



Speech By
Hon. Meaghan Scanlon

MEMBER FOR GAVEN

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CORONERS (MINING AND RESOURCES CORONER) AMENDMENT BILL 2025

 **Hon. MAJ SCANLON** (Gaven—ALP) (8.20 pm): I rise to speak on the Coroners (Mining and Resources Coroner) Amendment Bill 2025—a bill that in its current form represents yet another broken promise dressed up as reform. The Attorney-General has again made her contribution with her trademark condescension—the smirk, the sneer, the little digs that try to—

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Madam Deputy Speaker, I take personal offence and I ask the shadow minister to withdraw.

Ms SCANLON: I withdraw. The Attorney-General should not pretend she is mocking me; she is actually mocking the experts—the Queensland Law Society, the Coronial Assistance Legal Service, the Mining & Energy Union and even industry bodies such as the Association of Mining and Exploration Companies. Every one of those organisations told the parliamentary committee that this bill did not go far enough, yet we just heard from the Attorney-General that she has allegedly listened to everyone. That is not what we have seen with the bill before this House. Those experts were not subtle about their recommendations. Labor will be moving amendments to address these concerns. I table a copy of those amendments, the explanatory notes and a statement of compatibility with human rights in my name.

Tabled paper: Coroners (Mining and Resources Coroner) Amendment Bill 2025, amendments to be moved by Hon. Meaghan Scanlon MP [1565](#).

Tabled paper: Coroners (Mining and Resources Coroner) Amendment Bill 2025, explanatory notes to Hon. Meaghan Scanlon's amendments [1566](#).

Tabled paper: Coroners (Mining and Resources Coroner) Amendment Bill 2025, statement of compatibility with human rights contained in Hon. Meaghan Scanlon's amendments [1567](#).

Labor has a strong record of standing up for working Queenslanders, while the record of those opposite was to vote against things like labour licensing laws, paid domestic and family violence leave and industrial manslaughter. They voted against industrial protections for workers subject to sexual harassment and sex-based and gender-based harassment, they voted against portable long service leave laws for community service workers, and they voted against the wage theft inquiry which led to wage theft becoming a criminal offence in this state. No doubt those opposite will show their true colours and vote against our sensible amendments yet again.

Mr Head: You had 10 years.

Ms SCANLON: The government went to the election promising to re-establish a mining warden's court. I take the interjection from the member for Callide. That is what they all went to the election saying—that they were going to establish a mining warden's court. That is not what this bill does. Instead, what we have is a Mining and Resources Coroner whose powers are so limited that, by the department's own evidence, they will investigate only two to four deaths per year—I repeat: two to four—when a typical coroner carries 200 to 300 cases at any one time. That means the specialist Mining and Resources Coroner will touch perhaps one to two per cent of the real deaths connected to this

industry. The rest will simply fall outside the scope. Suicides, road crashes and occupational illnesses are all deemed too inconvenient for the government's announcement and headlines. It is a mining coroner in name only.

While Labor supports giving the Coroners Court the resources it needs, the government should not be able to come in here and pretend that this narrow bill honours their own commitment—because, let's be honest, this bill has been written to look like progress while avoiding responsibility. I will begin with the government's refusal to confront suicide in the resources sector. In evidence to the committee, Ms Klaire Coles from the Coronial Assistance Legal Service said—

Suicides amongst FIFO and resource sector workers occur at disproportionately higher rates and often in complex environments shaped by isolation, stigma and work related pressures.

That single sentence should stop this House in its tracks because it exposes a truth that too many on the other side would rather ignore—that the mental health crisis in our mining communities is not some private matter; it is a workplace safety issue every bit as real as a roof fall or an explosion.

The Mining & Energy Union told the committee the same thing. Their representative, Mr Hughes, said that he had personally dealt with several suicides in camps in towns like Moranbah and that 'in both those circumstances it was because of the workplace culture'. The names of these men and women are etched into the memories of their workmates, not the government's press releases. Mates in Mining revealed that suicide rates are 80 per cent higher in the mining and construction and energy sectors than in the general population—that is roughly 190 people a year—yet this bill explicitly excludes suicide from the Mining and Resources Coroner's jurisdiction. Think about that. This is a bill that was created allegedly to examine causes of death in the mining and resources industry. We heard from the Attorney-General that it is apparently to keep workers safe, yet the government's own explanatory notes excludes 'an injury that a person has intentionally self-inflicted i.e. suicide'.

The Coronial Assistance Legal Service called that exclusion 'a missed opportunity', warning it 'risks obscuring systemic issues and undermines the preventive focus of the coronial system'. The Queensland Law Society—

Mrs Frecklington interjected.

