

Speech By

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RESOURCES SAFETY AND HEALTH QUEENSLAND AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr CHIESA (Hinchinbrook—LNP) (4.33 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Resources Safety and Health Queensland and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2026. At its heart, the bill is about safety, accountability and confidence. It is about ensuring Queensland has a resources safety and health regulator that is clear in its purpose, strong in its governance and focused on the workers, families and communities it exists to protect. When we talk about resources safety and health, we are talking about people; we are talking about workers who go underground, work on sites, drive machinery, handle explosives, operate in quarries, work in gas fields and support one of the most important sectors of our state. We are talking about families who expect those workers to come home safely. We are talking about communities, including my community in the electorate of Hinchinbrook, that rely on a strong, responsible and safe resources industry.

The resources sector is central to Queensland's economy. It supports, as we have heard, one in five jobs and contributes one in every $4 to the Queensland economy. QRC member companies in 2024-25 contributed $8.6 billion in wages, supported more than 71,000 direct jobs, spent $35.8 billion across 17,600 Queensland businesses and contributed $7.9 billion in royalties. I feel like I am calling a rugby league game. Those royalties help fund roads, hospitals, schools and essential services.

In Hinchinbrook the sector has a real local impact. In 2024-25 member companies of QRC contributed $103 million in wages, supported 747 direct jobs, spent $48 million across 170 local businesses and supported community organisations. When direct investment and flow-on effects are included, the total economic contribution was $290 million in gross regional product, supporting 2,081 local jobs. These figures represent households, small businesses, contractors, families and communities, so when we debate a bill dealing with resources safety and health, it matters to Hinchinbrook.

A strong resources sector must also be a safe resources sector. We cannot have confidence in the industry unless workers have confidence in the system that protects them. We cannot expect investment to continue unless the regulatory framework is clear, effective and accountable. We cannot accept a model where roles are unclear, governance is weak and responsibility is blurred. That is why this bill is necessary. Resources Safety & Health Queensland is the independent regulator responsible for safety and health outcomes across Queensland's mining, quarrying, petroleum, gas and explosives industry. Since its establishment, concerns have been raised about oversight, independence and accountability. Minister Dale Last commissioned Professor Susan Johnston AM to undertake an independent review of the Queensland resources safety and health regulatory model. The review examined whether the model remained effective and contemporary. The message from the review was clear: the system needed stronger governance, clearer lines of accountability and a more contemporary regulatory model. This bill responds to that challenge.

The central reform is the establishment of a skills-based governing body for Resources Safety & Health Queensland. Under this model, the chief executive officer of RSHQ will report to the new board and the board will report to the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines. This is practical and sensible as it strengthens oversight, creates clearer accountability and gives a vital regulator the governance structure expected of a modern organisation.

The bill also abolishes the position of Commissioner for Resources Safety and Health and transfers the former statutory functions of that role to the new governing body. I know there has been debate about this part of the bill. It is fair that people ask questions about any change to the resources safety framework. The issue is not whether safety voices should be heard. Of course, they should be. The issue is whether the existing structure was the best way to deliver clarity, accountability and safety outcomes. The commissioner role had become unclear. The review identified confusion around its purpose and value. In contrast, a governing board gives the regulator a strong and more durable structure. It places responsibility with a body that can set direction, oversee performance and ensure RSHQ carries out its functions effectively. This bill is not about weakening safety; it is about strengthening the system that is supposed to deliver safety.

Importantly, the bill also strengthens the role of the Coal Mining Safety and Health Advisory Committee and the Mining Safety and Health Advisory Committee. These committees bring practical experience into the regulatory framework. The bill reinstates and strengthens their ability to review legislation, standards and guidelines and provide practical advice on regulatory changes. In industries where the risks are real, the lived experience of workers, operators and technical experts must inform the rules. Safety regulation must be practical, it must be grounded in what happens on the ground, it must respond to emerging risks and be capable of continuous improvement. I understand that when we debate resources safety, workers and their representatives want to know that their voices will continue to be heard. That is a legitimate concern, but this bill does not remove the importance of those voices. It strengthens advisory structures and gives them a clearer role in reviewing the standards, guidelines and legislation that shape safety outcomes.

The bill also makes important reforms to the Land Access Ombudsman. In regional Queensland, coexistence matters. Landholders, communities and resource companies need clear and practical pathways to resolve disputes. They need systems that are fair, accessible and efficient, but we also need to be honest about how government services are being used and how public money is being spent. The Land Access Ombudsman has been wholly government funded, with an annual allocation of $617,000. Since the office was established in 2018 it has fully resolved only two disputes, both referred in 2018. This does not mean landholders should be left without support—landholders must have access to fair and practical dispute resolutions—but the structure must be proportionate to the way the service is used. It must avoid unnecessary duplication, cost and complexity. The bill keeps the Land Access Ombudsman function but reforms the way it operates. The role will now be held by the chief executive officer of Coexistence Queensland. That creates a clearer, single interface for landholders and resource companies dealing with coexistence and land access matters.

The bill also repeals provisions from the former government's MEROLA Act which would have created an industry funded model for the Land Access Ombudsman through another levy and cost-recovery fees. Given the very low number of matters that are processed through the office, imposing the levy would have been difficult to justify. It would have just added cost and complexity to a resources sector already facing cost pressures. This is practical reform. It respects taxpayers' money, avoids unnecessary red tape and keeps support available in a more efficient and integrated way.

The bill also makes sensible administration changes to the Mineral Resources Act. This includes replacing references to maps with spatial data, clarifying renewal processes for resource authorities, confirming that an authority remains in force while a renewal is being determined and introducing a show cause process before cancellation is considered for unpaid rent. These may sound like technical changes, but they matter. Modern regulation should have modern language and tools. It should provide certainty, avoid confusion and ensure administrative processes are fair and clear.

For Hinchinbrook this bill speaks to a broader principle: regional Queensland needs industries that are strong, safe and responsibly regulated; we need a resources sector that supports jobs and small businesses; we need regulation that protects workers; we need land access arrangements that are practical and fair; and we need government agencies that are accountable, efficient and focused on outcomes. This bill delivers that balance. I commend this bill to the House.