




Speech By  
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**MEMBER FOR MACKAY**

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

 **Mrs GILBERT** (Mackay—ALP) (11.23 am): I rise to contribute to debate on the Coal Mining Safety and Health and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. Safety on all worksites, no matter where they are, is everybody's business. You are responsible for your safety and you are also responsible for the safety of all those around you. In my region the communities of the Bowen Basin are fatigued from hearing about workplace injuries at our coalmine sites. When there is an injury or a death, we do not care if you live locally or if you FIFO or you are a part of our community: our community's hearts break. We are angry that needless injuries and deaths occur. FIFO workers come from all over Australia and New Zealand. They FIFO in to work in our resources sector. We embrace all of our workers—every life is precious—and we are anxious for them when there is an injury. When it is reported, we mourn their death if that occurs.

The cycle of workplace injuries and deaths that have taken place since 2000 screams out that the behaviours need to change and the culture of workplaces and attitudes of employers need to change. In 2018 and 2019 there were six fatalities that occurred in the industry. That is six families that have been scarred for life. People say that it is a hazardous industry and that it is a high-danger industry and that this industry expects injuries. That is not good enough. What is causing the hazard? What is causing the danger? They say that it is freak accidents or human error or bad luck. These are only slogans, not reasons to simplify or ignore danger. If danger can be identified, then practices must be put in place to make it safe.

I have been to many health and safety seminars over the years and the one thing that families and first responders say is that after attending a tragedy your life is never the same, that that accident is with you forever. If there is one thing I wish for in life it is to never have to pick up the phone ever again to Isaac Mayor Anne Baker and give my condolences to her and her community after a mining incident. Workers, no matter where they work, should have an expectation that they arrive home safe after their shift and they need to be in the same shape as when they left home.

The resources sector is a good industry. It provides good ongoing work, it gives our young people their first training and set of skills and it contributes to local and state economies. There is no reason for it to be an unsafe industry. Yesterday I was listening with interest when the member for Toowoomba North talked about his experience of going down into the coalmine and the way that he described it. It is a hazardous industry, but there is no reason why we should just throw our hands up and allow accidents to happen. We know that we can make changes. The member for Hill talked about his experiences on the black lung committee. As we went through that whole process we knew that there was danger with the air, so we put in place practices to make sure that we keep miners safe.

We can continue to make mining workplaces as safe as possible. After that whole spate of mining accidents, we did the safety resets. One would expect that workers in mines could come out and say if there is danger, but unfortunately mineworkers are still saying to me that the culture is, 'Don't speak up

if you want to get another shift.' We do need to put processes in place to ensure that the legislation makes the industry safer, so all workers on mine sites are becoming permanent workers so they are not afraid to lose their jobs. That is why this legislation is so important.

The jobs of mine workers working in health and safety are tied to their employers so that the mining companies are taking responsibility for workers' safety. As others have said, on 25 May we did make changes to the legislation. However, this bill ensures that statutory positions are now directly employed by coalmine operators—that is, for coalmines the site operator executives, for surface mines the open-cut examiners, and for underground mines the underground mine managers, ventilation officers, explosion risk zone controllers, electrical engineer managers and mechanical engineer managers so that mine safety is about mine operators taking on the risk for safety.

It will be mandatory for some of these positions to be made permanent. I have had conversations with the people currently in those positions. Not all of them are happy about becoming permanent workers. They have set themselves up as businesses. They get tax concessions because they are running a business. There are reasons why they want to stay as contractors. They have told me about the way that they do their jobs. They talk with such pride about the safety levels that they have for themselves. I thank those contractors who have been brave enough to stand up and say there is an issue. That is not the case across the board. Even though those workers and business owners have identified that there will be some impact on the way that they do their business and their tax, we need to look after every worker. By putting this legislation in place we will make sure that our mine sites will operate as safely as possible.

I am looking forward to seeing this bill passed. In Queensland if there is a safety issue identified we put measures in place to keep workers safe. I was a member of the Coal Workers' Pneumoconiosis Select Committee and listened to tragic stories. I heard of the heartache of the families. We heard from workers who could no longer live to old age to support their families and enjoy their grandkids. We have put measures in place to stop black lung from coming back. Heart of Australia trucks are driving around Queensland and visiting our mine sites. They come into Mackay on a regular basis. The workers from my region who work in the mine sites can do so now knowing that they are not going to get black lung. We put in place processes around ventilation. It is not just good enough to say it is a hazardous industry, we need to get on with it because that is what it is and to expect injuries. We should not expect injuries in any workplace or any industry.

I thank the minister and the committee for bringing this legislation forward. We are learning from the past. The resource sector in this state has a long life ahead of it, because we are getting into rare earth minerals. Mining will go on forever and ever in this state. What we dig out of the ground might be different, but we are going to keep on digging it up. We need these changes for our young people who are looking forward to being resource sector workers in the future and for those who are working in the resource sector now. I support the bill.