



Speech by

Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard 22 July 1999

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

National Competition Policy

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier) (9.42 a.m.), by leave: Tomorrow the Leaders Forum in Sydney will deal with the draft terms of reference for the review of National Competition Policy. We will then need to discuss with the Commonwealth how this review will proceed from there. I am determined—and so is the Government—that job security and economic and social stability are not needlessly squandered in the name of competition.

It was always intended that the Competition Principles Agreement should be reviewed in 2000, five years after the initial signing. The review should reverse the onus of proof so that competition will only be introduced when there is a demonstrable benefit from doing so. The Queensland Cabinet decided there is also a need for a review of the National Competition Council's role. The National Competition Council has recommended the suspension of \$15m from payments to Queensland, because we want to build the St George dam. The council also is threatening further payments of up to \$98m, unless Queensland deregulates the farm gate price for milk.

These are just the latest examples of the council's high-handed interference in the good government of Queensland. The Queensland Government is determined to get on with the construction of the \$15m St George off-stream project. We want to make this happen to provide secure water allocations to a number of cotton producers in the south-west. They are desperate for this water. But the project is on the black list of the National Competition Council. There is no clear rationale behind that recommendation.

In relation to the dairy industry, the council has ignored the clear finding of the public benefit test. That test found that consumers would gain virtually nothing from deregulation of farm gate milk prices and that hundreds of dairy farmers would be under threat. I intend to raise these matters at the Leaders Forum tomorrow.

Queensland has been heading the tripartite working group—also including New South Wales and South Australia—looking at sweeping reform of National Competition Policy. All the States are concerned that the National Competition Council is exceeding its brief. This State in particular certainly is. Queensland will be arguing very strongly that the council be abolished and replaced by a truly representative body—under the Council of Australian Governments. This is about having the elected representatives of the people make those decisions. This is about restoring some democracy to competition in this country.

I want some explanations from the Federal Leader of the National Party. I want some explanations on behalf of the south-west cotton producers, and regional Queenslanders in general. John Anderson, the new Leader of the National Party and Deputy Prime Minister has not been strong enough in opposing National Competition Policy. It is time for him to drop the hardline ideology. It is time for him to stand up for the bush. The National Competition Council has made these recommendations to the Federal Government. The Federal Government will make the decision as to whether these payment cuts are made. The position is very simple. The Federal Government will determine now whether the State of Queensland loses the \$15m in competition payments. The Federal Government, where the Prime Minister is John Howard and John Anderson is the Deputy Prime Minister, will determine whether the farmers in the St George area get their dam or not. That is the bottom line of all this. They are either for the bush or against the bush. They have to make up their

minds; they cannot have it both ways. The economic rationalists who want to get out there and argue about these issues need to be able to justify their cause. Mr Anderson cannot get out of this one: in terms of the St George dam he either supports the farmers or he opposes the farmers.

As to dairy farmers—my Labor Government has stood firm to protect farm gate prices for the dairy farmers. The real issue for this industry—and I say this to every dairy farmer in Queensland—is this: is the National Party with dairy farmers or will it destroy them? The real test will be whether Mr Anderson says to Peter Costello that the Queensland Government should not be penalised the \$98m that they want to take away from us. This is not a time for rhetoric any more; this is a time for decisions. We have made our stand.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: They do not like it, because they know this is judgment day. Where are all their mates in Canberra? This is judgment day for the National Party and the Liberal Party.

Mr BORBIDGE: I rise to a point of order. In his ministerial statement, would the Premier please explain to the House why Premier Goss and Prime Minister Keating got us into this mess?

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

Mr BEATTIE: The National Competition Council has an agenda to deregulate as many industries as possible—without regard for job losses and social dislocation.

Mr HOBBS: I rise to a point of order. Can the Premier also explain how we were able to get through some of this NCP stuff and he could not?

Mr BEATTIE: But my Government simply will not accept the negative impact this approach has on regional Queensland and job security.

Mr FELDMAN: I rise to a point of order. The Premier should explain how One Nation is attempting to pull everybody out of this predicament.

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

Mr BEATTIE: Isn't it funny! They are all hot talk. They had two and a half years. We had a coalition Government in Brisbane and a coalition Government in Canberra. Did they change it? No, they did not.

We have been undertaking reform according to the rules by listening to the community and stringently applying the public benefit test. Unfortunately the National Competition Council has been behaving like an umpire who has decided the result of a match before the kick-off, rather than administering the rules of play. It is time for John Anderson to get the message: stick up for the bush and rein in the National Competition Council. In fact, he should go further and support the Queensland Government initiative for the National Competition Council to be scrapped.
