



Speech by

Hon. J. ELDER

MEMBER FOR CAPALABA

Hansard 28 October 1999

MINISTER FOR MINES AND ENERGY

Hon. J. P. ELDER (Capalaba—ALP) (Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development and Minister for Trade) (6.16 p.m.): I rise to oppose the motion. Members opposite have made a totally lame attempt to discredit my parliamentary colleague from Mount Isa. Unfounded allegations about his handling of the electricity industry have consistently failed to register, both in the industry and in the community. They connect about as often as Glenn McGrath's bat does when he is on the pitch.

The temporary Leader of the Opposition told the House earlier this week that he would put this Minister under close scrutiny this week in question time. And what have we seen? Nothing but a couple of questions, and that was supposed to be a grilling! Well, if that was a grilling, it was totally for vegetarians, because it was about as limp as an old celery stick.

The fact of the matter is—and it has been exposed in the gallery and in the media—that Opposition members did not allow the Minister to go to what was the most important regional development conference that this State and this country have held in the past decade. They said, "We are going to leave him in here, and we are going to put him under a grilling." And what did he get? Nothing! It was a very political and cynical attempt. The problem for the Opposition is that everyone saw through that.

I was sitting with the Leader of the House this morning, and we were talking about what the tactics of the Opposition might be today in relation to that. I said, "They would not be stupid enough, after not asking a question yesterday, and because of the criticism they copped yesterday, to ask him questions today, because it would just reinforce their stupidity." The Leader of the House said, "Well, they are probably stupid enough to do it." And what happened today? Sure enough, both the Leader of the House and I, sitting in here dumbfounded, said, "Look at that. They have asked questions." Their stupidity is free-falling. They have free-fallen to new depths.

Opposition members were seen to be cynical. Everyone in the media, in the gallery and in this House saw them as being cynical, and today they reinforced it by asking the Minister questions. They need a bit of help with their tactics. And if they want it, I am quite prepared to do it. But I have to tell them that they have to pick up their game as an Opposition, because they are starting to look pretty stupid indeed.

Members opposite gave us blackouts and brownouts. They gave us Queenslanders being kept in the dark. In the last two years that they were in Government—and people in the gallery would remember this—we had blackouts and brownouts. And why? Because they could not control their GOCs. They could not control their salaries or their maintenance programs across their power stations. At least when this Minister came to Government, the first thing he did was put in place a regime of maintenance that has seen that situation improve.

Mr Rowell interjected.

Mr ELDER: The member for Hinchinbrook is a bit like the member for Callide. The lights are flashing, the boom gates are down, but the train is not coming, is it? They are dimwits over there. There is not one bright spark amongst them who could actually see that maintenance was a problem. This Minister did.

Let me put the spotlight on a few of the projects that are coming on board. The tight power demand situation evaporated because we have a lot of new plant coming on board. We have the new Oakey 300-megawatt peaking plant nearing completion. We have Directlink, which is the 180-megawatt interconnector that is scheduled for commissioning in February next year. We have the main interconnector, namely Westlink. It was formerly Eastlink. The only thing that happened there was that the missing links opposite delayed it. As a result, it hits the deck in 2001. We have Callide C and Millmerran, which will lead to increased capacity over the next three years. We have other projects coming on board, namely Kogan Creek and Tarong. The commercial reality of life is that they are not all going to get up.

We have the Papua New Guinea gas pipeline coming on board as well. If we can get that project up with the support of the Papua New Guinea Government and the Commonwealth Government, we will. It is understood that all those projects will not be able to get up because of the commercial realities of life. What it means is that significant supply for the Queensland market is coming on board over the next few years.

Initially, the criticism was, "You are not supplying any power." Now the criticism is, "You are supplying too much power." The commercial realities of life are that there will be sufficient power. Do those opposite know what happens to prices as demand increases? Because we are in a commercial market, commercial realities apply. I know that sooner or later the penny will drop for those opposite. When there is significant supply in the market prices tend to drop. It will be our generators that will be pumping electricity into New South Wales.

It is extraordinary that those opposite say that the plants in New South Wales will be competitive. Those plants have been mothballed. Those plants are old technology. The new technology is taking place in Queensland. The plants in Queensland will be the ones that will be exporting power. It does not take a bright spark or a genius to work that out.

The Minister for Mines and Energy has got hold of the portfolio, restructured the industry, brought on the power projects and brought on the supply. That is a feather in this Government's cap.

Time expired.
