



Speech by

Dr DAVID WATSON

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

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FUEL PRICES

Dr WATSON (Moggill—LP) (Leader of the Liberal Party) (6.11 p.m.): I rise to second the motion that this Parliament calls on the Premier to establish a commission of inquiry into petrol pricing in Queensland as promised on the Government's petrol price watch web site. We support the motion for two reasons. The first reason is that we need to clear the air as to exactly why petrol in Queensland is priced the way it is. As the Leader of the Opposition just indicated, the petrol companies do have some questions to answer. The second reason we support an inquiry is that it will expose the rank hypocrisy of the Premier, Mr Beattie, and it will expose the duplicity of Mr Beattie and Mr Hamill over the beer subsidy.

Mr Beattie: Leave him out of it. He is all right.

Dr WATSON: No. The Premier and the Treasurer are two peas in a pod. We will get them both. It will expose the misinformation peddled by the Premier over his claim concerning fuel tankers heading south with Queensland fuel. Let us start with the Premier's hypocrisy. The editorial in today's Courier-Mail sums it up best. It states—

"The cynicism of the four Labor Premiers in complaining about the effects of the GST on petrol prices is compounded by the reality that they receive ALL of the revenue from the new tax. If they are disturbed by the tiny impact the GST has had on petrol prices, then they can hand the windfall back to their constituents however they choose."

I am sure that the Courier-Mail has done work on this. In short, through the GST the Queensland Government is getting at least 8.3c out of every litre of fuel sold in Queensland. It is in the Premier's power to hand every cent of this back to Queensland motorists. The Premier has already shown his true colours with his botched backflip over swapping the fuel subsidy for reduced registration. Having misled the people of Queensland once over fuel subsidies, how can we trust anything he says now? Let us have an inquiry and let us get all the figures out in the open so that the Premier's hypocrisy can be fully exposed.

Mr Beattie interjected.

Dr WATSON: It is within the Premier's power. All he has to do is do it here. We do not need to run off to the Feds. At the Estimates committee on 11 August I repeatedly asked the Treasurer to explain to the people of Queensland why the Beattie Government had ripped off beer drinkers to the tune of \$40m in last month's State Budget. Let me just remind members of what has transpired. A Federal subsidy was introduced in 1997 when the High Court ruled that liquor licensing fees were unconstitutional. With the introduction of the new tax system, the States continued to get the money through the GST revenue, but Mr Beattie abolished the savings to Queensland drinkers from 1 July this year. This resulted in a de facto beer tax which has pushed beer prices up by 2c a stubby or 50c a carton. The Premier and the Treasurer picked the pockets of beer drinkers to prop up their shonky Budget but did not even have the decency to tell them. This will go down as one of the most gutless, sneaky con jobs in Queensland's history.

Queensland is now the only State which has abolished the subsidy and pocketed the money. At the Estimates committee hearing when I repeatedly asked the Treasurer about scrapping the beer subsidy, he replied in a sanctimonious tone—"

"We would argue that it should be at our discretion as to how we use those moneys to the best interests of the people of Queensland."

We on this side of the House would argue that people have a right to know when a subsidy has been taken off one product and supposedly applied to another. We would argue that an inquiry into fuel prices look very closely at the swiftness the Premier and the Treasurer have tried to pull on the people of Queensland in supposedly—and I say that advisedly—diverting the money from the beer subsidy to the fuel subsidy without telling anyone.

The final reason we support a commission of inquiry into fuel prices in Queensland is to expose the untruths spoken by the Premier over the issue of fuel tankers going south. The Premier claims that up to \$100m worth of fuel is heading interstate every year, but he has not produced one shred of evidence to back this figure up. How did he come up with this fanciful figure? Did he have someone stand at the border and count the tankers heading south? Bring on the inquiry so it can bring out the truth. Bring on the inquiry so it can expose the Premier. Throughout this whole episode of rising fuel prices, he has done nothing but blame others, spread untruths and muddy the waters. In an attempt to divert attention from electoral fraud, he has committed his own fraud on the people of Queensland. Bring on the inquiry that the Premier's own web site calls for. Bring it on, and let us see what happens.
