



Speech by

**Mr ROB MITCHELL**

**MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS**

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Hansard 20 October 1998

**WATER STORAGE, IRVINEBANK; ELECTRICITY INDUSTRY**

**Mr MITCHELL** (Charters Towers—NPA) (6.19 p.m.): I move a further amendment to the motion—

"Delete all words after 'That' (first occurring) and insert the following—

'the Parliament of Queensland, acknowledging the economic future of Queenslanders relies upon an adequate supply of electricity, calls on the Government this calendar year to place before Parliament a blueprint that will ensure Queenslanders have an adequate long term power supply while maximising both job opportunities for Queenslanders and utilisation of Queensland resources.' "

**Mr Nuttall:** Have you just supported Eastlink?

**Mr MITCHELL:** It is strange that the member mentioned that. In relation to planning, one of the issues that really needs to be put to bed is the planning of Eastlink. Basically, every time the mercury hits 30 degrees, members opposite dial up a new date for Eastlink. In February, in an interview on Today Tonight, the then Opposition Leader had Eastlink on line in February or March. On 23 February on ABC radio, the current Mines and Energy Minister said—

"Eastlink would have been up and running next week—or even this week."

Now we have had another warm day and, once again, according to the Premier and the Minister for Mines and Energy, Eastlink would have been on line now. When it gets hot, they find a new date for Eastlink. Of course, February, let alone March and let alone October are all nonsense dates, as is the claim this morning by the Premier that the former Labor Government had actually commissioned Eastlink.

The simple fact is that when Labor left office in February 1996, it was months away from even any formal commitment to the project. The environmental impact study was not due until June of that year. No deal had been done with Pacific Power. Also, a Senate committee had been savagely critical of the consultation process and the handling of environmental issues, signalling massive legal problems. According to the former Labor Government's own Cabinet documents, it was not going to make a decision until August 1996. The former Government still would have had to do a deal for power, win all the court challenges and then build it.

I know that at the moment the Government is sensitive to the description of the Mines and Energy Minister as irrational, but the simple fact is that any suggestion that Eastlink would have been available at any time in 1999, let alone in 1998, is absolutely irrational. There were too many ifs and buts and too many problems. Across south-east Queensland, protest rallies were planned. Those rallies were targeting marginal seats in the upcoming election. So the Labor Party was copping it from two fronts: Eastlink and the Gold Coast motorway.

I refer to an answer that I received during the Estimates committee hearing, which states—

"However, Powerlink Queensland is unable to speculate on other actions which may have been initiated later by affected parties, nor did Powerlink Queensland conduct any studies into the feasibility of accelerating the construction timetable."

So the Government knew that all of these problems existed and that Eastlink was not going to go ahead when it actually said that it was. There was Buckley's chance of Eastlink being ready by January 1999 even for trials, let alone for the transmission of 5,000 megawatts. An amount of 2,000 megawatts might be realistic, and even that would be optimistic when one considers the comments of the Government's own engineering subcommittee on Eastlink, which reported in October 1994. On page 14 it states—

"Allowing two and a half years for construction the earliest an interconnection could be placed in service is June 1998."

I note the reference to two and a half years for construction. The Government claims that it could have done it in 18 months, taking a full year off the estimates of the engineers. This was not the estimates of politicians looking for a way out of a sticky problem, or the estimates of power bureaucrats being shoved into a corner by the politicians, but the estimates of the engineers. So the Government is actually overriding the engineers' report. The report went on to say—

"If route investigations were to await the outcome of the Queensland capacity decision at the end of 1994 the earliest date an interconnection could be placed in service would be June 1999 assuming a successful and timely outcome to the public consultation and environmental study."

Let me examine that mouthful in the context of "dial an Eastlink". The capacity decision was not made at the end of 1994—and this is the capacity decision that should have been made in 1991—it was not made until April 1995. So we have a four-year delay when they were first told about these sorts of things. We have heard enough of that through the media and through the Parliament. Then consider that the earliest possible date for an interconnection was June 1999, according to the engineers, which assumed a successful and timely outcome of public consultation and the environmental study. As has already been indicated, the final EIS was not going to be before the Government until June.

Time expired.

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