



Speech by

Hon. RUSSELL COOPER

MEMBER FOR CROWS NEST

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MINISTER FOR MINES AND ENERGY

Hon. T. R. COOPER (Crows Nest—NPA) (6.45 p.m.): When a series of blunders is committed over a considerable period, one thing leads to another. It is timely to spell out some of the blunders that have occurred since this Minister took office. Obviously, as the accountable person, the bucks stops with the Minister, even though some problems may occur down the line. Sometimes, that can develop into quite a record. I have the unfortunate task of spelling out some of the blunders that have occurred under this Minister.

In July 1998, the Minister commissioned a 10-week inquiry into power station maintenance which ran until October 1998. The inquiry recommended that electricity generators conduct their own reviews, which was a total waste of time. The inquiry simply recommended that the generators repeat what it was supposed to have done.

From July 1998 to March 1999, we saw the Gordonstone debacle. Instead of stepping in to resolve the issue, the Minister allowed militant miners to continue to block business. He then offered \$200,000 to the strikers, despite the fact that they were being paid by the union to strike while receiving a payout from the company.

From July 1998 to October 1999, we have seen the results of the unresolved or very badly resolved native title issues, which have caused a sharp drop in mining exploration. That has led to the continued refusal of permits to the Valhalla mining project. The uncertainty caused by the preference for the Chevron gas pipeline has stalled or cancelled many proposed power projects. The extension of the Tarong Power Station is still uncertain and \$5m was cut from the program to bring power to the Boulia and Barcoo Shires.

In July 1998 the regional mines office was moved from Townsville to the Minister's home town of Mount Isa. The Minister was accused of putting the \$800m Callide C Power Station on hold while he looked for a loophole in the contract in order to protect the Chevron gas pipeline. The Minister was also accused of wanting to keep electricity prices unnaturally high to help the Chevron gas pipeline.

In August 1998, the Minister apologised in advance for blackouts, causing concern in both the business and residential arenas. In September 1998, a coalition budget of over \$100m was stripped from the Callide C project. There was rolling blackouts and load shedding throughout Queensland.

In October 1998, there were claims of a conflict of interest due to the Minister's interest in the Mount Isa based mine training company MIGATE. The Minister repeatedly urged Queenslanders to cut the use of electricity to forestall blackouts. Townsville Hospital staff had to use hand-operated equipment to keep critically ill patients alive after a brownout and generator failure caused by a loss of power.

In November 1998 and December 1998, Aboriginal cultural monitors were paid \$31.25 an hour sitting money—a total of \$2.8m—on the Calvale-Tarong transmission line. From November 1998 to March 1999 the Government was left open to legal action due to delays in the construction of an electricity line to the Pasminco Century Zinc mine. In December 1998 we saw another coalminers strike. In January 1999 the Minister declared that he was personally against mains power north of the Daintree River, despite impact assessment studies showing that environmentally sensitive power is possible. Then we saw Cooktown losing power for up to 32 hours. In February 1999 Birdsville experienced

continual power surges and blackouts for up to 13 hours while the temperature reached 49 degrees and 50 degrees in the school classroom. In April 1999 he appointed the first of his cronies, Keith De Lacy, as Chairman of Ergon Energy, and there was a round of appointments to the new electricity boards, which were largely a case of jobs for the boys. In May 1999 Energex failed to read 140,000 electricity meters and then sent out bills based on guesses as to what was owed. Often they were overestimated. In June 1999, northern businesses were forced to pay 40% more for power than their southern counterparts. In July 1999 the mining warden accused the Government of stopping him from doing his statutory duty to investigate all serious accidents in the mining industry. The list goes on and on.

Mr Elder: No, it doesn't. You have half a page left. Read it.

Mr COOPER: There is heaps.

Mr Elder: It doesn't go on and on.

Mr COOPER: The Minister has chalked up this record. It does not read very well. The list goes on and on. I missed out on half of it; I knew I would not have enough time to read it all, because I have only five minutes. I will table the list.

Time expired.
