



Speech by

Mr M. ROWELL

MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

Hansard 29 April 1999

PERFORMANCE OF MINISTERS

Mr ROWELL (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (6.29 p.m.): I rise to support the motion moved by the member for Burnett. One of the most important commodities in this State is electricity. If we do not have power to generate——

Mr Gibbs: You are hardly a bright spark.

Mr ROWELL: The member is not much of a doer himself. We do not have much to worry about with the Minister. He sits there glum and he does not know what to do with himself.

The important issue is that we have to keep the lights on. There is no question about that. The industry has to work. I am afraid that in the very near future we are going to have major problems. When we were debating the Coal Mining Safety and Health Bill and Mining and Quarrying Safety and Health Bill, we heard from the choir of Government backbenchers about how great this Minister for Mines and Energy is. For him it is the second time around, and he is mucking it all up again. From the early 1990s up to 1996, no power stations of any consequence were built. As a result, we are getting to a point at which we desperately need some base load power stations. They are not coming on stream fast enough, and the Minister is really responsible for that.

What is the Minister doing about the Tarong Power Station? There is supposed to be an extension of that power station at a cost of \$1.4 billion, but nothing is happening. This can't do Government is in action again. It cannot achieve anything. When it comes to doing anything, the Minister is in a straitjacket. He talks a lot, but when it comes to pulling the levers, although he might be pulling them, there is nothing connected to the end of them. Nothing is happening. It is just a hand device that is not moving anything whatsoever. It is important that the expansion of the Tarong Power Station goes ahead. We are awaiting eagerly for an announcement for that to happen.

What happened with the regional boards? They have been collapsed. The whole six of them are going down the gurgler. Whom do we have chairing that process? The former Treasurer, Mr De Lacy! The Government could have picked somebody much, much better for the job. I do not agree with the process that the Minister has undertaken. Why did he not talk about Tom Pyne or Professor Peter Arlett as being chairman of the organisation? Tom Pyne has a lot of knowledge of the electricity industry. He was chairman of FNQEB. Professor Peter Arlett is also well versed in the electricity industry. Why was he not picked to be chairman of the board? Why did the Minister pick a lame duck former Treasurer for the position? Why did the Minister do that? Maybe the Minister can respond to my questions. This issue is important, because Mr De Lacy is going to drive Ergon Energy and the future electricity distribution capacity of this State. It is extremely important that, if the Minister is determined to go down that track, he has somebody competent to do that, but he does not have that. There are a few other things that I would like to mention about the boards. There were good people on those boards who had good local knowledge. People in business were driving those boards. Where are they going to end up? On the rubbish tip! No notice is going to be taken of the requirements of regional areas.

The members opposite talk about the former Government ripping off the electricity industry. With that \$850m, we built schools and police stations. Education and all of those other areas of Government responsibility were very strongly supported. What did the members opposite do? Between

1990 and 1996, they ripped \$2.5 billion out of the system. What did they do with \$1 billion of it? They gave it to their mate, Paul Keating, to prop him up. Poor old Paul! Where is Paul now? He is on the scrap heap. Nobody wants to know Paul, or his piggery, or anything else. Yet the members opposite supported him. They propped him up.

Of course, we also have the debacle of the power supply in the Daintree. I do not know why we cannot supply power across the Daintree. At present, the capability exists to do that. When I was up there, I saw power poles that were probably 25 years old. Some minor extensions are required, but this can't do Government is not going to get involved in doing that. It has a political axe to grind with the people up there who want electricity. I do not know why it cannot supply it to them. The former Government put in a scheme. We were going to reduce the number of overhead powerlines to a reasonable level. But no, those members opposite do not want to take any notice of that.

What is happening with Chevron? Chevron is critically important for the distribution of gas from the PNG area.

Mr Elder: Where in PNG?

Mr ROWELL: PNG. The member opposite probably has not been there and would not know what it is all about.

Time expired.
