



Speech by

Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard 13 December 2001

VALEDICTORY

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (3.46 p.m.): This is the fourth valedictory speech that I have given as Premier. On Boxing Day, this government will have been in office for three and a half years. On Monday, it is 10 months since the last state election. Doesn't time fly when you're having fun!

As the parliament rises for 2001, it is timely to reflect on the year just ending. For all of us, the year started with the election of Queensland's 50th Parliament. It was an excellent result for my government but it was also an excellent result for the women of Queensland, because it returned 32 women members, and I am proud to say that 27 of them are on my side of the House.

Mr Fouras: It is better for it.

Mr BEATTIE: Not only is it better for it; I understand that only Denmark and Sweden have a higher percentage of women in their parliaments than does Queensland. And haven't they enriched this place? It is a much better place. They are incredibly talented, what is more.

Mr Springborg interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: There are some, like the member for Southern Downs, who feel nervous about the number of women who are encroaching on his territory. And so should he feel nervous!

Mr Springborg: Why don't you give up your seat for one?

Mr BEATTIE: After you, my friend. I congratulate each and every one of them for the contributions—

Mr Springborg interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: Don't get excited; women will catch up with you sooner or later!

I congratulate each and every one of those women members for the contributions they have made to parliament this year. They all have improved our parliament. They have brought the woman's perspective to all matters before the House and ensured that our deliberations are truly representative of the people of Queensland.

This year has been a golden year for Queensland. The government has been successful in bringing a number of major employment projects to reality—projects such as the \$1.5 billion Comalco alumina refinery and the \$1.3 billion Australian Magnesium Corporation magnesium metal plant in central Queensland. I do not say this in any sense of bravado. All of us in this House should be proud that these projects are coming to Queensland; it doesn't matter whether you are Labor, Liberal, National, One Nation or Independent. These projects are unprecedented in the state's history and, indeed, they are the most significant projects in 25 years.

If we add other initiatives such as the Hail Creek coalmine, we can understand the importance of it. One of the reasons why they are so important is that they herald a new era of light metals. That is one of the metals of the future. It is not just that light metals are the metals of the future; we all know that cars are using light metals now. Engines are going to be lighter, seats are going to be lighter, seat casings and steering wheels—all of those things are going to be lighter, which is better for the environment. It means that cars are lighter. It means that they use less fuel. That means a better outcome for the planet. That is why light metals are so important.

I should say that the \$1.5 billion Comalco aluminium refinery is only stage 1. If the three stages go ahead, it will be a \$4 billion project. I am happy to say that there are other projects on the agenda such as LG Chemicals, and I saw the people involved with that company in Seoul. The Minister for State Development has also been talking to them. A little bit earlier on this afternoon I had a meeting with Aldoga. The people involved in that project will be seeing the minister in January. The Aldoga project is going ahead. I saw the major principals involved with Aldoga. Again, that is a huge project for this state.

This golden year is ending on a positive note for our airline and tourism industries, with my government playing a major role in securing Cairns as the hub for Qantas' new low-cost international leisure air service, Australian Airlines. The new airline will bring 350,000 extra tourists to Cairns in the first year. This is unprecedented in the state's history.

As one of our traditional job creation areas, as I said, the green light was also given for a \$425 million coalmine at Hail Creek, which is 100 kilometres west of Mackay. As the Minister for Trade, I should acknowledge that we have a Vietnamese trade delegation in the gallery. I want to thank them very much for being with us here today and visiting our parliament. It is an honour to have them.

This year the parliament has sat for 46 days—a total of more than 470 hours. This is the most hours sat during an election year since 1932. A total of 111 bills have been introduced to parliament this year—the largest number of bills introduced to parliament since 1990. As promised during the election campaign, the first bill introduced into the new parliament outlawed the use of racial and religious hatred to incite violence. The Anti-Discrimination Amendment Act 2001 has made unlawful any public statement that incites hatred or serious contempt for, or serious ridicule of, a person or group on the basis of race or religion. This government is determined that we will use our strength of multiculturalism to advance Queensland, not hold it back. We will not allow racism to destroy the great Australian fair go that we all believe in, that is, we judge people on who they are, not on their race, their religion or their gender.

This year we introduced Australia's toughest mining industry health and safety legislation, which represents the most significant change to mining safety in Queensland since 1925 when the current Coal Mining Act was introduced. The government also got tough on tobacco, with new laws passed in May 2001. The new laws, passed by our superstar Minister for Health, will ban smoking in enclosed public places, including the dining areas of licensed premises, and at most casino gaming tables. It will further restrict the location of tobacco-vending machines and ban point-of-sale tobacco advertising promotions.

