



Speech by

**Dr DAVID WATSON**

**MEMBER FOR MOGGILL**

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Hansard 8 June 1999

### **CAPITAL WORKS EXPENDITURE**

**Dr WATSON** (Moggill—LP) (Leader of the Liberal Party) (11.30 a.m.): I rise to again bring to the attention of this House a most serious matter. Twelve Beattie Government Ministers have intentionally misled this House by deliberately and knowingly providing a false answer to a question on notice. The coalition had jokingly dubbed them the "Dirty Dozen", but this is no longer a joking matter.

In a moment I will table documentary evidence which will prove conclusively that these 12 Ministers deliberately misled the House. I am glad that the member for Inala was not one of them. That evidence will prove that those Ministers misled the House at the direction of the Premier's office. These Ministers have brazenly conspired to withhold information from the people of Queensland. They did it because the information would prove conclusively that Labor's inability to manage departments has cost Queenslanders jobs.

Let me remind members of the sequence of events in this deliberate misleading of the House and the deliberate short-changing of the workers of Queensland. On 3 March this year, along with my shadow Cabinet colleagues, I asked a very simple question on notice. The purpose of the question was to ascertain the true state of play on capital works expenditure and the job creation figures of the Beattie Government. We asked for the following: the estimated quarterly capital expenditure forecasts, the actual monthly expenditure figures and the associated person-hours of employment generated from the said capital expenditure.

However, instead of receiving a simple answer to a simple question, the Opposition received 12 responses which stated as follows—

"Detailed information of person-hours impacts for Capital Works Projects is impossible to calculate."

Twelve Ministers, using the exact same phrasing, told us that person-hours impacts for capital works projects is impossible to calculate.

As I have told this House before, person-hour impacts for capital works projects are not impossible to calculate. They are quite simple to calculate. Today, we heard the Premier and the Minister for Primary Industries stand up in this House and say that they did calculate these figures but they were concerned about providing the information because it was uncertain and they were concerned about misleading the House. However, they had no compunction about deliberately misleading the House by saying that the figures were impossible to calculate.

I am going to table a document, which the Leader of the Opposition has already tabled, containing the calculations of the Department of Housing and the Department of Public Works.

**Mr Laming:** We only asked for estimates.

**Dr WATSON:** That is right, we only asked for estimates. The calculation is so simple that the Treasurer did the calculation in his Budget Speech last year. The Minister for Housing was able to do it in a ministerial statement delivered in this House in March this year. Those Ministers used the generally accepted formula within the Government that approximately \$1,400 of capital works expenditure equates to one person week of employment. Nevertheless, no fewer than 12 Ministers told the Parliament that the figures were impossible to calculate.

On 13 April, I drew the House's attention to this example of rank hypocrisy by one of the Ministers of the supposed open and accountable Beattie Government. On the same day, I wrote to the Speaker asking him to refer the matter to the Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee for its consideration. The next day, the Speaker informed me that he was rejecting my request.

On 27 April 1999, I again wrote to the Speaker and outlined that, whilst accepting that Ministers are entitled to considerable discretion in answering questions—and that was the reason the Speaker gave for not sending this matter to the Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee—I totally rejected any suggestion that such discretion extends to deliberately misleading the House. Two days later, the Speaker again saw fit to reject my arguments. The Speaker refused to pass the matter on to the Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee for its consideration.

However, today, as foreshadowed in question time, I have now secured additional documents under various freedom of information applications. These documents provide irrefutable evidence that, contrary to the Ministers' assertions, it is possible to calculate person-hours. In fact, these documents prove that it is not only possible to calculate person-hours but that at least two agencies—the Department of Public Works and the Department of Housing—actually completed that process as requested in the relevant questions on notice.

These documents also provide a compelling prima facie case of a conspiracy to mislead the House at the highest levels. In particular, I draw the House's attention to a handwritten note—which I now table—addressed to "Rob and Ron" from "Steve". We understand these parties to be the Premier's Chief of Staff, Rob Whiddon, the Principal Media Adviser, Steve Bishop, and the Director of Government Media, Ron Watson. The note reads—

"With only a third of the budget spent after 7 months we will get a pasting. I have asked for projections of spending by June 30. Similar projections will be given to each portfolio."

This note is rather more enlightening than most of the formal answers we received in response to our questions on notice and goes some way towards explaining the Government's decision to orchestrate a very misleading answer.

On the subject of orchestration, I refer members to a Premier's briefing note prepared by the Director-General, Dr Glyn Davis, dated 11 March 1999 seeking the Premier's personal authorisation to circulate the recommended and highly misleading response. A scrawled note in what would appear to be in the Premier's own hand on that same document states "David H is also drafting a response" and further implicates the Treasurer in this apparent conspiracy.

Other documents of particular interest include two memoranda from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. The first one is dated 12 March 1999 and was sent to each department and recommends the response quoted previously. Following upon what the Leader of the Opposition said earlier, I make the point that that document went out the day after the recommendation went to the Premier. The document would not have been sent out by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet if the Premier had not agreed to its going out.

The second memorandum, dated 1 April 1999, is marked "Urgent" and provides an "amended response" as follows—

"Detailed information on person-hours impacts for capital works projects administered by the Department is not available."

It is clear that this second memorandum was a tacit admission that the original response was incorrect and misleading. These Ministers realised that they were involved in a conspiracy to mislead this Parliament and the people of Queensland. However, by the time it was circulated throughout Government, 12 of the 18 Cabinet Ministers had already submitted their answers in accordance with the original memorandum. The Dirty Dozen had done the dirty on open and accountable government and deliberately misled this House.

It is now more than two months since those 12 misleading answers were tabled. The subsequent failure of the Ministers concerned to apologise and amend the information can only be construed as a conscious and deliberate decision. This is particularly so given my own considerable attempts to draw attention to this issue both inside and outside the House.

What we have witnessed here is a calculated and deliberate act of contempt for this Parliament by 12 Ministers of the Beattie Government. The Dirty Dozen have made a mockery of the Premier's supposed parliamentary standards and claims of open and accountable government. It is clear that the Deputy Premier, Mr Elder, the Treasurer, Mr Hamill, and Ministers Edmond, Wells, Barton, Schwarten, McGrady, Gibbs, Bligh, Rose, Spence and Welford have misled this House in their responses to the questions on notice.

Therefore, I will be formally requesting through you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and formally to the Speaker, that Mr Speaker refer this matter to the attention of the Members' Ethics and Parliamentary

Privileges Committee. Perhaps whilst Mr Speaker is at it, he might want to speak to the Premier, because it is obvious that, in an effort to avoid a so-called pasting—which is what his political minders are so worried about—for being so tardy about spending job-creating capital works dollars, the Premier's office orchestrated this whole disgraceful cover-up. Labor deserves to be more than pasted. Labor's slackness has cost Queenslanders jobs and this House has been deliberately misled in a cover-up.

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