




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MACKAY

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RESOURCES SAFETY AND HEALTH QUEENSLAND BILL

 **Mrs GILBERT** (Mackay—ALP) (3.48 pm): I rise to speak on the Resources Safety and Health Queensland Bill 2019. My region has a long history with the Bowen Basin mining industry. Many in my community proudly earn a living from the resources sector. My father worked on the construction of the North Goonyella wash plant, and he also worked on the construction of the Hay Point coal terminal. Being directly involved as a miner or working in one of the varied service industries is a way of life for my community. My family is like many others today. We have a connection with the Bowen Basin. I have a brother who drives a coal train, another brother who services machinery and a nephew who is an electrical supervisor, and my son-in-law works underground.

As with the rest of my community, my family have skin in the game when it comes to mine safety. We all want to get it right. We want our family and friends to come home from work fit and healthy. It is not just my community that has a stake in the mining industry; we are a state rich in minerals. We have mines from the cape down to our southern border and from the coast out to the Northern Territory border. There are also thousands of Queenslanders who do not have a mine in their backyard and they fly in and fly out of our communities every week. This industry is truly a state industry.

We are good at mining. We do it sustainably. We also have the strongest safety laws in the world. However, that is not good enough. Workers have been injured and, even worse, some have not made it home. We must continually focus on our laws and our regulations to ensure we keep our mining industry modern and safe. Since 2015 we have seen a re-emergence of pneumoconiosis, or black lung. In the past 18 months we have also seen the tragic death of men in our mines and quarries. This is not good enough by any standard. That is why we are debating this bill today: safety and people before profits always.

It is necessary to establish a regulatory model which engenders workers' trust, ensures appropriate independence and transparency, enhances the independence and oversight of the performance of the regulator and is consistent with approaches to ensure that the risks in the resources industry are at acceptable levels. The independent statutory body, the Resources Safety and Health Queensland, RSHQ, will undertake regulatory and compliance activities under the existing resources safety and health legislation. It will establish an independent commissioner for resources safety and help to provide strategic advice to the minister; engage with the industry to promote safety and health; and monitor, review and report on the performance of the RSHQ. We need to have checks and balances in place to ensure every person involved in the mining industry is playing their part in a safe working environment for all.

RSHQ will comprise the coalmines, mineral mines and quarries, explosives and petroleum and gas inspectorates. The RSHQ will also include the Safety in Mines Testing and Research Station—Simtars—and Coal Mine Workers Health Scheme. In 2015 when the first cases of black lung were diagnosed there were a lot of questions about who was responsible for workers' safety and who had responsibility for checks and balances on air quality safety monitoring. We cannot allow this situation to ever happen again.

As the resources safety and health regulator in Queensland, the RSHQ will administer the resources safety acts and further their purposes; protect the safety and health of persons in the resources industry; regulate the safety and health in the resources industry; monitor compliance and the effectiveness of the resources safety acts; and carry out commercial activities incidental to RSHQ's main functions, primarily in relation to the operation of Simtars and the government explosives reserves.

The model for RSHQ achieves the independence and accountability recommended by the parliamentary Coal Workers' Pneumoconiosis Select Committee by providing for a regulator functionally separate from the economic arm of government with an independent chief executive officer appointed by the Governor in Council. The model also provides for sector-specific independent monitoring and review of the performance of the regulator and report back to the minister.

The regulator will be based in Brisbane with inspectors based in regional centres like Mackay, Rockhampton, Townsville and Mount Isa so they will be close to where the regulation resources are needed to ensure appropriate regulation across all mine sites. The government is building on its existing arrangements and has committed \$1.68 million over two years for 2019-20 to increase regional occupational hygiene inspectors for audit activities in Mackay and Rockhampton. Just recently three additional inspectors began work across Mackay and Rockhampton. This is on top of the already 17 inspectors working and based in the Bowen Basin.

Like other speakers, I would like to remember the workers who have been diagnosed with black lung. I speak of workers like Percy Verrall and Allan Whyte, who have a lifetime of work history in the industry, and also the young workers with a relatively short history in the industry who are living with the disease. They are very fearful for their future. Nobody should be compromised by going to work.

My community welcomed the announcement of the mobile health units. The units will go into workplaces. There will be no excuses for workers missing out on screening. Every worker is important. I would just like to touch briefly on a point made by the previous speaker. There are a lot of workers out there. They are not living with embarrassment because they have black lung; they are fearful that they will lose their jobs. They are fearful they will not be allowed to stay in the mines, because it is an industry they do love. The best thing we can do is bring in these regulations and ensure we keep every worker safe so they can stay in the industry they love.

I would like to also remember the families of the workers who have tragically lost their lives on the job. Their families will never be the same again. We have not forgotten any workers. This bill is for all of them. I commend the bill to the House.