



Speech By
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MEMBER FOR TOOHEY

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CORONERS (MINING AND RESOURCES CORONER) AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

 **Mr RUSSO** (Toohey—ALP) (8.01 pm): I rise to speak in relation to the Coroners (Mining and Resources Coroner) Amendment Bill 2025. The stated aim of this bill is to provide more timely answers and greater certainty to families of those who have tragically lost their lives in mining related incidents, to ensure their deaths are properly investigated, lessons are learned and future tragedies are prevented. Importantly, it is also designed to ensure that companies in the mining and resources sector are held accountable when things go wrong.

The bill amends the Coroners Act 2003 to establish a dedicated position of Mining and Resources Coroner and require the Mining and Resources Coroner to undertake mandatory coronial investigations and inquests into all accidental mining related deaths including those occurring in mines, coalmines and quarries as well as at sites where petroleum and gas operations are carried out. These are significant changes—changes that recognise the unique nature of Queensland's mining and resources sector and the critical importance of transparency, accountability and justice when a worker loses their life at work.

The Queensland Labor opposition believes—and has always believed—that every worker has the right to be safe at work and to come home safe from work. This is a right, not a privilege. No industry, no matter how important to our economy, is exempt from that fundamental principle. For decades, Labor has championed the safety, health and wellbeing of workers across all industries through strong legislative reform. We have strengthened the rights of health and safety representatives, extended industrial manslaughter laws and taken firm action to prevent workplace harassment. Labor introduced Australia's first paid reproductive health leave for public sector workers and we implemented respect at work laws to ensure safer, fairer workplaces. In stark contrast, the LNP's history is one of weakening worker protections and prioritising profit over people. Through consistent advocacy, often in partnership with Queensland unions, Labor has built a framework that puts the safety and dignity of workers first. That legacy must be maintained and strengthened.

Queensland's mining and resources workforces are among the most skilled and dedicated in the world. These men and women work in challenging environments and make a tremendous contribution to our state's prosperity. The Labor opposition is committed to ensuring their workplaces are safe, their voices are heard and their families are protected. That is why the opposition will not stand in the way of the majority of amendments proposed under this bill. However, we must be honest about the bill's shortcomings, and there are several. These concerns are shared not only by the opposition but also by key industrial stakeholders, legal experts and representatives of the workforce itself.

One of the most significant concerns relates to clause 5(d), the decision of the Crisafulli government to explicitly remove 'intentionally self-inflicted injuries' from the scope of the Mining and Resources Coroner's responsibilities. This omission is deeply troubling, particularly given the nature of traditional fly-in fly-out, drive-in drive-out work arrangements. When mining workers spend extended periods away from family and community, living in company provided accommodation in remote locations, these circumstances can lead to isolation, loneliness and mental health challenges that are

well documented in the sector. Research consistently shows that workers in the mining, construction and energy industries experience suicide rates up to 80 per cent higher than the general Australian population. That statistic alone should give this parliament pause. The Mining and Energy Union made this point powerfully in its submission to the committee with regard to excluding suicide when it stated—

This is a failing of obligations to protect the health and safety of workers under Queensland's resources safety and health legislation. If not properly investigated, irrespective of the location in which the death occurred, this type of fatality can endanger and cause serious detriment to the lives of other workers.

The Coronial Assistance Legal Service also stressed that suicides in mining are a significant industrial and social issue that must be addressed proactively. It stated—

Mining is recognised as a locational, institutional and occupational setting with an elevated suicide risk ...

and that the full extent of the Mining and Resources Coroner's 'expertise should be utilised'.

If we are to establish a specialised Mining and Resources Coroner, it would be an extraordinary oversight not to include suicides within the coroner's remit. Such investigations would identify underlying causes and improve the sector's approach to mental health and support services, saving lives in the process.

Further, the bill does not provide scope for investigating fatalities on public roads when those deaths occur while workers are travelling to or from mining sites for work related purposes. This exclusion undermines the stated intent of the bill to provide timely answers to families and prevent future deaths. Fatigue related accidents are well known and a persistent issue in the resources sector. The Queensland Law Society noted in its submission—

Fatigue related injuries and risk management remains a significant issue for the resources sector ... enforcement and review need to be a priority.

The Mining and Energy Union similarly warned—

... where shift work, long hours, early starts and late finishes are common, coal mine workers are especially vulnerable to fatigue. Coupled with ... worsening road conditions ... this has increased the risk of accidents, particularly for tired or distracted drivers.

Even the member for Mirani acknowledged in the committee hearings that fatigue is a major concern for his constituents, noting that the rules around rest periods before driving home vary widely across different mine sites. If the intent of this bill is to ensure comprehensive investigation of all mining related deaths then deaths resulting from fatigue on journeys to and from mine sites must be within scope. After the Mining and Energy Union publicly called for these changes, a statement from Minister Last's office declared—

We're not going to duplicate work 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.

While no-one disputes the importance of mining safety, this statement demonstrates a narrow and incomplete understanding of what safety truly means. Mining safety is not confined to what happens within the fence line of a mine site; it includes the psychological wellbeing of workers, the conditions under which they travel and the long-term health effects of exposure to hazardous environments. By ignoring psychosocial safety and road safety, the government risks undermining the very purpose of this reform.

It has also failed to include deaths caused by illness or disease resulting from mining work such as dust lung diseases. The Queensland Law Society raised this issue directly, stating that from a health and safety perspective injuries and illnesses are treated the same and that if there is a possible causal link between the death and the work activity the death should be treated as 'in scope' and referred to the Mining and Resources Coroner. To exclude deaths arising from occupational disease when those diseases are directly linked to mining activity is inconsistent with both the spirit and the intent of the bill. If a dedicated coroner is to develop expertise in mining safety, that expertise must be extended to all forms of mining related deaths, whether they occur through accident, disease or mental health. The establishment of a Mining and Resources Coroner is an important and necessary reform. It recognises the dangers inherent in the mining industry and provides a mechanism for families to obtain answers when tragedy strikes.