



Speech By  
**Michael Berkman**


**MEMBER FOR MAIWAR**

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**QUEENSLAND CLIMATE TRANSITION BILL**

**Second Reading**

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (5.30 pm): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

Last week the Labor state government, under freshly minted Premier Steven Miles, approved a new coalmine in Queensland. It was their second new coalmine in just two weeks. Whitehaven Coal plans to extract 17 million tonnes annually for 30 years from its Winchester South greenfield coalmine in the Bowen Basin. That mine will create not only more than 14 million tonnes of fugitive emissions right here in Queensland but also an estimated of 567 million tonnes of emissions elsewhere in the globe. That is more than Australia's total domestic greenhouse gas emissions annually.

In assessing the project's environmental impact statement last year, the Coordinator-General determined that approval would limit human rights including the rights to life, property and freedom of movement and the particular rights of children to be protected and of First Nations people to preserve and practise their culture. Like other coalmines in Queensland, the proponent has no plan to reduce fugitive methane emissions, which we know are consistently underestimated and under-reported.

Late last year the Queensland Conservation Council and Lock the Gate released findings that fugitive methane emissions from current and proposed coal and gas projects could top 26.6 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions each year. This Labor government, led by self-proclaimed environmentalist Steven Miles, had that information and it approved the mine anyway. Where is Al Gore's protege now? Where is the bright-eyed, climate-conscious progressive leader who promised to put the environment front and centre as Premier? The Miles government did not even make it two months without approving new coalmines. What a disappointment—at least it would be a disappointment, if any of us still trusted the Labor Party on climate policy.

Their friends at the federal level have been busy approving new coalmines since they inched into power promising to end the delay and denial typical of the Liberal-National coalition, but keeping power is clearly all they care about. They lie to the public and do just enough to keep their seats while the temperature continues to rise. I do not think they are ignorant of that fact. I think calling the Labor Party ignorant of the climate crisis and their part in it is far too kind. They know that mining and burning coal and gas leads to more CO<sub>2</sub> and methane emissions, which trap heat and warm the climate. They approve them anyway. They know that a warming climate means more heatwaves, cyclones, floods and bushfires. They show up after the fact to offer their sympathies and handshakes and at press conferences they spruik grants that can never replace what has been lost in these disasters.

The Labor Party knows that climate change means the death of the reef, countless other species and thousands of jobs. The flow-on effects of sea level rise and more extreme weather will destroy livelihoods and kill innocent people. They will create more forced migration, more disease, more

uninsurable homes, more expensive food and more global conflict. But unless it affects them and their jobs and their power, they appear to just not care. Honestly, I do not know how we are expected to reach any other conclusion. They know that they are responsible, but they are looking us right in the face and telling us that they are not. It truly is psychopathic behaviour.

Labor wants to blame anyone but themselves for the climate crisis, as though they could not possibly know when they signed off on a new coalmine that the coal would be dug up and burned, simply because it is not going to be burned in Queensland. I am not buying it and it is, frankly, absurd that they are still peddling that nonsense. You do not have to be a specialist climatologist to know that the Earth's atmosphere does not include divisions along border lines or jurisdictions. There is no great authority in the sky diligently allocating the proportional impacts of global warming back to the countries responsible according to international carbon accounting standards.

Queensland's coal and gas are heating up the entire globe; that is a plain truth no matter how Labor spin it. Their spin is particularly galling when they know that Queenslanders will be hit hard—they are already being hit hard—by climate change. We here in Queensland are particularly vulnerable to extreme weather disasters. In fact, our economic losses from these events are almost double the national average on a per capita basis. Insurers are deserting Queenslanders because of the level of climate risk here.

We just sweated through months of rolling heatwaves, which may seem invisible but are in fact the deadliest of all weather disasters, especially for the most vulnerable people in our communities. The year 2023 was the hottest year on record globally, and experts are already warning that 2024 is likely to be even hotter. For the first time, the 12-month global average temperature increase has breached the 1.5-degree Celsius threshold that was specified in the Paris Agreement, to which Australia is a signatory. Experts project that it will exceed the permanent 1.5-degree increase above pre-industrial levels within 10 years. That is what the Paris Agreement was premised on avoiding. I do not say that to be defeatist. There is no doubt that action has been too slow and that the impacts of 1.5 degrees of warming will be grave, but we know from the work of hundreds of scientists that two degrees will be even worse, which is why the Paris Agreement said that if we cannot avoid 1.5 degrees we must at least keep warming below two degrees.

