

Question on Notice
No. 554
Asked on 19 April 2016

Mr Seeney asked the Premier and Minister for the Arts (Hon. A Palaszczuk)—

With reference to workers made redundant from the Cockatoo Coal mine and an invitation to the Premier to attend an urgent town meeting in Baralaba on 2 April 2016 and to further correspondence on 7 April 2016 providing an update on the dire situation facing workers and seeking the Premier's assistance/intervention—

Why have the retrenched Baralaba mine workers not received the same response from the State Government as the Queensland Nickel workers retrenched in a similar way and why has the Premier not responded to correspondence outlining the plight of workers and containing a formal request for assistance from the redundant Baralaba workers?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for the question. Like the Member for Callide, I am concerned for the Queenslanders that have lost their jobs at the Baralaba mine, and can assure the Member my Government is closely monitoring this situation.

In response to events at Queensland Nickel on 20 January 2016, I launched a five-point plan to stimulate jobs in Northern Queensland, including an Accelerated Works Program to bring forward Government-funded capital works projects in affected regions.

My Government also recognises the impacts of the mining downturn across regional Queensland. That is why we expanded the Accelerated Works Program to all affected regions, including the Fitzroy region. As outlined in the recently released State Infrastructure Plan, \$27 million worth of projects have been brought forward under the Accelerated Works Program supporting 67 full time equivalent jobs in the Fitzroy region.

As the Government is not a creditor of Cockatoo Coal, it would be inappropriate to intervene, especially given creditors have recently elected to enter a Deed of Company Agreement. However, my Government is focused on ensuring affected workers are appropriately assisted. Officers from the Department of State Development have been actively monitoring the situation at Baralaba, including having direct discussions with the administrators of Cockatoo Coal, PPB Advisory, and relevant federal and state agencies, including Centrelink.

The Department of State Development held an information session in Baralaba on 14 April 2016 to meet with affected individuals, discuss their current circumstances and link them up with possible government services. Eight former employees and a spouse of a terminated employee attended the session.

I can now confirm that following the receipt of an overdue tax refund, Cockatoo Coal's administrators, PPB Advisory, paid all terminated employees their entitlements in full on 6 May 2016.

With all disputed claims with creditors now clarified, PPB Advisory will also be in a position to process creditors' entitlements once the Deed of Company Agreement is completed.

I hope, as I am sure the Member for Callide does, that mining soon resumes in Baralaba. The Department of State Development will provide support to Cockatoo Coal, once out of administration, to assist with approvals to reopen the mine.