This year the long-term sustainability of Queensland's largest fishery, the east coast trawl fishery, was addressed through the introduction of new management arrangements. There were many detractors who said that that would not work, but it did work. The east coast trawl management strategy has worked and it goes side by side with the RFA as one of the most significant environmental achievements of this government. It also meant that the small trawler operators—the family trawl operator businesses—received a fair go. Robert Hill wanted to destroy them; we saved them. These arrangements are widely regarded, including by industry, as among the most advanced fisheries management regimes in place in the world.

This year we passed important legislation to create a new streamlined organisation to fight against organised crime and misconduct. The Crime and Misconduct Commission combines the separate research and intelligence resources of the Criminal Justice Commission and the Crime Commission.

The government is also determined to tackle the problem of alcohol and associated violence on Aboriginal communities in the cape. I have just finished doing an interview with *Stateline* about problems on Palm Island. We know that there are problems on Palm Island. We have had 200 years of bad policy from both sides of politics in relation to indigenous affairs. It is about time that we got some bipartisanship and some change, and that is what we are about. I will not run away, and nor will my government, from the problems of the past. We will solve these problems in the future, even if it takes years to achieve it. I again thank former Justice Tony Fitzgerald for his report into violence in indigenous communities on Cape York. He has set a path for us to follow to tackle this terrible problem—not just in Cape York but across the whole state. Currently, Judy Spence is consulting with Aboriginal communities on the best way to implement the Fitzgerald plan. This will be one of our priorities in the coming year.

I would now like to single out for special mention some of those people who contributed most to the efficient running of this parliament. As members can see from the matters that I have dealt with—and I have dealt with them only quickly—that is the benefit of having 66 government members in this parliament. We can deliver outcomes. When there was criticism of AMC, a faint-hearted government in a minority position or with a small handful of a majority, would have run away. We held our ground, because we had 66 members. That is what it means to have 66 government members in this House. I say to the people of Queensland that it means outcomes. It means Comalco, it means AMC, it means Australian Airlines—it means all of those projects that we can deliver.

I want to thank a number of people. To the Speaker, Ray Hollis: while this parliament has generally been very well behaved, particularly in comparison with past Queensland parliaments, from time to time we have a vigorous debate and members sometimes become just a little excitable.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: I was talking about the member. Ray has dealt with these situations in a fair and even-handed way. He has done much, both in the House and in his other activities as Speaker, to lift the standards of the parliament. He has also made welcome to this parliament a large cross-section of the community. Only yesterday, thanks to Ray, I was able to host the volunteers from my own electorate of Brisbane Central, who were presented with volunteer medals thanks to his courtesy. I thank him for that.

I thank the Deputy Speaker and Chairman of Committees, Jim Fouras, the Temporary Chairmen and the parliamentary committees for all of their hard work. I also want to thank the whips on both sides of the House. On our side we have Terry Sullivan, Pat Purcell and Phil Reeves—the public transport friend or freak—and the whips of the official opposition are Vince Lester and Lawrence Springborg. I would also like to acknowledge the work of the member for Gladstone, Liz Cunningham, who organised the speaking list for the crossbench parties and Independents. Their efforts have contributed greatly to the efficient running of the House.

I would also like to make special mention of the Independent member for Nicklin, Peter Wellington. This year Peter had a terrible accident and it is great to see him up and about and recovering so well. Although his injuries this year have slowed him down physically, they have not been able to dampen his exuberance for work and life. It is great to see him recovering so well. In fact, Peter sent me a Christmas card, which showed him sitting with Jenny. You can see both his legs. When I saw him wandering around the chamber I said to him that it should have said something like 'legless for Christmas,' and he took that in good spirit. For somebody to go through such an accident but to make sure that his legs are on display in his Christmas card shows courage. That is exactly what Peter Wellington is: he is one of the true Independents in this place.

The member for Toowoomba North, Kerry Shine, has also had some major health problems and it is great to see him recovering so well. I know that all members of this parliament would like me to again wish him well.

I would like to thank in particular the Deputy Premier and Treasurer, Terry Mackenroth, for his support. Through his first budget, he has managed to keep Queensland in a strong fiscal position. I also appreciate his personal friendship and support for me as Premier. I could not get a better deputy, and I thank him very much. I would also like to thank the Leader of the House and the Education Minister, Anna Bligh, who, after this year, is able to say that she has the best record since 1932 in an election year.

Mr Mackenroth interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: No, the Treasurer's record was the best since 1909, remember.

Mr Mackenroth: Yes.

Mr BEATTIE: Let me tell members: I have an answer for everything. I thank my ministerial colleagues. I have had the pleasure of leading a great team. They are very loyal, very supportive, very dedicated and they have worked very, very hard through the community cabinet process.

We all know in this game that the people who suffer are our families. Ministers, like everyone else in the community, have families. They give them up regularly to go to community cabinet meetings, travelling around the state, giving up some time Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays as well. As leader, I expect my team to work very hard and I am delighted that they do, but I thank my cabinet ministers and my team for their loyalty and support. They do a great job.

