



Speech by

Hon. KEN HAYWARD

MEMBER FOR KALLANGUR

Hansard 15 April 1999

ELECTRICITY INDUSTRY

Hon. K. W. HAYWARD (Kallangur—ALP) (6.48 p.m.): It is a pleasure to rise in this debate tonight to speak against the motion and to speak in support of the amendment. Let me just state to the Parliament what the amendment is. It says that we "commend the Minister for Mines and Energy for his management of the Queensland electricity supply industry and bringing about greater accountability to the people of Queensland." The electricity industry structure put in place by the former coalition Government was clearly set up to facilitate the privatisation of that industry. As a result, Government-owned electricity corporations have focused on financial performance and profitability. Certainly, there is nothing wrong with focusing on financial performance and profitability, but not at the expense of customer service and reliability of supply.

I use an example in my own electorate of Kallangur. In the area of Narangba, for instance, in that period around 1998, there were continuous complaints about blackouts and about getting power reconnected. I understand why they occurred. It is a fast developing area and a number of subdivisions were being established. As the water supply was being connected powerlines were disrupted or knocked over. Even though the reason for the problem became clear, there was an inability to quickly repair the breakdowns. It was not possible to restore power in the manner in which ordinary people who live in the suburbs expected.

I remember when the member for Caloundra, Mrs Sheldon, made a statement at, I think, a Liberal Party conference. Whilst speaking about the reason why blackouts were occurring I am certain Mrs Sheldon alleged that it was some type of union plot. She alleged that workers in the power stations were guilty of sabotage and were causing the blackouts. That statement was clearly rejected by everybody. I believe even members of the coalition were horrified to hear that ridiculous suggestion.

This Government is putting in place initiatives to restore the important balance between commercial performance and the delivery of core services for generation and distribution of electricity. One initiative concerns the establishment of the Electricity Monitoring Unit. This is a most important unit because it means that, for the first time in this State's history, Queenslanders will have their complaints investigated by a third party if they are not satisfied with the response that they receive from their electricity distributor.

When people complained to me about problems in having power restored I found that it was difficult to clearly explain how the problem could be solved and why it would not happen in the future. The establishment of the Electricity Monitoring Unit will provide another avenue through which complaints may be investigated. The unit will report to the Minister for Mines and Energy on a regular basis. Importantly, it will oversee and audit the implementation of a number of recommendations and monitor the general maintenance practices of the Government owned generators.

The Electricity Monitoring Unit will also provide an independent arbitration mechanism for disputes which cannot be resolved through mediation. That will give Queensland's electricity customers easy access to an independent mediator to resolve any problems they may have with their electricity supply.

Time expired.
