




Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

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RESOURCES SAFETY AND HEALTH QUEENSLAND BILL

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (12.03 pm): In 2017-18 the resources sector provided one in every eight jobs and \$63 billion to the Queensland economy. As we know, without the resources sector Queensland does not work. Despite all of the technological and safety advances, the resources industry can be a dangerous workplace. In 18 months we have had the tragedy of eight deaths in Queensland's mines and quarries, and that is a huge burden for families, communities and our state to cope with. We know there are solutions. We have had a couple of resets, but Queenslanders still want answers. They still want to know why there were 500 fewer mine safety inspections last year than there were four years ago. They still want to know why we have vacant mine safety inspector roles, and they still want to know about gender requirements on advisory committees.

We believe that the crucial mine safety laws currently before this parliament must be passed this week. The government needs to get on with the job and pass these important mine safety amendments with the Resources Safety and Health Queensland Bill. We had a false start at the beginning of this parliamentary sitting week, and if I have time I may touch on the amendments that were attached to this bill in the first instance.

In July last year the minister announced two separate independent reviews into Queensland's mine safety. These reports were meant to be finalised by the end of 2019; however, they are yet to be tabled. Mine workers and their families deserve to have those reports tabled. The LNP moved a motion, as has been clearly articulated by other speakers, for a full parliamentary inquiry into these and other issues that contributed to the deaths and injuries in Queensland's mines and quarries. The way this government dismissed that inquiry was disturbing. It was an insult to resource industry workers and their families across this state who just want to see this parliament working together to ensure we do everything we can to make extremely dangerous workplaces even safer. The LNP has never asked for a safety reset to be slowed or ceased, and we were somewhat disappointed when that was implied by some opposite. I remind members that this parliament has previously been united in the interests of the health and safety of our resources workers and we hope that will continue.

The fact that the committee report into this legislation refers to and draws from the report of the select committee proves that the LNP's motion for a parliamentary inquiry into safety in our mines and quarries was not only warranted but essential. When you look at the fact that the interim report of the CWPSC included quotes and phrases like 'massive systematic failure' and 'an absolute failure by the DNRM, its Mine Inspectorate, SIMTARS and its Health Surveillance Unit', you would have to think that the situation that led to eight deaths in 18 months may in fact deserve complete oversight.

It is not only the opportunity for a full parliamentary inquiry that has been refused by those opposite. I draw to the attention of the minister and the House part 12 of the Coal Mining Safety and Health Act—existing legislation. This section expressly provides the minister with the power to establish a board of inquiry into 'a serious accident'. We believe this should have happened. We believe that those opposite have not exercised the power available to them, and I think that workers in the resource

industry deserve to know about the workings of this parliament when it appears to fail workers. Part 12 states that the inquiry must be held in public. What does the minister not want the public of Queensland to know?

Part 12 empowers the board of inquiry to call witnesses, receive evidence under oath, seek documents and offer witnesses the same protection as a witness in a proceeding in the Supreme Court. Despite these powers and widespread calls from throughout the resources sector, this minister did not act. Queensland's resource workers deserve the truth. Why did the minister not act, and what guarantees do Queenslanders have that the minister will get it right this time around? We want to make sure that this legislation goes some way to plug the legislative reforms and anomalies that continue to be raised.

Weeks ago the parliament began debating these laws, but all of a sudden the bill was delayed without explanation. I look forward to the minister's summing-up to provide some explanation, because we were committed to making sure this was introduced as the first act of the Queensland parliament. We are somewhat disappointed, as we are already some months into the year. It was extraordinary that, after the government released long-awaited reports into mining fatalities and accidents, these laws to improve mine safety were delayed. We call for the reports to be made transparent and public. The mining industry needs to do more when it comes to safety, and we all agree in this place that we have a role and responsibility to ensure that happens.

We know the real reason why the laws were put on ice. It has been articulated before. We understand that the former member for Bundamba was not happy. She did not think they went far enough. I think she mentioned that a couple of times in this place. It was made very clear that without a full inquiry into mine safety Queenslanders will continue to die and be injured in our mines and quarries. The LNP will continue its call for a full parliamentary inquiry. We should all acknowledge the eight mining fatalities in Queensland. If these mine safety laws fail to pass this week, it is further proof that Labor has its priorities all wrong. While resource workers, their families and the LNP are concerned about the safety regime, we must remain focused on mine safety. Reports must be tabled so they can be scrutinised by members of this place and, more importantly, the public.

I refer to some of the amendments tacked to this bill in the early days of 2020 in relation to 17 different acts and regulations passed in this House in terms of Paradise Dam. Some of these amendments are somewhat confusing and still very disturbing. Certainly, I am on the public record in terms of the unprecedented acts of this place around dam safety in my part of the world. It is important to acknowledge the number of great reports. The economic costs of inaction on Paradise Dam continue to highlight the seriousness of this issue.

What about the fact that these amendments were attached to the bill? I hope that is okay. I point out that, although 25 per cent of all irrigated agriculture comes out of that region, these water issues continue. We still are suspicious of those 17 amendments. We do not believe that this needed to be such a dramatic issue but have some sympathy in terms of the minister's issues around dam safety. I commend my contribution. I look forward to this House passing this bill today to ensure that coalmine and quarry safety is at the forefront of any future activities.