




Speech By
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Record of Proceedings, 12 June 2024

**RESOURCES SAFETY AND HEALTH LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL;
MINERAL AND ENERGY RESOURCES AND OTHER LEGISLATION
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (3.45 pm): I rise to make my contribution to this cognate debate on the Resources Safety and Health Legislation Amendment Bill and the Mineral and Energy Resources and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. First, just let me say that the time we were given to look at these bills was really insufficient to do the job as well as we would have liked. I would like to thank the members of the committee, particularly those opposite, who did listen. I would also like to thank the minister, who has listened and has removed the subsidence issue from the bill. It is too big an issue to be resolved under this time pressure and it is too important for the long-term future of Queensland to get it wrong. It is good that it is gone. Let me also say that protecting the Great Artesian Basin is critical. My colleague the shadow minister for the environment spoke well on that, and I would like to be associated with those comments.

I will start with the Resources Safety and Health Legislation Amendment Bill. We need to be very clear: the resources industry and all of its components underpin this state in a major way. The industry is represented in the shield that sits above the Speaker's chair because the resources industry is critical to Queensland. As part of that, something that this place needs to take very seriously is making sure that everybody gets home safely. There have been instances where that has not happened, when someone has lost their life or found themselves permanently injured. When that happens we need to make sure we go through a process of looking at how to improve things. We look at process. We look at culture. We look at the organisation. We look at motivation. We look at all of those things. It is really important that we do that.

What concerns me here is the lack of consultation in the preparation of this bill. Again, there has been some discussion around arrogance. There has been some discussion around incompetence. I am not sure it is either of those. I think it is this desire to know everything, so maybe it is arrogance. The unions and the industry have both asked for tripartite, meaningful consultation through a working group over an extended period of time so that they can avoid any unseen or unintended legislative requirements or regulatory requirements, even with the good intent of someone sitting in an office and coming up with an idea. I think listening to the industry and listening to the unions and the workers who are in that environment is critical to getting it right.

I would encourage the minister to support a tripartite working group for safety regulation. It should be something that is done openly, transparently and frequently so that Queensland can lead the way in the resources industry worldwide and not have this situation where amendments and changes are thrown in at the last minute, where the committee is under pressure and where the secretariat, who did a fantastic job, do not have the resources.

I will go to a couple of examples. One is the importance of context in reporting high-potential incidents. The Brady review highlighted that an increase in high-potential incidents could in fact indicate a robust safety culture; however, concerns were raised that the reporting of these incidents might be used for naming and shaming. RSHQ clarified that the intent is to improve safety outcomes. It is critical that today the minister confirms that so people do not shy away from reporting these high-potential incidents and it is very clear that the intent is not to name and shame but to improve safety. Timeliness and transparency is another area that others have spoken about, so with the very short time I have left I will move on. Potential workforce shortages and economic impacts are areas that need to be looked at. As we raise standards and require people to have the necessary certification, it is important that we have the time to train those people effectively and get them in place so it does not stifle the industry.

I turn to the Mineral and Energy Resources and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. The situation we have here is that the government has issued a property right to a farmer, so they have a property right on top of the land; under the land the state has a property right to explore for resources, whether it be gas or something else; then potentially above that land there are renewables. It is bringing people into conflict as to whose property right trumps someone else's property right. A lot more time is required to really get into this issue. There has been a good outcome, but people have been put under financial and mental stress as this bill was thrust upon them. Whether they are a property owner or someone who works in the resources industry, it affects the community they live in. As everyone buys their groceries at the same store, arguments are starting to unfold in the community, and that is something that needs to be considered as we go through this process.

This is about getting the very best long-term outcome for Queenslanders and making sure everybody's property rights are respected. A chaotic and rushed approach in a non-transparent and dictatorial way from the centre of Brisbane is not helpful at all to anybody, whether they be from the resources sector, a landowner or an activist who would prefer that we just let everything go back to nature. Whoever it is, having an open, transparent and detailed long-term communication process will achieve a better outcome than this process, that is for sure, and result in better legislation and regulation. The move to Coexistence Queensland is a move that will help, as more than just gas fields need to be considered in some of these communities. The selection of board members—who they are, their experience, background and everything else—will become very important to make sure we have an open and balanced capacity within that structure to ensure we are getting the very best outcome for all Queenslanders.

There are a couple of other things in there, but I see that my time is running down. In relation to the impact on the fossicking industry and gem fields, the bill introduces new elements relating to fossicking without any prior consultation. There is a bit of a theme running through the whole thing—that is, a lack of consultation and a lack of time. That has resulted in a fair amount of confusion and distress within the industry as stakeholders were left in the dark about potential regulatory changes. We heard from various industry members who are not sure exactly where this is heading, so it was distressing for them, their livelihoods and the communities they are part of.

Provisions in the bill regarding environmental rehabilitation bonds set an arbitrary \$10 million risk-detering investment in critical minerals. That \$10 million is an arbitrary figure. We need these critical minerals to be sought and developed, and putting a barrier to entry really means that only big international players can step into that space and smaller projects will be disproportionately affected. That is certainly an issue and it is a shame that arbitrary figure is there. We could do better with that.

The Office of Groundwater Impact Assessment and the Office of the Land Access Ombudsman need to make sure they have the proper resources. This industry and the people who live in these communities contribute a massive amount to the lifestyle of Queensland. They deserve better than an arrogant government that rushes a bill through and forces things onto them without decent consultation, decent input and making sure correct arrangements are in place. With that, my time is up. That is the shame of this parliament.