I try to take some comfort in the government's change of heart regarding certain aspects of this bill. When I introduced the bill last year, the state's emission reduction targets were on a par with those of the former Morrison Liberal-National government. The government had committed to just a 30 per cent reduction in emissions on 2005 levels by 2030 and net zero emissions by 2050. This bill includes provisions to increase our emissions reduction target to 75 per cent by 2030 and to reach net zero by 2035. That is what leading climate scientists say needs to be met if we are going to meet our Paris obligations. Late last year, the new Premier finally announced that Labor will increase its target to 75 per cent by 2035. While it falls a bit short of the science-based targets in this bill, it is a big step up from Morrison and Palaszczuk targets.

Make no mistake: these big steps from Labor seem to follow a pretty predictable pattern. They come close to elections, whenever it is apparent that Labor might be threatened by the Greens. Right after the 2022 federal election, when Queenslanders elected four new Greens representatives to federal parliament, the government released its Energy and Jobs Plan. Again, the government inched really close to Greens policy—a big build of publicly owned renewable energy and a job guarantee for energy workers negotiated with unions—but their big blind spot remained. They still will not touch coal and gas extraction. We still have a government that claims to take climate action while it is still committing Queensland's biggest mining crimes—namely, the continued mining and export of fossil fuels.

They can put domestic commissions and renewable energy numbers on a press release and pretend that they are doing Al Gore proud but the inconvenient truth is: the arbitrary distinction between emissions from Queensland coal burned in Millmerran or Mumbai is the one of the biggest lies this government has ever told. It is a bald-faced lie. It is also a lie for the government to pretend that they are supporting workers—

**Mr LANGBROEK:** Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. The member is using unparliamentary language and should be asked to withdraw.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Martin): Member, I did not hear any—

**Mr LANGBROEK:** He is using the word 'lie'.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member, it would assist debate if you said you would withdraw.

**Mr BERKMAN:** I withdraw. It is also misleading for the government to pretend that they are supporting workers on a climate transition while the resources industry is totally excluded from their plans. This bill would create the Queensland climate transition authority as a new independent statutory

authority to develop the Queensland climate transition strategic plan by the end of the 2024. The authority would be a central coordinating body to support government departments and existing agencies to implement the plan.

In addition to setting out strategies and policies for Queensland to meet the emissions reduction targets and phase out fossil fuel exports by 2030, the plan would need to ensure employment stability and income security for affected resources workers and communities. The transition authority would be explicitly tasked with taking a collaborative, place-based approach to consulting with stakeholders like unions, employers and community members on the local transition plan—a plan for retraining, redeployment opportunities, a job guarantee and new opportunities like expanding critical minerals mining and processing as well as local green manufacturing and exports.

The government has made no such commitment for resources workers. They are misleading communities about the impacts of coal and gas mining on our climate and they are misleading those same communities about the longevity of jobs in the fossil fuel sector. They know this because their own experts have told them. I refer to the Deloitte report on the climate transition and the resources industry that the government commissioned in 2021 which found that fossil fuel demand is declining globally, and jobs growth productivity and wellbeing will go with it.

The state government must begin planning now to protect Queenslanders from sudden job losses as a result of unplanned declines in investment, from global penalties and sanctions, and from stranded assets. It must stop contributing to the tension and confusion in communities where new fossil fuel projects are approved with little long-term viability.

The Premier has acknowledged that it is his job, the government's job, to convince Queenslanders that there is a future beyond coal and gas in the energy sector. It is also their job to work towards a future for the resources sector beyond coal and gas. The government wants to act like coal and gas mined here is someone else's problem. They use the 'drug dealer's defence' and any number of other excuses. Tonight I am asking them to take some responsibility for what we do here in Queensland.