



Speech by

Mr G. HEALY

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH

Hansard 30 July 1998

MOTION OF CONFIDENCE

Mr HEALY (Toowoomba North—NPA) (9.49 p.m.): In rising to oppose the confidence motion before the Parliament today, I firstly wish to thank the people of the electorate of Toowoomba North for their confidence in me as their elected member for a third time. As I have done twice before in this place at the beginning of the Parliament, I pledge my total commitment to represent them.

I place on record my thanks and tribute to several of my former parliamentary colleagues who were not returned after the 13 June election. In particular, I pay tribute to a gentleman who became a very good friend of mine, of many members in this place on both sides of the Chamber and of officers of the Parliament. I refer to the former member for Lockyer, Mr Tony FitzGerald. I think it was the member for South Brisbane who, on the night of the election in the tally room, said that it would be a little strange not having Tony FitzGerald around the Parliament any more. Given the fact that it was the member for South Brisbane who said that, that was a fitting tribute to the bipartisan support that Tony received as a member in this place.

Of course, she was absolutely right. Tony absolutely loved the Parliament. He loved good-spirited debate. He loved being involved in the tactics, strategies, mysteries and intrigues of this place. When we were in Opposition, he was perfect in the role of Leader of Opposition Business and later, when we were Government, in the role of Leader of the House. I am sure that there is many a former Minister from the coalition who will privately agree that Tony was a great help to them as he sat beside them during the carriage of fairly difficult and intricate legislation in this place. Tony loved that sort of thing and revelled in it. He served this Parliament very, very well. A former Minister, a former Government Whip and a fervent supporter of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the Australasian Study of Parliament Group, he served on various committees in this place as well as in many other roles that he played to ensure that this Parliament worked as well as it possibly could.

Mr Quinn interjected.

Mr HEALY: The member for Merrimac hit it on the head when he said that the former member for Lockyer was an outstanding parliamentarian.

I wish both him and his lovely wife, Bernadette, all the very best for the future. Who knows, perhaps somewhere down the track we may see that little carrot top back in here some time. I certainly hope so. I wish him well.

In common with many others in this place since the commencement of the 49th Parliament, I express my appreciation to the former Speaker of this place, Speaker Turner. When a young member comes in here for the first time after being elected, normally on this side of politics—and I am sure it happens on the other side as well—an older member from the political party is usually assigned to keep an eye on him or her, not let him or her go astray and perhaps offer a little friendly, fatherly advice from time to time. I believe that Neil Turner had been assigned to look after me, or so it seemed at the time. Before too long, I knew the famous horse poem off by heart. That must have meant that he did his job. I thank him publicly for his friendship and his wise counsel. I pay tribute to him for the way in which he conducted himself as Speaker of this Parliament. He leaves enormous shoes to fill and will be fondly remembered in the precincts of this place for many years to come.

I congratulate Mr Speaker on his election. I am sure that he realises the enormous responsibility of the position. I was quite pleased to hear some of the comments that he made in his opening address as Speaker of this Parliament.

In just two and a quarter years, the Borbidge/Sheldon Government took this State to a state of renewed economic vigour and confidence with sound policies and respected economic management. I am afraid that that is something for which Labor will never be remembered. I congratulate the three former Ministers whose portfolios I now have the responsibility of shadowing in this place, namely, the member for Noosa in Tourism, the member for Southport in Sport, and the member for Crows Nest in Racing. After they were appointed in early 1996, all three of those men played a major role in the success of the previous coalition Government and provided this State with some wonderful initiatives that helped to create jobs and continue prosperity in Queensland.

Despite all the rhetoric of the Labor party, the tourism industry in Queensland is in a state of uncertainty, not just because of the Asian economic downturn and the collapse of the economies in places such as Japan and elsewhere but also because it is in fear of a return to the bad old days of a Labor administration when political interference caused bodies such as the Queensland Tourist and Travel Corporation to be restricted in what they could do to enhance tourism in this State. One of the first things that the Labor Government did only weeks after it assumed power was to force the resignation of successful Queensland Tourist and Travel Corporation Chair, Mrs Sallyanne Atkinson. I suppose that to some extent that move was not totally unexpected given the political climate at the time. The point that I want to make is that Mrs Atkinson was doing a very, very good job in the role of chairman of the QTTC.

