



Speech by

DESLEY BOYLE

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

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ELECTRICITY INDUSTRY

Ms BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (6.38 p.m.): I say to honourable members opposite, particularly the member for Clayfield but also the members for Callide and Moggill, that it is really clear that they are now no more in touch with the views of people in north Queensland than they were when they lost the election back in June 1998. If the people of far-north Queensland were to hear the nonsense that has been spoken by those honourable members tonight, the Liberal and National Parties would have little chance of gaining any kind of reasonable voting pattern at the next election.

What the people of far-north Queensland and north Queensland like about this energy policy is that it is forward looking and practical and that it gets north Queensland somewhere. It actually does something that is positive for our future and in a way that will benefit in the first instance the region of Townsville—the minerals province—but in the broader sense all of us in the northern Queensland region.

Since coming to office the Beattie Government has been committed to delivering competitively priced energy to north Queensland. A headline in the Cairns Post of yesterday provides the proof that we are turning that into a reality. Cheaper power is what it means. Cheaper power is on the way for Townsville and for Cairns—for all of the industries that will benefit from that.

The Beattie Government of course understands regional development and what regional development means. It understands regional competitive advantages and acts in tangible ways to actually promote regional development. The Beattie Government knows how important underlying competitively priced energy is to the north for future development in various industry sectors.

The new Cleaner Energy Strategy puts in place a plan to make good the promise of the Beattie Government and to deliver those reduced energy prices. Of course, lower energy prices are the foundation of industrial and economic growth and job creation. That reflects the Beattie Government's understanding of the contribution Government can make, in a realistic and practical fashion, in facilitating the development of industry in regional and rural areas. Instead of talking about it, we are doing it.

The northern region lies at the hub of the mineral producing areas of Queensland. The Government is working hard to ensure that Townsville becomes a major centre for mineral processing in the Asia-Pacific region. North Queensland has the potential to be a haven for these energy intensive industries, but only if competitively priced electricity and gas are readily available.

The can-do Beattie Government has made a number of strong commitments under the new energy policy to help realise north Queensland's strong potential. Firstly, the can-do Government will advance the construction of a gas pipeline from Gladstone to Townsville, bringing a vital fuel source to the region. At their peril those opposite underestimate the importance of that to everybody in north and far-north Queensland.

Secondly, subject to the successful delivery of gas, the can-do Government will build a gas-fired base load power station in Townsville or negotiate the conversion of one or more of the existing peaking power stations in Townsville to gas and base load operation. This strategy will ensure that there is more competitively priced electricity for the north, particularly when abundant competitively priced gas

becomes available from sources such as Papua New Guinea, the Timor Sea, south-west Queensland or coal seam methane.

Locally generated electricity will help north Queensland to achieve lower prices, and the availability of gas as an alternative fuel will provide industry with choice about meeting their energy requirements and the opportunity to reduce energy bills. Lower energy prices are the incentive needed for industry to thrive in north Queensland, not least in the manufacturing sector, and also to help industries already located there, such as the zinc, nickel and copper refineries, to become more competitive. It is this underlying facilitation and practical action that the Beattie Government is taking that will really boost the confidence of companies wishing to expand their investments in north Queensland or of new companies seeking to invest in far-north Queensland.

Cairns welcomes this news for Townsville and the tremendous benefit there will be for the regional economy based on Townsville, but also for Cairns and the far north and the broader region of north Queensland, because it is a tangible contribution to the future of the north—to jobs, to industry and to the promotion of not only cheaper energy prices but also a cleaner energy policy.
