



Speech by

Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE

MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

Hansard 9 November 1999

APEC TECHNOMART

Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE (Surfers Paradise—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (6 p.m.): I move—

"That this House condemns the 'can't do' Beattie Labor Government for its continuing failure to deliver on major events and for the embarrassment that has resulted as a consequence of the high profile failures of ventures like APEC Technomart III which have seriously undermined Queensland's reputation as a place to invest and do business."

I do not think that there could possibly have been a clearer, a more stark, a more honest admission of the wellspring of the serial incompetence of this Government when it comes to major events and project development than we had in this Chamber this morning from the member for Capalaba in his confessional on the Technomart farce. What he literally told the members of this House this morning was that we can lead this Government to water, but we cannot stop it falling in.

What the member for Capalaba very clearly enunciated this morning was that even when this Government's eyes are collectively wide open, even when the monumental processes and the legions of highly paid advisers are in place, even when all the reasonable precautions have superficially been taken, and when we have three senior Ministers engaged—including the Premier and the Deputy Premier—this Government can unerringly find a way of walking into a shut door every time and making Queensland look silly, and then, of course, follow through with the Beattie doctrine—that is, blame somebody else.

The pattern is well established. We have seen it now any number of times in under 18 months. We have seen it snatch defeat from the jaws of victory in relation to Baywatch. We have seen it self-destruct in relation to net bet. We have seen it drop the ball in relation to Expo 2002. We have seen it fail to achieve the Garden Expo. We have seen it lose control in relation to the Queensland raceway. It is an absolute litany of dropped balls, of missed opportunities. And wherever possible, the failures have been spiced with acrimonious recriminations. Even relatively junior staffers have been able to join in the spite—and I refer in particular to the Indy.

I do not think any Government in the history of this State has missed so much so quickly. And now we have had a detailed dissection of this Government's ability to fail—so complete that, if it was not a contradiction in terms, one would think that the member for Capalaba was on truth serum. The admission of the total gullibility of this administration, of its absolute inability to walk and chew gum at the same time, was complete. It was shameless. It was refreshing—up to a point.

What the Deputy Premier admitted so candidly, so innocently—almost proudly—this morning was that, at an undesignated date but when the Government was new and it was first approached for confirmation of Government support for the Technomart conference, it identified a risk in relation to the event. And it was clearly a major risk. The Minister told us that the Government, from day one, was aware of the potential for the failure of the event—with all that would mean in relation to the credibility of our State, not just nationally but internationally. He told us that the Government was concerned from day one about poor organisation and that it was consequently concerned from day one about low numbers of acceptances.

So there is no excuse, and there can be no excuse. The Government lent its name—the name of the State of Queensland—to this event with its eyes wide open. A condition of Government support, the Minister said, was an ability to closely monitor the development of the event to protect the State's

interests. In other words, the Government was concerned about the potential for failure, so it wanted to make sure that that could not happen by being on the case. So far so good; 10 out of 10!

To achieve this close monitoring, we were told that an interdepartmental working group was established last November, almost a year ago. A good idea! It was headed by a deputy director-general, and I endorse that. That was an appropriately senior appointment. The departments of Premier's, State Development and Local Government lent significant human resources, and so they should have. With so much to gain and so much to lose, it was important to make sure the event progressed to success.

The Minister then told us that this group held monthly, and then weekly, meetings with the private sector organisers and some of the other participants. Again, that was good—commonsensical with what was at stake. But what the Deputy Premier, the Minister for State Development for the State of Queensland, then admitted this morning was this: the very best this Government could do was absolutely useless in protecting the reputation of our State. He literally may as well not have bothered with all the process and with the application of all those resources. What he told us was that the lights were on in the Government but nobody was home. Because even with that elaborate mechanism in place, it still was claiming—is claiming—ignorance in relation to what actually happened. With a virtual task force on the job, it could not find out. The Government was in the dark. The Minister was in the dark. The Government could not work out what was really happening—what was really going down. It knew that there were risks. It set up elaborate machinery to counter them. It walked right into a shut door and, of course, it blames the organisers. The Beattie doctrine is that it is always someone else's fault. But all they had to do to put this great due diligence structure—this great phalanx of Queensland troops—off its stroke was to deliver a couple of "Don't you worry about that", and the Government of Queensland rolled over. It is no wonder the Labor mates got through the net bet system. It is no wonder Baywatch was lost. It is no wonder the Government could not get its act together in Paris for Expo 2002. It is no wonder the Garden Expo was lost. It is no wonder we ended up with financial egg all over our face in relation to the Queensland 500 motor race.

The alarm bells did not even ring in relation to Technomart when the interdepartmental group sought detail, in writing in August, about the number of acceptances and did not get a response and could not get hard information between then and the disaster last weekend. Even when the Government was ignored, the Government did not react. That is not good enough. This Government has a massive central control mechanism at its disposal—not least in the Premier's Department, with a Policy Coordination Division, with 135 souls who, we are told, are dedicated to making sure the Premier gets it right.

On top of that, as another arm of the central agency, we have a Ministry of State Development, which last year grew like topsy and was the only agency in Government to receive a budget increase that was larger, in percentage terms, than the increase for the Premier's Department. Health got around 3%. Education got 3%. Police got 0.1%. The Premier got 41%. The Minister for State Development got a 60% plus increase in his budget. And all we are getting for our money are monumental stuff-ups. The Premier should immediately review the personnel and the structures engaged in major events and major project development, with special reference to the lack of performance from his Office of the Cabinet—under another name—and from his Minister for State Development. They are letting him and this State down. Queensland cannot afford the levels of incompetence that we have consistently seen to date continue. He has to sort it out.

I just make this observation. The Deputy Premier took exception when I said in this place this morning that he was aware of problems in August. In this place this morning, the Deputy Premier, the responsible Minister, admitted that there were concerns about numbers and concerns about organisational matters from day one—from when the Government was new. And we had this extraordinary situation where the Premier, as the self-proclaimed supersalesman of this event, made pilgrimages to North America and to Japan to sell it.

The simple fact is that if you put your name and your signature and the crest or the coat of arms of the State of Queensland on a particular proposal, you have a responsibility to follow it through in those key marketplaces. And the reality is that this Government did not. I know people in the IT industry who have told me that it will take Queensland years to recover as a result of this bumbling, stumbling incompetence.

Time expired.