Not long after that, just as the Minister was jumping aboard the plane to take him to New York to sign up the Goodwill Games, I understand that another little gem of a story appeared in quite a few regional newspapers around the State. The story stated that the Minister had plans to gut the QTTC and to reduce its membership. Naturally, that sent a shiver down the spines of particularly those current board representatives who represent important tourism areas in regional Queensland. It was interesting that one newspaper journalist rang me to say that he had rung the Minister's office for a further comment and was told by a ministerial staffer that the Minister had denied saying that he was going to do that to the QTTC. I thought that that was quite strange. Here we are several weeks later and still no announcement has been made of an appointment in relation to the chairman of the QTTC and no further announcement in relation to the make-up of the board. We have heard all sorts of rumours about who will become the QTTC chairman. There are all sorts of rumours about certain sporting personalities and about the appointment of former Federal or State Ministers. That issue is creating uncertainty within the industry. Who is going to miss out in terms of the make-up of the board for the regions? Which regions will not have a representative on Queensland's peak tourism body?

I urge the Minister to bring an end to all the uncertainty and announce exactly what he is going to do and whom he is going to appoint. Only that will end all the speculation and innuendo that have prevailed over the past few weeks in an industry that does not need uncertainty at this time. We in the Opposition will be watching very, very closely indeed to see who is appointed to that important position on that board. It would be very foolish were the Minister to go down the same path as his colleague the Minister for Employment and Training, who bowed to the pressure of his union and party mates when he made changes to the WorkCover board. Because of all the factors that are affecting the industry currently, the position of the QTTC chairman and the make-up of that board is important to Queensland in this time of uncertainty within the industry. We need people on that board who will represent their regions. We need a person who will take the helm of the QTTC with vigour and somebody who will be respected within the industry.

The coalition Government had secured the tourism industry as a top priority with policies that would ensure major employment growth and foreign exchange earnings. Under a coalition Government, the tourism industry received record support. As my colleague the member for Noosa mentioned earlier, the coalition increased the budget for the QTTC from only \$29m under Labor to what was going to be a record \$42m in our Budget. Funding for the Queensland Events Corporation had increased. The Gold Coast Events Company funding for Indy had been maintained. No Government, especially Labor, had ever delivered the level of financial support to tourism that the Borbidge/Sheldon Government was able to deliver over the two and a bit years that it was in office. Commitments had been given to marketing and promotion and major events, regional tourism, inbound tour operations, growth initiatives, taxation, industrial relations, infrastructure, transport, education and training, the year 2000 Olympics, special interest markets and ecotourism. The coalition recognised that tourism was essentially driven by private sector enterprise and that one of the key roles of Government was to provide an environment that stimulated and value added to the efforts of the industry.

During the term of the coalition Government there were thousands more hospitality jobs created in Queensland than there ever were under Labor. In fact, ABS figures showed that at the end of the March quarter 1996, there were 73,300 jobs in the hospitality sector in Queensland. At the end of the

March quarter this year, the total was 85,600. Queensland was the first State in Australia to respond to the Asian economic crisis with urgent industry summits in Brisbane earlier this year and a special \$5m marketing grant to the QTTC. Of course, that has been matched already by Labor but, as I understand it, is short of the pre-election commitment that was touted by Labor prior to the election.

Let me say that, from talking to tourism industry leaders as I did at the Queensland Tourism Awards on the Gold Coast last Friday night, the tourism summit that the Government conducted last week left a lot to be desired compared to the initiative-driven exercises that were conducted by the coalition Government earlier this year. At this point, I congratulate all of those award winners in the Queensland Tourism Awards last Friday night. I think that it bears special mention. It was a wonderful occasion at which some of Queensland's most prolific tourist destinations were awarded the accolades that they certainly deserved. It was a great message that was sent out to the tourism industry around Australia and across South East Asia as to what sort of quality and calibre of tourist destinations we have in Queensland.

The last time Labor held Government in Queensland, it allowed the tourism marketing budget to fall way behind that of most other States, even South Australia. Labor's old ways of promoting and handling tourism will simply not cut the mustard in these difficult times. Although the Government may promise budget increases and fast-tracking of special funding for marketing and promotion, its paltry record in the past simply suggests a return to the bad old days. In the past under Labor, Queensland's hard-won position as the dominant tourism State was sacrificed because the industry did not fit the Labor mould. Of course, who could forget the infamous Yo! Way to go! campaign, which was a national embarrassment and which left morale in the industry at an all-time low.

