




Speech By
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RESOURCES SAFETY AND HEALTH QUEENSLAND BILL

 **Mr KELLY** (Greenslopes—ALP) (3.33 pm): I rise to support the Resources Safety and Health Queensland Bill. I would like to start by acknowledging those people who have lost their lives or been injured in the mining industry and their families. Our entire society benefits significantly from mining, and those people have made significant sacrifices for the benefit of our society. I particularly want to thank all those workers and their families who were brave enough to share their stories with the Coal Workers' Pneumoconiosis Select Committee, of which I was privileged to be a member. Many of the people who appeared before the committee did so under very physically, emotionally, socially and mentally difficult circumstances. Some of those people who appeared before us were very ill due to the impacts of CWP or other mine dust lung diseases. Some were in real fear of losing their jobs for speaking up. For many people in that situation the loss of a job means the loss of identity, the loss of a place to live or a house to live in, and it can mean the severing of your ties to a community that you and generations of your family have been part of. That is a very real fear, and those people braved that fear and gave evidence.

The things they said were quite shocking and the evidence our committee gathered was quite shocking to hear. In his contribution the member for Hill outlined some of the things we heard; for example, records stored in broom closets and health practitioners failing to do their jobs properly. Ultimately, all of that was driven by a regulatory system that completely and utterly failed. When I spoke on the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation (Coal Workers' Pneumoconiosis) and Other Legislation Bill I made the following statement—

While it is great to have the compensation sorted out, our real goal and our enduring and fundamental goal should be to ensure that no worker is ever diagnosed with CWP again. The recommendations in the report lay out a way for that to occur, and I urge the government to implement those ...

This bill represents an important step in achieving the goal of implementing the recommendations of that select committee.

In the early 1980s a massive screening of every coal worker in Queensland was undertaken. Approximately 10 per cent of those workers were found to have some sort of coalmining related lung disease. Approximately one per cent had CWP. Amazingly, in subsequent years there were no cases of CWP detected or reported. Like most people in Queensland, I had given black lung disease very little thought. Like children down mines and pit ponies, I thought it was something from another age. Sadly, it was still with us.

When I did give it some thought and understood the nature and progress of this disease, it occurred to me that the scenario I have just described was impossible. It is impossible for a disease to be detected amongst one per cent of a workforce in one year and then be completely eradicated and disappear in subsequent years. It is not a disease that disappears because of a one-off screening program. You could imagine an infectious disease being eradicated quickly due to new antibiotics or a vaccine. Some cancers have reduced quickly when there are new detection processes or treatments put in place. However, this is a slowly-developing disease. There would have been people screened in

1984 who did not show signs of the disease until subsequent years. Since at that time no real changes to work practices were implemented and there would have been people continuing to be exposed to unsafe levels of coal dust who subsequently developed CWP, but these people would not have been picked up in local hospitals because the symptoms are close to other diseases.

We had a culture where people believed that we just did not have CWP in Queensland anymore, so nobody was looking for it. Indeed, nobody knew what to look for. It is a completely impossible scenario for this disease to have disappeared in Queensland, but collectively we all believed it—unions, employers, the government, health workers—and it is impossible to apportion blame to one individual group, department or employer. To the shame of this state, it has been a collective failure of all of those groups that stretched over three decades. There can be no doubt in my mind that, as the committee found, a huge part of that failure has been the lack of independent regulation and enforcement. Sadly, some of those workers have paid the ultimate price for that failure of regulation.

That regulation and enforcement should have focused on work practices, inspection practices and health screening. That failure to regulate and enforce independently stops with the passage of this bill. This gives effect to the goal of ensuring that no worker is ever diagnosed with CWP again. I know there will be many other positive benefits from this bill in other areas of safety, but I particularly wanted to focus on CWP. I spent time on that select committee and I saw what it means for those individuals, their families and communities. The state should be ashamed that we fell into a collective delusion that this disease had been eradicated.

I want to acknowledge the hard work of the minister. The minister dedicated his life prior to entering parliament and, I would argue, after it as well to maintaining and restoring health and to preventing injury and illness. When a person is injured or killed in the mining industry, it has a significant impact on the minister personally. This bill represents a real personal commitment by the minister to achieve that goal of ensuring that no worker is ever diagnosed with CWP again.

I want to finish by thanking and acknowledging those families affected by injury and death in the mining industry. I particularly want to thank those affected by CWP who were brave enough to appear before the select committee. They were no doubt ably supported by the CFMEU, representatives of which provided testimony and many appearances at the committee hearing, as well as much support to those people. I believe they support this bill. It is the people who are affected and their families that we should think about when we consider this bill. Without their bravery and their persistence, I doubt we would be having this debate today. I commend the bill to the House.