



Speech by

Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard Thursday, 19 August 2004

APPROPRIATION BILLS; ESTIMATES COMMITTEE G

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (3.17 p.m.): I rise to speak to Estimates Committee G to address concerns in regard to the state's infrastructure and, in this particular case, energy. The problems now emerging within the electricity industry have been revealed clearly. This week has been an extraordinary week where we have had the government try to congratulate itself on fixing a problem, or alleging that it is going to fix a problem which it, in fact, created. Labor has been in government six years. Premier Beattie has been Premier for six years, and still in this parliament he cannot explain how they mucked up the electricity system. They have gone even further than that and said, 'Don't ask us how it was destroyed; just let us concentrate now on how we are going to fix it.' That is an interesting scenario. If someone was running an organisation with many shareholders who were expecting you to look after their assets and to perform the services associated with an organisation and then, as the person in charge of that organisation you ended up causing a crisis which destroyed the asset base and was likely to undermine the service you were delivering, the shareholders would have every right to say, 'How did this occur? What were the lines of communication—the management system—that allowed this to fail?'

But no, Premier Beattie, as the one who is in charge of the Queensland government, says, 'Please do not ask me; just trust me now that we are going to fix it.' That is not good enough because that is not how you are going to fix the electricity system in Queensland.

The government has gone further and said the extraction of the extraordinary and special dividends cannot be blamed for the destruction of the electricity system. Yet when the government is asked how much it is going to cost to restore current reliability, let alone deal with future needs, it still cannot put a figure on what that is going to cost.

On the one hand the government says not to blame the amount of money that it has sucked out of the organisation and yet on the other hand it cannot put a definitive figure on what it is going to cost to fix the issue. The government simply cannot be believed. The government cannot be trusted. It is extremely disappointing when one sees the parliament being abused the way we have seen this week. We saw the government using its numbers, 70 per cent of the seats, to give itself a vote of confidence for undermining what is a fundamental and basic service that Queenslanders rely on. Government has the primary role of delivering infrastructure. The state government has the role of ensuring that electricity capacity is there and that there is reliability of supply. What we have seen happen has been an undermining of that reliability of supply.

Linesmen I have spoken to in my area have been warning about the cutbacks in maintenance and the services that they saw were being undermined. Yet coming into the last state election the government said, 'No, trust us. Everything is fine.' After the election it announces a review. It clearly covered up and did not come clean with the people of Queensland about how it had undermined six years of maintenance and the services of our electricity system. The government cannot be trusted to put in place the infrastructure for the future.

In relation to other issues such as child safety, the government had been in power for six years and suddenly we saw the appalling breakdown and the incredibly high turnover in circumstances where our child safety system was on the point of collapse.

We see it in other infrastructure areas, for example with roads, and I alluded in an earlier estimates committee debate to the gridlock that has occurred. These things did not happen overnight. The next, of course, will be water. All these things have long-term planning requirements. When the crisis occurs it is because the warning signals have been ignored by those who are in a position to do something about it and they ignored it. These things do not happen overnight and that is why every time there is a blackout in future people will blame the Beattie government—quite rightly. This government has let down the people of Queensland. It should not say it is going to do a good job, but should get in there and do the job, invest in the infrastructure and supply for all of Queensland. It should not just put out press releases that promote the government and say there is a system for all of Queensland when clearly they have undermined and, in many cases, even destroyed some businesses which have found that they have to throw out stock.