



Speech by

Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE

MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

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APEC TECHNOMART

Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE (Surfers Paradise—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (11.30 a.m.): This morning we heard more from the Deputy Premier in respect of the Government's involvement, or lack of involvement—hands-free driving—in respect of the Technomart disaster on the Gold Coast. I should apologise to the Deputy Premier because, after listening to him this morning, I believe that I may have misrepresented him. I have been saying that he knew back in August about the problems which have so tarnished Queensland's international reputation. I apologise. I was wrong because the Deputy Premier admitted to the Parliament this morning that he knew about potential problems from day one. Let me quote from what the Deputy Premier said—

"The Queensland Government was first approached in the dying days of the Borbidge/Sheldon Government, which provided in-principle support for the technomart. As a new Government, we were approached by the principals of PacRim for confirmation of support. At that time we identified that one risk was the potential failure of the event due to poor organisation and correspondingly low numbers of acceptances."

They are the words of the Deputy Premier—the words of the techno dud in this Parliament today. He knew this from day one. This incompetent Minister knew about the potential problems and he never worked it out.

Let us have a look at the record. Let us look at the enlightenment with which the Parliament has been provided this morning. As I have indicated, this Government was aware of the potential failure of the event from the moment it considered it at an unspecified date, but it was a "new Government", to quote the Minister, with concerns about "poor organisation and correspondingly low numbers of acceptances."

Notwithstanding this, the Beattie Government formally endorsed it on 28 November last year and established an interdepartmental working group under Mr Elder's department on the understanding that the Government would closely monitor developments. Minister Elder says that considerable human resources from the Premier's Department, the Department of Local Government and his own department were at work. There were initially monthly and then weekly meetings. The Minister says that in mid August there was more concern, namely about the number of delegates. As a result, a letter was sent to PacRim seeking data on the number of participants. The correspondence was not answered!

Did that ring any alarm bells with the Minister for State Development, with the Premier or with the Government? Apparently not! They went back to sleep. They went back to promoting themselves, which is their idea of what governing Queensland is all about. Thereafter, this Minister continued to accept simple assurances that everything was okay. They told him that it was okay, so he said that it was okay. Never mind Queensland's international reputation! Never mind the fact that the job strategy of this Government has been built around the Smart State strategy that has been the cornerstone of Labor's economic development policy in this State! The Government says, "They are telling us it's okay, so it must be."

What do we have? We have a situation where the Government knew about the potential for failure of the event from day one of its involvement. Despite an interdepartmental working group, including representatives from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, from the Department of Local Government and from the Department of State Development, those opposite remained totally in the dark. They never found out what was going on. Presumably, they never asked or, if they did ask,

they believed what was being told to them without having an independent assessment or an independent audit.

What a hopeless, shabby, disgraceful way to mortgage Queensland's international business reputation and make us the laughing stock of the information technology industry right around the world! Then, incredibly, despite the fact that these problems had been going on for some time, along came supersalesman Pete—supersalesman Beattie. He gave himself that tag in a ministerial media statement on 8 October 1999. Let us read it in to the record—

"Premier to be super salesman for smart state and Technomart.

Premier Peter Beattie will use his trade trip to Japan next week to act as a super salesman for Queensland's emerging high tech research and industry which will be on display at Australia's biggest ever technology conference and expo in November.

'APEC Technomart on the Gold Coast from November 1-6 will be an ideal showcase for Queensland's achievements and potential in high tech development,' said Mr Beattie."

This Premier has become an international embarrassment to Queensland. His Government has become an international embarrassment to our State.

I can remember a previous occasion when a Minister in my Government launched a particular exercise which fell on difficult financial times. Those opposites demanded his head. They said that the Minister should be sacked. Well, let us see Premier Beattie and let us see the born-again former Deputy Opposition Leader, Minister Elder, apply to themselves the same standards of public accountability that they demanded when they were sitting on the Opposition benches.

But it is always someone else's fault! It is the fault of the Federal Government. It is the fault of the previous Government. It is the fault of Joh Bjelke-Petersen. It is always someone else's fault. That is the Beattie doctrine: it is always someone else's fault.

The Premier of the day is the custodian of Queensland's international reputation. Over the years, in the field of IT, Governments on both sides of this House have worked hard to nurture and to protect that international reputation. But what do we have now? In the IT area—the area that is absolutely crucial in terms of the next millennium for the State of Queensland—we have a Government presided over by a leader who is now viewed by experts in that industry not only as a State joke, not only as a national joke, but as an international joke.

Let us look at the consequences. On being offered Expo when the Philippines withdrew—when everyone knew that the Philippines were going to withdraw—the Premier did not want it. Because the Premier reneged on the support that he gave for that particular event when he was Opposition Leader, no other Australian State can make application for a World Expo because people will say, "What about that funny Peter Beattie in Queensland? We offered him Expo in 1999, something which he said he supported when he was Opposition Leader, but he said, 'It is all too hard; we don't want it any more.'"

The same applies now to major IT conferences. What chance now Queensland, or Australia for that matter, ever hosting another Technomart? What chance is there of this great State of ours redeeming our lost reputation as a result of the actions of the master of the press release and the infidel of substance in Government?

What has happened in respect of this particular venture demonstrates incompetence on the part of the Deputy Premier, it demonstrates incompetence on the part of the Premier and it represents incompetence on the part of the Government. One simply would not put one's coat of arms and the whole imprimatur of the State of Queensland on a particular venture when one knew as long ago as August that there were problems. If we believe what the Deputy Premier has told the Parliament today, he effectively knew from day one that there was potential for failure of the event due to "poor organisation and correspondingly low numbers of acceptances".

If the Deputy Premier knew that shortly after he became the Minister, why did he not make sure that that did not happen? The fact is that this Government has traded in Queensland's hard-won international reputation. It has done immense damage. It deserves and it warrants the censure of the people of Queensland.