One of the great things about living in a great democracy is that we recognise the importance of the opposition and the role the opposition plays in keeping governments on their toes and ensuring accountability in parliament. As you would expect, the Opposition Leader and I differ strongly on many policy issues, but there are many times and many forums in which we work very constructively together and set our political differences aside in the best interests of Queensland. I thank the Leader of the Opposition for that. I repeat what I said this morning in question time: in the year that we have had, particularly since 11 September, with terrorism in New York and the war in Afghanistan, you have really got to say what a great country we live in when we can have our political differences across this chamber and I can go to functions with Mike and we can talk about matters as friends. I think that is a great part of being Australian. We should never, ever lose sight of that, particularly after the year we have had. I hope that everyone in this chamber reflects on this over Christmas and remembers what a great country we have.

Just think of this: if you look at the number of changes of government we have had in Queensland in recent times—and I don't want the trend to continue, I should say—we went from Goss

to Borbidge in 1996 and we went from Borbidge to this government in 1998 without one shot being fired and without one drop of blood being lost. We did it. Perhaps in some cases we did not like it, but we did it and we did it in the Australian way. Very few places in the world can actually say that. Look at the Balkans, look at the Middle East, then look at the problems we have had. Very few countries in the world can say it. It is a proud tradition in this country and I know every one of us would fight to keep it.

I do want to say to you, Mike, there have been occasions when you and I have needed to deal with things. They have been sensitive issues. You have always dealt with me in a very friendly and open way, and I thank you for that. We certainly did that in relation to 11 September. I think one of the tributes of this parliament for this year is the way in fact that you and I did handle the events of 11 September and I think the community appreciates that, and I thank you for your cooperation on those matters.

I thank our other party leaders, Bob Quinn and Bill Flynn, and the Independents for their contributions. This parliament has more Independents than at any other time in the history of Queensland. I know the Independents have worked as hard as they possibly can and I wish them well and I thank them for their contribution to this parliament.

I pay tribute to the families of our members. In particular, I thank my wife, Heather, who on 4 January will have put up with me for 27 years, which requires her to receive a medal of honour. She has actually just won her doctorate and she is now a Doctor of Education. She has indicated to me that when we go to Government House in future, we will be introduced as Dr Beattie and someone else! I never thought we would have two big heads in the one family, I have to tell you. I thought one was enough! She pointed out that as we arrive our names will be called out, and it will be 'Dr Beattie and Mr Beattie'. I now know my place, Mr Speaker.

Mr Mackenroth: You always knew it.

Mr BEATTIE: Yes. As the deputy said, I always knew my place.

Mr Palaszczuk: What about Rusty?

Mr BEATTIE: I will get to Rusty. You stay out of it. Even though he licked the minister's shoes the other day, the minister can wait his turn.

I thank my children; my daughter, Larissa, who has just finished year 11 and is about to go into year 12, and my twin sons, Matthew and Denis. I have not been home a great deal in the last year, because it has been a pretty rough time. As members may well recall, this time last year in particular was pretty ugly. My children have been quite understanding and I am looking forward to having a break with them.

As members know, the Queensland Parliament functions well because of the hard work of the support staff. I thank the Clerk of the Parliament, Robert Doyle, and all his staff. I know he is not in the House, Neil, but I would be grateful if our regards could be passed on to the Clerk and all the staff, yourself, and all the committee staff.

I acknowledge the Chief Reporter, Doug Rohl, and his hardworking Hansard staff. I am always in awe of Hansard; how they turn the rabble and dribble in this place into articulate words that make sense is beyond me. I have to say, Doug, you really deserve a medal of honour. With Her Majesty's awards coming up in the next few years, I am sure we can make a nomination for you.

I thank Ian Thomson and his staff in the Table Office, and the attendants and security staff. Thank you, guys, for looking after all the things I table in the House.

We enjoy excellent library services here at parliament. Our thanks to Mary Seefried and the library staff. I make special mention of Nick Bannenberg, the former librarian who retired this year after many years of excellent service. Again I place on record my appreciation to the library.

It takes an enormous amount of effort from a large number of people to make Parliament House function. I thank the switchboard operators who are always pleasant and helpful. They are wonderful. I make special mention also of something close to all members' hearts—the catering division. They do a great job. None of us could get to look the way we are without their help. I would also like to thank property services and one of their number who retired this year, gardener Alf Whackett. Alf started here in 1954, when Vince Gair was Premier and Johnno Mann—one of my predecessors in Brisbane Central—was the Speaker. Alf played a key role in keeping the grounds in such pristine condition for the past 47 years.

I thank my personal staff—my chief of staff, Rob Whiddon, who works incredibly hard for the government. As the Leader of the Opposition knows, the personal staff—particularly the chief of staff—carry an enormous burden. Rob has been wonderful. I also thank my deputy chief of staff, Damian McGreevy; my principal media adviser, Steve Bishop; economic adviser Shaun Drabsch, Steve Keating and, of course, John Algate.

