Speech By  
**Shane Knuth**

**MEMBER FOR HILL**

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Record of Proceedings, 31 October 2018

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

 **Mr KNUTH** (Hill—KAP) (2.14 pm): In speaking to the Mines Legislation (Resources Safety) Amendment Bill 2018, I would like to say that it was a great privilege to be part of the Coal Workers' Pneumoconiosis Select Committee, which looked into the re-emergence of coal workers' pneumoconiosis among coalmine workers in Queensland. Coal workers' pneumoconiosis is a type of respiratory disease that is caused solely by prolonged exposure to coalmine dust.

In 1984, the Coal Board published a report highlighting 75 suspected cases of CWP. For the following 33 years, no black lung disease was diagnosed. That never struck a chord with anyone. Consecutive state governments never thought that it was strange that every other jurisdiction that had coalmines still had black lung disease, yet for some reason Queensland was exempt from black lung disease.

State governments tasked with protecting the health of Queensland miners neglected and ignored the very people whom they should have been caring for and supporting. There had been no regard for their medical records. As the committee saw, those records were stored in shipping containers and broom closets. Could members imagine the outcry of Queensland bureaucrats if their medical records were stored in shipping containers?

The reidentification of coal workers' pneumoconiosis was a shock to those responsible for monitoring the health of Queensland coal workers, but this was because they would not listen to the many workers who had been working in the industry and reporting the symptoms. For three decades, those workers were told that their concerns were baseless as the disease had been eradicated.

The reidentification of coal workers' pneumoconiosis has been shattering for the families of affected workers and embarrassing for the state government and its departments. The harrowing testimonies of victims of black lung and their families will stay with me and many other members of the committee. The arrogance of the mining executives and the complete incompetence of some of those departmental officials was astounding.

I support aspects of the bill, which I will get to shortly, but I want to pre-empt my comments with the statement that the legislation does not go far enough. The committee recommended that a mine safety and health authority be established and be based in Mackay. Until that occurs, I do not think that we can fairly say that we have heard, acknowledged or addressed the monumental disaster of mine regulatory processes, the failure of those responsible for the health and care of mineworkers or dealt with the neglect and pain suffered by those with this terrible disease.

The harrowing accounts of workers who were misdiagnosed, maltreated and simply ignored was heartbreaking. It is the responsibility of every one of us here to do everything we can to ensure that this never happens again. Queensland coal workers deserve better than what they have received. Queenslanders deserve to be safe at work. It is time we stood up for them. I acknowledge the CFMEU for its passion and dedication and for never giving up on this issue.

The Mines Legislation (Resources Safety) Amendment Bill 2018 seeks to provide certainty regarding the competency of ventilation officers to ensure that people with sufficient experience, expertise and understanding of the statutory obligations are working at the operational level as ventilation officers. I commend this move to address the cause of black lung to ensure that those responsible for ventilation, which will reduce the exposure of workers to coal dust, are adequately trained to perform that important task.

Although I welcomed the appointment of the independent Commissioner for Mine Safety and Health in 2016, the changes proposed in this bill to increase the number of departmental representatives gives the minister the discretionary power to appoint a person who does not have experience in mining operations, which is a step in the wrong direction. Those responsible for overseeing the health of the workers should have experience in the industry, not in bureaucracy. As I said, I fully support a committee to be based in Mackay. I commend the bill to the House.