




Speech By
Jessica Pugh

MEMBER FOR MOUNT OMMANEY

Record of Proceedings, 4 February 2020

RESOURCES SAFETY AND HEALTH QUEENSLAND BILL

 **Ms PUGH** (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (3.05 pm): All members of this House would agree that something needs to be done urgently to address safety in our resources sector, particularly our mining industry. Eight Queensland workers have lost their lives in the last 18 months. That is eight workers—in this case eight young men—who have not returned home to their families and to their communities. It is worth noting that the average age of mining employees is about 30 years old and that the industry is still male dominated. It is incredibly sad for these families—the mums and dads, the partners and spouses and the sons and daughters—who have had a loved one go onto the worksite and not come off the worksite that day. It is important as we debate this bill that we do not lose sight of what we are fighting to protect: the right of employees to come home off the worksite safely. These men should have been planning for the future of their young families, not having their young families plan their funerals.

The Labor Party has always been the party of the worker and it is with that proud legacy in mind that I stand in support of this legislation here today. Establishing Resources Safety and Health Queensland as a statutory body ensures that the role of protecting workers in the resources sector is separate to the role of growing the mining and resources sector, which is as it should be. It is critical that the role of growing the sector is held at arm's length from the role of upholding best practice safety standards right across the industry.

This bill enhances the functions of the existing Coal Mining Safety and Health Advisory Committee and the Mining Safety and Health Advisory Committee. The bill provides for a more strategic focus of the advisory committees, including the functions of developing a five-year strategic plan and identifying and prioritising critical health and safety risks. Those can be both immediate and more long-term as we have seen with the terrible re-emergence of coal workers' pneumoconiosis. The advisory committees will also have the function of reporting to the minister on how effectively the RSHQ has performed its functions.

One of the key outcomes of this bill is the creation of a safety and health regulator with coverage of all of the mineral and energy sectors. It will include an inspectorate for coalmines, mineral mines, quarries, explosives, petroleum and gas as opposed to just the mining industry which is essentially covered under the existing provisions. The RSHQ will have its own CEO who will report separately to the minister and be responsible for ensuring effective performance of the organisation's duties. It will allow for enhanced functions of the advisory committees.

The bill establishes the Commissioner for Resources Safety and Health to supersede the existing Commissioner for Mine Safety and Health. They will be required to prepare and provide an annual report about the operations of the commissioner for each financial year. This report will then be published publicly on the Queensland government website and tabled in parliament. The advisory committees will be chaired by the Commissioner for Resources Safety and Health and the existing arrangements relating to appointments and memberships of these advisory committees will continue.

I understand that at one time during the sitting of the 55th Parliament the idea was floated to move the regulator to Mackay and to base all of the operations of the role out of that region. However, the fact is that the workforce is spread right across Queensland and a lot of the roles are already

regionally based. I think that that is important, as it allows inspectorates to be close to their respective sectors, ensuring that equal attention is paid to areas right across the state of Queensland, from the gas fields in the Surat Basin to the very important North West Minerals Province. The resources sector is based not just in Mackay, as much as they might like us to believe it. It is based throughout Queensland and we need inspectorates located in the most responsive and appropriate locations possible.

I finish by acknowledging the tragic re-emergence of coal workers' pneumoconiosis, also known as black lung disease, amongst mine employees. That sleeping threat has re-emerged in recent years. I know that every member of this House wants to see it stamped out. In his speech, the minister noted that, since detecting cases in Queensland, we have conducted almost 50,000 scans of workers to better detect the horrific disease. Of course, in this day and age it is unacceptable that the disease continues in our coalmining communities and we need to stamp it out. As I said earlier, in the mining sector the average age of employees is just 30 years. Those workers have a lot of living left to do. Not just as a government but also as a parliament, we need to do everything that we can to ensure that workers not only come home each day but also do not bring that insidious disease with them. I commend the bill to the House.