



Speech by

Dr DAVID WATSON

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

Hansard 26 October 1999

CENSURE OF MINISTER FOR MINES AND ENERGY

Dr WATSON (Moggill—LP) (Leader of the Liberal Party) (6.10 p.m.): I second the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition. Members were treated this morning to tantrums by the Minister for Mines and Energy because he said he had had enough. He has had enough. I think we have all had enough. I think the people of Queensland have had enough. We want the people of Queensland to know what is going on with our electricity industry. We want the Government to come clean on what it is doing and how it operates. We have just heard from the Leader of the Opposition that what the Premier tabled today was simply misleading, and it was deliberately misleading, because he must have known precisely—

Mr BEATTIE: I rise to a point of order. I find that offensive and ask that it be withdrawn. It is untrue.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Premier has sought a withdrawal.

Dr WATSON: "Deliberately misleading" is not unparliamentary.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Premier has asked the member to withdraw those comments. The member will withdraw.

Dr WATSON: I withdraw, but what the Premier said was misleading. We cannot trust anything that comes out of this Government.

For the next few minutes, I want to look at what the Minister for Mines and Energy has said. He has indicated in this place and elsewhere that he had meetings—monthly meetings—with the Energex Chairman, Mr Popple, since he took over that portfolio. We are led to believe that since June last year, at monthly meetings, at no time did the Minister for Mines and Energy have discussions relating to salaries, directors' remunerations or compare what directors in Queensland and elsewhere receive.

I have looked at a few old media releases. It is interesting to look at these documents, because the main thing that Mr McGrady put his stamp on was that the Beattie Government believed that the focus of the new boards would be on customer service and accountability. That was very important to him. Not only was that comment made in his press releases, but it was repeated by the Courier-Mail.

It is interesting to consider the information that came out at that particular time. Government staffers knew what the remuneration was for the directors of these Government owned corporations. An article in the Townsville Bulletin on 1 June said—

"A Government spokesman said payments to board members would be about \$17,000 although it would vary below and above that figure, while the chairman would receive up to about \$40,000."

Government staffers knew what the directors of these corporations were going to be receiving—within reason—but today the Minister for Mines and Energy could not answer the questions in the Parliament, and he could not answer them beforehand. Why is it that Government staffers know what the remuneration is, yet the Minister, who is charged with the public responsibility for knowing what is going on in these corporations, does not know? Either the Minister simply misled—here and elsewhere—the people of Queensland, or he is simply incompetent.

Let me go a bit further. This Minister knows details about certain things but not other things. Last year, when he was going to restructure the electricity industry, what did Mr McGrady tell us? He

said that he was looking at what the directors and CEOs of the boards were doing. He said that he was looking at the NORQEB board. He said this on 11 June—

"As members would know, the Queensland Cabinet took a decision some months ago to amalgamate the six regional electricity corporations into one. On that decision, I then requested all of the corporations to inform me of their travel arrangements and also of the policies of the boards with regard to travel."

Here we have the Minister for Mines and Energy worrying about the travel arrangements of the directors and the CEOs of the corporations, but not once did he ask the question, "What are you getting paid?" Not once did he say, "I am putting you in charge of a multibillion-dollar corporation, and I do not know what you are getting paid. I do not know what the remuneration is." It is unbelievable to think that a Minister would worry about the travel arrangements of a CEO but not worry about what he was getting for the money. I could go on.

Government members interjected.

Dr WATSON: These are pretty interesting things.

Mr Borbidge: They think it's funny. What an arrogant bunch!

Dr WATSON: They think it is funny, but the fact is that, when it suits them, they can look at the most intricate details of corporations; but on other occasions, when it is about running the corporations responsibly and knowing what the directors—and particularly the CEOs—are getting, and whether they are getting value for money, this Minister cannot even be bothered to find out what it is.
