



Speech by

Dr DAVID WATSON

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

Hansard 20 June 2000

FUEL SUBSIDY SCHEME

Dr WATSON (Moggill—LP) (Leader of the Liberal Party) (6.08 p.m.): I rise to second the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition. Queensland is being run by a Premier who makes it up as he goes along, a Premier who contradicts himself day after day after day after day. The fuel tax fiasco is simply a perfect example. First he claimed that the subsidy was not being passed on, when all the hard data showed that it was. Then he claimed that the Government had not even considered a fuel tax until a couple of weeks ago, when all the evidence screamed otherwise. Then he claimed that every last cent would be returned to the motorists, when independent experts such as the RACQ estimated the Treasury tax grab at something like \$140m. The Premier compounded his deceit by blowing \$400,000 on blatant political propaganda.

On Friday he cancelled his deceitful advertising campaign, on Saturday he cancelled his fuel tax and on Sunday he announced plan B to pay the subsidy at the bowser. Service station operators estimate that that could push up the price by about 4c a litre. Yesterday we saw the first pike in another humiliating backflip as the Premier started to walk away from plan B. Plan A has gone, plan B is on the way out and he is well on his way to plan C. The Premier has finally done what he should have done in the first place—called in the experts. The most likely outcome of all the work that is being done now is some kind of finetuning to the scheme put in place by the coalition more than three years ago. This is the same scheme that the Premier claimed was a dud, the same scheme that he claimed as being rorted left, right and centre. After two years, he has not come up with a viable alternative. The can-do Premier is a can't do fraud.

The only way to get to the bottom of this issue is through a formal investigation. The Premier has refused to establish a royal commission because he knows that a wide-ranging inquiry would destroy his political credibility. It would put the lie to just about everything he has said about the issue since day one. The Premier claims that the scheme is being rorted to the tune of \$100m a year. That works out at 22,000 tanker loads. Think about it. Our Premier wants us to believe that 22,000 fuel tankers are heading south every year.

An Opposition member interjected.

Dr WATSON: The Treasurer has experience at suggesting that.

Mr Hamill: Do you know that 22,000 vehicles is about one-fifth of the day's traffic on that road?

Dr WATSON: The Premier suggests 22,000 fuel tankers. I think they are phantom fuel tankers. He says that 22,000 fuel tankers head south every year. That is 60 tankers a day, 365 days a year. What a crock! Smokey and the Bandit could not organise a convoy like that. The Premier is treating the people of Queensland like mugs. Where are these 60 tankers a day? Where are the 22,000 tankers a year? They simply do not exist, and he knows it. It is a big lie. The whole case was based on a blatant political fraud. The Premier has not produced one shred of evidence to support his allegation that \$100m is being rorted. He has not produced a shred of evidence to prove a million-dollar rort. All we have is his word for it, and that is not good enough. That is why we need an investigation. That is why I support the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition.

If the system is being rorted, the offenders should be brought to justice. If the system is being rorted, we need to know how. If the system is being rorted, we need to fix it. What does the

Government have to lose? What is the Premier trying to hide? The Commissioner for Stamp Duties has wide-ranging powers under the Fuel Subsidy Act. He was given those powers by the coalition to safeguard Queensland's interests. If the Premier is right about wholesale rorting, the commissioner has an obligation to act. If the commissioner will not act of his own accord, the Government should issue a directive.

The Treasurer has a responsibility, too. He has a responsibility to the taxpayers of Queensland. He has an obligation to ensure that their money is well spent. If the 20% State subsidy is crossing the border every year, he is duty-bound to act. He is duty-bound to do everything in his power to stop the traffic and recover the money. I support the Leader of the Opposition. I commend the motion to the House.
