



Speech by

Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE

MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

Hansard 25 May 1999

MEMBERS' AND RELATED PERSONS' REGISTERS OF INTERESTS

Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE (Surfers Paradise—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (4 p.m.): The Opposition will be supporting the motion before the House. However, I would like to take this opportunity to go through a bit of past history because, as is his wont in this place, the honourable member for Ashgrove, in seeking to score a few cheap political points, has managed to misrepresent the position of the previous Government and the coalition. Of all the members opposite, it is no wonder that the member is the one being challenged for preselection. He comes in here and seeks to deliberately misrepresent the position. I cannot remember ever seeing the member for Ashgrove attending a meeting of the coalition parties, so how he could comment in this place on what went on and what did not go on is for him to explain.

For the benefit of the honourable member—and I will come to him in a minute—I will detail the very considerable response given by the previous Government. The fact is that, for over 12 months following the change of Government in this place, that response lay dormant. I indicated that the Opposition would be supporting this motion. We had given it some thought and, during the last sittings, asked some questions. In respect to the concerns that we raised, we received certain assurances from the Government, and I accept those particular assurances.

However, for the benefit of the member for Ashgrove, I have with me a letter dated 22 April 1998 signed by me, when Premier, addressed to the Clerk of the Parliament, which states—

"Dear Mr Doyle,

I enclose a copy of my Ministerial response to the Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee Report on the Review of the Register of Members' Interest of the Legislative Assembly.

Could you please take the necessary steps to table this response."

The date stamp states that the letter was received by the Legislative Assembly on 24 April and, I believe, tabled in this place on 12 May. In that report, the previous coalition Government accepted 19 out of the 21 recommendations proposed by the committee.

After nearly 12 months of a Labor Government—12 months after the report was tabled—that Government has accepted 18 out of the 21 recommendations. I will not argue over the difference between 18 and 19. However, I make the point that the comments of the member for Ashgrove are not factual. He denies the fact that the previous Government gave a formal and detailed response in regard to this matter.

Mr FOURAS: I rise to a point of order. I find the comments by the Leader of the Opposition offensive and untrue and I ask for a withdrawal.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Nelson-Carr): Will the member withdraw?

Mr BORBIDGE: They are true, but if the member finds them offensive, I withdraw. However, I state that, contrary to the comments made by the honourable member for Ashgrove about the lack of action by the previous Government in respect of this matter, on 22 April 1998, on behalf of the previous Government, I responded and that response accepted 19 out of the 21 recommendations. It sat on the table and was not acted upon in the nearly 12 months that Labor has been back on the Treasury

benches. So the facts as I have recounted them seem to be at odds with the particular version given by the member for Ashgrove in this place today.

While I am dealing with hypocrisy, duplicity and cheap political point scoring, I want to say a few things about the involvement of the member for Brisbane Central, the current Premier, in regard to this matter. Of course, a series of articles about this matter appeared in the Sunday Mail. One of those articles states—

"Premier Peter Beattie is under fire over a rule change that will allow MPs to accept perks without declaring them."

The article goes on to state—

"Yesterday the Premier said the change would not stop MPs declaring any conflict of interest they felt these benefits might bring.

He said it aimed only to relieve MPs of declaring 'trivial things' like free cups of coffee at morning teas and the meals MPs received at speaking engagements and functions."

They are the words of Mr Beattie as reported in the Sunday Mail. However, what happened when the Premier decided that he would announce these new guidelines? According to the Sunday Mail, it was a trivial change, but when the Premier announces that, nearly 12 months into office his Government had got around to accepting one fewer recommendation of the parliamentary committee than the previous coalition Government accepted, the press release states—

"Super tough guidelines for Queensland politicians.

State Cabinet today agreed to super-tough honesty and accountability guidelines for Members and Ministers."

So we have a choice: we can believe the Premier, who, in the Sunday Mail on 11 April, states that the changes are only trivial, or we can believe the Premier in his press release of 19 April where the changes contain super tough honesty and accountability guidelines. According to the Premier, the guidelines will do this and they will do that.

I believe that there has been a lot of duplicity and a lot of politics in regard to this matter. The simple facts are—and I will recount them—that the previous coalition Government signed off on 19 of the 21 recommendations. A couple of weeks after that, the Parliament was dissolved and we went to a general election. Twelve months into the term of the Beattie Labor Government, 18 out of the 21 recommendations are agreed to. On 11 April, the changes are described by the Premier as trivial. On 19 April, they are described as super tough. I think that just shows the plastic performance of the honourable member for Brisbane Central in dealing with issues of accountability in this place.

In conclusion, I think that the mix is basically pretty good. The reality is that, from my experience of the pecuniary interests register, most members err on the side of caution. Members have probably declared things that may not necessarily be declarable under the rules that applied at the time. However, I make the observation that in my view, and from my understanding of the situation, members on both sides of the House have been responsible. I take exception to the contribution of members such as the honourable member for Ashgrove, who seeks to portray this motion as an act of Labor purity against the odds of the former evil coalition Government. That does the member no credit at all. As I have detailed in regard to the facts of the situation as compared to the contribution to this debate made by the honourable member for Ashgrove, the record speaks for itself.
