



Speech by

VAUGHAN JOHNSON

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

Hansard 14 November 2000

FUEL PRICES

Mr JOHNSON (Gregory—NPA) (6.25 p.m.): I feel that I must contribute to this debate because of the significant impact that increased fuel prices has on people in rural and regional Queensland—especially the part of Queensland that I represent. It is the significant impact that fuel costs have on the transport chain that was behind the Federal Government's move to subsidise the cost of diesel fuel as an integral part of the new taxation system. As members are aware, the integrity of this proposal was seriously jeopardised by the Australian Labor Party and its minions, the Australian Democrats, who acted to prevent this subsidy flowing on to off-road operations, including road-building contractors.

The Deputy Prime Minister has been made aware of the concerns of motorists in regional and rural Australia who pay a premium for their fuel. Accordingly, the Deputy Prime Minister has decided to implement a program to enhance road funding in regional and remote Australia to ensure that the benefits to the production chain originally intended by the fuel rebate system are actually delivered where they were intended before the spoiling tactics by Labor, despite the mandate given to the Federal Government by the people of Australia at the last election.

There is no doubt that the fuel industry in this nation has also acted to frustrate the honourable intentions of the Commonwealth Government. I find it impossible to account for the recent dramatic increases in the cost of diesel fuel. Remember that diesel is basically what is left over after one distils motor spirit from crude oil. The people of Queensland are continually frustrated by the daily fluctuations in the price of fuel.

I heard what the Premier had to say in the House this evening. I endorse some of his remarks with regard to costs. This State Government is prepared to accept that fuel on the same day can be 76c a litre south of Brisbane, up to 89c in Brisbane and well over \$1 a litre in rural Queensland. In Birdsville today, unleaded petrol is \$1.15 a litre but, even worse, diesel is \$1.20 a litre. In Bedourie this evening, unleaded petrol is \$1.16 a litre and diesel is \$1.25 a litre.

The Beattie Government wants to pass the buck to Canberra and absolve itself from any responsibility from inequities caused by the marketing of fuel in this State. I ask Queenslanders to remember that the Premier and the Treasurer were more than happy to try their fuel tax rort. I remind members on the other side of the House about those fuel tax television ads that cost taxpayers a small fortune, because they will see them again in the near future.

I rise in this House to support the motion of the member for Gladstone which calls for a freeze on the fuel excise indexation due in February. I believe that the excise indexation should be frozen until a full inquiry into the fuel industry in Australia is undertaken and made public.

I assure this House that Prime Minister John Howard and the Deputy Prime Minister, John Anderson, will make the responsible decision at the appropriate time, bearing in mind that it is absolutely paramount that we recognise the importance of keeping interest rates at a responsible coalition level, not like the disastrous levels with which we were inflicted by Labor leaders Hawke and Keating. Honourable members can rest assured that there will be more of the same if Kim Beazley can con the Australian electorate with continuing Labor deceit because of Labor's lack of guts to tell us what its tax policy is all about.

John Anderson's announcement of the \$1 billion road infrastructure package is a fairer way to give Australians back the extra excise money. It will help to rebuild our road infrastructure that Labor continues to run down until such time as we see the excise issue addressed in February.

I can assure the House that John Anderson is well aware of the ramifications of the high excise on fuel. He is aware of the ramifications not only for regional and remote Queensland, but for all Queensland. I urge the Federal Government and the State Government to show some leadership in having a full inquiry into fuel prices right across the length and breadth of this State and across the length and breadth of this nation. I say here this evening that there cannot be a differentiation of 50c a litre in the cost of freight to regional and remote areas when the price of fuel in Brisbane is significantly lower.
