



Speech by

**JEFF SEENEY**

**MEMBER FOR CALLIDE**

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Hansard 15 April 1999

#### **ELECTRICITY INDUSTRY**

**Mr SEENEY** (Callide—NPA) (6.33 p.m.): I rise to support the motion moved by the member for Charters Towers, and I hope that I can make a damned sight more sense than the member for Logan did. It is important to accept that there are some inherent problems in the Queensland power supply industry. The first step to solving those problems is to recognise them. First we need to acknowledge that they exist and then we need to define what they are. This Government, in keeping with the approach it adopted in its previous six-year term, has failed to do either. That failure is obvious in the stupid amendment that has been moved here tonight.

The current Minister seems as confused about the situation now as he was for six years when he was Minister previously. His record during that time is one he will never escape and it is one that is a constant embarrassment to all members opposite. He was Minister for six years, yet not one base load power station was constructed.

I would like to pick up on a couple of points the Minister made in his pathetic address to the House tonight. The Minister spoke about the \$850m in debt restructuring payment by the power industry that went into capital works during the life of the previous Government. He does not speak about the billion dollars that he took out of the industry to help Paul Keating reduce his debt. He does not speak about the second billion dollars he took out of the industry via his credit enhancement fee, his dividends and his tax equivalents, a regime of payments by the power industry set in place by the same incompetent Minister. He started taking that money long before he had the corporatisation regime in place.

**Government members** interjected.

**Mr SEENEY:** Those opposite cannot hack the truth. The Minister was so desperate to start raiding the industry that he started before he had the regime in place.

The second point I make—and I hope that the Minister is listening, because he did not have the decency to stay in the House—

**Mr MICKEL:** Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I am just acting as a circuit-breaker to calm things down for the health of my honourable friend.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! There is no point of order.

**Mr SEENEY:** Obviously there is no point of order; the member is wasting my time. It is a shame that the Minister is not here, because I would like to ask him something. When will he table the directive to the Queensland power generating corporations ordering them not to engage in expansion plans as long as the Government is negotiating in relation to the Chevron project? I know that that directive has been issued. When will he table it in this House? Or will he break the law and not table it at all?

His confused performance as a Minister to date is no better than it was in his previous six-year term. His very first strategy on winning Government was to desperately try twice to stop the Callide C power project. There were two attempts to scuttle a project that was planned and let to tender by the coalition to address the looming power shortage caused by the Minister's six years of confusion and self-delusion. Then in a confused, mixed-up state he ran around the place apologising in advance for the blackouts he knew were coming, as though by apologising in advance he could somehow fix the problem. This Parliament was given a number of conflicting versions of what the problem was.

When trying to dismantle the Callide C project, the Government's position was that generating capacity was not a problem and that maintenance was the issue. Then, during the Estimates committee hearing the Minister continually reverted to the position that reserve generating capacity was very tight. Of course it was tight! That was why the coalition was fast-tracking Callide C. It was tight because in six years of Labor inactivity and self-delusion nothing was done. From as far back as 1991 the Queensland Electricity Commission had warned the Labor Government of the day—the same incompetent Minister was warned—that blackouts were likely in the summer of 1997-98.

For six years Labor did nothing, and then as soon as it regained power it tried to sink the Callide C power station. Then the Minister set out to shift the blame to the maintenance workers, the blokes who crawl around inside those boilers and keep them working. That is demonstrable nonsense and an insult to those who work in extreme conditions to ensure that the power stations run at world's best level.

The average availability for base load power stations worldwide is 80%. Queensland's major base load power stations deliver reliability in the order of 95%. That is a credit to the skills of the power station management and to the commitment of the power station maintenance workers. I have saluted them in the House on previous occasions, and I do so again now. I salute those blokes who work in atrocious conditions. They have been insulted by an incompetent Minister, who cannot take responsibility for his own actions.

Queensland needs an Energy Minister who can clearly identify and address the problems this State faces, a Minister who can provide the infrastructure for our future growth and development.

Time expired.

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