Ms SCANLON: I take again the condescending remarks from the Attorney-General about the Queensland Law Society.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Madam Deputy Speaker, I take offence at those statements and I ask her to withdraw.

Ms SCANLON: I withdraw. The Queensland Law Society said—

Mrs Frecklington: It's not schoolgirl politics now.

Ms SCANLON: I suggest the Attorney-General listens. The Queensland Law Society said—

We are aware other submitters have objected to deaths by suicide being expressly omitted by the bill. The QLS agrees there is a public interest in bringing these deaths within scope in appropriate circumstances, noting the psychosocial hazards in the workplace are increasingly being exposed and examined.

Even the Association of Mining and Exploration Companies, representing industry itself, told the committee—

The term 'suicide' is currently excluded. AMEC recommends that the use of this term be reviewed, as it is at odds with the intention of the coronial inquiry to determine the cause of death.

When unions, lawyers, coronial experts and industry are all saying the same thing and the only people disagreeing are those opposite, you know the ideology has trumped evidence. Even the LNP chair, the member for Burnett, asked—

I have a question with the emphasis on this unfortunate issue of suicide within our community, particularly in the mining sector, and the work and the advocacy that has been around. Has it been prevalent that people have been pushing for this issue to be included as a reportable incident?

He asked that question, to which Ms Dickson, the Queensland director of the Association of Mining and Exploration Companies, said—

There has been an increased focus on psychosocial safety and recognition that that is a significant part that leads to unnatural deaths.

The association went on to say—

In our submission we provided two very clear examples suspected suicide and unnatural death directly within the industry. Both of them were in circumstances where I was working in the industry, so I was highly aware of them. I think they really demonstrate why we think this is an important matter that should be included.

The LNP committee members ignored their ask. When the bill says that the Mining and Resources Coroner may only act where a death is not intentionally self-inflicted, the government is legislating a blindfold. It is telling coroners to look away from the hardest truths.

Psychosocial safety deserves the same status as physical safety. A worker crushed by a haul truck and a worker crushed by despair both deserve justice, learning and change. Instead of listening to the families and experts who work in the mining industry, the LNP bizarrely said, 'We're not going to duplicate work that's already undertaken by agencies like the Queensland Police Service.' Clearly they have no idea how the coronial system actually works.

Our coronial system exists precisely to look beyond individual incidents and identify patterns to prevent the next tragedy, not just record the last. When you exclude suicides from that process, you are not avoiding duplication; you are avoiding accountability. Mining culture is tough, proud and stoic, but too often it is silent. We all know the image of the miner: hard hat, dust covered boots and a quiet resilience. What we do not see is the invisible injuries: the anxiety before a shift, the loneliness of a donga room, the pressure of job insecurity and the toll of separation from family week after week. Mr Hill from the Mining & Energy Union told the committee—

The rate of workers compensation around psychosocial injuries is well above physical injuries ...

He explained—

... psychosocial issues of people being isolated and the employment arrangements of contractors and labour hire put extra pressure on people. ... All these little things add up to create big psychosocial injuries that lead to suicides.

That is not political rhetoric; that is the lived experience from the coalface. What I cannot understand is why the LNP would create a specialist mining and resources coroner and then legislate that they not consider the psychosocial factors that drive mining related suicides. This narrow definition of safety ignores reality. It ignores the culture of the camps, the isolation, the long rosters and the 12-hour nights that blur into one another.

I have seen comments by the members for Mackay and Mirani, who have tried to defend this exclusion, just recommending that the department publish information clarifying how suicide deaths would be investigated within the existing coronial framework. Firstly, the members are essentially saying, 'Leave the system as it is,' so I am not sure how they can say that and then criticise the Labor opposition. Secondly, the comments failed to acknowledge the point that was made by the department and the submitters that such fatalities under the scope of this bill would need to be in the 'public interest' to be treated the same way as other mine related reportable deaths, which are not required to meet that same test. If we are establishing a specialised mining coroner then why, given the number of suicides by mineworkers and the department's admission that only one to two per cent of the mining coroner's work will be taken up by mine and resource related fatalities, have suicides—which represent a large number of those fatalities—been excluded, because that is what this bill does? If this government really believed in safety, it would not sanitise the law to exclude the human cost of its own industrial model.

Psychosocial safety is mining safety. Fatigue, stress and depression kill just as surely as machinery failure. If this parliament is going to create a dedicated mining commissioner then it ought to do it properly. Then there are the deaths that do not happen overnight—the slow, suffocating ones. The bill before us excludes diseases and illnesses caused by work in the mining and resources sector. That means conditions like coal worker's pneumoconiosis, silicosis and other dust lung diseases. Fatal illnesses directly linked to exposure are outside the Mining and Resources Coroner's reach. How can a coroner charged with improving safety ignore the diseases that take years to kill the men and women who dig up our minerals and power our state? The Queensland Law Society told the committee this approach is inconsistent with the entire purpose of the legislation. Their submission stated—

If there is a possible causal link between the death and the 'in scope' work activity, the death should be treated in the same way as if it resulted from a physical incident causing death and be referred to the—

Mining and Resources Coroner. They went further, saying—

Deaths occurring from an illness or disease caused by mining and other related work will not result in a mandatory referral to the—

Mining and Resources Coroner. It goes on—

This exclusion contradicts the intent of these reforms.

