



Speech by

Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard 17 October 2001

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Queensland Economy

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.34 a.m.), by leave: Queensland, Australia and the rest of the world are now confronting a very changed economic environment compared with that which existed only a few weeks ago. Prior to the horrendous events on 11 September, Queensland was leading the nation out of the GST-induced downturn. Business confidence was surging in Queensland. The National Australia Bank survey for the September quarter released yesterday showed that business confidence in Queensland was the highest in the nation. The latest unemployment statistics show Queensland dropping rapidly back down to 8.1 per cent while nationally it was creeping up.

The events of early September have dramatically transformed the economic outlook. Terrorism and the loss of Ansett services have combined to strike a wicked blow to economic activity, particularly in the tourism sector. A short, effective and carefully targeted retaliation against the terrorists will ensure that the global economy can digest these unwelcome events in time. I am pleased that the international reaction to date has been relatively measured and stock markets are beginning to recognise that the doomsday scenarios will not necessarily eventuate.

Domestically my government is working hard to restore Ansett services and related regional services. We have provided Flight West with \$110,000 per week for a fixed period to maintain its air operating certificate until it can be sold by the administrator. Sunshine Express has also received \$17,000 a week for six weeks—that is around \$102,000—to serve Thangool and Maroochydore. We have acted quickly to support our important tourism sector by—

conducting a marketing campaign, valued at \$4.1 million—it is \$3.3 million in expenditure but valued at \$4.1 million because of the buying power of Tourism Queensland—encouraging Australians to make the time to holiday at home in Queensland; and

drafting a six-point plan to help struggling tourism operators.

The challenge facing our tourist industry is no blip. We are not prepared to sit back. We are taking a proactive approach to help this vital industry. That is why a key element of our six-point plan, released on Monday, is to provide up to \$10 million for low-interest loans to help battling tourism operators. A submission came to cabinet from Matt Foley, the Minister for Employment; Merri Rose, the Minister for Tourism; Tom Barton, the Minister for State Development; the Treasurer and me to ensure that this package was there to assist.

Under the scheme the maximum advance will be \$100,000 to maintain effective operations for 12 months. The amount will be assessed on a case by case basis for businesses directly affected by the exceptional events of the Ansett collapse and the international terrorist driven downturn. The assistance is not meant to cover losses incurred but, rather, to enable the businesses to carry on until the industry recovers from the exceptional circumstances.

Provision exists for deferment of the principal repayment. Applications may be considered for an interest-only period of up to two years. The interest will initially be at four per cent. Interest will be charged on daily balances and debited to accounts monthly. The maximum term available will be for seven years, with concessional interest applying for a maximum of three years. The scheme will be administered by the Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority. The QRAA has the expertise and regional

offices in place to make the \$10 million available immediately. This measure is akin to exceptional circumstance payments to drought stricken farmers.

The aviation downturn is effectively creating a drought of tourists for some operators. We have a tradition of standing by those in need, and we will do the same with the tourism industry and workers. Tourism is exceptionally important to Queensland, and we are determined to ensure that the tourism industry, which employs some 150,000 Queenslanders, bounces back as quickly as possible. I want the Queensland tourism and hospitality industry to know that we are right behind them in these difficult times and we will support them. We have the best tourism industry in the best international tourism destination in the world, and we plan to keep it that way.

The federal government's response to date has been, nevertheless, disappointing. The federal Tourism Minister, Jackie Kelly, announced on 8 October that \$15 million is available for small businesses that have been affected directly by the Ansett collapse. Some \$15 million nationally is totally inadequate. It should at least match the \$10 million for Queensland operators that this government is putting forward. I suspect that, as the November poll looms, the inadequacy of the Howard government's response will become too obvious, even for it to ignore. This is a priority issue, and it needs to be addressed now. There is a hotline for anyone wanting more information on the tourism package. That hotline number is 1800 507 700.

