



Speech by

Mr ROB MITCHELL

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

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APPROPRIATION BILL, ESTIMATES COMMITTEE F

Mr MITCHELL (Charters Towers—NPA) (2.46 p.m.): I rise to speak briefly to the report of Estimates Committee F on capital expenditure in the portfolio of Mines and Energy. As everybody would realise, this portfolio remains one of the most important in the State. The bulk of the \$1.372 billion budget is almost self-funded through investments from State electricity corporations.

It was pleasing to note that some of the projects proposed and budgeted for by the coalition Government and which were considered to be facing the axe under the incoming Labor Government a couple of years ago are finally becoming a reality after a lot of consternation about their future. I will mention two of these. The Callide C project involves the construction of an 840 megawatt station—two by 420 megawatt plants. It is a joint venture with Shell Coal that is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2001. Tarong Energy, which dropped off the Budget completely a couple of years ago, is also funded to continue the construction of the long-awaited 450 megawatt extension and also the other power facility at Carole Park. The controversial national grid interconnector is nearing completion, which will benefit Queensland through its entrance into the national electricity market. The major upgrade to the Swanbank plant has been long overdue. The plant was on the edge of extinguishment. That will assist in maintaining Queensland's level of generated power. Other upgrades to generators are part of an ongoing program to maintain their viability in this very competitive market.

The advent of further privately funded power stations such as the Millmerran project will keep Queensland up there as the leader for power production in Australia. We all know that future power supplies will rely on alternative energy supplies, such as gas—besides the coal-fired power stations that I have mentioned and a few others that are already online. Queensland is also a leader in the continuing investigations into gas supply sources—for example, the Papua New Guinea fields, the Timor Sea and, of course, our own coal methane supply, which has been investigated thoroughly in recent years.

I now wish to touch on some of the local issues affecting the electorate of Charters Towers. I am pleased to see the continued allocation for the mid west SWER line upgrades. This has been a tremendous program and is a much-needed upgrade that will benefit many land-holders and property owners in the Richmond/Winton area. I do believe, however, that many of our SWER line connections right across the State need a decent upgrade. We seem to have problems with those lines that have not had a reasonable upgrade for many, many years. If capital funding is spent on major upgrades, it will further decrease the amount of maintenance and patch-up jobs that have been occurring over the past couple of decades.

The link between Richmond and Hughenden is progressing well and, when completed, will also enhance the continued power supply to all of the towns in north-west Queensland as the last link between Townsville and Mount Isa. I still remain very sceptical, though, about some of the other proposed alternative power supplies, such as the remote area supply, which the member for Gregory has already talked about today—about the problems facing some of those people on this program or wanting to get on the program—the Daintree remote area power supply and the western properties remote area power supply.

People are being forced to accept these schemes, as this Government will not even consider the SWER line connections or the grid power connections to rural and remote Queensland. It has

already been proven that the people will be faced with dearer power supplies through these programs because of the ongoing costs and upgrades that these consumers have faced. With the advent of new technology, especially in relation to education in rural and remote Queensland, it is now more important than ever before to have an adequate and reliable electricity supply.

I wish to take this opportunity to actually thank the Minister for his quick response to the power problem which affected the small township of Homestead a couple of months ago in which all of the electricity appliances in every house blew up. Those people are very grateful for the assistance that the Minister was able to offer very quickly to get things back in order.

In the short time I have remaining, I wish to mention briefly some of the occurrences in the mining area which are having an effect on the electorate of Charters Towers. I make special mention of the mine capping program at Charters Towers, which is most important. Somewhere in the vicinity of 760 shafts have been catalogued. So it is very important that this program continues to further ensure the public safety of people in Charters Towers. The other area of concern—and the member for Kallangur mentioned it last night—is the current backlog of approximately 1,200 applications for exploration permits and another 600 applications for mining leases and mining claims. This situation has the potential to bring mining ventures to a grinding halt in Queensland.

Time expired.
