



Speech by

VAUGHAN JOHNSON

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

Hansard 22 August 2000

FUEL PRICES

Mr JOHNSON (Gregory—NPA) (6.25 p.m.): I rise to support the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition, which calls for an inquiry into the price of fuel in Queensland. Holding an inquiry is the honourable thing for this Government to do. If it is going to show leadership and accountability, that inquiry should be constituted straight away.

Honourable members will recall that it was only a couple of months ago that the Premier and the Treasurer were so concerned with fuel price rorting in Queensland that they were going to impose their own fuel tax on Queensland motorists by levying a fee of about \$400 per annum per vehicle. The Premier and his Treasurer were so concerned about the fuel rip-off that they decided they would put a bring-up on the file for 18 months' time. Suddenly, when the corrupt Labor candidate blows the cover on the systemic corruption of the Labor Party, under the guidance of the member for Woodridge and to the benefit of the member for Townsville, the Premier drags the file out of the bottom drawer to try to blow the corruption issue off the front page. Like the Beattie fuel tax proposal, this hypocritical stunt has also backfired. He got page 2, while the Elder halfway house scored the front page. And what a second page he got!

Why is it that the Premier is avoiding a judicial inquiry into fuel pricing in Queensland? What is he afraid of? A couple of weeks ago he was against an inquiry because he said that too many had been held and it would cost too much. Now he wants an inquiry but not in Queensland. Is he protecting the fuel companies in Queensland? Let me give the Premier a few reasons why we need a judicial inquiry in Queensland.

A couple of weeks ago the rorting was going to be fixed by appointing police and transport inspectors to stop fuel jobbers crossing the border with Queensland subsidised fuel. What has been the result of this exercise? What have these investigations revealed? I am not denying that there are important Federal issues that relate to the pricing problem, but that does not mean the Government of Queensland should duckshove this problem. I refer to the Government's amendment. It states—

"... supports the Premier in calling for a national inquiry into the impact of the GST and oil industry pricing practices on the price of fuel."

There is no mention of OPEC in that amendment. The amendment is narrow in its focus. It totally excludes the Fuel Subsidy Scheme, the exchange rate and the world price of oil. The world price of crude oil at this very moment is over US\$30 a barrel. As the Leader of the Opposition said, early in this decade it was around US\$12 a barrel. The amendment is narrow and focuses only on a national and ineffective inquiry. That is totally inadequate in this situation.

We also know that the recent fuel increases are the result of import price parity policy. Is the Premier suggesting that this policy should go? Did the Premier see Mr Beazley last evening squirm on national television when he was asked what he would do? Predictably, his reaction was to say that he would have to wait till closer to the election before he announced his policy. Just like the Beattie Government, the Federal Opposition does not have an answer to this problem. In other words, Mr Beazley has no answer either.

I propose that Queensland can provide some leadership on this problem of being at the mercy of the oil-producing countries. As the most decentralised State in the nation, the impact of high fuel

prices is of particular concern to Queenslanders. I represent a very remote electorate which relies on fuel. Our commercial road transport industry and our mining and agricultural industries are at the mercy of these high fuel prices. Now is an ideal time for Queensland to examine the adoption of ethanol supplementation of fuel, for example.

The member for Hinchinbrook has been a strong supporter of the ethanol option proposed by the Johnstone Shire Council. The addition of 5% or 10% ethanol to petrol to extend fuel could be quite feasible, given the existing price of world fuel. The advantages of ethanol supplementation are that it is a renewable resource, it burns more cleanly, it enhances engine performance, it lowers net carbon emissions, it would assist the sugar industry in a time of need, and it would provide employment and export opportunities. These are some of the reasons that Queensland should carry out an examination into fuel pricing, as recommended by the coalition—

Time expired.
