




Speech By
Hon. Glenn Butcher

MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE

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**MINERAL AND ENERGY RESOURCES AND OTHER LEGISLATION
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Hon. GJ BUTCHER** (Gladstone—ALP) (Minister for Regional Development and Manufacturing) (5.04 pm): I rise tonight to support the Mineral and Energy Resources and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2020. Queensland Labor governments have a long and proud history when it comes to delivering on workers' safety in this state. Thanks to Labor, Queensland already has one of the toughest mine safety and health laws in the world. We have spent the last five years extensively reforming safety in this very, very important sector. It is every workers' right to be able to walk out their front door each day in the morning, go to work, then come home safely to their families at the end of their shift. Our laws might be strong, but we can always do more. We know workers in the resource sector deserve the best protection that they can get. That is why the Palaszczuk Labor government made a commitment to further strengthen mine safety in Queensland. Today that commitment is being met.

This legislation strengthens safety culture in the resource sector in two very crucial ways. Firstly, it introduces the offence of industrial manslaughter, meaning that senior officers of a mine or a quarry company can be tried for industrial manslaughter if criminal negligence is proven for a worker's death. Maximum penalties are fines up to \$13 million or 20 years in jail. Queensland resource workers and their families can take comfort in the fact that this bill will further strengthen safety culture in the resource sector. By introducing the offence of industrial manslaughter, we are sending a clear message to employers and to senior officers that if they act with criminal negligence they will face the full force of the law and will be prosecuted. The message is clear: the safety and health of workers in Queensland is paramount.

Secondly, the bill requires that persons appointed to critical safety statutory roles for coalmining operations in Queensland be an employee of the coalmine operator. These are positions of critical oversight. The people who fulfil these roles should feel comfortable when raising safety issues and reporting on dangerous conditions without fear of losing their jobs for speaking up about safety.

During the statewide safety resets that were held last year, Queensland miners indicated that their fellow workmates were deterred from raising safety issues out of fear of losing their jobs. This is real and this happens. That is why the changes we have introduced through this bill are so very critical. They will bring the conduct of senior officers clearly into focus, holding industry and those in charge on site to account. These laws will make senior mining officers and executives think twice before sending a worker off to do something unsafe. No job is worth dying for. I do not want Queensland mineworkers having to choose between protecting the lives of their workmates and protecting their jobs.

On this side of the House, we are proud of our record in protecting Queensland workers. The LNP's record on this issue—nothing. During their disastrous three years in government, they joined up with One Nation to oppose industrial manslaughter for non-resource workplaces. If their statement of

reservation is anything to go by, it looks like they are at it again. Some say it is unfortunate those opposite are trying to make political mileage out of mining tragedies. It is more than unfortunate; it is outright appalling.

Instead of playing politics with the lives of resource sector workers, the Palaszczuk government is getting on with the job. During our time in government, we have continued to reform mine safety laws. Our work in relation to black lung prevention and detection is the envy of other jurisdictions, including the United States. Experts there say other jurisdictions should strongly consider adopting the changes that Queensland has made.

The safety of resource sector workers is particularly personal to me. After finishing school, I started my apprenticeship at the power station as a fitter and turner. When I finished, I worked at Queensland Alumina for 21 years, eventually becoming a maintenance superintendent which meant I oversaw 12 mechanical supervisors, 95 tradesmen and a budget of over \$85 million.

I know what it feels like to be responsible for workers' safety and big budgets. Managing a workplace is not easy, but there was never any doubt in my mind that the safety of those whom I supervised was paramount. I have never been afraid to speak on issues of workers' health and safety. That is why I joined the Labor Party. It is an honour and privilege to further my passion to serve regional Queensland in my capacity as Minister for Regional Development. Jobs in the resources sector are spread throughout Queensland, particularly in the regions that I support and live in. The workers who do these jobs are the lifeblood of regional communities—communities that, despite their small size, support and power so much of this great state of Queensland.

Any death in a mine or quarry is tragic and unacceptable. These incidents have a profoundly devastating impact on families, workplaces and communities and they send shock waves across the entire resource industry. We can and must do everything in our power to protect our resource sector workers. Our state's record when it comes to the strength of our resource sector is outstanding. However, as the minister has said, the most important product to come off a mine site or a quarry at the end of a shift is not minerals, not coal, not aluminium, not alumina; it is a worker heading home to their family and friends. I commend the Palaszczuk government for taking strong action to further protect all Queensland workers.