Under this government, Queensland has enjoyed the creation of almost 110,000 new jobs. To be precise, the number is 109,400. We will maintain our vigilance over the state's economy and will act where necessary to ensure the stability of jobs and industry in this state. This government will support projects that are good for this state, including projects like AMC, notwithstanding some unfounded criticism we may get along the way. We will do what is in the best interests of this state and for the future of Queensland. I table for the information of the House details of the criteria of our concessional loan arrangements for struggling tourism operators.

I also draw to the attention of the House, because it is related to these matters involving international terrorism and other issues, the fact that an internal process has been developed between the state and federal governments and departments for dealing with suspect mail packages. As I said, it was agreed to in consultation with Commonwealth authorities. It has been sent to all state government departments and government owned corporations. It is a letter from me which gives detailed advice on what people should do if they believe they have been exposed to a package containing any biological agent. As at 7 a.m. this morning, the police had reported to them 102 suspect packages or letters. Of those, 42 have been cleared. They have checked 42 and all of them have been cleared. I seek leave to incorporate in *Hansard* a letter I have sent to government departments and GOCs, as well as an attachment. It is only two pages, but I think all members should be aware of the advice that is being prepared and sent to departments and GOCs to protect those employed in the public sector.

Leave granted.

Queensland Government
Premier of Queensland and Minister for Trade
16 OCT 2001

SUSPECT MAIL PACKAGES

This morning a small number of suspect letters have been reported as having been received by agencies in Queensland—mainly in Brisbane. Given the current international climate, you are strongly encouraged to review current mail handling procedures.

Mail should be scanned where possible and if there is any level of concern, should be left unopened and the police contacted immediately. The contact number to report suspect mail/packages is 3364 6464.

If you and/or your staff suspect you have been exposed to a package or device containing a biological agent:

Do not disturb the package any further. Do not pass it around. Do not try to clean up the powder or liquid, or brush off your clothing;

If possible, place an object such as a large waste bin over the package without disturbing it;

Stay in your office or immediate work area. This also applies to co-workers in the same room. Prevent others from entering the area and becoming contaminated. Remember you are not in immediate danger.,

Call for help on 3364 6464. Advise:

Exact location of incident—Street address, building floor

Number of people potentially exposed

Description of the package/device

Action taken eg., package covered with black coat, area isolated.

Keep your hands away from your face to avoid contaminating your eyes, nose and mouth;

If possible (without leaving your workspace) wash your hands;

If possible have the building ventilation system shut down and turn off any fans or equipment that is circulating air around your workplace; and

Wait for help to arrive

Further information concerning suspect mail and advice to employees from Emergency Management Australia is attached.

Yours sincerely

Peter Beattie MP

Premier and Minister for Trade

MAIL BOMBS AND SUSPICIOUS PACKAGES

Features that should attract attention include:

- an unexpected item is left at the office
- excessive postage has been paid
- the weight is unexpectedly high
- there are holes that could have been made by wires
- there are stains or grease marks (these could be the result of 'sweating' explosives)
- letters have stiffening in them (for example, cardboard or metal)
- foreign mail, air mail and special delivery items
- restrictive markings such as 'Confidential' or 'Personal'
- hand-written or poorly typed address
- incorrect titles
- titles but names omitted
- misspellings of common words
- no return address (unknown source)
- excessive securing materials such as tape or string
- an unusual odour
- visual distractions such as large stickers or messages on the wrapper such as 'Fragile', 'Do not bend', 'Handle with care', 'Urgent'

Mr BEATTIE: I also table advice to government employees as well, which is more detailed. That does not need to be included in *Hansard*, but I table it for the information of the House.

I conclude on this matter by saying that I do understand why there is some anxiety. There is heightened anxiety in the community because of international events, but I do ask people to act with restraint and to be calm. We do not want to see this situation inflamed. For anyone who has legitimate concerns—and that is reflected in the advice we have provided to government—we want those concerns taken seriously, but we do not want to embellish this situation. We want people to be restrained in their behaviour. I again ask people to be cautious in how they address letters. I warn anybody who is thinking in any way of being involved in a hoax that there are very, very severe penalties, including jail. It would be very unwise to be involved in any such activity.