A special thank you to the director of the government media unit, Lorann Downer. This is Lorann's last day with us in parliament. She is moving to a new career and I wish her well. She has been wonderful. I promised her that I would shout her a drink, so when we break up here, the Speaker is shouting one on my behalf. The Speaker has agreed to do it on my behalf, so I will be asking Lorann to come along to have a drink. Thank you, Mr Speaker. I did promise Lorann that she would get a drink.

Mr SPEAKER: Spoken like a true Scotsman.

Mr BEATTIE: That's right. Spoken like a true Scotsman. Lorann has been wonderful. She has worked very, very hard and I am certainly going to miss her. As members know, these jobs are incredibly high pressure. I am delighted that she is moving on to a new career, but I certainly will miss her. She is wonderful.

I thank all my other staff. Any government—and my government is no exception—relies heavily on the professional qualities of its Public Service for high quality advice and assistance. I have enjoyed tremendous support from the Director-General of the Department of Premier and Cabinet for the past three and a half years, Dr Glyn Davis. Glyn has now moved to a new position as Vice-Chancellor of Griffith University. He worked with my colleagues and I very closely to develop the Smart State strategy. Again, Glyn is someone whom I will miss. He is certainly a great Queenslander and I wish him well.

Fortunately, we have found an excellent successor in Leo Keliher, who has vast experience in policy development and administration. I thank the other director-generals for their hard work and I thank the Public Service for their support.

In addition to Glyn, there are a number of other changes taking place. Ross Rolfe, the head of State Development, who is not only the director-general who works with Tom Barton, but he is also my director-general in Trade. He has a farewell function tonight. He is going to become the CEO for Stanwell. I wish Ross all the best. He has helped with State Development to deliver a large number of projects for this state in cooperation with Treasury and my department. It is a good team between Treasury, State Development and Premier's. They work very well together and that team has produced this golden year for Queensland. Again, we will miss Ross Rolfe and his contribution.

I also mention that Tony Bellas from Treasury has gone to the energy industry. Tony was a key player in the AMC negotiations along with State Development and my department. When we were desperately looking for a financial strategy to save AMC and keep it alive, Tony Bellas was a key player in that and I want to place my appreciation on record. Also, Shaun Drabsch, my economics adviser, has left to head up the private-public partnership section in State Development. Kate Ellis is temporarily acting in that role. We all know the public-private partnership area is a very important one for the future. It is a way to encourage and see a number of major developments. It is an area where we need to be cautious, but it is an area where there are enormous opportunities. He has headed off to do that.

I pay tribute also to someone who is leaving us not necessarily freely of will but who is leaving us nevertheless, and that is Mike D'Arcy. We all know that there have been changes in the media, and it is not for me to comment on those matters here. We have a love/hate relationship with the media; we love them and they hate us.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: I would never say that. The member might say that, but I would not. I love them. I am only kidding. Mike D'Arcy has been an institution. I have been in politics for a long time. He has worked for Channel 7 for over 20 years. He has made a significant contribution. In thanking the gallery for its coverage of parliament—we do have a heart; we thank them for their coverage; we have not always enjoyed it, but we know they do their job and are a vital part of the strength of this democracy—it would be remiss of me if I did not say to Mike D'Arcy: thanks for your friendship and coverage of politics. Again, you will be missed in the scheme of things. We wish you well.

Finally, I thank everyone in the parliament, and the backbench members of government and those in key roles. This is the most talented caucus the Labor Party has ever had in parliament. I thank them for their support. I know the Leader of the Opposition will not mind my saying this. I thank my team. They have worked very hard. They are very dedicated and are ensuring that Queensland has the great future that we all want it to. I wish them all a merry Christmas and a prosperous 2002.

I say to the community, though, that it is imperative for everyone, including us, that over Christmas we drive carefully. As the Minister for Transport and the Minister for Police would tell us, there are too many decent, wonderful Queenslanders who lose their lives over the Christmas-New Year period. I know we say it every year, but there are too many broken bodies and too many dead souls. It is important that we remind people that they need to drive carefully.

Finally, I look forward to spending some time on the beach with Rusty and the kids.

An honourable member: They're not allowed on the beach.

Mr BEATTIE: Who said dogs are not allowed on beaches? Who banned that? The first piece of legislation next year will be to allow dogs on beaches. Who said that we cannot have dogs on beaches?

Mr Foley: Don't go to Fraser Island.

Mr BEATTIE: I am not talking about Fraser Island. The Minister for Employment wants to be put down, I think. I am only kidding.

I urge everybody to have a great break over Christmas. We have had an exciting year. I wish everyone a merry Christmas and a safe 2002. Good luck to everybody.