



Speech by

Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE

MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

Hansard 8 June 1999

NELLY BAY DEVELOPMENT, MAGNETIC ISLAND

Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE (Surfers Paradise—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (5.59 p.m.): I move—

"That this House supports the Government's handling of the Nelly Bay harbour development at Magnetic Island."

This is an unusual motion for the Opposition to move, but we do so in the face of the unprecedented attack on this project by the Premier's Parliamentary Secretary and representative in north Queensland, and the Labor members for Townsville and Mundingburra.

The Nelly Bay project has taken too long to resolve. It is important that the Government receives the backing of the Parliament on this issue and completes the job put in place and initiated in what proved to be a long and tortuous process during the term of the previous coalition Government. In the last coalition Budget, under Key Initiatives 1998-99, the Budget papers state—

"The department has committed to provide funding on completion of the construction of a safe harbour and associated public infrastructure at Nelly Bay on Magnetic Island, which will benefit both residents and tourists of the region."

In the program statement for the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, there was particular reference to the Nelly Bay harbour development project of \$6m. I am pleased that the Beattie Labor Government decided to follow through on the work that had been done by the previous coalition Government. Of course, the project itself had been in limbo for a number of years and dated back to the Goss era. However, I was amazed when a submission to the Premier from the member for Townsville and the member for Mundingburra dated 5 May 1999 was apparently leaked to the media by members of the Government who were unimpressed with the actions taken by the two honourable members concerned. Those members wrote the following to the Premier—

"We draw to your attention difficulties that we are experiencing as the Members for Townsville and Mundingburra, in relation to the Nelly Bay Harbour Development proposal."

They went on to state—

"... we have serious concerns in relation to the community perception of the process. Increasingly the process is being seen as non-transparent, non-consultative and biased.

The community reaction to the Final ... EIS ... has been hostile in the extreme.

...

Increasingly people feel let down by the Government. Increasingly, they feel let down by us, their local members.

...

Rightly or wrongly, no one now believes us. The Government is now seen as complicit.

...

We believe we, the local members and the Government, are in a 'no win' situation in relation to this matter."

So we have the extraordinary situation in which this Government is doing the right thing but it is being attacked from within. It is being betrayed from within its own ranks. I acknowledge the right of a backbench member of Parliament to from time to time have a snap at the Government. It is called representing one's electorate. However, the member for Townsville is the Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier. He is the Premier's representative in north Queensland.

I am the member of this House who introduced, firstly by way of Executive arrangements and subsequently by legislation, parliamentary secretaries into the system of Executive Government in Queensland. The role of a parliamentary secretary is that of an assistant or deputy Minister. The parliamentary secretary takes an oath of office and takes that oath of office before His Excellency the Governor. The job of the Premier's representative in north Queensland, the job of a parliamentary secretary, is to support his Minister in the implementation of Government policy.

However, what did the member for Townsville do? He undermined his Minister, betrayed his Minister, argued against his Minister and spoke out against his Minister, in my view, in breach of certainly the principle, if not the substance, of the oath of office that he took to become a parliamentary secretary in this Government. So instead of having the Premier's office in north Queensland actively supporting and implementing Government policy, supporting the Premier and supporting the Deputy Premier, we have the parliamentary secretary undermining them by criticising them in words that we in the Opposition, I guess, would not necessarily use on this occasion. We are pleased to say that the Government, in our view, on the information that we have to date, has been doing the right thing in regard to its handling of this particular process. We are pleased to support the Premier and the Deputy Premier, if their members from Townsville will not.

Of course, we have seen the reaction in the press. An article headlined "Backflip Reynolds does about-turn on Nelly Bay plan" quotes the honourable members concerned and, of course, states rightly—

"Townsville Mayor Tony Mooney said he was surprised there would be any further move to prolong the agony of a good outcome on the Nelly Bay safe harbour project.

However, Mr Reynolds—who said on December 17, 1997, that his concerns about the project had been put to rest—said yesterday he was making no apology."

Then we saw the article headlined, "Nelly saga played out" and the Butts on Monday column in the Townsville Bulletin headlined, "Reynolds given the ALP flick", which states—

"And while his action this time might have heartened a few of his island comrades, it did nothing to enhance his favour with the Labor hierarchy in Queen street.

Not to mention Townsville and island residents and even his very own party members. And if poor Mike is wondering who leaked the letter, we can tell him. The Department of Transport, mate, in Brisbane."

Then we have another article in the Townsville Bulletin back on 18 May stating that Deputy Premier Jim Elder, only a few short months ago the man who was going to see the project through, was questioned in respect of his commitment to Nelly Bay. The article states further—

"There is growing suspicion ... that once again the Nelly Bay project may be sold down the river ... but for what political reason is impossible for mere mortals to discover."

Also on 18 May in the Townsville Bulletin we saw an article headlined "Decision on Nelly Bay project is put off again" and in the Magnetic Community News the Our View column by Geoff Orpin headlined "Who's conning who?" states—

"Well, it's all out in the open, for all to see, following leaked documents implicating the Premiers Representative Mike Reynolds, and Northern MP Lindy Nelson-Carr in yet another attempt to scuttle a safe harbour in Nelly Bay.

Apparently, just to appease certain business interests and the demands of the loony left who of course were responsible for his current return to politics.

This time 15 pages of regurgitated misinformation, in what could be seen as a final attempt to try and influence his Premier to carry out an independent review."

The article states further—

"As foreshadowed last week in the Community News, Reynolds and Nelson-Carr's advances did not go unnoticed and apparently this must have been the last straw. Enough was enough for it was one of their own Ministers that dumped on them from a great height."

This project must proceed. It should not be allowed to be placed at risk by the Premier's representative in north Queensland who, when mayor of that city, did more to create the economic boom in Cairns than any other living human being, because the honourable member, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier, when he was mayor chased every job, every development

project, every investment out of Townsville because of his anti-development,extreme environmentalist stance. Now we see that he is out to do it again: to scuttle a project that he should be supporting and implementing while holding the position of Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier and as the Premier's representative in north Queensland.

This motion is about jobs, this is about people who are fair dinkum and this is about accountability. I challenge the honourable members opposite to state to the Parliament their positions tonight and vote accordingly.

Time expired.
