




Speech By
Lachlan Millar

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

Record of Proceedings, 4 February 2020

RESOURCES SAFETY AND HEALTH QUEENSLAND BILL

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (3.16 pm): I rise to speak on the Resources Safety and Health Queensland Bill. I am relieved that finally some action is being taken with regard to mine safety. I am frustrated that it has taken the deaths of eight Queenslanders in 18 months to get the government's attention and to have this matter debated in the House. Frequently matters of importance to many Queenslanders are relegated to the bottom of the *Notice Paper*, but mining safety should not have to beg for the government's proper attention. Apart from the human toll inflicted due to injury and fatality, the mining industry at every level is highly conscious of the fact that its ability to operate requires a social licence.

While noting that eight deaths have gone unaddressed for 18 months in an industry that is worth \$62.9 billion to the Queensland economy, it should also be noted that, even as we hold this important debate today, we are still waiting for the public release of the findings of not one but two internal Labor reviews into mine safety. The internal review is another political ploy of the Labor government. We have seen it in response to Queensland's bushfire crisis and we are seeing it applied to the crisis in mining deaths. An internal review enables government to whitewash. The content of public submissions can be kept secret in an internal review. As a result, what the public knows and when it knows it can be manipulated for political reasons. Mining safety is too important to be used for petty politics.

Furthermore, as the member for Burdekin has pointed out, even when those reports are tabled there is no guarantee that we will see a timely legislative response to any recommendations. With very few sitting days before the election date, any new laws could lapse when the 56th Parliament is dissolved. I have to say that this approach is just not good enough. As a Bowen Basin member of parliament representing places such as Blackwater, Emerald, Springsure, Rolleston, Tieri and Capella, which are all mining towns, I have watched the rising death toll with horror. The loss of people such as Allan Houston and Donald Rabbitt is shattering for their families, friends, work mates and communities. Everyone in the Bowen Basin is talking about this issue. Their focus on the lack of action by the government has been intense, because there is no pattern in the types of fatal accidents that have claimed lives.

Mine safety is incredibly important. We need to take it seriously. The fact that important mine safety committees were not meeting and reporting on these matters was noticed and questions were asked. The committees were effectively dissolved or suspended because the membership did not meet the Palaszczuk government's gender equity guidelines.

It is also noted that there were 500 fewer mine safety inspections completed in 2018-19 than in 2015-16. This speaks volumes. Serious questions must be asked about why so many vital mine safety roles have been and remain vacant under the current administration. I will be standing shoulder to shoulder with mining constituents on this because it is truly a matter of life and death. The LNP will not be opposing this bill for that very reason.

I am a bit concerned that we should be talking solely about mine safety when it comes to this legislation when this morning we heard about the amendments that are to be moved with regard to Paradise Dam. If the government is bringing in legislative amendments with regard to Paradise Dam

then we need to get out and meet the people who are affected by Paradise Dam. I am talking about the macadamia and avocado growers in the seats of Bundaberg, Burnett and Callide where Paradise Dam is located.

We need to get out and meet those people. We are talking about reducing water reliability for the most productive agricultural area in Queensland—Bundaberg. The town of Bundaberg relies on agriculture. Not only does it grow sugar cane but it probably has the best soils in Queensland when it comes to producing tree crops like avocados, macadamias and other fruit and vegetables. The economy in Bundaberg is reliant on water reliability. When water reliability is reduced it has an impact on farmers. Farmers have mortgages to pay and loans to pay back. They are also answerable to a bank manager who counts their water rights as a part of their valuation. When their valuation is affected it affects a whole line of things for those farmers.

I will be honest that I come from the Central Highlands which is a very productive agricultural area but we need to look at what Bundaberg produces in kilograms per hectare when it comes to macadamias, avocados and tomatoes. What we are doing here today by not allowing the amendments related to Paradise Dam to go through the committee system is not allowing the minister, the department and, most importantly, the parliamentary committee—made up of members from the Labor Party, the LNP and the crossbench—hear the impact that this will have.

We are making a choice today about the impact of Paradise Dam. As a person who has grown up and been around water all my life, I know the value of water when it meets a property. If we are to reduce that, we need to go out and explain that and have a parliamentary process around that. We need to allow the parliamentary State Development, Natural Resources and Agricultural Industry Development Committee to do that. Mr Deputy Speaker Weir is the deputy chair of that committee. He also understands the importance of making sure we are accountable and transparent when we make major shifts in terms of water policy in Queensland.

The minister needs to have open and transparent conversations with farmers through the parliamentary committee system. To bring in amendments today as we are debating this legislation, without taking them through the parliament committee system, is unfair on farmers, unfair on the agricultural industry and unfair to the Bundaberg, Burnett and Callide regions.

I can tell the House that there are farmers out there who are worried about what this is going to do to their tree crops and their ability to continue to produce what is essentially an important economic base for agriculture in Queensland. I beg the minister to take these amendments through the committee process so that the process is open and transparent for everyone.