




Speech By
Bryson Head

MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

Record of Proceedings, 8 November 2022

COAL MINING SAFETY AND HEALTH AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr HEAD** (Callide—LNP) (5.43 pm): I rise to speak on the Coal Mining Safety and Health and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I have been a coalmine worker. I have seen firsthand the results of when safe practices are not followed or adhered to. Every single person who goes to work deserves to be able to return home at the end of their shift in one piece. As a coalmine worker I have been through an experience that I hope not a single soul in this country has to ever go through. I was an employee at a coalmine in Queensland where a fellow colleague was killed. On 25 March this year one of my colleagues at a Central Queensland mine went to work for the day and never made it home. He went to work to support his family and his family never saw him again. This is a price absolutely no coalmine worker should pay. I was off shift at the time, but that does not mean for a second that I, along with all of my colleagues, was not impacted by it. It was only 36 hours later that I was packing my bag to head back to site with little knowledge as to what happened and what the future held. It makes you question your own sanity and your own life decisions. Are all the benefits really worth it if this is ultimately the price you may pay? Every coalmine worker knows they work in a hazardous industry but, as all coalminers know, a hazard only becomes a risk when it is not appropriately managed.

Every single worker at that coalmine and across the Bowen Basin has been impacted by that fatality. My last shifts at site before taking leave for the Callide by-election were ultimately spent in the office—rightfully—with no work to be conducted until investigations were complete. This is a tragedy that ultimately happened under the watch of this minister. Last week while in Moranbah on a committee trip for our other safety inquiry, I made it to the Moranbah Miners Memorial and saw the memorial plaque of Gavin Feltwell, the very man who was killed on this tragic day only this year. His plaque was unveiled last Friday at the 2022 Moranbah Miners Memorial ceremony. It was yet another plaque that should never have been added. For the House, and to help the seriousness and importance of mine safety hit home, I table a photo of his plaque taken only last week in Moranbah.

Tabled paper: Photograph, dated November 2022, depicting the member for Callide, Mr Bryson Head MP, beside the plaque of Mr Gavin Feltwell [1858](#).

I give every coalmine worker in Queensland this commitment: as the member for Callide I will do everything in my power to work with all parties to see genuine improvements in mine safety in Queensland so we do not have to see yet another tragedy like this. I and my LNP colleagues understand how critical mine safety is. That is why the LNP will always welcome legislative change that is measured, thought out, well consulted and genuinely improves the safety outcomes for mineworkers. As my colleagues have already alluded to, the LNP will not be opposing this bill as there are provisions in this bill that attempt to tidy up some of the mess created when the bill was first introduced in 2020.

After the introduction of the bill in 2020 those opposite could have conducted an elaborate consultation process over, say, 12 months and then brought the amendments to the Transport and Resources Committee with an appropriate amount of time to review the legislation, call for submissions

and conduct hearings. They could have done this, but instead the Minister for Resources sat on his hands for 18 months. This bill sat on his desk while Gavin's family did not even get a chance to say goodbye.

Instead of bringing these amendments to the House months ago, the minister was off hiding—maybe trying to smooth over the aftermath of the coalmining royalties tax. He turned up here in October, introduced this bill and marked it as urgent. The committee was to report back by 4 November—three weeks and two days is all the committee got. The minister takes 18 months, runs a so-called working group to nut out this legislation and then at the end of November realises time is nearly up and expects everyone to jump as high as the heavens to go through the process of reviewing this legislation. Doing this on such a critical piece of legislation is a slap in the face to coalmine workers in Queensland.

As anyone who understands primary industry in general would know, you cannot be lazy when it comes to safety. Safety in every workplace is paramount and must be treated with utmost respect. In recent times the industry has been pushing the message of 'chronic unease' to encourage their coalmine workers to always maintain a level of uneasiness with their surroundings to reduce complacency and ultimately reduce harm in the workplace. They have been spreading this message across their sites as part of their safety activation days. Having been a part of those activation days myself in Central Queensland coalmines, I have a significant level of chronic unease with this bill and the extreme levels of complacency from the minister in his actions during the process of this legislation.

We are talking about people's lives. We are talking about the lives of our sisters, our brothers, our parents, our children and our neighbours. I would say that every single member of this House has constituents who are employed in coalmines in this state. We must get safety legislation right. To get it right, due process must be followed and it must be fair. In this instance, the process has been far from fair for the coalminers of Queensland.

When I asked Resources Safety & Health Queensland about some of these provisions, they could not point to evidence that shows this will lead to genuine improved safety outcomes. I said—

I am not aware of a similar law in Australia with this level of restrictions. Are you aware of any place in the world that might? Is there evidence in the current day that supports the fact that this may improve mine safety?

They responded that they are 'not aware of any other comparative provisions from other jurisdictions' and that they had nothing further to add. We are significantly changing the requirements of coalmine operators in terms of statutory positions and we do not have any evidence that it will improve safety outcomes. I am all for legislation that will improve safety outcomes but to change key aspects of coalmine safety legislation without any evidence that it will improve safety outcomes is absolute madness.

There are also serious questions yet to be answered about the provisions including sites under care and maintenance. I asked RSHQ why care and maintenance was not exempt as exploration sites were. Their response was—

When the provisions were originally introduced in 2020, they applied to all operations. In the working group and consultation process that followed, exploration companies were specifically raised ... Mines in care and maintenance was not raised in that process.

I had the opportunity to ask the QRC a similar question. They responded—

Care, maintenance and rehabilitation probably has not been adequately discussed. It certainly was not a feature in the previous provisions. QRC have raised it a number of times but it is not something that has appeared in the amendment bill. It is a really important issue that we need to ensure gets picked up. It needs to be treated like exploration. It needs to be excluded.

Therefore, it is clear that this bill is a failure when it comes to consultation, it is a failure when it comes to safety and it is a complete failure when it comes to preventing more fatalities in Queensland coalmines.

Ms Pease: Why are you voting for it?

Mr HEAD: I have said why we are voting for it. We need to because the legislation expires at the end of this month. The 80 per cent contractor exemption appears to be completely plucked from the sky. No submitter was able to state where that figure came from as it was not discussed in a working group. Ultimately, the company with the most employees on a site has the most on the line when it comes to mine safety. If we were given more time to appropriately consult and understand these amendments then we may have been able to propose a more workable alternative.

The lives of my former colleagues and my family, friends and neighbours are ultimately affected by poor safety standards and poor coalmine safety legislation. Any death that happens in a Queensland coalmine is ultimately at the hands of the Minister for Resources. We are talking about people's lives. We must get this right. That is why we are calling on the government to respect this time frame.

Mr STEWART: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I take offence and I ask the member to withdraw.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Lui): Member for Callide, the member for Townsville takes offence. Do you withdraw?

Mr HEAD: I withdraw. I want to thank my fellow committee members and the committee staff for their efforts in pulling off a miracle by getting the committee report and recommendations together by the due date. We must get this right and that is why we are calling on the government to extend the time frame.