



Speech by

## Hon. V. LESTER

### MEMBER FOR KEPPEL

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Hansard 30 July 1998

#### MOTION OF CONFIDENCE

**Hon. V. P. LESTER** (Keppel—NPA) (8.40 p.m.): Mr Speaker, I congratulate you very sincerely on attaining your very high post. I had the pleasure of working with you when I was Chairman of the Parliamentary Criminal Justice Committee. At all times you offered very wise counsel. In fact, you set an example that was excellent at all times. I was proud to be associated with you. I wish you well.

From the floor of this House, to the people of Keppel and those who assisted me in the last election I say very simply and sincerely: thank you very, very much. The recent campaign for members of the National Party was harder than usual. Party members in my electorate rallied when I told them very early in the piece that they would need to rally. At all times, we had polling booths filled to the brim with lots of helpers. In the end, we had quite a good result considering the circumstances. I thank the party members who helped and the constituents who supported me. As to those who did not support me— hopefully they will next time.

Before I discuss any other matter, I will make one or two comments in relation to my role as Chairman of the Parliamentary Criminal Justice Committee. We were a committee that did achieve an enormous amount. We brought into the House recommendations for change. Most of those recommendations were taken up and legislated upon. One of the achievements was the appointment of a Parliamentary Commissioner whose role it is to investigate certain matters. I certainly hope that the CJC does not continue to try to step in the way of the role of the Parliamentary Commissioner. That person has a job to do. That person should be left to do that job as that person sees fit. The Parliamentary Commissioner will have the capacity to investigate fully all aspects of the Criminal Justice Commission. From time to time, the committee received complaints. We would start to investigate those complaints and then the CJC could say that it was not in the public interest to disclose some important information to us. Quite honestly, that was not satisfactory. We believe that we have overcome that.

I am very happy to say that within our term we completed the three-year review. We have left the committee all ready for the next committee to take over. I wish the new chairman, who I understand will be Mr Lucas, all the very best in that important role. At this point, it seems that I will still be a member of that committee and I will be supporting him. I pay tribute to the members of the former committee: Gordon Nuttall, the deputy chairman; Stephen Robertson; Mr Carroll; Mr Baumann; and, of course, Mr Speaker, whom I mentioned earlier. I appreciate deeply all of their work. The reason we achieved as much as we did is that we pulled together very well. Just about everything was done by consensus. That was really good. I am very proud of that achievement.

We had very good support staff. In the early stages, the gentleman who is looking most astute at the table, Mr Laurie, gave us a lot of very wise counsel. He was backed up by Kerryn Newton. Then we had—and still have—the assistance of Mr David Groth, who has put a lot of effort into the role. He has always advised us in a most professional manner. The support staff, Veronica, Penny and Maree, also played a very important role.

Another role that I have currently is that of Opposition spokesman on Environment and Heritage and Natural Resources.

**Mr Schwarten:** What did you do to deserve that at your stage of the game?

**Mr LESTER:** I am getting better as I get older, and the member for Rockhampton knows that.

If I may, I will make one criticism. I am a little bewildered as to why the Government should place the Environment and the Natural Resources departments together.

**Mr Schwarten:** They're not together. They're two departments—two DGs.

**Mr LESTER:** They are two departments, two DGs and under the control of one Minister. That Minister will find himself writing letters in one direction and then answering them back in the other direction. In a nutshell, that is what will happen. Of course, the honourable member for Rockhampton knows very well that that is true, because at one time he did have a little bit to do with that particular department.

I am concerned that the environmental groups might try to assert their strength. If they do, that could be to the detriment of development within our State. We have to have a very balanced approach to environmental matters and development. If we do not, we could well find that, if the environmental factions get control of this department, we could have a lot of very good employment-generating projects grinding to a halt or put on hold yet again. Obviously, that would result in fewer jobs. That would be quite tragic for our State. We need to use modern technology to ensure that we can deal with the environmental concerns that will arise from time to time. Some of the things that went on in this country in the early days cannot be forgiven. However, we have the advantages of modern technology.

Even in relation to the Nathan dam, which is an issue of contention with various groups—and I seem to get into a bit of trouble in relation to that whichever way I go—modern technology is playing a role. We have learned a lot from the mistakes of the past. That comment is not pertaining to one particular Government. That has been the case over a long, long time. Each irrigation farm now has to have an environmental licence. It has to ensure that it complies with regulations and that water that may be affected by sprays does not wash into streams and rivers. That water has to be used on the farm. If those initiatives are implemented and policed, they can do a very good job.

So some people want the Nathan dam, some people do not. However, some of those people who do not want the dam miss the point a little bit. It is a fact that most of the water that comes into the Fitzroy River actually comes out of the Mackenzie and, indeed, the Isaac Rivers. I am quite sure that, with careful consideration and careful monitoring, that dam can well go ahead. It can produce hundreds of jobs and, in fact, can be——

**Mr Schwarten:** You said hundreds of thousands of jobs the other day.

**Mr LESTER:** I was quoting what Mr Goss said.

**Mr Schwarten:** I know. I know you were.

**Mr LESTER:** If Mr Goss made those comments, I am surprised that Mr Schwarten would try to make a political play out of it. Mr Goss was the Premier and he is now not here to defend himself. Shame on the member! I am sure that he does not intend to criticise the former Premier.

**Mr Schwarten** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Reeves): Order! The Minister for Public Works and Housing! The member is on his feet.