The previous Minister, the member for Noosa, would often tell me that when he took over the portfolio he was appalled at the poor relationship between the industry and the Government. There was no trust, there was no team spirit and there was no cohesion. It was in absolute disarray. The coalition Government fostered strong relationships with the industry, both at a domestic and international level, to maximise the profitability of Queensland. It completed marketing strategies for all 14 tourism regions in association with industry and regional tourist associations. Those strategies are vital for the continued economic prosperity of those regions.

The Borbidge/Sheldon Government had put in place the initiatives that reflected a clear understanding of the strength and future potential of the tourism industry. Those initiatives paid off in a big way. With the coalition's continued support for the meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions sector throughout the State, only last week we saw Cairns making the top 100 best convention venues in the world list. That is a great achievement for Cairns because it had never made that list before.

Of course, that leads me to the issue of the Cairns Convention Centre and the commitment by the coalition to allocate in its Budget \$21m in 1998-99 and 1999-2000 for the expansion of the Cairns Convention Centre to host the National Basketball League franchise team. I ask: is Labor going to welsh on that deal when it brings down its Budget on 15 September? I urge the Labor Government not to welsh on that deal. It is vitally important for Cairns, it is vitally important now that the Cairns national basketball franchise team has been included in the national competition but, more importantly, the commitment should be given now so that the people of Cairns know what the commitment is.

It was the coalition Government that funded Queensland Events, the State's major event organisation, to enable it to be the most successful major events body in Australia over the past two years, winning every single bid it had entered for new events for this State. That is a terrific record. In just over two years, more than 27 events had been added to Queensland Events' portfolio, delivering an estimated \$400m in direct economic benefit to the State and another \$200,000 in promotional value.

The coalition Government was able to secure the Magic Millions yearling sales and Magic Millions two-year-old classic for the Gold Coast for five years as well as provide for the establishment and promotion of a \$500,000 three-year-old Magic Millions race during the summer racing carnival.

One thing that was forgotten under the previous Labor Government was the importance of domestic tourism. That is why, as I mentioned before, in April this year the coalition Government announced Queensland's biggest ever domestic tourism push, worth \$8.2m and aimed specifically at interstate markets. The domestic tourism market represents around 80% of all visitors. It is of even greater significance to Queensland this year, as competition for the Australian holiday dollar is more fierce than ever before. In addition, the year to September 1997 results from the Queensland visitors survey showed that interstate visitor numbers jumped to 2.6 million, a 17% increase on the previous year, and awareness of the State's holiday destinations was at 47%, the highest rate in Australia and two and a half times that of our closest rival, New South Wales. The coalition Government had armed the tourism industry with the funding and support necessary to face the challenges of the immediate future as it continued to appreciate the vital contribution that tourism makes to the State's economy. The coalition believes that that should continue.

In the time remaining to me during this debate, I want to make a few comments about the racing industry. I think that it is important to highlight not only some of the initiatives that the previous coalition Government instigated for the industry but also, if time permits, to comment on the proposed TAB privatisation that the coalition Government had begun to initiate. In just over two years, the previous Minister, the member for Crows Nest, achieved marvellous reforms in the industry. The industry will remember some of those reforms that he was able to instigate. We saw the provision for the very first time of \$2m for a training track subsidy scheme to assist in maintaining vital infrastructure to eligible clubs throughout the State. It was the first time in 10 years that consolidated revenue money had been used as an injection of funds for the racing industry. We saw the Kennedy review of the Queensland Racing Industry Incentive Scheme implemented—a total commitment of \$3.5m, including an additional \$500,000 for an unplaced starter subsidy. We saw \$750,000 given to the Greyhound Racing Authority for administration and capital works and \$2.5m to the Queensland harness racing industry. We saw a record intake of overseas students at the Queensland Racing Industry Training Centre, with a \$5m flow-on effect for the State economy. I will have more to say about the Queensland Racing Industry Training Centre in the next couple of days, because that is also another interesting scenario that has taken place since this Government came to power in Queensland.

I say that the Minister for Racing is one of only very few members opposite who fully understands why the TAB must go through the process that the coalition Government instigated. I feel for him because he has to try to convince some of his colleagues opposite why there is the need for Queensland's TAB to compete. If we do not, we will fall so far behind the other States such as New South Wales and Victoria that it does not matter. Queensland's mighty racing industry must compete. I am prepared to sit with the Minister and talk about this in a bipartisan way because he understands the industry and he understands the problems that Queensland's TAB has faced in relation to low growth and the competition that is coming from other States. I think that we need to drive this as a Parliament, as a Government. I say one thing: it was the industry that started the drive for TAB privatisation and the coalition Government responded to that and implemented the first process.

Time expired.
