




Speech By
James Martin

MEMBER FOR STRETTON

Record of Proceedings, 26 October 2023

TRANSPORT AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Mr MARTIN** (Stretton—ALP) (3.31 pm): I rise to speak on the parliamentary Transport and Resources Committee's report No. 29 into coalmining industry safety. The report looked at the current practices and activities of the coalmining industry to cultivate and improve safety culture. The scope included both surface and underground operations, and involved coalmine operators and their senior management, contractors, labour hire, unions, companies and the Queensland Resources Council.

I thank all the members of the Transport and Resources Committee as well as the committee chair, the member for Kurwongbah, for their work on the inquiry. The committee held public hearings in Moranbah and Brisbane, as well as a number of teleconferences. I thank all the witnesses who gave insights during those hearings. Thanks also to the individuals and organisations that made written submissions to the inquiry.

During the inquiry, members of the committee had the opportunity to visit the Grosvenor Mine and experience the conditions that underground miners work in. I have to say that going underground with the committee was a pretty eye-opening experience. Before we went underground, we had training in the oxygen tanks that miners carry. They are known as self-contained self-rescuers. That training leaves you with no doubt as to how serious it is to go underground and that, when something goes wrong, it can have very serious consequences.

We also had the opportunity to visit the miners' memorial in Moranbah Town Square, which commemorates those miners whose lives have been tragically lost in the Moranbah coalfields and while travelling on the roads to and from work. It is a very moving memorial. If members have not been there, I encourage them to visit it. It is a bronze sculpture depicting a seated miner who is looking at the plaques with all of the names of the miners who have been lost, contemplating when he might see his mates again.

Currently, there are 66 operational coalmines in Queensland and most of them are located in the Central Queensland region. There are 53 open-cut and 13 underground mines. Since 2020, the Queensland coal industry has benefitted from unprecedented high coal prices. Queensland continues to offer a very attractive environment for investment in coal. There are several competitive advantages including high-quality hard coking coal, proximity to fast-growing Asian regions, efficient supply chains, good infrastructure and, most importantly, a skilled workforce. Substantial investments and acquisitions in the Queensland coal industry indicate coal producers' ongoing confidence in investing in Queensland, which is in contrast to some of the criticisms from the Queensland Resources Council.

With the number of new coal projects increasing, we are required to increase our commitment to safety and risk management. Therefore, while we know that operators make substantial profits from Queensland coalmines, it is vital that the productivity of the mines never comes before the safety of the workers in them. The safety of Queenslanders should always come first because every person has the right to feel safe in their workplace. Any mineworker death is a preventable tragedy.

Risk-based legislation plays a major role in upholding mine safety, but it is just as important that there is collaboration and information sharing between industry workers, unions and regulators. Some of the key issues that the inquiry paid attention to were the competing priorities of coal production rates and worker safety and, in particular, the impact of production, safety bonuses and incentives on workers and worker behaviour; appropriate and effective incident reporting; the safety implications of the use of labour hire; general site safety; and the distinction between process safety and personal safety, which the member for Kurwongbah spoke about.

The committee identified that coalmine operators often emphasise their company's commitment to safety above all else while worker representatives and community submitters often identify health and safety deficits. It emphasised the need for the improved sharing of information between employers, workers, regulators and the union. The committee also noted that workplace cultures were often crucial to successfully achieving sustainable coal production in a safe way. Further research into how coalmines in Queensland are managed and the competing demands of production and safety would also be of great benefit to the industry as a whole. I commend the committee's report to the House.