



Speech by

## Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE

MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

Hansard 15 September 1999

### BURNETT REGION

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

"That this House calls on the Beattie Labor Government to assist the embattled Burnett Region which is suffering as a result of—

1. the Government's failure to give meaningful support for the South Burnett Meatworks;
2. the Government's lack of commitment to the expansion of the Tarong Power Station;
3. the Government's failure to secure the future of local timber mills through the Regional Forest Agreement;
4. the Government's rejection of Yarraman as a site for a new prison; and
5. threats to the future of the Nanango Hospital."

The Burnett region is one of the most productive in Queensland. It is an area that historically has contributed magnificently to the welfare of this State and to the people who live there and the people who live in the cities. But the reality is that it is suffering, it is bleeding, it is haemorrhaging because of the actions—the premeditated actions—of Government. Increasingly, an area that was one of wealth and prosperity is experiencing hardship and difficulty.

Last week, at the Local Government Association conference in Toowoomba, I spoke to a number of mayors from the Burnett region. Their stories were strikingly similar and reflected a growing sense of despair in their region. Eighteen months ago, that region had a meatworks employing 600 workers at Murgon; the then coalition Government had endorsed the expansion of the Tarong Power Station outside Nanango; the coalition Government was working towards the finalisation of the Regional Forest Agreement, which would have secured the future of timberworkers from Gympie through to Kilcoy; Yarraman was a frontrunner for the siting of a new 200-bed prison; and the future of the Nanango Hospital was secure. But we had an election, the Government changed, and all that has changed in the 18 months or so of this do-nothing Government, which has left the Burnett and the people of the Burnett for dead.

The South Burnett Meatworks is in the hands of an administrator, 600 jobs are on hold, and all the Premier could do was abuse the management which has worked so hard to keep the operation afloat and local jobs going after providing some \$6m in assistance to the multinational operators of ConAgra at Dinmore. The Regional Forest Agreement is still wandering in the wilderness while mill owners and workers are worried sick about their future and their families' futures.

The handling of the RFA process by this Government has been an absolute disgrace. All it had to do was sign off. The deal was done, the Timber Board was happy, the environmentalists were happy, there was broad agreement, and the scientific work had been completed. But instead, this Government and this Premier were locked into a shabby pre-election deal with the Greens which promised the closure of logging in the hardwood forests in exchange for preferences at the last election. We await with interest the looming announcement in respect of the RFA and whether the Premier will stand up for jobs in Queensland or for his mates in the environmental movement who delivered the preferences to the Labor Party in the last State election.

Yarraman's hopes of a 200-bed prison have been dashed and along with those hopes any chance of a badly needed employment and cash injection into the town. The people of Nanango were

shocked to find that a Government-commissioned report had recommended the closure of their hospital along with a significant number of beds in other hospitals throughout the State.

The latest blow came last week, when the news came through that US energy giant Entergy had pulled out of a venture with Tarong Energy, which would have seen a \$1.4 billion expansion of the Tarong Power Station. And the reason was not because the people of the South Burnett had not worked hard enough. It was not because the Tarong expansion was not an attractive and worthwhile proposition. It was not because the South Burnett was not a good place to invest in capital, in people and in the future of people. It was because of lengthy and consistent and deliberate delays by this Government in providing the required approvals. The final application documents sat in the Premier's in-tray—the acting Treasurer's in-tray—for 15 weeks. They were there so long that they started to rot. And we had the revelation in the Parliament today about the \$80,000 a day penalty—the \$4m penalty—in regard to the failure of this Government to tick off in respect of the Tarong expansion. Tarong's application was left to wither on the vine while this do-nothing, achieve-nothing Government desperately tried to keep coal-fired power stations out of the equation.

This side of the House has no quarrel with the Chevron gas pipeline. We would welcome it to Queensland, and we sincerely hope that it comes to fruition. But we cannot and we will not condone the sacrificing of coal-fired projects such as Tarong and Kogan Creek in order for Chevron to succeed. Chevron must stand on its own two feet. It must be able to compete on its own merits. When we sacrifice projects like Tarong and Kogan Creek, we sacrifice people, we sacrifice communities and we sacrifice opportunities that may never come along again.

This Government has a responsibility to govern for all Queenslanders—not just Labor mates in Labor electorates, not just the cities and the coastal towns. Under this Government, the people of the Burnett, like people in other parts of Queensland who feel inclined not to support Labor at the polls, have become the forgotten people. They have become the betrayed people of modern Queensland. We have a Premier who makes much about the fact that he wants to build a smart Queensland. It does not sound very smart to me. It does not sound very smart to my colleagues to let a whole region suffer and struggle.

How is it that this Government can find \$250m for a football stadium in the Premier's electorate but cannot find money for one major project in the Burnett region? How is it that this Government says that it is committed to jobs, jobs, jobs and is letting hundreds of jobs go down the drain in the Burnett region? Viable industries and viable projects are being sacrificed by a vengeful Labor Government which has no commitment to rural and regional Queensland. This Government stands condemned for its shabby treatment of the Burnett region. It must mend its ways and reach out and help the people of the Burnett region. By the time a conservative Government returns to the Treasury benches in 2001, it may be too late.

I just reiterate the change of fortune under Labor for the people of that region. Before Labor came to office, we had a meatworks employing 600 workers; the endorsement of the expansion of the Tarong Power Station; the coalition Government all but finalising the Regional Forest Agreement, which all this man opposite had to do was sign off on; Yarraman was the frontrunner for the siting of a new 200-bed prison; and the future of the Nanango Hospital was secure. "Jobs, jobs, jobs", he says. Gone, gone, gone! The projects have gone, the commitment has gone, the investment has gone, and the future has gone as the member for Brisbane Central totally betrays the people of the Burnett time and time again, project after project after project.

It is not too late. This Government can still do something to rescue its credibility and its honour. I say to the member for Brisbane Central: if he went to the Burnett, he would know how much he is on the nose. He would know how much his Government has destroyed the future of that great part of Queensland.

Time expired.

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