



Speech by

Hon. R. SCHWARTEN

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

Hansard 24 November 1999

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Statewide Purchasing Policy

Hon. R. E. SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton— ALP) (Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing) (9.55 a.m.), by leave: Yesterday in this House the member for Mooloolah proved yet again why the Liberal Party is totally irrelevant to all but a handful of branch stackers in Brisbane's western suburbs. The member for Mooloolah made all sorts of claims yesterday about the draft of the new Statewide Purchasing Policy. Yet, despite numerous opportunities, he has never once taken the time to put pen to paper and have his views considered in the overhaul of the existing policy.

Several other members opposite have rushed to their local newspapers saying what the Government should or should not put in its new policy. The only problem is that they, too, have never told me—the one person who could do something about their concerns. Like the member for Mooloolah, they have never lodged a submission on the new policy. They clearly have no ideas and apparently no interest in assisting small business and creating jobs in Queensland, especially in regional centres like Charleville, Rockhampton or Mount Isa. I am surprised that the member for Mooloolah has taken such a negative and carping approach to a draft policy designed to assist business in regional and remote areas. After all, he is the Liberal Party's second most remote member—edged out only by the member for Noosa.

Most revealing yesterday was the member for Mooloolah's blatant plagiarism. He has not even tried to understand the policy—even after I arranged a briefing for him by departmental officers. All he did was cobble together issues already raised with the Government by industry groups such as the Queensland Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Australian Industry Group. Those groups and others have been consulted at length in the process of developing the new policy. Over the past few months, they have expressed their views on all aspects of the draft policy.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: There he goes, Mr Speaker—like the thirteenth strike of a deranged cuckoo clock, showing his absurdity and irrelevance. Whether they are right or wrong or whether I agree or disagree with their views is not at issue here.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: I note, Mr Speaker, that members opposite are not interested in this policy, which will assist regional Queensland.

The point I make is that, even if they have criticisms, at least some of those groups have taken the time to analyse and comment on the draft policy. That is more than can be said for the member for Mooloolah—the coalition's own Helen Demidenko. His so-called analysis consists of cutting and pasting the views of others and presenting them as his own. I wonder how those organisations feel about the recycling of their material for ammunition in a blatantly political attack. The member for Mooloolah spent a lot of time pondering the fact that the overhaul of the State Purchasing Policy was announced a year ago. The overhaul process has taken longer than anticipated, largely because of the extensive consultation involved. I make no apologies for that.

Mr Borbidge: You're better off the cuff.

Mr SCHWARTEN: I am; the Leader of the Opposition is right.

In that consultation process about 900 people have attended 30 public forums held in 15 centres across Queensland. Almost 100 submissions have been received from industry groups, Government agencies and individuals. They have all had to be assessed and considered as part of the overhaul and consultation process. All of that takes time to do properly.

I might repeat that nobody from the Opposition, including the member for Mooloolah, chose to burden departmental officers with submissions of their own. It is worth noting that halfway through this term, the shadow Minister has still not set out one policy on any issue to do with the Public Works portfolio—apart from plans to scrap Q-Build, and even they came from the shadow Minister for Education. There is certainly no coherent policy on Government procurement coming from the Opposition.

I have always said quite plainly that the revised policy will not be the answer to everyone's prayers. I fully expect just as much criticism of purchasing decisions under the new Statewide Purchasing Policy as occurs under the existing one. But if further refinements are needed once the new policy is operational, then they will be considered. This Government has responded to widespread industry concerns about the existing policy, which has clearly outlived its usefulness.

It is worth remembering that the existing State Purchasing Policy had its origins in the post-Fitzgerald days and was designed to ensure honesty and accountability in Government purchasing. It was by nature a peremptory policy—peremptory in that its weakness was its inflexibility. We would not have needed such a policy if it was not for the blatantly corrupt practices that past coalition Governments allowed to flourish. That has been the coalition's only contribution to the development of the policy—being so corrupt that business demanded a policy to ensure honesty and fairness in doing business with Government. It was a previous Labor Government that established that policy and brought honesty to the system. It is this Labor Government that is overhauling it to make it more responsive to the needs of business.

Yesterday we saw yet again an Opposition that chooses to sit back, whinge and contribute nothing positive, as we have heard this morning. The contrast between a can-do Government on this side and a won't try Opposition on the other side has never been more stark.
