



Speech by

HOWARD HOBBS

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

Hansard 30 July 1998

MOTION OF CONFIDENCE

Mr HOBBS (Warrego—NPA) (9.19 p.m.): The Beattie Government is looking for a vote of confidence. Before any such decision is made, all honourable members need to examine the track record of the Labor Government and decide whether the pitfalls of the past will be revisited, or can we see a modern, forward-thinking Government? There is an old saying that a guide to the future is a past. So let us have a little glimpse, a little walk back through the annals of history—a very short history.

As I examine the record of the Labor Government of two and a half years ago, I remember—and I am sure all Queenslanders remember—the caning that the Labor Government gave the bush.

Mr Schwarten: You got a hell of a caning.

Mr HOBBS: We have got a better margin than the member had.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Reeves): Order! I remind members that, if they are going to interject, they should be in their correct seats.

Mr HOBBS: I remember the closing down of the railways and the loss of jobs. Each time the Labor Minister for Transport came into my electorate and assured the community that no more jobs would go, one could guarantee that, within a week or two, three or four rail employees would be told that their jobs were gone. I remember that 5,000 rail jobs were made redundant.

Mr Johnson: Eight thousand over six years.

Mr HOBBS: Eight thousand over six years, as the member for Gregory says. I remember that 21 stock railway sidings closed in Warrego. I remember the attempted closing down of the Cunnamulla, Quilpie, Glenmorgan and Dirranbandi rail lines. I remember Labor's community service obligation slogan, "Use it or lose it." The coalition fully reinstated those lines and commenced the upgrade. So far the score is: coalition 1; Labor 0.

I remember the closing down of the hospitals boards, the taking away of real community input into managing health in Queensland. I remember the Labor waiting lists for elective surgery—the longest in Australia. I remember the Beattie debt after capital works funding was used for recurrent funding—and the Labor Party could not fund the capital works program. The coalition reduced the waiting lists, funded health adequately and improved local input with district health councils. Score: coalition 2; Labor 0.

I remember the destruction of the DPI. Never before in Queensland's history has rural industry suffered more than it did at the hands of the Labor Government. In 1992, 460 DPI personnel alone were taken out of the field—most were sacked—and 30 to 40 DPI offices closed down throughout Queensland. Remember what Labor did for water development in Queensland? Absolutely nothing! Australia is the driest continent on earth. In six years one would think that the Labor Government would have had the vision to come up with a plan. All that it did was build the Teemburra Dam. Funds had already been provided by the previous National Party Government to build the Finch Hatton dam; Labor simply moved the site.

Within one and a half years of the coalition attaining Government, I put in place a plan for sustainable water development to an extent never before seen in this State. The plan was to spend \$2 billion and was equivalent in volume to two Snowy Mountain schemes, and that would have generated 10,000 rural jobs here in Queensland. That would have been the largest boost to rural jobs since the wool boom of the 1950s. I note that the new Labor Minister has stated that the water program is on hold until the Government can decide what to do. Therefore, we can expect nothing to happen. This Government has not shown that it has learnt from the mistakes of the past. Score: coalition 3; Labor 0.

In relation to financial management, remember the \$400m black hole in the Workers Compensation Fund? Remember the raiding of the Nominal Defendants Fund? Remember the raiding of the local ambulance fund—the hard-earned money raised from chook raffles? I will give honourable members an example: \$189,000 was taken from Charleville's local community; Dirranbandi, \$4,000; Goondiwindi, \$77,000; and Mitchell, \$11,000. That money has gone. They never saw it again. It was taken away. They never got it back. Remember the raiding of the Auctioneers and Agents Fund? Most of all, I remember the killer interest rates that were imposed by this Government's Federal counterparts. More damage was done to rural Australia than ever before, resulting in huge debts, people walking off the family farm and rural poverty. Score: coalition 4; Labor 0.

I remember the closures of courthouses across Queensland. I see the honourable former Attorney-General smiling. He should, because he certainly did put a lot of programs in place to improve that disastrous situation. The coalition reinstated many of the courthouses and placed Government agents into other towns to provide assistance to those communities. The members opposite have not learnt the lessons of the past. Within one month of being in Government, it has cut the legal aid service to the community of Mitchell, which is one community in which the Government closed the courthouse down and the coalition reopened it. I have here a letter from the Booringa Shire Council, which I will table. I also have letters from concerned citizens of the Mitchell area in which they state quite clearly that the duty solicitor will now not be available for Magistrates Court sittings. I seek leave to table that document.

Leave granted.

Mr HOBBS: The score: coalition 5; Labor 0. Remember when Labor increased land rentals by 3,000%? The coalition did an independent review and reduced them to an appropriate level. Score: coalition 6; Labor 0. Remember the national park acquisition of up to 4% of Queensland? Pat Comben was the one running around doing that. Families who survived the drought and financial crisis were then forced off the land by compulsory acquisition. There was no proportional increase in staff to manage those parks. Minister Welford said last week that the national park acquisition would go to 5%. Score: coalition 7; Labor 0.

