



Speech by

CHRIS CUMMINS

MEMBER FOR KAWANA

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FUEL PRICES; PARLIAMENTARY SELECT COMMITTEE

Mr CUMMINS (Kawana—ALP) (6.24 p.m.): Fuel prices are a continual issue of controversy not just on the Sunshine Coast but indeed right across Queensland. Our media is well aware of Queenslanders' ongoing interest in the price we must pay at the bowser, as it constantly runs stories of seesawing prices. On some commercial TV and radio networks and also on the ABC we are constantly advised—often daily—of the cheapest prices consumers may pay at various outlets not just around Brisbane but also around the state. It is no secret—in fact, it is a proud achievement of this state government—that Queenslanders normally pay per litre the lowest fuel prices in Australia.

Recently on the Sunshine Coast we have seen new fuel outlets coming under the banner of Woolworths. There are outlets at Chancellor Park and Sippy Downs, and there is a proposal to build one at Currimundi. Coles Myer has also recently announced its entry into the market. The fuel industry is a multibillion-dollar industry. It must be overseen not by a Queensland parliamentary committee but by a federal body, and the ACCC is the ideal body to do it. The ball is clearly in the federal government's court.

The Beattie state government is prepared to work in cooperation with the federal government to deliver proper regulatory powers for the ACCC. This, I believe, would be the most effective way to address the issue before us tonight. The ACCC already has various powers under the Trade Practices Act that should make it able to target those who abuse their abilities in colluding to improperly influence the market in which they operate. The ACCC, we must concede, has made some attempts to investigate, target or pursue various fuel companies, but sadly it has little to be proud of for these efforts. In my opinion, that is because the ACCC, presently chaired by Professor Allan Fels, is underresourced and underfunded. Its powers and its funding need to be increased, and that clearly rests with the federal government. If members disagree with me on this, they obviously feel that there is no problem with current fuel prices.

It is a sad fact that the present federal government has reduced—in fact, it has stripped—the ACCC's price monitoring role. On the other side of the spectrum, we know that the same federal government introduced, supported and passed Commonwealth legislation to compel the ACCC to be the enforcer, the body to oversee possible GST exploitation. A state based Queensland-only parliamentary committee to further scrutinise fair, competitive and transparent fuel pricing is a complete waste of valuable state resources. The solution is simple: it must be a federal push. It must be a national response that will result in the ACCC receiving the necessary powers. The ACCC must be given the necessary mandate to ensure fair, competitive and transparent fuel pricing. The federal government must also fully and properly fund the ACCC to ensure that it utilises the powers it deserves.

Queenslanders are well aware that the Beattie government could rip off half a billion dollars if we raised the price of fuel in line with other states. No other state offers \$500 million in fuel price relief to its consumers. The fuel industry is a volatile one—no pun intended. The fuel industry needs a proper balance. Smaller independents must not be forced out of the market by larger players. Independent supplier outlets offer competition and, as we know, competition and fair practices should maintain affordable prices. Families on the Sunshine Coast are heavily reliant on their family cars and therefore they are very obviously heavily impacted on when fuel prices rise. We as a state parliament, every single member—Labor, Liberal, National, One Nation, Independent, Independent One Nation, Independent National, truly Independent, and any I may have missed—must express our support for fair—

Mr Flynn: There's no such thing as Independent One Nation. They are Independents or nothing.

Mr CUMMINS: I take the interjection. I do not know why, but I take the interjection. We must express our support for fair, equitable and transparent fuel pricing right across Queensland. We must call on the ACCC and the Commonwealth government to ensure that the long-term interests of Queensland motorists are a priority and that fuel pricing is fair and transparent. To achieve this—

Time expired.