




Speech By  
**Dale Last**

**MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN**

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Record of Proceedings, 8 November 2022

## **COAL MINING SAFETY AND HEALTH AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (6.45 pm): I rise to contribute to the Coal Mining Safety and Health and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. From the start, we say that this bill is another broken promise by those opposite. I take members back to 19 May 2020 in this House when the then minister for natural resources spoke on the Mineral and Energy Resources and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. At that time, I was the shadow minister for natural resources and mines. What is important to remember about that bill is that when then minister Lynham introduced it he said it delivered on ‘three significant government priorities’. The first was to strengthen the safety culture in the resources sector. The second was to support reforms to mine rehabilitation and financial assurance. The third, and the most telling, was to progress amendments that ‘align with our election commitment to improve the regulatory efficiency of the resources sector’.

There we have it. The legislation was to deliver on an election commitment or, in layman’s terms, a promise to the people of Queensland. It is important to keep that previous bill in mind as we debate this particular bill because the current minister referred to that very bill when he introduced this bill. Just like his predecessor, the current minister spoke about strengthening the safety and health culture, but what the current minister also spoke about was what he called ‘challenges to implementing the direct employment requirements’.

Back in 2020 I raised the issue of implementing those requirements when I asked what assurances the minister could provide that we had sufficient SSEs, for example, to allow implementation. No assurances were given. The minister ignored the question, and here we are today with proof that the original bill was big on talk, big on so-called commitment, but when it comes to actually delivering it is yet another fail. I met with a group of SSEs at that time and they expressed to me their grave concerns with what was going on in the industry. They had grave concerns about what it meant to them in the performance of their duties and grave concerns about the ongoing safety of coalminers in this state. When it comes to mine safety, we need to get it right. We seem to have been going backwards and forwards in this place since 2020, talking about this particular issue, talking about mining safety. There has been lots of talk. I will not go too far into the evidence given at the inquiry last week in Moranbah, suffice it to say that some of it was chilling. There will be more to say about that in due course.

While they chose to ignore my questions, those opposite obviously believed that SSEs and other statutory position holders would just appear by magic. The reality is they do not. Yet this bill proposes that directly employed statutory position holders, like SSEs, will be needed for mines that are in rehabilitation, care and maintenance stages with no explanation given. What we have seen previously when it comes to this government’s record on addressing mine safety is review after review, and many of the recommendations of those reviews are ignored or not implemented. A prime example is the Coal Workers’ Pneumoconiosis Select Committee’s report that was worked on by five current members, three of them being government members. That report offered a recommendation that would make a

huge difference to safety—the increase of unannounced inspections to 50 per cent. Has it been done? No! More than five years after the recommendation was made, we still have statutory position holders calling for ‘a hell of a lot more unannounced inspections’ as recently as last week.

**Mr STEWART:** Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I believe that the member on his feet is straying outside the long title of the bill and I seek your guidance to bring him back to what is being debated this evening.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Krause): Member for Burdekin, I ask you to please be relevant to the long title of the bill.

**Mr LAST:** Certainly, Mr Deputy Speaker. Why? Because according to the RSHQ’s most recent annual report, only 15 per cent of Coal Inspectorate inspections were unannounced. We have seen this government commission review after review—

**Mr STEWART:** Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. Despite your guidance to the member for Burdekin, he seemed to resume talking about unannounced inspections and ignored what you said.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Is your point of order relevance, Minister?

**Mr STEWART:** My point of order is coming back to the long title of the bill and ignoring what you had asked him to do.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member, you do not need to give me any guidance about my directions. Your point of order is relevance, I assume? Member for Burdekin, please keep your comments to the long title of the bill and resume your contribution.

**Mr LAST:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. We have seen this government commission review after review, but when it came to this bill, the committee was given less than a month to review the bill—not even enough time for a committee hearing outside of Brisbane. Is it any wonder the committee was given such a brief period to examine the legislation when the Mining and Energy Union describes the bill as undermining the intent of the legislative change and says that this bill ‘places coalmine workers at risk’? It is clear from history and from feedback from groups like the Mining and Energy Union that this government has backtracked on their promise, and it is clear that those opposite are dodging the responsibilities they hold as government. Not only do those responsibilities include the need for inspections but also they include responsibilities for legislative changes like we have seen from the reviews and from the Coal Mining Board of Inquiry. Those responsibilities include getting the legislation right.

This government has had close to two years to get this right and they have failed. This government has had close to two years to deliver on what was clearly an election commitment, but they cannot. The reason is that this government’s commitment was based on winning an election, instead of being based on keeping coalmine workers safe.

It is not just when it comes to legislation that those opposite are failing; their failings are evident throughout the resources industry, and those failings are abundantly clear in the Burdekin electorate, home to the lion’s share of the state’s coalmines. Just last week, the mayor of the Isaac Regional Council stated that her region produced almost \$23 billion in annual economic output. To put that into perspective, that is seven times the amount of the Treasurer’s unforeseen expenditure. Yet, despite that huge economic output, the mayor described medical services in the region—and let’s keep in mind that this is a bill about safety and health—as insufficient and said they posed a serious risk to workers. To quote Mayor Baker when talking about the Grosvenor mining incident, ‘It is acknowledged that lives would have been lost if not for the coincidental presence of a visiting doctor.’ Not only has this government failed to get it right over the past two years, they have also failed to ensure that basic government provided services were available in that community.

**Mr Stewart:** Building a new hospital.

**Mr LAST:** I will take that interjection. There was a mention of a new hospital in the lead-up to the last election, the same project that has been included in the glossy brochure, but I ask the members opposite to show me the line item in the budget documents where the funding for that new hospital is identified. They will not find it. There is no budget line item in the document. Once again, here we are, a government making promises that are not supported by funding. It is very clearly a question of ‘show me the money’.

The LNP understands the importance of safety for our mine and quarry workers. As the member for Burdekin, I speak with mineworkers every day, and I have spoken with the families of miners who have lost their lives in Queensland mines. In fact, I attended the miners’ memorial service last Friday in Moranbah, and we heard from some of the families in that community who had lost husbands, fathers and brothers to mining incidents. At that ceremony we sadly added another name, Gavin Feltwell, who

unfortunately lost his life in a mining incident on 25 March this year to bring the total number to 15 in that community. To see the grief etched on their faces, to hear them speak about the impact of losing a loved one, brought home just how important it is that, as legislators in this place, we get this right. When it comes to mine safety—and we have heard it all here tonight about how important it is that when they go to work they go home again—when you hear from one of the widows of the impact when she answered a knock on the door and three police officers were standing there to deliver that news, you appreciate that this is real and that we do need to get it right.

It is a fact that despite numerous reviews, this government cannot get it right, and it is a fact that this government is not listening. It is a fact that despite all their claims and election promises, there are calls from workers for a more proactive inspectorate and there are high potential incidents in Queensland mines occurring each and every day. It is time for this government and this minister to listen. It is time for this government and this minister to accept that, as a government, they also have responsibilities when it comes to making our mines as safe as possible. It is time for this government and this minister to get it right. It is the absolute least we can do because that is what our mineworkers deserve.