



Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MANSFIELD

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CORONERS (MINING AND RESOURCES CORONER) AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

 **Ms McMILLAN** (Mansfield—ALP) (8.39 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Coroners (Mining and Resources Coroner) Amendment Bill 2025. The Labor opposition has a firm position and a solid record on placing people before politics. Workers have the right to feel and be safe at work, with the mining and resources sector being no exception to this. That is why during our time in government we introduced the Resources Safety and Health Queensland Act 2020, which established Resources Safety & Health Queensland to help support safety throughout the resources sector. This is why we will be supporting the mining and resources amendment bill.

However, the Labor opposition does hold concerns surrounding the scope of responsibility not being comprehensive enough to achieve the policy objectives outlined in the bill. These objectives include: establishing a dedicated coroner for the sector; re-establishing the mining warden's court with powers to investigate fatal incidents on Queensland's mining and quarry sites; providing more timely answers for families of workers who die while working in the state's mining and quarry sites; and establishing a position to liaise with family throughout the investigation process.

The lack of comprehensiveness surrounds the government's decision to not include suicide, road fatalities and mining related illness and disease deaths in the Mining and Resources Coroner's purview. The government seems to be less concerned about any of these effects, especially if we are to consider these comments from the office of the minister in response to concerns expressed in the media by the Mining and Energy Union. Those comments include—

We're not going to duplicate work that's already undertaken by agencies like the Queensland Police Service ... The scope of the Mining Coroner's investigation will be anchored around mining safety because mining safety in our resources sector is not negotiable.

The Labor opposition stands with the stakeholders who have expressed the need to expand the Mining and Resources Coroner's scope. We support the need for psychosocial care, road safety and consideration for illnesses contracted on the job, unlike those opposite. I might just add that the demographics of Queensland, the location of our mining sites and the context in which workers work across our vast state makes some of these issues much more important here in Queensland than across the nation.

There are many reasons we are concerned about the failure to include the previously stated items in the coroner's scope. First, allow me to put the concern around suicide in the sector into perspective. The suicide prevention group Mates in Mining have said that suicide rates in the mining, energy and construction sectors are 80 per cent higher than in the nation's general population. If we had similar rates of suicide within any other workforce—including a workforce I am very familiar with, and that is education—then our union and our employer would be incredibly concerned. It is simply not okay that a sector of workers experiences 80 per cent higher suicide rates than in the nation's general population.

According to a submission on this bill from the Mining and Energy Union, there are 190 deaths by suicide reported onsite, on adjacent accommodation, in camp accommodation and at home each year. With the rates of suicide in the sector this high, the Crisafulli government must seek to include suicide within the coroner's scope of investigative responsibilities. It is illogical to not include suicide in the scope, given the unique psychosocial experiences of fly-in fly-out mining sector workers. I mentioned the demographic and the vast array of workers who are situated around the state. The Coronial Assistance Legal Service said it best when they stated—

Suicides in mining are a contemporary societal and industrial issue that should be proactively addressed by the Act. Mining is recognised as a locational, institutional and occupational setting with an elevated suicide risk.

A couple of years ago I had the opportunity of travelling more than four kilometres underground in a coalmine. I have to say that if I was put in a position where I was working in that context I believe that my own mental health would be quite challenged. The failure to include self-inflicted fatalities within the coroner's purview directly contrasts with the bill's policy objectives, which seeks to provide timely information to affected families and improve safety for the sector's workers.

In relation to road fatalities, mining and resource sector workers also face the unique issue of travelling to and from remotely located mine sites. This is several hundred kilometres in some instances. This shiftwork has long hours, early starts, late finishes and overnight work, and this type of work—which is often done in the dark—can lead to heightened fatigue, which means these workers are at a higher risk of driving accidents. Despite this very real risk factor in this line of work, road fatalities have been left out of the coroner's scope of investigative responsibilities. In their submission for this bill, the Mining and Energy Union said—

In the mining industry, where shift work, long hours, early starts and late finishes are common, coal mine workers are especially vulnerable to fatigue.

Any worker is vulnerable to fatigue but especially those who work underground and often in the dark. In fact, the member for Mirani also expressed his concern for his own constituents around this issue. Like the member for Mirani, I have members in my—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Kempton): Member, would you address the chair and not other members in the House.

Ms McMILLAN: It was actually complimentary, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I know, but rules are rules.

Ms McMILLAN: Thank you. Like the member for Mirani, many members in my community are fly-in fly-out workers. The member for Mirani said—

Fatigue is a big issue for a lot of my constituents in Mirani.

That is the same for me in my electorate. The member for Mirani continued—

I know that the safety standards around fatigue management can vary across different mines—whether they can drive home straight after they finish their stint or they need to rest before getting on the road, to mitigate the risk of a crash as a result of fatigue.

The member for Mirani doubled down on this, stating—

Your submission touches on very similar issues to those contained in the MEU submission around referrals for road deaths involving travelling to and from site. This is an important issue for my constituents, especially given the quality of some of the roads to our mines in that country.

I concur with the member for Mirani. I do have fly-in fly-out workers who live in my electorate. The government are not even listening to their own members about their concerns around this issue. These are real concerns. The scope of the Mining and Resources Coroner's investigation responsibility should comprehensively reflect the challenges and safety concerns that are particular and unique to the sector.

In relation to illness and disease, the scope also does not extend to the diseases and illnesses that can occur as a result of working on a mining site. With associated risks including illnesses like mine dust lung disease, the current scope for the coroner's position overlooks a serious health and safety component of the mining and resources sector. Again, this is as a result of working kilometres underground in darkness, in moist conditions and often in heat. If the government wish to be taken seriously on their commitment to the safety and wellbeing of mining and resources now and into the future, they must include illness and disease related deaths in the coroner's scope. The Labor opposition believes it is critical for any reforms made to support the health and safety of the sector's workers to be inclusive of the complex and diverse challenges, as I said, that are unique to this workforce.

In conclusion, the Labor opposition supports the bill. The changes bring about a much needed position that will go towards improving the safety and wellbeing of mining and resource sector workers, but we will continue to hold the government to account. We will continue to advocate for the rights of workers to ensure that the scope of the coroner's investigative responsibilities is broadened to include the very important issues of suicide, of road fatalities and of mining related illnesses and disease deaths.