



Speech by

JEFF SEENEY

MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

Hansard 28 October 1999

APPROPRIATION BILL
Estimates Committee E
Report

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (12.11 p.m.): I rise to comment on the report of Estimates Committee E. Although I did not attend the Estimates committee hearing, the portfolios that the committee investigated are particularly important to my electorate. When I read the transcript of the committee hearing, I was interested to note that the Minister for Mines and Energy avoided so many of the questions that were put to him. That raises some very serious concerns about the ability of the Minister to come to grips with the huge issues involved in his portfolio.

I note that the Minister has not seen fit to stay in the Chamber today to hear the comments of members of the Opposition and members from his own side concerning his very poor performance at the Estimates committee hearing. Yesterday, we were treated to an enormous whinge session from the Minister and his colleagues about how we prevented him from going to Canberra. When one reads the transcript of the Estimates committee and one witnesses his performance in this place today, it is no wonder that the Minister wanted to go to Canberra. He, of all people, should be present. A number of Ministers have portfolio areas that cover rural Queensland, so someone else could easily have gone to Canberra. Instead, the Minister for Mines and Energy tried to use that as an excuse to avoid his responsibilities with respect to accountability in his portfolio.

When I looked at the transcript of the Estimates committee hearing, the first thing that I looked for was any mention of the Callide C Power Station, which is critically important to my electorate. Apparently, the Minister's conscience is still troubling him over the Callide C project. Members will remember that it was a major issue in the Estimates committee hearing last year. We all remember well how the current Minister for Mines and Energy twice tried desperately to stop the Callide C project, but he was unsuccessful. I am pleased to say that the Callide C project is well into its main construction phase, which is providing a huge economic boost to the whole of the central Queensland region and the town of Biloela in particular. I congratulate all of the people who are working long hours in multiple shifts on the Callide C project for the work that they are doing.

It is particularly gratifying to see such a huge project come to fruition because, when the coalition was in Government, all of the people involved in the portfolio put in a great deal of effort to get that project to the stage at which it was ready to go ahead. Unfortunately, the coalition lost Government at the election. Because I know of the effort that the current Minister for Mines and Energy put in to trying to stop and to sink that huge project, it is particularly gratifying to see that it is taking shape in Biloela. As I said, it is obvious that the Minister's conscience still troubles him, because he was again responding to the issue at this year's Estimates committee hearing.

The Minister was asked about maintenance issues relating to Energex and Ergon. There is a lot of concern in central Queensland regarding maintenance. When one drives beside some of the main power lines, it is pretty obvious that the maintenance programs are certainly not what they could be. Even the casual observer can spot poles that look very much in need of replacement. It is not hard to find poles with white crosses painted on them, which means that they need to be replaced. It is not hard to see poles that have been around for a heck of a long time. Indeed, some almost have crosses painted on top of the crosses. The shadow Minister recognised the problem with maintenance and asked a question of the Minister on the issue, and that question was taken on notice. It is interesting

that when we eventually received the answer, we saw that rather than providing any sort of increase in funding to address the fairly obvious maintenance problem, there has been a marked reduction in the total expenditure on maintenance for Energex and Ergon from \$69,000 to \$65,000 for the current year. Once again, that points to a disturbing trend. The trend line should be going the other way, yet the Minister sees fit to cut the maintenance budget at every opportunity, rather than increasing it.

Mr McGRADY: I rise to a point of order. The Minister has no input at all into the budgets of Energex or Ergon.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! There is no point of order.

Mr SEENEY: I thank the Minister for that comment.
