



Speech by

Mr DOUG SLACK

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Hansard 9 November 1999

APEC TECHNOMART

Mr SLACK (Burnett—NPA) (6.35 p.m.): It comes as no surprise to me, as shadow Minister for State Development and Trade, that Minister Elder was unaware of the major problems with the APEC Technomart until two days before it collapsed, because it is just one of several areas of portfolio responsibility that he has taken his eye off. One can be quite sure that the Minister and the self-proclaimed supersalesman Premier Beattie would have boldly claimed all credit had they managed to realise just a little of the immense potential that this conference had to offer the Queensland economy. To distance themselves entirely from blame in the wash-up would be all too comical, if it were not so serious.

There is no question that the Queensland Government of the day retains ultimate responsibility for such major events and that this public debacle has undermined Queensland's reputation as a place to invest and do business. While in Government, the coalition worked tirelessly to promote Queensland's progressive business environment. Many of the projects coming to fruition now are thanks to the good stewardship of our term in office. However, in a dynamic market environment, international reputations are constantly under threat from the competition and perceptions have a major ongoing impact on our business success.

It is vitally important that Governments maintain a reputation for getting major projects up and running. In the area of infrastructure development, there appears to be a distinct lack of priority. As I mentioned in my reservation statement during the Estimates debate, the Surat/Dawson Valley project is now 12 months behind schedule, the Tarong project seems to be a victim of private market confusion over the Government's real position on the gas versus coal power generation debate, and the Nathan dam appears to be going nowhere. I am also concerned about this Government's failure to support a worthy high-technology support network known as Techquad.

Mr Elder: Do you know who they are?

Mr SLACK: Yes, and I am about to tell the House. It was the success of overseas high-technology growth centres such as Silicon Valley, San Diego and Austin in Texas that prompted three leading Queensland universities and Queensland Innovation Development Limited to join forces and found this partnership. The technology quadrangle of south-east Queensland is a regional initiative that fosters partnerships between private sector high-tech enterprises, research and development institutions, service industries and Government. Its founding sponsors included the University of Queensland, Griffith University and the QUT. Based in Brisbane and on the Gold Coast, Techquad, in plain English, is set up to identify IT opportunities and position south-east Queensland as Australia's answer to Silicon Valley.

Techquad has already succeeded with several major projects that have helped drive the economy of this region. During my time as Minister - and this will answer the Minister's question - the Department of Economic Development and Trade worked with this network to encourage DASCOM to relocate its software research and production headquarters from California's Silicon Valley to the Bond Research Park at the Gold Coast. This was a coup for Queensland and is expected to deliver 250 jobs. By the way, DASCOM was only one of a string of multinational companies that chose to relocate their regional headquarters to Queensland.

The Pacific Innovation Corridor—a plan to link all universities, technology parks and major technology enterprises in south-east Queensland with high-speed communications in a super corridor—is also the brainchild of Techquad. It is vital that this technical infrastructure providing bandwidth for super-speed computers is established to give this State a leading edge in IT and other fields of research. It will also have immense ramifications industry wide.

Recognising the need to foster collaborative links between IT research and universities and to drive economic development, the former coalition Government supported Techquad financially and provided \$50,000 in funding. What has the Government provided? Sweet nothing! The Beattie Labor Government has backed away from providing tangible support for this well established network. I can only wonder why. The Minister for State Development and Minister for Trade failed to include a financial allocation in the 1999-2000 Budget and has declined to be a member of Techquad. It concerns me that this sends the wrong message to the national and international sponsors of this project and could lead to a lack of confidence in this group. It concerns me that the role that this group is playing could fragment between the players and, as a result, Queensland could lose a lot of impetus in the international marketplace, when we already have problems in gaining recognition. Techquad may be the last chance the Government has to ensure collaborative research between the universities.

Time expired.