They are not my words; they are the words, as I said, of the Queensland Law Society, and they are right. The intent of any coronial reform in the resources sector should be to prevent further harm. How can we prevent what we refuse to examine?

What I found particularly bizarre were the comments in the media by the member for Mackay when the Labor opposition announced our amendments. The LNP doubled down on the committee's recommendation that the department consider publishing information clarifying how mine dust lung disease related deaths would be investigated within the coronial framework. I know that the member for Mackay was in the committee hearings. The department's evidence was very clear that the State Coroner's guidelines state—

By convention, diseases due to the longstanding effects of repeated or relatively low-level exposure to chemicals are generally not regarded as unnatural.

That was said during the committee process, so he knows that the guidelines outline that those matters are not deemed to be within scope. This omission is not just technical; it tells every miner with damaged lungs that their suffering is not the kind of death the LNP wants to count. Every worker who has drawn a laboured breath because of mine dust deserves to be seen by the justice system, not hidden behind definitional lines.

Queenslanders still remember when Labor stood up and created Resources Safety & Health Queensland in 2020 because we knew miners deserved an independent safety body, not one controlled by industry interests. The same principle applies here. The Mining and Resources Coroner should be empowered to look wherever the evidence leads, from immediate accidents to diseases that are decades in the making. The government's refusal to do so shows this bill is not about safety; it is about spin.

The next glaring omission in this bill concerns travel. Anyone who has driven long stretches between Mackay and Moranbah knows the danger: shiftworkers finishing a 12-hour night drive home on narrow regional roads, often after days of heat and dust, their concentration drained and eyelids heavy. It is one of the most predictable and preventable risks in the industry and yet this government has deliberately excluded road deaths from the scope of the Mining and Resources Coroner. At the public hearing the member for Mirani, Mr Glen Kelly, spoke plainly about what his own constituents face, saying—

Fatigue is a big issue for a lot of my constituents in Mirani. ... whether they can drive home straight after they finish their stint or they need to rest before getting on the road ...

He is right: fatigue does kill. Every roster change and every extra hour demanded of a tired worker magnifies that risk. The member for Mackay went further, asking the witnesses—

How would you react to the mining coroner looking at suicides within the mining camp and also to and from work—say, a single-vehicle crash?

The Coronial Legal Service, represented by Ms Coles, did not hesitate in responding. She said—

We think suicides within the mining camp should be included within the jurisdiction, because, effectively, people are being required to stay in that place in order to perform their work in the mining sector. ... we would also support the submissions that we have seen made by the Queensland Law Society and other submitters about motor vehicle accidents which occur on public roads but relate to people travelling to or from a mining site. I think it is well recognised that issues like fatigue and other work related pressures can have some influence on that kind of accident which would be of benefit for the mining coroner to review.

Even the AMEC Queensland director told the committee about some of the key issues, particularly in exploration, being drive-in drive-out work and travelling to and from work and issues around fatigue and suicide. Once again every expert—union, lawyer, coroner's advocate—said to include travel. The only people saying exclude it sit on the government benches. The Mining & Energy Union put it starkly, saying—

If we are looking at fatalities in the mining industry, road deaths would be miles above the fatalities that happen onsite.

That is an extraordinary omission. The greatest risk to life in the sector is not explosions or roof collapses; it is the long drive home. These workers are not careless; they are exhausted. They have just worked a 10-, 12- or sometimes 14-hour shift, away from their family, and then face driving hundreds of kilometres under pressure to make it home in time for the next rotation, yet this government says these deaths are out of scope. The whole point of creating a mining and resources coroner was to ensure someone with industry knowledge—and ideally expertise—could connect the dots to see how roster design, fatigue management and long-distance commuting combine to create lethal conditions. How can the coroner do that if the law excludes these as reportable deaths?

Here is the irony: the member for Mirani, one of the LNP's own, made the same case in the committee. He said—

This is an important issue for my constituents, especially given the quality of some of the roads to our mines in that country.

