



Speech by

**Mr DOUG SLACK**

**MEMBER FOR BURNETT**

Hansard 29 March 1999

### PERFORMANCE OF MINISTERS

**Mr SLACK** (Burnett—NPA) (6 p.m.): I move—

"That this House condemns the Beattie Government for the disastrous performance of its Ministers, particularly Ministers Elder, Barton, Gibbs, McGrady and Palaszczuk."

This Government is very strong on rhetoric. It is great at making promises, but it is dreadfully bad at delivery. We are having this debate tonight so that the people of Queensland, who were promised so much by Labor and who have been delivered nothing, apart from hot air, can have their say.

The member for Capalaba, the self-proclaimed "Mr Fix-it" of Queensland politics, promised maximum grunt when he was running for office. In office for 10 red tape bound months, all he has delivered is maximum groan. That is what his departmental officers are saying around the water coolers. In office he has delivered nothing. In the major project area—a key area of the grunt department of which he is the political head—he promises us the Chevron project. Let me make it clear: the coalition welcomes the prospect of Chevron and will applaud if it eventuates.

Apart from that, in the major project area what have we seen since the change of Government? We have seen hold-ups. We have seen bureaucratic shuffling. We have seen the giant Surat Dawson project put on the backburner—the single most important agricultural and resource expansion project we have going in this State. I say "we have going" because we, the coalition, got it going—as we did Dascom, as we did Boeing, as we did Century, as we did Qantas' new operations in Brisbane, as we did Ernest Henry, as we did with Shell, as we did with north-west gas and Stuart oil shale, and so on. We did this in several instances on an ongoing basis—taking over the reins from previous Governments.

What Queensland needs is continuity. The people want results. They want a future. They do not want political footballs; they want the real thing. What Queensland does not need is grunting and roaring that produces more and more hot air and fewer and fewer balloons to rise with it.

On 2 March this year I asked the Deputy Premier a question on notice about the estimated expenditure and associated person hours for his portfolio and its entities in terms of the capital works program. His answer was very revealing. The member for Capalaba replied that, while capital works expenditure had thus far been low—his answer was tabled on 1 April, an appropriate date in the circumstances—acceleration was now occurring as negotiations concerning major projects were finalised.

This Minister has had 10 months in office, and "Mr Grunt" is still trying to find the accelerator. It is the same with power costs. It is the same with water storage infrastructure. It is the same with roads. I am talking about all of Queensland, as the Minister should be talking about all of Queensland.

Can it be that the grunt department is just too big for the member for Capalaba to handle? He does have a lot on his plate. Aside from major projects and trade, upon which we will not touch tonight, he also has business. He has things such as red tape—the reduction of it, not the creation of it—and the Small Business Council. It seems that these things may also have become lost in the black hole that, according to departmental legend, opens up to swallow things whenever the door to the ministerial suite at 111 George Street is prised ajar. Once again, present performance does not match past rhetoric.

In May 1997, when the now Minister was in Opposition, he made a speech to this House in which he thundered about red tape reform. Honourable members will remember the red tape reduction program we instituted in Government through my colleague the member for Noosa.

**Mr GIBBS:** Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I point out to the House that the Deputy Premier is not ensconced in 111 George Street. That happens to be my office.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order!

**Mr SLACK:** Honourable members will remember the red tape reduction program we instituted in Government through my colleague the member for Noosa. The business community remembers it, too—fondly—as something that was actually working, actually getting somewhere, and actually delivering promised benefits to the business community, and particularly to small business, through the first one-stop shop for licensing and regulation. The member for Capalaba thought it was not working. He was wrong, of course—and he knows it.

One thing alone demonstrates with absolute clarity the feet of clay that the Minister has brought to the process of Government. In March 1998 the then Minister for Tourism and Small Business, the member for Noosa, introduced the Retail Shop Leases Amendment Bill into this House. In March this year, the current document was introduced into this House by the Deputy Premier. And yesterday, 12 months after its original arrival, the second reading took place.

What should seriously concern honourable members and the people of Queensland is that all of the work that preceded the presentation of this document has now been under way for nearly two years, yet only now are we getting to the crux of the matter, to the real business of this House, which is to make these amendments law.

The member for Capalaba has been Minister for 10 months—10 months in which, in relation to this legislation, he has produced three pages. Where has he been? What was he doing, given that this is legislation that was labelled best practice by the Property Council of Australia in March last year? I will lay odds that he will not have a satisfactory answer to that.

We all appreciate that the Minister has been busy. He has had to manage the transition to Government. He has had to move into his new offices. He has had to paint the foyer, appoint a phalanx of new officers, chase the Y2K bug, and gallivant around the State reopening all sorts of things. But the real work must go on as well.

I have a message for the Minister for "Red Tape". Red tape is the single most invasive and debilitating aspect of Government today where business is concerned. It is red tape reduction that is required, not red tape production. On his red tape reduction performance to date, I think he would have trouble navigating his way to a Labour Day march—we will all be watching him with interest on Monday—let alone assaulting bureaucracy or producing business legislation.

It does not end there. There is also the matter of the Small Business Advisory Council board. That is one of the things the Minister has not made an announcement on. Tonight I can put a smile on the faces of Queensland's long-suffering business people on that score. The Minister has not announced it but the Motor Traders journal has. It is right here. The chairman is none other than the Minister's parliamentary secretary, the member for Sunnybank—just what the small business community needs: another Left Wing pollie pointing the way ahead.

It will be small wonder if they conclude he will be pointing the way ahead to disaster for small business, the vital sector of Queensland's economy that simply will not fit into the union straitjacket that this Government wants to put everyone in. There is a much better chairman on the new board—Angelo Efstathis, managing director of Queensland Pine Company. He is someone from the real world. I do pay tribute to the Minister. At least he has now named a board to represent small business at senior Government level. It is just a pity that it took him 10 months to remember that this is a vital part of his job.

While I am on my feet, I announce to the House another late appointment from the Minister for "Grunt"—that of John Dawson, chief executive officer of the Bank of Queensland, as chair of the revised Red Tape Reduction Task Force. The Minister has not told us that yet, but we welcome this appointment. It is better late than never. I welcome the Minister back to the land of the living.

It does not take much to work out that business in Queensland—big business and small business—needs the Department of State Development and Trade to work with a great deal more speed than has been evident so far. It does not take much to work out that better direction is desperately needed in the Minister's office. It does not take much to work out that Queensland needs much more than high level rhetoric if as a community we are to work through our present problems and create the better, richer future that the people of Queensland deserve. The business community certainly knows this. It is already convinced that there is a lot that is not happening in this State. Even the dogs are barking about who is to blame for that: "Mr Five Per Cent" and the self-styled runt with grunt.

We have some time before the people of Queensland get the chance to correct the historic—I nearly said "hysteric"—failings of this Government: the Government that constantly claims it is the can-do Government; the Government that consistently proves the theory that empty vessels make most noise; the Government that, through the Minister for State Development and Trade, so amply demonstrates that there is no substitute for action and that there is no action.

Time expired.

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