



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**BILLS**

**Environment Protection and Biodiversity  
Conservation Amendment (Independent Expert  
Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and  
Large Coal Mining Development) Bill 2012**

**Second Reading**

**SPEECH**

**Wednesday, 23 May 2012**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

---

## SPEECH

**Date** Wednesday, 23 May 2012  
**Page** 5340  
**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Neumann, Shayne, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Mr NEUMANN** (Blair) (18:34): I speak in support of this piece of legislation, the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and Large Coal Mining Development) Bill 2012.

My community, Ipswich, was built on coalmining. At one stage we had about 30 coalmines in Ipswich. Ipswich has also been the scene of some of the worst tragedies in Queensland with many deaths as result of the coalmining industry, including at Box Flat in the early 1970s where many men were killed. If you look at the crest of Ipswich you will see 'Be confident when doing right' in Latin, but you will also see symbols of the coalmining industry. Coalmining has been a particularly important industry in Ipswich. Thousands of men, and some women as well, have worked in the industry, which is developing Ipswich and providing funds and employment for the local community. If you go to the heritage centre at Redbank Plains you will see the wonderful work done by the CFMEU to restore and remember Ipswich's coalmining history.

There is still coalmining in the Ipswich and West Moreton region. There are two active New Hope coalmines near Rosewood, a rural township near Ipswich; Jeebropilly is one and New Oakleigh the other. They provide employment. When I first became a federal member there was some talk that all coalmines in Ipswich would be closed but in fact there has been an expansion of coalmining in the Ipswich and West Moreton region.

If you look at any of the newspapers from around South-East Queensland—like the *Fassifern Guardian*, the *Kilcoy Sentinel* or the *Gatton Star* or the *Toowoomba Chronicle* in places like the Scenic Rim area, the Lockyer Valley, the rural parts of Ipswich, the Brisbane valley, the Kilcoy shire, or the Toowoomba and Darling Downs areas—you will see letters to the editor, press releases from politicians, and comments made by councillors and chambers of commerce. This is a very big issue. Coalmining and the coal seam gas industry is a controversial issue. I do not always agree with the member for Flinders, but his comment in relation to water is accurate. It is extremely important that we make sure we have a good, adequate and clean water supply not just for industry and agriculture but also for the consumers—the men and women, the mums and dads—in these rural areas like Boonah, Gatton, Fernvale and Lowood, and major provincial cities in Queensland, like Toowoomba and Ipswich.

In the last state election in Queensland we heard a lot of controversial statements and claims. We saw the new LNP government and the now Premier make a play for every side of the street on this particular issue, saying one thing to farmers and another to industry. When the Prime Minister was in Ipswich some time ago this issue was raised with her, and it is certainly an issue that has been raised with me. There is great controversy around mining explorations and mining licences in and around Ipswich and Ebenezer, as well as Mount Mort, Mount Walker and other areas. I am aware of this as a local member, I am aware of this from my childhood and I am aware of this from my time working and living in Ipswich.

This legislation goes towards addressing some of the community's concerns in relation to coal seam gas and large coalmining developments. To put it in its context, the community concerns could be expressed like this: there was talk some months ago around the upper part of the Brisbane Valley, where there are 900 people on the electoral roll in the rural township of Toogoolawah. In fact, about a quarter of the township came out one very cold and bitter night to talk about coalmining, the possibility of coalmining in the Brisbane Valley and its proximity to the Wivenhoe and Somerset dams. They expressed strong community concern and objection. I notice the Somerset Regional Council has also expressed its objection to large coalmining developments in and around the Brisbane Valley. Certainly, with its emphasis on tourism and agriculture, and its proximity to the water supply for Brisbane and Ipswich, large coalmining developments are not appropriate in the Brisbane Valley region.

We have listened to what communities have said in South-East Queensland and elsewhere, and we are looking at introducing a new science based framework to provide some certainty for these communities, protecting the long-term health of our water supplies, making sure that the best scientific analysis and evidence can be given, and advice offered, to governments. I applaud the Prime Minister for announcing in November 2011 that the

new independent expert scientific committee will be established in relation to these issues. This will take some of the heat out of the issue—not all of it, of course, but some of it—and will make sure that people can rely on expert advice. They are concerned about the impact on water resources. They are concerned about what might happen in their region to biodiversity, conservation, the environment and protected species. They are concerned about all of these issues.

This bill creates a new division under part 19 of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, establishing a new statutory committee with responsibility for: research; advice on bioregional assessments, and on the impact of coal seam gas and large coalmining developments; advice on research and development commissioned by the minister for the environment following consideration of that committee's advice; and providing advice in a number of other areas as well. It provides for information on the comparability and consistency of research. We often have the coal seam gas industry commissioning expert advice and evidence, which is then contradicted by other people.

This is about best practice. It is about making sure that we have listened to community concerns. It is about providing, by legislation, the creation of a new committee which will give that advice, making sure that the minister, while being accountable, open and transparent and while listening to local communities, has the best independent expert scientific advice on hand for coal seam gas and large coalmining developments. I think that will in some way assuage the concerns of people in the Ipswich and West Moreton regions. I know it will continue to be an issue. I know some farmers are supportive of these developments while others have tremendous hostility. We have seen a strange marriage of political alliance between the likes of Alan Jones and Bob Katter, and we have seen the Greens also involved in these things.

We want to make sure that we can take the heat out of these issues. We want to make sure that the government makes good decisions, and that councils and state governments make good decisions, in relation to planning and development. We want to make sure that the kinds of decisions we make take into consideration the environment, the flora and fauna, the potential economic development of the industries and the employment opportunities. We also want to make sure that these decisions maintain the viability of these communities and the viability of an agricultural industry which, to Queensland, is particularly important. I am aware of this from living in Ipswich and I am aware of this from being a federal member.

I commend the legislation to the House and I support it.