




Speech By
Hon. Shannon Fentiman

MEMBER FOR WATERFORD

Record of Proceedings, 4 February 2020

RESOURCES SAFETY AND HEALTH QUEENSLAND BILL

 **Hon. SM FENTIMAN** (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development) (4.19 pm): I rise to support the Resources Safety and Health Queensland Bill. In rising today, I want to acknowledge the victims, their families and their communities who have been impacted by the re-emergence of coal workers' pneumoconiosis and recent quarrying fatalities. Every worker in Queensland deserves to come home safe after a day's work. Every worker in Queensland should have faith that the government is doing everything possible to protect their health and safety on the job. The safety of Queensland's resource workers is at the very heart of this bill. Along with everyone else in Queensland, we were shocked when there was another fatality in January at a mine site. The loss of that young man was a devastating blow and my condolences go out to the victim's family and friends. This was the eighth fatality in two years and it is entirely unacceptable.

The Palaszczuk government has already extensively reformed mine safety and health over the past five years. This bill is another step in delivering on the Palaszczuk government's commitment to protect mineworkers' safety, which already includes sweeping changes to better prevent and detect black lung disease amongst coal workers and provide a safety net for affected workers; extra powers for the mine safety regulator to issue fines without going to court for mine safety and health breaches; and an increase in maximum court penalties to \$4 million. Under this bill, the government is establishing a statutory body, Resources Safety and Health Queensland, to monitor the safety and health within the resources industry and ensure the industry's compliance with the resources safety acts. The bill will also establish a Commissioner for Resources Safety and Health to replace the existing mine safety commissioner. Creating a separate statutory body will ensure the genuine independence of the regulator and that the safety and health of workers will be above commercial considerations.

This bill has arisen from the recommendations of the Coal Workers' Pneumoconiosis Select Committee and in establishing the statutory body it will not be part of, or subject to oversight from, the mines department. I want to acknowledge the work of community advocates and health professionals who have lobbied for victims after the re-emergence of black lung disease. I particularly want to acknowledge my colleague the former member for Mirani who, as chair of the mine dust diseases victims group, has long championed this important issue.

This bill also provides for an independent Work Health and Safety Prosecutor established under the Work Health and Safety Act to prosecute serious offences. The bill also amends legislation to define what a serious offence is and what would be prosecuted by the Work Health and Safety Prosecutor. I am a proud AMWU member, having first worked there as a young lawyer and advocate, and I note in its submission it supports the safety reset that is key to this bill. I did want to mention John Hempseed, a local Moura resident and long-time coal shop steward for the AMWU, who has fought for many years for a miners' memorial in the town of Moura. At the opening ceremony of the Moura Miners' Memorial, former CFMEU vice-president and local resident Ray Barker spoke. He said—

Some people say time tends to cure all, but I don't think it does in the hearts and minds of the immediate families of these men, of the fathers, husbands, sons that went to work one day and didn't come back ...

The union movement has a long and proud history of giving a voice to workers and defending their rights and fighting for their safety. I want to thank all of the unions that continue to advocate on behalf of their members on these important issues. This is about safety and it is about the right of all workers to go to work and to come home to be part of their family. Every Queenslanders deserves to feel safe at work and to feel confident that they will make it back home to their loved ones. It is about workers and it is about their families and their communities. It is about keeping workers safe. I commend the bill to the House. I move—

That the debate be now adjourned.