




Speech By
Dale Last

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

Record of Proceedings, 26 October 2023

TRANSPORT AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (3.26 pm): I rise to speak to the Transport and Resources Committee's report into coalmining industry safety. Even though the board of inquiry made 11 recommendations relating to the government, the motion establishing this inquiry singles out mine operators, labour hire companies and associated entities for the committee's scrutiny. It goes without saying that government has a role in improving safety in Queensland's mines—something the committee obviously agrees with, given it made four recommendations that directly relate to actions of this government. But still this government refuses to act, with the response to three of those four recommendations being little more than 'I will seek advice'.

In this report is yet another recommendation to increase the number of unannounced inspections in mines. The Coal Workers' Pneumoconiosis Select Committee's second report in 2016 highlighted the importance of increasing unannounced inspections, but instead we saw not only a reduction in unannounced inspections in 2022-23 but also a reduction in total inspections. The RSHQ annual report refers to this committee report and gives reasons why the proportion of unannounced inspections should not increase, including that they had identified no real difference in the rate of noncompliance or substandard practices between the two types of inspections. Is it any wonder no difference was identified when workers tell me that on an arrival to conduct an unannounced inspection inspectors are greeted with a platter of sandwiches from a well-known food chain—something that can only be described as a miracle in a mine an hour away from the nearest town. The system is clearly broken and, despite the best efforts of the committee, it is a fait accompli that unannounced inspections will not increase.

The genesis of this committee inquiry and report was the recommendation stemming from the Coal Mining Board of Inquiry, an inquiry also referred to in the RSHQ's annual report. In the more than two years since the board of inquiry concluded, 10 of the 30 recommendations made to government have been implemented. As for the rest, RSHQ says that many of them 'propose legislative amendment and are subject to government consideration'. Perhaps the minister in his contribution today can explain why we are still waiting. One issue identified by the board of inquiry more than three years ago is the issue of compulsion of witnesses—something the former resources minister told the board would be given careful consideration by government but clearly has not.

When he appeared before the committee, my constituent Scott Leggett explained the importance of compelling witnesses. Scott has worked in coalmines for 30 years. He has worked in mines rescue, he has been an open-cut examiner for 10 years and he holds a site senior executive ticket. Scott told the committee—

If you cannot get the information then you are never going to get a result. You need truth. You need to be able to compel people to tell the truth about what happened. If you cannot get that information you will never get to what caused it. If you cannot understand or find what caused it you will never fix it. It will happen again.

This government has a responsibility to every worker in Queensland's mines and a responsibility to their families—families like that of Phil and Michelle Dodunski who, for 10 years, have sought answers into the circumstances surrounding the death of their son Gareth. Coroner MacKenzie addressed the delay in delivering his findings, citing a loss of important evidence as a direct consequence of the absence of the power to compel witnesses. The coroner found the inability to compel witnesses hindered the investigation and included a reference to the director of the Serious Incident Investigation Unit at RSHQ, advising that the inspectorate had previously sought those powers but was unsuccessful.

It is clear that mine operators, labour hire companies and associated entities have a responsibility when it comes to mine safety, but so does the government—a fact proven by this committee. This report is another opportunity for the government to play its part, to take some responsibility and to do the right thing in the interests of safety in Queensland's mines. The people who work in our mines deserve nothing less. Coalmining is like no other industry: I see the camaraderie and I see the way that the miners work and support each other. As I always say, safety must come before production.