




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE

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RESOURCES SAFETY AND HEALTH QUEENSLAND BILL

 **Mr STEWART** (Townsville—ALP) (4.10 pm): All speakers in the debate of this bill today agree that this is about making sure that miners who go to work and do their job come home at night. We want that for every one of our workers, whether they are in the mining sector or in the emergency services. We all want to make sure we look after our people.

I heard the member for Gregory talk about Springsure being a mining community. Back in the day, when I started my teaching career, it certainly was not a mining community; it was agriculture and beef. In recent years it has gone into mining. I imagine that a number of the students I taught back in the day—that is going back several years now—would be working in those mines. They would have families too. I want to make sure that we in this House do everything possible to protect the kids I taught who are now men and women with their own kids going to Springsure State School—to ensure that those people go to work each day, do their job in a safe environment and come back home to their kids. That is what we need to do.

I have also spent some time in Townsville. In fact, this is my 22nd year of living in Townsville. It is not quite a coalmining town, but when I first arrived there it had the largest fly-in fly-out workforce in Queensland. It was the second largest in Australia—second only to Perth in Western Australia. Mining was a major part of the workforce, particularly in a lot of the schools that I taught in. We had kids who would wait for mum and dad to return from their various times out at those workplaces. I can still remember really clearly some instances where there was a collapse of a mine. Whether it was in the mine that these kids' parents were working at or not, you could see the uncertainty, terror and anxiety in the kids. It really affected these kids mentally.

For some kids, both their mum and their dad were away working on mine sites. These kids were usually under the care and guidance of grandparents or an aunty or uncle. Not knowing what was happening was really difficult for the kids. On those occasions we allowed kids to have their phones switched on so they could receive a phone call from their mum or dad that they were okay, that it was not them. I could never imagine what that was like. I could never imagine thinking, 'Are my mum and dad okay, because I have heard there is a mine collapse or there are some problems in a mine?' This legislation is about protecting workers so that their kids feel safe.

Recently while out west I did a bit of a mine tour. I thank all those mines that welcomed me. It was absolutely brilliant for a city boy who goes to work during the day and comes home most nights to family. The mine environment is very different. The workers rely on their mates and on the safety of the mines. Every single time I went to one of those mine sites, the first words out of people's mouths related to safety. Everything we did was impacted by safety—making sure people worked safely and that we visited those sites in a safe way. The people conducting those site visits were making sure of not only our safety but also their safety and the safety of everyone else. When it comes to mining and some of the big machinery, you do not get a second chance. That is why we have to do everything right. That is why we need to ensure that every step we take is to protect these workers.

When I read through the select committee report and saw what was happening in our coalmining sector, it astounded me. Black lung, as it used to be called back in the day, had all but vanished. For 30 years it was not an issue. It was not on our radar. It was never spoken about. That is what happened in the 'old days' of mining. We have seen that old disease returning. It is affecting the livelihoods and the lives of our workers. It is affecting their partners. It is affecting their families. We need to be doing something about this.

What I saw from reading the committee report was complacency at that initial level. While we had systems in place, complacency had crept in because people had not seen this disease for 30 years. We saw things like coalmines not being required to report dust-monitoring results or any exceedences to the Commissioner for Mine Safety and Health. To me, that is just ludicrous. If you are not relying on data to tell you a story, you are not getting the right story. We need to be doing everything we can. Also, there was no central repository for data on dust exposures in Queensland coalmines. We were just relying on people's memories or adhocery, because we did not believe that this disease existed anymore.

I congratulate every member of the select committee that did the work on this. I know that the former member for Southern Downs, Lawrence Springborg, was involved with it. I acknowledge the work of each and every member of that committee. I thank them for bringing this issue to the attention of this House. Here today we are working through what processes and what steps we put in place.

This bill will establish Resources Safety and Health Queensland as a statutory authority. This ensures that RSHQ will not be part of or subject to oversight from an administering department such as the Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy. This will ensure that the function of protecting workers is separate from the government functions of growing and facilitating mining and exploration projects and the resources sector as a whole. That is a great step. That is about separation of functions. The government will be able to promote mining while a completely separate body will ensure things are being done appropriately.

The Project Management Office report stated that structural changes do not in themselves protect workers from risks to their safety and health. The management and control of workplace risks involves, among other things, targeted intervention coupled with robust monitoring and review directed at continuous improvement. Organisations work through continuous improvement. That continuous improvement means collecting data, reporting data, having an independent body able to review that data and making sure they put in place the necessary strategies and interventions to address this particular issue.

I mention the annual report. Clause 64 states—

(1) The commissioner must—

- (a) prepare and give to the Minister a written report about the operations of the commissioner during each financial year; and
- (b) as soon as practicable after it is given to the Minister, publish it on a Queensland government website.

That is about clear and transparent accountability for the public. I notice that the committee has also asked in its workings that it see a review of that process as well. Mining, as we have heard, is a huge part of our economy. It is a huge part of our workforce and, as in my background with my great-grandfather involved with the Mount Isa Mines, largely we all have a number of distant relatives who were involved in mining, the backbone of this great state. I commend this bill to the House and thank the committees for their work.