



Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

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CORONERS (MINING AND RESOURCES CORONER) AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (5.04 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Coroners (Mining and Resources Coroner) Amendment Bill—a forward-thinking and necessary reform that demonstrates our unwavering commitment to the safety, transparency and accountability of our state’s vital mining and resources sector, and it is long overdue. This bill represents more than a legislative change; it is a strong and clear message to workers, families and industry stakeholders that we are listening and acting. It is critical reform that will enhance justice, improve safety and honour the lives of those lost in one of our most important industries.

Our committee heard from those opposite a narrative designed to frustrate the progress of the legislation and to highlight their failure to address these issues for over a decade. There is a clear scope in this legislation. Some may choose to stray outside the long title of the bill and even move amendments, but let us be clear: the coroner may choose to conduct inquests for reportable deaths outside scope, such as deaths through self-harm, suicide or when driving to and from mine sites, and they should be considered if they are in the public interest.

There has been a lot of quoting of our committee proceedings by members over the last couple of days. I bring to the attention of the House the comments of the industry safety and health representative from the Mining and Energy Union. They were asked: ‘Prior to this bill being introduced, when was the last time active attempts were made to change the process?’ How far back? Were there active attempts to change the act to include issues like suicide and other things? The response was—

It probably was not thought about, honestly, until this bill came up and I personally started thinking about it.

I say to those opposite that they cannot posture on this bill. They have to be fair dinkum about the fights they fight. Those opposite wanted to quote the stakeholders at length yesterday, but I am quoting from them now. This was an afterthought of many of the stakeholders who gave evidence.

This bill restores a vital justice service for miners, families and communities. It benefits everyone in the state. Those opposite were going to shut down the coal industry anyway. That is why our commitment to repeal the renewable energy targets will support flexible, market-led energy system planning.

The mining and resources industries are at the heart of our economy, providing thousands of jobs and contributing significantly to the prosperity of our state. With such an opportunity comes a responsibility—a responsibility to protect lives, to uphold rigorous safety standards and to ensure that when tragedy does occur it is investigated thoroughly, independently and with the utmost sensitivity and professionalism. That is why this bill is important.

By establishing a dedicated Mining and Resources Coroner, this legislation ensures that matters involving deaths in the mining and resources sector are handled by a coroner with specialised expertise and sector knowledge. It is a significant step forward in ensuring that investigations are not only robust

and technically informed but also prompt and respectful to the families and communities affected. A specialised coroner will bring a greater depth of understanding of industry practices, risks and regulatory frameworks, leading to more relevant findings, more practical recommendations and, ultimately, improved safety outcomes.

This bill also reflects the findings and recommendations from previous inquiries and reviews, including those that call for a more consistent, focused approach to coronial investigations in high-risk industries. It shows we have taken these lessons seriously. We must also acknowledge the workers who have lost their lives in the course of duty and the families who have borne that loss. This bill recognises them—not just with words but with actions. It ensures their stories are heard and their deaths are not in vain, and the lessons will lead to a safer workplace for the others.

The establishment of the Mining and Resources Coroner will provide greater certainty and trust for industry stakeholders and regulatory bodies. Stronger collaboration between the Coroners Court and safety regulators and the faster delivery of inquest outcomes will contribute more to a responsive and effective safety culture.

The mining and resources sector is not only the economic backbone of Queensland but also the lifeblood of many regional communities. It fuels our exports. It provides jobs for thousands of Queenslanders and drives innovation and infrastructure. As we also know, it is a high-risk industry where the cost of failure is sometimes measured in lives. Tragically, in recent years we have seen a number of fatalities in Queensland mines. While every death is a tragedy, the response of the justice system must be one of rigour, expertise and urgency. Sadly, coronial inquests into mining deaths have far too often exposed delays, inconsistency and a lack of sector-specific expertise.

The inquest into the deaths of six coalminers between 2012 and 2020, for example, laid bare systemic failures and called for significant improvements in how investigations are conducted and how findings are applied. The coroner noted that these delays in holding inquests had prolonged the suffering of families and undermined the preventive role of the coronial process.

These families deserve answers—timely, expert and respectful answers. More importantly, the industry and regulators deserve clear, practical recommendations that can drive real practical change on the ground. That is exactly what this bill delivers.

The new role will ensure a more consistent, expert-led approach to inquests and will strengthen the connection between coronial findings and meaningful safety reforms. It will also support better collaboration with the Office of the Work Health and Safety Protector, Resources Safety & Health Queensland and industry bodies to ensure that no recommendation falls through the cracks.

Let's be clear: this is not just legislative reform. This is about respect for workers, for families and for communities. It is about restoring trust in the coronial system, improving outcomes and working to prevent further loss of life. In short, this bill strengthens our justice system, bolsters workplace safety and improves transparency in one of our most important sectors. It is a smart, responsible and compassionate reform and honours the Queensland government's commitment to the resource sector. I commend the bill to the House.