

Australia: Miner killed at Peak Downs in central Queensland

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A miner was killed and another seriously injured in a collision between two vehicles at the BHP Mitsubishi Alliance (BMA) Peak Downs open-cut coal mine in central Queensland's Bowen Basin on July 24.

According to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), Andreas Loizou, a contractor employed by Thiess, died at the scene after a massive dump truck reversed over the work utility vehicle in which he was a passenger on a mine road at approximately 4:38 a.m.

The vehicle's driver was trapped by the lower legs and taken to Moranbah Hospital, approximately 30km from Peak Downs, in a serious but stable condition with chest and leg injuries.

"While emergency services were responding, a third person at the mine site suffered a medical episode and was flown to Mackay Base Hospital in a stable condition," the ABC reported.

A one-minute silence was held at the Moranbah Miners Memorial in honour of Loizou. The memorial honours the 13 miners killed in the region between 1972 and 2019, including Athol Parry (1974) and Peter Reynolds (1986), the two previous fatalities at Peak Downs.

Following the fatality, BMA suspended operations for just 24 hours at its central Queensland Bowen Basin sites—Peak Downs, Saraji, Broadmeadow, Caval Ridge and Goonyella Riverside. A BMA spokesperson told 7News the shutdown was to "support authorities and enable our people to reflect and refocus on safe ways of working."

This is an attempt to quell anger and blame workers for such deaths.

In open-cut mines, light vehicles and big haul trucks often operate in the same confined work area. A loaded dump truck can weigh hundreds of tonnes, and a smaller vehicle might be almost invisible from the operator's cabin because of large blind spots, especially in darkness and while reversing.

The technology to prevent such collisions—proximity detection systems, collision avoidance, segregated light and heavy vehicle road networks—has existed for years. Yet such

incidents are common.

Queensland government data on accidents in surface (open-cut) coal mines from July 2022 to June 2025 found 125 serious accidents, with 12 being from "vehicle interaction." Out of 4,566 potentially dangerous incidents over the same period, "vehicle-collision" and "vehicle-unplanned movement" were second and third highest categories, with 727 and 596, or 29 percent, of all incidents.

BMA is a joint venture between BHP and Mitsubishi Development, two industry giants, and Peak Downs one of the world's largest metallurgical coal mines. BHP reported that Peak Downs produced 3.3 million tons of coal in the nine months to March 2026. That was roughly a quarter of BMA's total steelmaking coal production for the period.

BHP alone posted US\$5.6 billion in attributable profit for the first half year of 2026, up 28 percent from last year.

Loizou was employed as a contractor by Thiess, an international mining services company based in Brisbane, as part of a contract workforce that has been systematically expanded as BMA and other mining conglomerates have shed permanent positions.

BMA currently employs around 9,500 staff and contractors across its central Queensland operations. Last September, BMA announced 750 job cuts and the mothballing of its Saraji South mine, while Anglo American slashed a further 200 positions across the Bowen Basin.

This is the fourth fatality in a Queensland mine this year and the seventh in mining nationally, already surpassing the six mining deaths recorded in 2025. Workplace death figures understate the true toll: chronic occupational illnesses are routinely excluded from official counts, while other incidents go unreported.

According to Safe Work Australia, 180 workers were killed on the job nationally in 2025. Across all industries, as of July 16 at least 65 workers have been killed this year—roughly one every three days. Mining has the third-highest fatality rate of any industry, at 3.4 deaths per 100,000 workers.

Resources Safety and Health Queensland (RSHQ), the

state's mining safety regulator, dispatched inspectors to the site and said it had begun an investigation. The regulator issued general recommendations urging mine operators to ensure critical controls are in place to reduce risk "to an acceptable level and as low as reasonably achievable."

As has become typical, the Mining and Energy Union (MEU) indicated its readiness to leave any investigation in official hands. It told 7News its "industry safety and health representatives are responding to the incident and providing support while investigations continue." The MEU added that its "priority is supporting workers while the full circumstances of the incident are still being established."

Workers should draw lessons from the previous investigations into mining deaths.

At Coronado Global Resources' Curragh complex, about 180km southeast of Peak Downs, where Jeff Palmer was killed in a roof collapse in January, two workers had already died in the preceding five years. On January 12, 2020, 33-year-old Donald Rabbitt was crushed by a falling tyre assembly weighing more than five tonnes.

After RSHQ investigated Rabbitt's death, Coronado, the mine's senior executive and contractor Thiess were charged with breaching the Queensland Coal Mining Safety and Health Act. By August 2024, the Office of the Work Health and Safety Prosecutor had dropped all charges.

Almost five years after Rabbitt's death, in December 2024, Coroner David O'Connell found that Rabbitt had been directed to change the tyre alone—though the mine's own standard operating procedures specified a three-person job—and that he had received no practical training for the task. The coroner declined to hold a full inquest, claiming "there did not appear to be any prospect of making recommendations that would reduce the likelihood of similar deaths occurring." No one was held accountable.

On November 21, 2021, 54-year-old Clark Peadon, a dragline operator who had worked at Curragh since 2006, was crushed by one of the machine's propel shoes while doing cable relocation work. Coronado was charged with failing to meet its obligation to keep workers safe. The maximum penalty was \$689,250. The company was fined \$80,000. No conviction was recorded.

At the Endeavor mine in Cobar, New South Wales (NSW), 59-year-old Ambrose McMullen and 24-year-old Holly Clarke were killed in an explosion on October 28 last year. The mine was fully reopened—including the use of explosives—within a month, before any cause had been determined. Nine months later, the NSW Resources Regulator has still not produced an explanation. The reopening was carried out with the approval of the state safety regulator and without any opposition from the Australian Workers Union or the MEU.

As the experiences of Curragh and Cobar show, the official investigations are not impartial but meant to cover over, as much as possible, corporate wrongdoing and ensure continued profits. Rather than mobilise mineworkers to demand and conduct independent investigations to uncover the truth of what happened and ensure workers' safety, the union bureaucracy tells workers to sit back and let the government and corporate investigators clean up.

Left in the hands of the union apparatuses, profits will keep coming before workers' lives and safety, regardless of any union officials' occasional militant phrases or slogans.

For decades, the unions have collaborated with operators to gut permanent jobs, expand contract labour, impose 12-hour shifts and seven-day rosters, and worsen safety and infrastructure.

Their role after every fatality is the same—channel anger into toothless official investigations and help production resume as quickly as possible. The unions have become instruments of class collaboration, integrated into the state and the companies. Workers can only ensure their safety by taking matters into their own hands.

Over the past year, the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) has led independent investigations into worker deaths internationally. Rank-and-file committees must be built in every workplace, democratically controlled by workers, independent of union bureaucracies and management, with the power to investigate deaths, enforce safety demands, and shut down unsafe operations through industrial action.

The fight for health and safety is inseparable from the struggle to end the capitalist system based on the exploitation of workers' labour for private profit. That requires forging a socialist and internationalist leadership in the working class, uniting workers across borders to take control of basic industries and reorganise the world economy to meet human need, not boost profits.



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