Mr Hayward: What happened to 6?

Mr HOBBS: The honourable member missed it. Remember Labor's green tax? Within the Warrego electorate Labor's green tax would have had the following impact: Waggamba, \$120,000; Balonne, \$98,000; Waroo, \$62,000; Tambo, my own shire, \$28,000; Tara, \$64,000; Paroo, \$38,000; and Booringa, \$51,000. Thank heavens the coalition came along and put the green tax beast down!

I was dismayed to hear that the new Labor Government was introducing the Environmental Protection Agency. It is actually an enforcement group. People out in the general community might not realise that at this stage, but it is an enforcement group. This agency's emphasis will be on compliance—the green police. I understand that a large bureaucracy with a director-general will also be involved. Score: coalition 8; Labor 0.

I remember the unemployment figures that went up 65% under the previous State Labor Government. The Premier talked of a target of 5% in one to five years. Of course, the Deputy Leader of the National Party, Mr Horan, pointed out that Mr Beattie had said that after one year it would be 5% and then realised that that was a bit difficult so he extended it to five years. I suspect that that figure is what one could call political speak which will once again damage the image of politicians. We have heard it before. An example would be Prime Minister Hawke when he said, "No child will live in poverty by the year 1990", I think it was. Mr Keating also said in the middle of a recession, "What a lovely set of figures." We knew he was fibbing.

The Premier is touring the State, acting like the pope with his open palms saying, "Believe me." That might work on some of the new members and some members of the public, but those of us who have been here a bit longer can shake our heads and smile, and look again at another reborn politician. If he really wants to create some jobs, he could crank up the water program, which is one that I was particularly involved with. There are 10,000 rural jobs there. Let us see how dedicated and keen the Premier is to get unemployment down in Queensland. That is one way of doing it. Score: coalition 9; Labor, 0. I remember the attitude of Labor to rural communities.

A Government member interjected.

Mr HOBBS: The member will be impressed with this. This is his old boss, Tom Burns. He was dubbed "Labor Minister for the bush". He said to the people of Mitchell, "Pack up and leave because the town will not be there in 10 years," Nothing has been said that convinces us that Labor is going to change its attitude to rural industry. Nothing has shown us that Labor is genuine about trying to fix up the problem. Score: coalition 10; Labor 0. Looking at my unbiased scoring, it is quite clear that I am not confident that the Beattie Government will be good for Queensland.

Mr Hayward: There are only two rounds to go.

Mr HOBBS: We will see. In the recent election campaign the coalition was prepared to support local government to the tune of \$200m on the waste management strategy. The cost to local government is something like \$600m. I have not heard anything from the Labor Government to indicate that it is going to assist local authorities with this program. Enormous cost is involved, and mayors and councillors from the various local authorities will know the importance of a good waste management program. We had a program. What is Labor's program? So far we have heard nothing. We are listening; we are all ears. What will this Government do with the new Integrated Planning Act? Will the subsequent amendments proposed by the previous Minister, and supported by the Local Government Association, be progressed? What will happen with vegetation controls under the Integrated Planning Act?

After all, it was a Labor Government which brought in restrictive timber control on freehold and leasehold land. We heard about riparian corridors. Mention that word to people on the north coast and a shiver goes up their spines. It is still there. Maybe it is going to come back. I do not have confidence that land-holders are going to be dealt a fair hand. How will this Government deal with the projects for development under the new EPA? How long will it take to get projects up and running? How long will it take to get those projects finished? What other issues are likely to come out of the woodwork when the projects are almost completed?

I look at the amendments that have been moved in the House today. I strongly support the amendment moved by the Leader of the Opposition. It talks about recognising the commitments given by the Premier to the member for Nicklin. Anyone worth his salt would realise that these commitments are very important, not just for the Labor Government but also for the people of Queensland. For the integrity of that agreement to be put in place and kept in place, we believe that we need nothing less than an assurance from this Government, through this amendment, that it is fair dinkum. If the Government is not fair dinkum we should be told. Has a deal been done of which we are not aware? Is there something different? Why can the Government not support what it has said previously? Is there not some way in which the Government can explain to the community, "Yes, that is the deal. We have no problem with that"?

It is really a matter of looking at the facts. The letter was published in the Courier-Mail, so it has had fair coverage. Is something going to be recorded in Hansard for posterity to support the view that Labor is going to honour that contract and thus ensure that it is able to govern in this State?

It has been my pleasure tonight to cover a lot of issues. I have genuine difficulty in coming to a decision to support the Labor Government. Obviously, from our side of the House it would be difficult. There has not been any great signal to any of us in the rural areas particularly, which I represent, that there is going to be any great change. It is the same team, the same actions, the same motions, and the same types of signals. I do not believe that this Government deserves the confidence of the House.
