



Speech by

JEFF SEENEY

MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL APPROPRIATION BILL

Committee (Cognate Debate)

Estimates Committee E

Report

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (12.50 p.m.): I appreciate the opportunity to comment on this Budget Estimates committee report. The Estimates committee hearing illustrated beyond any doubt to me the laughable incompetence of the Minister for Mines and Energy, the only Minister who has apologised in advance for his own failings. His handling of the Callide C project has destroyed forever any credibility he may have had. It is interesting that, in his comments on the Estimates committee hearings a few moments ago, he made no mention of Callide C. Is that any wonder? The saga that has developed around Callide C has exposed the total incompetence of this Minister. Despite the obvious importance of this project to the future power supplies of this State, there can be no doubt from the Estimates committee hearings that this Government and this Minister in particular tried twice—not once, but twice—to stop that project.

At the same time as he was apologising in advance for power blackouts that he knew were coming, he was desperately trying to stop a project that he knew would provide cheap, reliable supplies of electricity for this State. Two ministerial inquiries—one of which Mr McGrady told the Estimates hearing he could not recall—were ordered to try to find a way to break the contracts that had been entered into by the coalition Government. Two ministerial attempts were made to kill a project that represented 1,000 construction jobs for my electorate and 900 megawatts of electricity for Queensland.

Failing in what was a desperate attempt to give the Chevron gas project an unfair and unjust advantage, it became obvious from the Budget figures that the strategy became one of delaying the project by denying funds this financial year. The figure allocated to Callide C was \$27.9m. That figure, despite the Minister's denials, is written on page 50 of the Capital Outlays Budget Paper No. 3. That is some \$100m less than the amount identified in the coalition Budget brought down in May. Almost unbelievably, the "Minister for Apologising in Advance" stupidly tried to deny that Budget cut. When faced with the evidence of his own figures, he adopted the absurd position that the project would proceed this year anyway, but the payment schedules had been renegotiated until next year. No doubt, that made many of the contractors involved in the project somewhat nervous. They were being told that they were going to do the work this year and not get paid until next year. The stupidity of that position quickly became apparent even to the "Minister for Apologising in Advance". A new story was concocted. The Estimates committee was told that the \$27.9m was just an indication. \$27.9m sounds pretty precise to me and to most of us, but we were told that it was just an indication and did not represent the total to be spent on Callide C from this Budget. The figure of \$27.9m was published in the capital expenditure documents, but did not represent the amount to be spent! That was an equally absurd position and just as quickly became unsustainable and was abandoned by the "Minister for Apologising in Advance".

Then the figure changed again. Mr Jardine from Powerlink told the Estimates committee that \$70m was the figure required for the project. So the figure went from \$128m to \$27.9m to about \$70m. What incredibly inept financial management for what was the biggest capital works project within the Minister's field of responsibility! With such inconsistency, the "Minister for Apologising in Advance"

demonstrated beyond doubt his own incompetence. He did not have a clue what was going on and he still does not. Callide C is a very important project to the Queensland power supply, but it is even more important to the community of Biloela and central Queensland. It represents 1,000 construction jobs in a relatively small rural community and ongoing employment for operators and coalminers. Naturally, as the local member I took a close interest in the budgeted expenditure for this project, and other members in this Chamber would have done the same had that project been in their electorate.

With his constantly changing positions on this matter, with his conflicting statements and his totally unsustainable logic, the "Minister for Apologising in Advance" demonstrated for all to see his total inability to handle this most important project and his total lack of control of his portfolio. It is a portfolio that is too important to this State to be left in the hands of such demonstrated incompetence. An apology in advance is no substitute for a reliable, affordable power supply. An apology in advance is no substitute for performance. Mr McGrady should be replaced.
