




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR KEPPEL

Record of Proceedings, 4 February 2020

RESOURCES SAFETY AND HEALTH QUEENSLAND BILL

 **Mrs LAUGA** (Keppel—ALP) (3.23 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Resources Safety and Health Queensland Bill 2019—a bill which will set up an independent body to protect the safety and health of Queensland’s 70,000-plus resources sector workers. Firstly, I want to note that recent tragic incidents in mines and quarries in Queensland have been deeply disturbing. Families have a right to expect that loved ones will return home from work. It is every mining family’s worst nightmare when their loved ones do not come home from work.

I want to offer my sincere condolences to the families, friends and co-workers of the eight men who have lost their lives on mine sites in Queensland in past the 20 months. The family and friends of Adam Malone, Connor-Shaye Milne, Allan Houston, Bradley Hardwick, David Routledge, Jack Gerdes, Brad Duxbury and Donald Rabbitt have had their lives torn apart because their husbands, their dads, their uncles, their fathers, their grandads have not come home from work. That is a real tragedy. That is why it is so important we are standing in this place today passing legislation which will make a difference to the health and safety of workers in our Queensland mines.

These deaths and injuries should not be happening and enough is enough. Over the past two decades 47 Queenslanders have died in the mining and quarrying industry, and that is plain unacceptable. The Palaszczuk government takes mine worker safety extremely seriously. As the member for the Keppel, I will always stand up and fight for improved safety for mine workers in Central Queensland.

Resources Safety and Health Queensland will form a new, independent safety and health regulator statutory body that will be a strong regulator with teeth and, importantly, be at arm’s length from the industry it is regulating. Resources Safety and Health Queensland will include already independent mining inspectors as well as excising safety and health functions currently within the Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy. This separates the job of protecting the workers from the job of growing and facilitating mining and exploration projects and the resources sector as a whole. This is something that mine workers have been talking about for a long time and something that mine workers talk to me about regularly.

RSHQ will include Queensland’s mines, explosives and petroleum and gas inspectors, the Safety in Mines Testing and Research Station in Redbank near Ipswich and the Coal Mine Workers’ Health Scheme that covers mine dust lung diseases, including black lung. RSHQ will be subject to monitoring and review by a separate, independent commissioner for mining and quarrying, petroleum and gas and explosives. The establishment of the independent body flows from the recommendations of the parliamentary select committee into coal workers’ pneumoconiosis. The committee made 68 recommendations, all of which the government supported or supported in principle.

Over the last couple of months I have met with a number of former mine workers who suffer from coal workers’ dust diseases. It is tragic to hear their stories. Tim, whom I met only a few weeks ago, is only 38 years of age. He started his mining career at the age of 17. He has only known working in mines and yet has multiple coal workers’ dust diseases. His career in mining is over. He struggles to find

employment. He is struggling mentally to deal with what has happened to him. His family has been completely torn apart by having to relocate after being diagnosed. It is horrible what is happening to him.

I am pleased that the government has supported those 68 recommendations, but there is still more work to be done. This bill is yet another in the suite of reforms the Palaszczuk government has put in place over the past five years to protect the safety and health of our resources sector workers. Our government has introduced reforms to enable the better detection and prevention of black lung and an improved safety net for affected workers, a \$35 million package to deliver reforms to improve the safety and health of our mine workers and a commitment to tighter controls on mine dust levels.

This bill represents the third major package of legislative reforms to mining safety and health in the past three years. Last year the regulator was given powers to issue fines without going to court for mine safety and health breaches. Maximum court penalties were increased to \$4 million. The government has also introduced sweeping changes to prevent and detect black lung disease among coal workers and provide a safety net for affected workers.

Our government has also invested \$1.2 million which will see a health service on wheels deliver vital medical checks to coal workers throughout regional Queensland. Talking to coal workers in my electorate and from further around Central Queensland I hear that they are very pleased about this commitment. It is an innovative way of delivering health services out in coalfields to the workers who need those checks done. The new mobile health screening service means respiratory health checks will be accessible to more Queensland coalmine workers. The mobile service, which is an equipped and staffed van, was recommended by the parliamentary select committee into coal workers' pneumoconiosis and will supplement existing regional specialist services.

These are more funds for more reforms to protect the health and safety of our 38,000 Queensland coalmine workers. The budget provides \$1.21 million over two years for the mobile screening service, which will help improve the detection of coal workers' pneumoconiosis, silicosis and other mine dust lung diseases. This bill was introduced weeks after a commitment by all mining and quarrying companies to improve safety culture, including safety reset sessions on all worksites statewide. I am incredibly proud that the minister has today introduced legislation to make industrial manslaughter an offence as it is in other Queensland workplaces. Queensland coalmine workers have told me that this is something that is important that this government needs to deliver on. I am pleased that we are.

The re-identification of coal workers' pneumoconiosis and the six mining and quarrying fatalities highlighted the importance of a transparent, independent safety and health body. At the time of the inquiry there were six mining and quarrying fatalities, but sadly we are now up to eight in the last 20 months. Queenslanders want to see a strong, fully independent regulator at arm's length from the industry it is regulating. That is what the RSHQ will deliver with a sole focus on the safety and health of our resources industries' workers. Mine worker safety is imperative and it is on all of us—government, industry and unions—to make safety our No. 1 priority to ensure Queenslanders come home safely to their loved ones. I commend the bill to the House.