



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**PROOF**

**BILLS**

**National Occupational Respiratory  
Disease Registry Bill 2023, National  
Occupational Respiratory Disease Registry  
(Consequential Amendments) Bill 2023**

**Second Reading**

**SPEECH**

**Tuesday, 5 September 2023**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

<b>Date</b> Tuesday, 5 September 2023	<b>Source</b> House
<b>Page</b> 70	<b>Proof</b> Yes
<b>Questioner</b>	<b>Responder</b>
<b>Speaker</b> Khalil, Peter MP	<b>Question No.</b>

**Mr KHALIL (Wills) (19:04):** The Albanese government is aware that the current rates of silicosis and other occupational respiratory diseases are unacceptably high in Australia. Silicosis is an irreversible lung disease. It affects workers who are exposed to silica dust, mainly in the construction and mining industries, and those working with engineered stone industries. Currently, there are no effective treatments for silicosis. Once damage from silicosis occurs, it cannot be reversed. Treatment focuses on slowing down progression and relieving symptoms. In severe cases, a lung transplant may be required. Silicosis is said to have caused death and disability in Australia for over 100 years. According to Lung Foundation Australia, around 600,000 Australian workers are potentially exposed to silica dust each year across various industries. Tragically these are preventable conditions and often preventable deaths. Everyone has the right to feel safe and protected at work, and this government feels passionately about this. We all do. Workers should not have to be exposed to unacceptable risks in workplaces or fall ill or die because their employers failed to keep them safe at work.

The Australian Workers Union, the AWU, highlights that our safety standards and their enforcement in Australia are so shameful that even workers in the United States and Mexico have better protection from silica dust. The AWU has been fiercely campaigning to protect workers from silicosis. I want to acknowledge the ongoing efforts in awareness-raising and leading some of the broader advocacy that has been conducted. The Australian Workers Union has highlighted stories of the personal challenges of many Australians who have suffered detrimental consequences from exposure at work. One of these is from Michelle Iorangi, a 40-year-old Brisbane mother of six. She talks of her once active husband's rapid decline and death after working at a Brisbane powder-coating company. She explained that her husband would often return home covered in a thick layer of silica dust. He needed to use dish washing liquid to wash off the powder, as soap itself did not remove it from his skin. She said that the workplace didn't do much for dust prevention. In 2015, her husband, Nako, had scarring on his lungs. His condition unfortunately progressed quickly, and he died in 2019. I commend Michelle on her bravery in sharing her personal story, as difficult as it was for her to do so, with the inquiry as part of the federal government's National Dust Disease Taskforce. The story of Michelle and her husband—these are real stories. These are real impacts on families who have tragically lost loved ones from situations that could have been, frankly, prevented.

This government commits to tackling occupational respiratory diseases. We are introducing reforms with the National Occupational Respiratory Disease Registry Bill 2023 and the National Occupational Respiratory Disease Registry (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2023 to ensure that there are world-class prevention and treatment measures, ensuring workers are protected from unacceptable health risks. We're doing this by: working with health professionals, unions and industry to develop a national silicosis prevention strategy and national action plan; investing in education campaigns for employers, workers and health professionals to improve prevention, detection and treatment; investigating ways to limit the use of engineered stone, including an import ban; and working with state and territories on a coordinated approach to keep workers safe.

The National Occupational Respiratory Disease Registry Bill 2023 delivers on recommendations made by the National Dust Disease Taskforce. The taskforce had recommended the establishment of a national occupational respiratory disease registry. A national registry enables us to consistently collect information about respiratory diseases that have been caused occupationally or exacerbated in that way. Data collection is essential to better understand the true extent of these diseases in Australia and to help us take action to further reduce workplace exposure. The registry will also be used to collect information from certain medical specialists who diagnose occupational respiratory diseases and allow information about the diagnosis, patient and exposure details to be shared within the registry via an online portal.

At this stage, based on recommendations of the taskforce, only silicosis will initially be a prescribed occupational respiratory disease. The mandatory elements that must be notified will also be kept to a minimum to ensure that the potential burden on physicians is limited. Where consent is provided, additional information can be collected relating to demographics and lifestyle. This includes smoking history, employment status and details of employment where individuals may have been exposed to a respiratory disease-causing agent. Information

sharing will be made easier through this reform, to ensure that people can be provided with the best possible care. This includes information being made available to physicians treating the individual, as well as sharing notifications about an individual from the national registry to Commonwealth, state or territory authorities and state and territory health and safety agencies. The information-sharing element will increase awareness of the prevalence of occupational respiratory diseases across our country and help us take actions to reduce further worker exposure to these diseases. Having a national registry demonstrates the government's commitment to keeping workers safe.

The devastating story that I relayed of Michelle Iorangi and her husband, Nako, are real stories of families impacted by this tragic illness. His death and the death of many others were preventable. People should not have to fall ill or die because employers fail to keep them safe at work. These reforms are part of the broader efforts of this government to tackle occupational respiratory diseases.

This bill demonstrates the Albanese government's commitment to not only understanding the occupational respiratory health of workers but also taking important steps to support the early detection and prevention of workplace risks, as well as developing strategies to protect workers from further exposure. It demonstrates this government's commitment to taking action to protect Australians from exposure to unacceptable workplace risks. It demonstrates this government's commitment to safety for workers on the job, and this is something that we are all passionate about. If there is a life that can be saved or prevented from being taken in a workplace, that is something that we have to do everything we can to support, such as through this legislation.