However, his government has ignored him too. This is what happens when legislation is drafted to satisfy a headline rather than actually solve the problem. The government could have written a bill that saves lives. Instead, it wrote one that saves face. When you step back, you see the pattern. This

bill was sold as a bold step forward for safety in the resources sector—the fulfilment, apparently, of an election promise, proof that the LNP understood the dangers miners face—but the evidence tells a very different story. If fatalities from suicide, road death and dust disease are excluded under the law established for this so-called ‘specialist coroner’, then why are we naming this position a ‘Mining and Resources Coroner’? With regard to a handful of tragic accidents a year, that is not a safety system; that is a symbolic gesture. The Association of Mining and Exploration Companies said that the—

... inclusion of ... suicide ... is important for the mining and mineral exploration industry.

The Law Society, which is usually cautious in its language, warned that the—

... optional referral system will create undue uncertainty and delay ...

In other words, even the legal profession thinks the structure will add confusion and not clarity. The Coronial Legal Service—the very organisation that literally supports grieving families through inquests—called this—

... a missed opportunity for the specialist knowledge and jurisdiction of the Mining and Resources Coroner to be applied to all deaths that occur on a mining site ...

This is not about opposing extra resources for the Coroners Court. We of course support that. What the government has delivered is a headline that reads ‘LNP delivers mining coroner’, but under the limited scope we hold concerns that miners in Moranbah, Dysart or Emerald will not feel any safer because of it. When Labor was in government we created Resources Safety & Health Queensland—an independent body focused on prevention, enforcement and education. We strengthened the law after the Moura, Box Flat and Grosvenor tragedies. We did not pretend symbolism could substitute for substance.

The government had a chance to write legislation that could change lives. At the heart of this, this bill exposes the difference between Labor and the LNP. Labor believes every Queenslanders has the right to feel safe and to be safe at work. That is not a slogan; it is a value that runs deep through everything we do. That is why we established RSHQ in 2020. That is why we strengthened workplace safety laws, empowered unions and investigators and funded mental health programs in mining communities, because we know that safety is not optional; it is fundamental. The LNP, by contrast, talks a big game about cutting red tape.

Mr Last: Then why did you back in the CFMEU?

Ms SCANLON: It would be good if the member understood the union movement given the member’s interjection. There is the MEU, which represents mining workers, so I suggest the member looks at the coverage. The LNP, by contrast, talks a big game about cutting red tape, but what it has really done here is cut compassion out of the process. It has designed a Mining and Resources Coroner who will deal with only two to four cases a year—one per cent to two per cent of mining related deaths. It has excluded suicides, excluded road deaths and excluded occupational diseases. The Queensland Law Society said—

If there is a possible causal link between the death and the ‘in scope’ work activity, the death should be treated in the same way ... and be referred to the MRC.

The Coronial Assistance Legal Service said—

Suicides in mining are a contemporary societal and industrial issue that should be proactively addressed by the Act.

Even industry representatives such as Kate Dickson, the head of national operations and Queensland director of the Association of Mining and Exploration Companies, talked of one of the key issues being drive-in drive-out aspects of exploration. When asked if travelling to and from work should be included, the head of the industry association gave a clear response, and that was yes. Every one of them, from workers’ representatives to lawyers to the mining companies themselves, told the government the same thing: this bill does not go far enough—but those opposite did not listen because for them consultation is not about listening; it is about ticking boxes.

This bill is ultimately a broken promise and a missed opportunity. The government, as has been outlined, promised a mining warden’s court. Instead, it delivered a limited coroners role. Labor will not oppose additional resources for the coronial system, but we will not stand silently while the government pretends that half-measured reforms are sufficient in terms of what the government actually promised at the election, because when it comes to safety near enough is not good enough. This parliament has a moral responsibility to honour the lives of those who have been lost—the miners who never came home, the families who still wait for answers and the communities which continue to carry grief. They deserve more than symbolism. Labor will always be on the side of workers who build this state. We will always stand up for the right for workers to come home.

If the Attorney-General truly believes that this bill delivers what Queenslanders were promised, she should explain to the families of those who have died from silicosis why their loved ones do not count under this bill. She should explain to the widows of miners who have taken their own lives why those deaths are out of scope. She should explain to the shiftworkers driving home in the dark why fatigue failures are not worthy of consideration by the mining coroner, because until she can answer those questions this bill remains a monument to denial, not a blueprint for safety. Labor stands with workers, we stand with families, we stand with experts who told this government the truth and we will continue to fight for a system that values every life, not just the ones that fit the press release, because in Queensland the measure of a government is not how many headlines it writes; it is how many lives it protects.

On that measure, we believe that this bill fails and we hope the government will do the right thing and accept our amendments. Frankly, with all of the resources of government, if those opposite have other amendments that they wish to put forward we are always willing to work with the government. Unfortunately, so far the Attorney-General has not, in my view and in the view of the Labor opposition, adequately responded to all of the concerns that those stakeholders put forward through the committee process.