**Mr LESTER:** Yesterday at the opening of Parliament I was very surprised to learn from the Governor's Opening Speech that there does not appear to be any provision for any new dams in the State. That is really a tragedy. Under the previous Government, throughout the State provision was made for dams in a way that took into account conservation concerns. Water area management schemes would have been put in place. That would have had the effect of generating jobs twice the capacity of the Snowy River scheme. So we should not pre-empt things and cut out development. The careful provision of dams is a great way of allaying environmental concerns, providing future employment and, indeed, a future for us all.

Another issue that I wish to address is the fact that our Great Barrier Reef appears to be dying. In recent times my comments on that have attracted quite a bit of interest by the press. In fact, representatives of the Greenpeace organisation came along and had a yarn with me about the situation as well. They are certainly of the view that nobody seems to be taking the dying of the reef very seriously. They claimed that I was the first politician who really made any fair dinkum public comment about it. Basically, what has been said by Federal and State Governments is that they are monitoring the situation. They are monitoring the reef's dying! Although there are authorities to look after the Great Barrier Reef, such as the marine park authority, the reef continues to die.

This evening from the floor of this House I again say that the relevant State and Federal Ministers should meet to set up a very quick-fire task force to see what can be done. It would seem that global warming has contributed to the reef's dying, because it is not only our reef that is dying; it is happening to other reefs throughout the world. However, if we consider what is happening to the reef and the effect that will have on tourism and the financial effect of losing hundreds of thousands of tourists, and if we do not try to do something about the reef, it is going to be to our peril. This, of course, is added to what is yet to be a significant Asian crisis. We need our heads read if we do not try

to do something about it. So yet again I make that very strong plea to try to see if something can be done.

Recently, the Minister said that people who own land could predetermine what should happen environmentally with that land in the future. I hasten to add a little word of caution. Frankly, I believe that we are not too sure what might happen 10 years down the track. It could be very detrimental to have built into title of certain land certain environmental things that have to be done. It may not be in the national interest. I believe that a small parliamentary committee should be set up to consider that matter. Such a proposal might sound good, it might please some people, but we always have to think 10 years or a bit further down the track as to what it will mean. I know that it sounds good to say it, but I hasten to add a word of caution.

Currently, we have had quite a bit of talk about Briztram. I am quite astounded to think that the State Government has hit it on the head. The Government will give us all of the reasons why it has hit the Briztram proposal on the head, but as far as I can see it is a decision that will mean a major loss to our environment and to our heritage. I believe that the Briztram route to the university, the hospital, the Valley and St Lucia and then the tram cum walk bridge across the Brisbane River to West End would have been magnificent. It would have provided students with the opportunity to live at West End and other southern points. I think that all we are doing is making a proviso for more buses, more ugly car parks, more traffic in the city, more pollution and less heritage. That does not seem to make a lot of sense to me.

I know that it is argued that traffic needs to get into the city. Frankly, I think the least traffic in the middle of the city the better. Under the Briztram proposal, we would have had a tram to take people about. Trams are all the rage in Europe and, in many cities, they are being reintroduced. In Christchurch in New Zealand, an effort has been made to reintroduce trams. That involves only a small track that runs around a few blocks. However, it is extraordinarily popular with tourists. In fact, most people who visit Christchurch do not get on the tram once, they get on it a few times and visit the heritage buildings, the university library—all sorts of places. One of the trams that is used is an old tram from Philadelphia. That is fine. It is heritage. There is nothing wrong with that. I think that another tram is a former Melbourne tram—it may not be, but I think that it is. It is interesting to see children's parties being held on those trams. One of the trams is backed up with a McDonald's tram and one sees all these kids having a McDonald's party on the tram. I do not think that there would have been anything wrong with doing that in Brisbane; I really do not.

So we have blown \$65m fair out the back door to help pollute Brisbane a little bit more. In addition, we are also going to blow 2,000 jobs. We are also going to blow a considerable amount of TAFE training. Mr Beattie talks about a massive jobs program and more employment. This is an opportunity to employ more people, but he has thrown away 2,000 jobs and \$65m. Mr Beattie has thrown away a number of other opportunities to create employment. Sometimes one has to bite the bullet and do the job in order to create the jobs.

In relation to heritage, I compliment all of those people who are connected with the work being undertaken at St John's Cathedral. They are doing an extraordinary job with the Gothic-type restructure of that cathedral. It is my advice to all members of the Parliament to have a look at it. Those people will willingly take them around the cathedral. The work is quite extraordinary. I think that they have raised about \$5m or \$6m. However, the total cost of the work is \$26m, so let me tell members that those people have a job in front of them. I do not think that they intend to finish the cathedral until about the year 2005.

One does not realise how big the job is. However, it is going to be just great for our City of Brisbane. We certainly should encourage this as best we can in every way and do all that we can to support it. The Goss Government did not give them any money. I think we have given them about \$2m and the City of Brisbane, through Mr Soorley, has given them \$1m. I urge the present Government to continue that commitment to this very important area.

Land valuations continue to be a problem. A gentleman in my electorate has a problem in this area. He paid a rent of \$265 and built a \$2,000 fence to house koalas, to feed them and then let them out into the community. The Natural Resources Department, in its wisdom, has now presented him with a bill for \$1,900. That does not seem to make a lot of sense. Here we have someone doing some good for the community. I call on the Minister to treat this as a special case and investigate the matter to see what can be done.

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