




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE

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**MINERAL AND ENERGY RESOURCES AND OTHER LEGISLATION
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr STEWART** (Townsville—ALP) (4.49 pm): The Queensland mining industry is a major contributor to the state's resource exports and a significant source of employment, as we know. As of January 2020, the overall value of the Queensland resource exports was \$71.5 billion, which is almost double the export value of \$36 million in 2009. As at June 2019, a total of 53,084 people were employed in the resource industry, split across the following subsectors: over 37,000 in coalmining, over 14,000 in minerals mines and over 1,700 in quarries.

It is great to see the Palaszczuk government backing mining. We saw that today with the announcement of the Queensland Economic Recovery Strategy, which highlighted the importance of the CopperString 2.0 project. The \$14.8 million investment into CopperString will help the mining industry. We will see more mines opening. When mines open, jobs are created. We will see more miners moving into the work sites. More miners will come from cities such as Townsville, Mackay and Cairns. Every one of the miners who goes into those workplaces will know that they will be protected under the legislation that we are debating today.

For a number of years, Townsville was the second largest fly-in fly-out mining hub in Australia and supported the mining industry with workers to Cannington mine, Dugald River mine, Phosphate Hill and Ernest Henry mine, just to name a few. Last year I had the opportunity to visit each of those mines and experienced firsthand their operations. I acknowledge the mine managers who took time out of their very busy schedules to spend half a day with me, showing me their mine operations. I also had time to speak with the workers at the mine sites. They said it was tough doing fly-in fly-out work and being so far away from home. They were happy about the camp sites and the support they were given on the sites. In fact, at the Cannington mine they had a wellbeing trainer who looked after their physical and mental fitness while onsite. At each of those sites, a strong safety culture exists as does a focus on ensuring each and every worker returns safe after their day's work. However, we know that the mining industry can be a dangerous industry and, unfortunately, fatalities occur.

The Brady review analysed the 47 deaths by year from 2000 to July 2019. Brady stated—

If the industry continues to take a similar approach to safety, using the same philosophies and methodologies adopted over the past 19½ years, then similar safety outcomes are to be expected.

...

There will be periods where a significant number of fatalities occur, followed by periods where there are few to none. Past behaviour suggests that in the order of 12 fatalities are likely to occur over any 5 year period.

Those numbers—those figures—represent people. They represent dads or mums, uncles or aunties, next-door neighbours or friends with whom we share lazy Sunday afternoon barbecues. They represent workers whose families expect them to come home after their roster is finished. Those families expect them to come home and read to their kids in bed, instead of via Zoom or videoconference; to come home and share dinner around the table and talk about the day's events over a beer or a glass of wine.

I listened to the speech of the member for Gregory, who talked about his electorate where there are a number of mines. He talked about Springsure. When I spent time in Springsure, mining was not part of their work. The people were farmers and graziers. That has changed. Some of the students I taught in my early days of teaching have now become miners in the local mines. We need to protect those kids who are now workers in the mining industry. We need to protect the future miners who will work in the industry. This legislation will do that. I am not prepared to accept one death, let alone an average of 12 deaths over the next five years, in the mining industry. This House will do everything it can to ensure that we do not lose any more miners. That is what this is about. It is about making sure that the miners can get home to their families.

It seems to me that complacency can creep into a mine site. We all know that behaviours are hard to break. The Brady review found that the majority of fatalities were the result of interactions between factors across various levels in the mine site—for example, individual, supervisory and organisational. Many were preventable. I repeat: many were preventable. There was rarely a single cause. The Brady review stated that the fatalities are typically the result of a combination of banal, everyday, straightforward factors, such as a failure or absence of controls, a lack of training, and/or absent or inadequate supervision. What is the price of a worker's life? It comes down to a combination of three very simple problems that generally lead to a tragedy at a mine site: a failure or absence of controls, a lack of training and an absence of or inadequate supervision. Those things are preventable.

Importantly, in his recommendations Brady discusses high-reliability organisational theory, which considers a safety culture to be a reporting culture. The Palaszczuk government has moved quickly to introduce amendments to ensure that statutory office holders can raise safety issues and make reports about dangerous conditions without fear of reprisal or impact on their employment. That is where the cultural shift needs to happen—a shift where reporting issues and concerns are as important as the single bottom line of profits to a company; a shift of culture where resolving safety concerns swiftly and effectively is celebrated as much as celebrating an increase in ore production. Unfortunately, that is not the culture. Resource workers deserve the equivalent protections that all other workers in Queensland workplaces already have under the Palaszczuk government. Government has already extensively reformed mine safety and health over the past five years. In fact, we have 48 mine inspectors, which is the highest number we have had in 10 years. We are working on these improvements.

This legislation strengthens the safety culture in the resources sector through the introduction of industrial manslaughter provisions and requiring that persons appointed to critical safety statutory roles for coalmining operations must be an employee of the mine operator. Statutory officeholder positions are positions that are required to be appointed under legislation to a mine's management structure or in its operation. They are positions of oversight. Those officeholders should be able to raise safety concerns and make reports about dangerous conditions without fear of reprisal or impact on their employment. The industrial manslaughter provisions will bring the conduct of senior officers clearly into focus, holding industry and those in senior positions on site to account. Under the proposed laws, senior officers of a mine or quarry company can be tried for industrial manslaughter if criminal negligence is proved for a worker's death. Executives could face up to 20 years in jail if a Queensland mine or quarry worker dies because of their criminal negligence. Fines can also apply, with maximum penalties ranging up to \$13 million.

It is unfortunate that the big-stick approach has had to be taken to bring about cultural change. However, when it comes to protecting the lives of workers, the Palaszczuk government will do whatever it takes to ensure that the most important thing that comes out of a mine is every miner, safe and well at the end of their shift, so that they can go home to their families and read to their kids in bed or have a glass of wine and unwind at the end of the day. Those are the important things. That is why this bill is so important and it is why I commend the bill to the House.