

CORONERS (MINING AND RESOURCES CORONER) AMENDMENT BILL 2025

Sandy Bolton MP Member for Noosa

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Since 2022, seven workers tragically have lost their lives at Queensland mine sites. From 2014 to 2024, Resources Safety and Health Queensland (RSHQ) has investigated 27 deaths in mines and quarries in Queensland. Coronial inquests were held for two of these, as well as for two that occurred prior to 2014.

The Coroners (Mining and Resources Coroner) Amendment Bill amends the Coroners Act to establish a permanent, dedicated, ‘Mining and Resources Coroner’. The Mining Coroner will undertake mandatory coronial investigations and inquests into all accidental mining-related deaths, including those occurring in mines, coal mines, and quarries, as well as certain sites where petroleum and gas works are carried out.¹

A coronial inquest is an inquisitorial fact-finding process, and is not undertaken to find or attribute liability to anyone. In fact, a coroner is specifically prohibited from making any findings or comments that a person is criminally or civilly liable for anything.²

¹ Statement of compatibility, p 1.

² Coroners Act, ss 45(5), 46(3)

Currently, coroners generally handle approximately 200 to 300 cases at any given time. In 2023-24, 6,055 investigations were finalised by the Coroners Court, and 31 inquests were held.³

The bill include amendment so that all mining related reportable deaths must be investigated by the Mining Coroner.⁴

The last Coronial inquest into a mining fatality in Queensland was held in 2020 after the 2017 death of Daniel Springer at Goonyella Riverside Mine.⁵ with some families waiting for several years for answers about a loved one's death.⁶ The Mining Coroner would immediately oversee outstanding inquests, providing much needed comfort to these families. Hopefully this means that would start as soon as possible and thus finish quicker.

The Department of Justice (the department) reported that, based on existing data, the MRC would consider an average of 2 to 4 accidental mining related deaths per year if the Bill is passed.⁷ and carry out general coronial work at the same time as undertaking mining-related work, which will assist in reducing the backlog of coronial matters and improving clearance rates.⁸

³ Department of Justice, correspondence, 27 June 2025, p 4.

⁴ Or by another coroner if the MRC is not available. Bill, cl 5.

⁵ 'Queensland appoints Wayne Pennell as state's first mining and resources coroner', ABC News, 8 May 2025.

⁶ 'Queensland appoints Wayne Pennell as state's first mining and resources coroner', ABC News, 8 May 2025.

⁷ Department of Justice, public briefing transcript, Brisbane, 30 June 2025, p 5.

⁸ Department of Justice, correspondence, 27 June 2025, p 2.

Consultation on the Bill was undertaken with stakeholders from the judiciary, legal, resources, union groups and local government.

In the public hearing, the Mining and Energy Union (MEU) made it clear it didn't think the Bill would make the industry any safer and the mechanisms that government should consider are already included in the current legislation.⁹ The department noted that the Bill does not provide any new investigative processes that do not already exist within the current coronial framework.¹⁰

Other stakeholders were supportive and at the public hearing, the Association of Mining and Exploration Companies (AMEC) noted the coroner is already addressing significant matters in the resources industry so has the predisposition and the experience, as opposed to a separate coroner.¹¹

Ultimately, will the establishment of the MRC provide more timely answers and certainty to families? Potentially, although the timely and appropriate investigation of all deaths, regardless of industry could be achieved by increasing funding to the Coroners Court and appoint more standard types of Coroners.

I thank the Committee, submitters and attendees at the public hearing for their examination of this Bill.

⁹ Public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 28 July 2025, p 10.

¹⁰ Public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 28 July 2025, p 10.

¹¹ Public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 28 July 2025, p 6.