



Speech by

Hon. D. HAMILL

MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

Hansard 11 November 1998

NATIONAL COMPETITION POLICY

Hon. D. J. HAMILL (Ipswich—ALP) (Treasurer) (6.22 p.m.): I move—

"Delete all words after 'moved—That' and insert the following—

'This House supports the Beattie Government's commitment to apply a rigorous Public Benefit Test in any application of National Competition Policy in Queensland.

This House considers that this test must give full weight to issues including jobs and job security, social welfare and equity considerations, health and safety, and regional development as well as the interests of consumers.

Further, the House supports the use of Community Service Payments to ensure the maintenance of quality services to people in regional areas on the right of the State Government to identify and determine such Community Service Obligations.

Further, the House condemns the views emanating from the National Competition Council and calls on the Federal Government to constrain the powers of this unelected body in order that it is not able to slash millions of dollars from State Government budgets with potentially devastating effects on employment and services, particularly in rural and regional areas.'"

In commending this amendment to the House, I will respond to the member for Gregory. I well recall when the legislation was before the House during the last Parliament. I expressed similar sentiments in moving a set of amendments to legislation which the then Government had before the House to ensure that due weight and due consideration was given to issues such as those I have outlined in this amendment in any consideration of policy in relation to National Competition Policy. I am sure that my colleague the member for Gregory well remembers that debate because he is nodding his head in agreement. At that time the House came together and supported those amendments. I was pleased that that occurred.

Here we have a set of policies which are very important. Surely no-one would argue against economic reforms which make our industries more competitive and which make Australia more viable, but we need to have a dollop of good old-fashioned commonsense. We need not simply market theory but market theory tempered with sensible policy prescriptions which ensure that we do not lose sight of our social responsibilities. What is the good of being tremendously competitive if we do not have communities that are viable? What is the benefit of dismantling large sections of our social infrastructure if what we then have left is distress and poverty? We have to have a sensible administration of policy. That sensible administration of policy must take into account the very things I have outlined in my amendment.

Furthermore—this is something I am distressed about—we have here the National Competition Council purporting to set itself above elected Governments, saying to elected Governments, "Thou shalt not have community service obligations." It says that Governments should not determine or identify those things which are important to Governments and that Governments should not have the right to provide support through community service payments.

Dr Watson interjected.

Mr HAMILL: Indeed. Why have Governments if they are not there to administer social policy—if they are not there to reflect the views and aspirations of the community? We as a Government have an obligation to provide quality services to all of our communities, no matter where they are located. If that means providing community service obligations, then that is what we have to do.

This Government provides community service obligations in terms of power to remote communities. We want to do it also in relation to water, yet the National Competition Council says, "You should not do that." Well, I reject that view. That is nonsense. The National Competition Council is giving itself a role which was not intended, which the Governments of Australia would not have willed to be the case. We as Governments in Australia need to reassert ourselves and make sure that the policy serves the people and that the people are not subservient to the policy.

Time expired.
