



Speech by

Mr T. MALONE

MEMBER FOR MIRANI

Hansard 15 April 1999

ELECTRICITY INDUSTRY

Mr MALONE (Mirani—NPA) (6.43 p.m.): I rise to support the motion moved by the member for Charters Towers. If the House requires further evidence of a Minister who simply is not capable of doing the job, one would have to go no further than to look at what has already been referred to by people with much more experience in this place as the half-baked restructure by the Minister for Mines and Energy of the Queensland electricity supply industry.

As has already been discussed, the Minister has insisted, both since and during his time in Opposition, that there has been an alleged pressing need for a restructure of the industry. His joint aims were: to reamalgamate the three generating corporations; to bring back the central role of AUSTA and the head of the generating arm; and to restore ministerial authority over the industry. According to the Minister, as late as October last year, during the Estimates process, he had done his homework about the restructure. He was very sure of himself at that time, and he was very sure that it could be done. As usual, he failed; because when he announced the restructure, there was no reamalgamation of the generators; and AUSTA, far from being restored to a central authority, was in fact axed. The outcome was 100% at odds with what had already been flagged. The simple fact is that the Minister was never going to be able to undertake a restructure of the industry in the terms that he had suggested both in Opposition and in Government. Apart from this, the issue of restructure was never going to achieve a rebirth of ministerial authority, either.

The background to the ministerial authority issue, which only makes the Minister look incompetent, has been spelt out in this debate. What has not been detailed, however, is why the reamalgamation of the three generators was never going to happen. The explanation is in the same vein as the ministerial authority issue. It was another non-event. This is demonstrated just as readily as the ministerial authority issue, because the very nature of the corporatisation process he led, and which robbed him of much of his own authority, also set in train a process by the Minister, the Labor Premier of the day and the Labor Treasurer of the day—a process which, I might add, was very carefully designed to be irreversible. This is all in relation to the so-called reform of the structure of the electricity industry promised by the Minister.

So as certainly as the Minister signed away his own authority via the corporatisation process, the Minister also signed away any ability to turn back the clock in relation to the industry structure by his unstinting acceptance—and the unstinting acceptance by the Labor Government—of the National Competition Policy regime. The Minister would have been aware, for example, that the original separation of the generation and transmission arms of the Queensland industry, which occurred as part of the corporatisation process that he oversaw, was always going to be the precursor under NCP principles to more far-reaching reforms in the context of increasing the competitiveness of the industry. Those reforms were always going to include—logically, if not inevitably—the break-up of the generating arm of the Queensland industry into separate and competing units. In other words, the natural and inevitable progress of the steady move away from a vertically integrated industry—as a virtual dictate of the policy into which Queensland Labor locked this State—was the separation of the generators. This fact is inescapable to everybody but our very own Energy Minister. The Minister knew, or should have known, that his recent wish to reamalgamate the generator was, by definition and by policy, simply never on. This is a policy for which the Minister was directly responsible. And in any event, the Minister

was obviously never going to be able to deliver what had been the cornerstone of his plans for the restructure of the industry.

It is the scale and the transparency of the nonsense that the Minister has sought to put forward on these issues that establishes his clear unsuitability for the task at hand. A Minister who cannot see, or refuses to see, that policies he himself has put in train are the cause of the alleged problems that he rails against—and that comprehensively deny him the solutions he seeks—ought to be in a much less demanding line of work. The State simply cannot afford to have as a Mines and Energy Minister—and most especially at this crucial time—one whose principal interest is fabricating stories that make it difficult for him to retain credibility with the people of this State.

The continuing and increasing incidence of blackouts throughout the State has made it inevitable that this Minister is going to have his work cut out and make it very difficult for him to achieve credibility throughout the State.

Time expired.
