



Speech by

Mrs D. PRATT

MEMBER FOR BARAMBAH

Hansard 20 October 1998

WATER STORAGE, IRVINEBANK; ELECTRICITY INDUSTRY

Mrs PRATT (Barambah—ONP) (Deputy Leader of the One Nation Party) (6.05 p.m.): I rise to second the motion put forward by the member for Tablelands. Media reports of late tend to confirm the fragility of our electricity generating infrastructure. It is patently obvious that our reserve generating capacity is hopelessly insufficient to provide a reasonable buffer in times of breakdowns. We almost certainly face major disruption from power outages in the upcoming season of peak demand. Ongoing power outages cost millions of dollars to industry. They cost thousands of dollars to individuals and, quite often, cost Queenslanders their jobs and pose an unacceptable inconvenience to the citizens of this State. Even worse, blackouts can be life threatening to the ill and elderly.

There are two decisions which must be taken by this Government. Firstly, the poor economic performance which contributes to the continuing corporatisation of our essential services must be controlled. Uncontrolled obsession with profits, which inevitably accompany uncontrolled corporatisation, places unnecessary pressure on maintenance schedules and ignores social costs. Apart from the inconvenience factor, reduced maintenance equals reduced service levels and reduced safety standards. Assessment of all such projects must include an extensive socioeconomic impact study.

The second action required of this Government is to immediately upgrade the Tarong Power Station. In the design stage, provision was made for its future expansion. Such expansion can be accomplished efficiently, quickly and cost effectively. Expert opinion considers this option to be the quickest way to provide an increase in our State's generating capacity. Given the current extremely critical situation, surely this action is the only way to ensure that the people of Queensland need not live with the fear of major power disruptions for any longer than is absolutely necessary.

I believe that the gas pipeline from Papua New Guinea is a far inferior option on several counts. The time frame from inception to completion would be far too long to address the potential problems we are faced with now. Another factor is the very real danger the pipeline could pose to the environment and especially to some of the more sensitive areas of Queensland. Add to these problems the fact that, under the pipeline option, we would be dependent upon a foreign country for one of our most vital essential services and it becomes patently obvious that the gas pipeline should not be the linchpin of our power generating infrastructure. Need I mention Bougainville and Ok Tedi?

The Tarong option, though, has much to recommend it. Apart from the short lead time I mentioned earlier, which will quickly provide a much-needed buffer, there are numerous other related benefits. Unemployment levels in the Wide Bay/Burnett area are among the nation's highest. The construction phase would provide a much-needed boost to employment in the region. There would be ongoing employment opportunities as well—jobs, jobs, jobs.

The Surat Basin contains a vast quantity of high-quality steaming coal with relatively low emissions. This resource is crying out for development and has the potential for major export earnings. Initial cash flow accruing from a contract to supply extra coal to Tarong would be a great incentive to establish the infrastructure necessary to commence the development of the Surat Basin and to begin a very strong export-earning operation. The benefits to the Queensland economy would also be enormous and widespread. My contention is that, while the Papua New Guinea pipeline may warrant long-term consideration as an additional power source, Queensland's need is immediate, and the best option to address that need is to embark on an immediate upgrade of Tarong.

The Mines and Energy Minister apologised to the people of Queensland for future load shedding. I respectfully suggest that the Minister stop apologising and seize the opportunity of the Tarong expansion to minimise the damage caused to industry and householders due to the department's lack of forethought and planning by both Labor and coalition Governments.
