



Speech by

**JOHN MICKEL**

**MEMBER FOR LOGAN**

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Hansard 15 April 1999

#### **ELECTRICITY INDUSTRY**

**Mr MICKEL** (Logan—ALP) (6.27 p.m.): I am glad that we are speaking tonight about power, because the Opposition was talking about power failures. Those on that side of the House would know all about power failures—only the second Government in the history of Queensland to lose power in just under three years. They even beat the record of the Moore Government. Remember the Moore Government? "No more Moore." They had no more of Borbidge, either.

I remember sitting over there; we used to hear it all, "We are going to get rid of Eastlink." Members opposite sure did! It changed direction; it became Westlink. I remember, too, "We will not buy any power from New South Wales." It is no wonder that the One Nation Party outpolled them out in my favourite country town of Goondiwindi; they have been buying power from New South Wales for years. The cotton industry out there had been buying it from northern New South Wales for decades, and they did not know about that because they lost their way in the bush. If honourable members ever needed any example of how a party could lose its way in the bush, it was what the Premier said today about the fringe benefits tax. They sat there today like stunned mullets when the Premier read out the disastrous effects that the FBT is going to have on the bush, because when the coalition came to power, its policies were going to have disastrous implications for the bush.

They allowed the National Party to run with any sort of ridiculous promise it could give, and Treasury officers will openly say that the only way to fund all those idiotic promises it made in Government was to privatise the electricity industry. Unfortunately, Kerry Chikarovski picked up the policy and thought it was a good idea, and we all saw what happened in New South Wales.

My good friend and colleague the member for Callide will follow me in this debate, and I hope that he will talk about Tarong. The reason he has to talk about Tarong is that it was a crook decision made by a crooked Government at the time. The fact of the matter is that the power station should have gone to Millmerran. Everybody knew it. In the 1980s that is where it was to be, but a crooked Bjelke-Petersen Government put it at Tarong, against all the advice about Millmerran.

I refer to an aspect raised by the member for Gregory. I am sorry that I follow him in this debate, as I did in the previous debate. I am hoping that he will follow me in the next one so that we can square things up. The honourable gentleman spoke about National Competition Policy. The further away from Government he gets, the worse his advice becomes. He forgets that his Government signed off on National Competition Policy and then re-endorsed it.

**Mr JOHNSON:** Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order. It was the Goss Labor Government that signed off on National Competition Policy.

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

**Mr MICKEL:** That was a nice try, but I will tell the member something. Has he ever heard of that famous Irishman Vince FitzGerald, who conducted the Commission of Audit that recommended the privatisation of the electricity industry? The colleagues of the member for Gregory had their signatures all over that report. He cannot walk away from that, no matter how much he would love to, to try to drag those votes away from One Nation. I give One Nation members a tip: with the Vince FitzGerald audit they will get the coalition. Their signatures are on it. It is National Competition Policy under another name.

We have had to go in there and restructure the industry because it was left in such a mess. It was a financial disaster. In 1997-98, AUSTA posted an after-tax loss of \$6.8m. For the six months to 31

December, AUSTA posted losses of \$3.3m. These figures equate to half a million dollars a month, or \$25,000 a day. What an absolute disgrace! The coalition Government created a structure that caused this financial loss because it broke it the industry up into three. It could not wait to get its hands on that National Competition Policy through the Vince FitzGerald audit. The member for Gregory knows it; they just did not tell him in Cabinet. This loss of money showed an absolute contempt for those hardworking Queensland taxpayers.

Then of course we had Mr Max Christmas running around Asia. An article I have here carries the headline "Max mad over \$1m rumpus". Poor all "Mad Max" earned \$1m in consultancies as those opposite raced him overseas, trying to rip off the Queensland industry.

**Government members:** Earned?

**Mr MICKEL:** I am sorry: given a million dollars. It reeked of the old white shoe brigade. Those opposite got back into Government and——

Time expired.

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