




Speech By
Tim Mander

MEMBER FOR EVERTON

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MINERAL AND ENERGY RESOURCES (FINANCIAL PROVISIONING) BILL

 **Mr MANDER** (Everton—LNP) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (11.35 am): I rise to address the Mineral and Energy Resources (Financial Provisioning) Bill 2018, introduced into parliament on 15 February this year by the Treasurer and considered by the Economics and Governance Committee.

As outlined in the explanatory notes, the Mineral and Energy Resources (Financial Provisioning) Bill 2018 makes various amendments to a number of acts administered by the Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships. The stated policy objectives of the bill are to: manage the financial risks to the state if mineral and energy resource tenure holders do not comply with their environmental management and rehabilitation obligations; and ensure land disturbed by mining activities is rehabilitated to a safe and stable land form that does not cause environmental harm and can sustain an approved postmining land use.

The bill proposes to replace the current financial assurance framework for resource activities under the Environmental Protection Act with a new financial provisioning scheme. The new scheme will provide government with access to funds for environmental management and rehabilitation activities where an operator does not comply with its obligations and for funding other resource related activities such as rehabilitating abandoned mines and operating sites, and research into rehabilitation techniques.

The bill proposes that the scheme fund will operate on a pooled basis rather than under the current arrangements, where assurance is provided for each EA and may only be applied for rehabilitation activities related to the EA. Operating a pooled fund is intended to avoid the risk of funding shortfalls and require holders to pay only an annual contribution. This is an important issue not only in terms of having a viable resources sector but also to ensure that our natural environment is protected and maintained for generations to come.

The current financial assurance system promotes individual responsibility, but there have been too many occasions of poor rehabilitation—or none at all—and Queensland taxpayers are left with the cost of environmental rehabilitation. In some cases the financial assurance is nowhere near the actual cost that is needed, which is why things need to change.

The resources industry has made and will continue to make an incredible contribution to the Queensland economy. We think that most Queenslanders support our resources industry, the jobs it provides our state and the economic benefits. In 2016-17 our minerals and energy sector contributed over \$25 billion to the Queensland economy with a total supported workforce of almost 51,000 full-time-equivalent positions, and the latest ABS stats show that 63,500 Queenslanders are currently employed directly within the mining industry in Queensland. The industry contributes around \$55.1 billion to the state gross product, amounting to 17.4 per cent of GSP for Queensland through \$25.5 billion in direct effects and \$29.6 billion in supply chain and consumption effects. Some \$25.1 billion in income through wages and salaries is paid to workers and 282,634 full-time-equivalent jobs are supported, equating to 12 per cent of total employment in Queensland during 2016-17 because of the resources industry.

Some \$4 billion is paid to the state government—whether that be through royalties, stamp duty, payroll tax or land tax—and in 2017-18 these same royalties have increased to almost \$4.5 billion, and the tip is that the Treasurer is going to get another multimillion dollar bonus in royalties in the midyear estimates.

While most Queenslanders support the industry, they also expect these resource projects to stack up environmentally as well as economically and that the sites should be rehabilitated properly after their operations have finished. We believe that the framework that is included in this bill is the right one going forward and one that we considered when we were in government.

We have had some issues about the right-to-information exemptions. The bill originally proposed to introduce additional categories of documents and entities to which the RTI Act would not apply. It intended to exclude a document created or received by the scheme manager under part 3 of the bill from the operation of the RTI Act and also exclude the scheme manager in relation to the scheme manager's functions from the operation of the RTI Act. This exclusion, described as an exemption, was made with the goal of addressing concerns raised by stakeholders about protecting the confidentiality of commercially sensitive documents, but notably stakeholders such as QRC did not request the blanket exclusions proposed in the bill. However, the government's proposed exclusion to the RTI Act was completely unnecessary and a secretive measure that the LNP has already highlighted in the media. The RTI Act already ensures that all commercially sensitive information is not revealed to the public and there is no reason this particular industry needs an exclusion to the RTI Act.

The Office of the Information Commissioner raised concerns about changing the RTI Act to exempt documents and communications to the scheme or the scheme manager. OIC proposed that while the explanatory notes refer to the proposed amendments to the RTI Act as exemptions they are in fact exclusions, not exemptions, as they would exclude the relevant documents and the scheme manager from the operations of the legislation as a whole. OIC also claims, as has already been mentioned, that the RTI Act already contains sufficient exemptions and exclusions, including for commercial-in-confidence documents and for disclosure that would, on balance, be contrary to the public interest. This completely over-the-top secrecy is typical of the Palaszczuk Labor government that already has a record of delaying damning reports and hiding from media when times get tough. It is yet just another example of Labor trying to shroud yet one more area in secrecy rather than showing even a semblance of accountability. It is my understanding that the amendments put forward—

Mr Power: Read the amendments.

Mr MANDER: It is my understanding, if the member would remain quiet for five seconds, that the amendments put forward in this bill by Labor will somewhat address the RTI issue by having a list of exemptions rather than a blanket exclusion. However, it is disgraceful that it took the combined pressure of the independent Office of the Information Commissioner, Transparency International and the LNP in opposition to stop the Palaszczuk Labor government from tearing a hole in the RTI Act that went beyond the wildest dreams of even the mining industry. The fact that an hour ago over 60 amendments have been added to this bill today, completely bypassing the committee process, shows yet again the arrogance of the Labor government. This has been an incredibly poor process with limited consultation with the right people at the right time which has caused so many amendments to be introduced today by the Treasurer. However, despite the poor process and the fact that amendments have been made with regard to RTI, this side of the chamber will be supporting the bill.