



Speech by

## Lawrence Springborg

MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

Hansard Tuesday, 17 August 2004

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### ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

**Mr SPRINGBORG** (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (8.20 p.m): After a day of bluff and bluster from this government and after weeks of bluff and bluster from this government we are still no closer to finding out who is responsible for the electricity crisis in Queensland. Today, we have sat through a whole range of excuses from Mr Beattie and a range of his ministers and backbenchers. They have been standing up making excuses for this electricity crisis. He has not told us who is responsible for it. After all of this today he has not told us who was responsible for this. He has not told us whether he was lied to. He has not told us who told who what. He has not told us that. All he has done is stood there and said, 'Mea culpa, but I am not going to tell you how this whole crisis unfolded and why the people of Queensland were put through the inconvenience of blackouts through the early part of this year and last Friday night.'

Quite frankly, we have had to sit through the ignominy, we have had to sit through the spectacle of Mr Beattie congratulating himself and backbenchers congratulating the government on its appalling performance. What that basically means is today we have seen members of this government congratulating themselves for blackouts. We have seen this government commending itself for the blackouts.

What do the people of Queensland think? What do those people out there think who have suffered the problems and who have suffered the inconvenience of blackouts, whether it be throwing out food, whether it is not having the convenience of being able to flick a light switch to be able to see where they are going, or the people in my electorate who last Friday night were suffering in the cold if they had to rely upon electricity to be able to heat their homes and who were unable to do so because of the blackout? There has been no explanation today from Mr Beattie or his government members as to who was responsible for this particular crisis. We have heard a lot of promises about fixing it. We have heard a lot of promises about how good it is because it had a report done in the Somerville report, which, quite frankly, it had no choice but to do. What did it expose? We know what it exposed, because quite frankly it exposed the hypocrisy and the lies from Mr Beattie and the members opposite who said that the problems were all about flying foxes and little furry animals and cars hitting powerlines. We now know from Mr Somerville that that was a lie, because 57 per cent of last summer's outages were brought about because of the lack of investment in refurbishments, maintenance and upgrades of the power distribution system across Queensland.

Mr McGrady walked into this place earlier today and said that this issue had not been raised before, that this issue had not been raised by the opposition earlier. I have done a little bit of a search in the short time available to me, and on 1 February prior to the state election I issued a press release saying that power companies should concentrate on supply. That followed the revelations of the ripping out of the dividends and the effects that this was having on the distribution network. The then Deputy Leader of the Coalition, Bob Quinn, issued a press release on 30 January saying that Beattie should apologise to blackout victims. Again, on 31 January 2004 the then Deputy Leader of the Coalition, Bob Quinn, put out a press release about blackout delays due to government raids. We were raising it earlier. When Mr Beattie was clutching his heart and wringing his hands and saying that there was not a problem, we were saying

that there was a problem. Again, there was a press release from the then coalition on 1 February saying that Beattie needs to shed light on energy bonuses. This followed the storm crisis that contributed to the failure and the breakdown of the distribution system which, as we know now, was at least caused 57 per cent of the time because of the failure of this government to sufficiently upgrade, maintain and refurbish the system. Let us hear no more nonsense from the government about how good it is. Let us hear no more nonsense at all.

The other thing is that we have seen lots of challenges in the media and also in this parliament today for all members to better acquaint themselves with the real facts. When we exposed six weeks ago that the power companies in Queensland were at least \$4.6 billion in debt, what did Mr Beattie say? He could not repudiate it at all. He said, 'We should be better briefed.' He said that we would be better briefed. He could not repudiate it, because it was in his own documents. We got them under FOI. But we have been waiting ever since that to have a briefing from Ergon. We have been waiting ever since that time to have a briefing from Energex. We have been waiting ever since that time for a briefing from Powerlink, from CS Energy, from Enertrade, from Stanwell, you name it. We have been waiting all of that time. There has been nothing—nary a word from Mr Beattie and nary a word from those electricity chiefs. Mr Beattie knows that he has to keep those people under wraps because otherwise he runs the risk of those people letting the cat further out of the bag. We know that together they can concoct and maintain the lie, but apart the whole fabric of their stories starts to fall apart.

I just say to Mr Beattie: no more of your stunts. If you are true to your word, then you will arrange for the energy chiefs to come in and brief myself as leader of the Nationals and the National shadow cabinet when next we meet so that we have the opportunity to be able to question them to really understand what is going on in Queensland. But you will not do that because you are hiding something. You are hiding a lot and you do not want to have that exposed. What we have seen again today from this government is more promises and more promises and more promises. As we have discovered from this government, words are cheap but after a while they really mean nothing because you do not see the actions.

The proof of this government's commitment is going to be some time down the track. It is going to be this storm season. It is going to be the storm season after. It is going to be subsequent times to that when we see the full extent of any power failures in the future. We also know that the electricity demand this summer is going to be seven per cent higher than the previous summer. We also know that in the following summer it is going to be at least seven per cent higher again. So how is this government going to be able to fix that crisis with cheap words? We are yet to see if its actions are going to properly match its words, and the opposition will be doing its level best to keep the government accountable to its words for the people of Queensland. The people of Queensland demand better from this government. The people of Queensland demand a power supply which is reliable and which is a 21st century power supply—not a 19th century power supply but a 21st century power supply. What has been proven by this government's management or mismanagement of the electricity system is that we have a Third World power supply system in Queensland.

Let us look at the strategic plan for summer 2004-05 from Energex. This is typical. It is the sort of Beattie government spin machine that is typical of it. What is contained in the introduction? It says that one of the crucial ways of addressing this crisis is increasing the use of mass media as a communication medium to customers for information regarding power outages. We have seen that over the last few weeks in Queensland. We have seen the spin cycle. We have seen a whole lot of spin. We have seen a lot of smoke and mirrors, but we have not seen too much light from this government. What we have not heard today from Mr Mackenroth or Mr Robertson or Mr Beattie is how much it is going to cost to fix this crisis which is of their own making. We have not heard that. We have not heard if it is \$200 million. We have not heard if it is \$300 million. We have not heard if it is \$500 million. We have not heard if it is \$1 billion. We have not heard if it is \$2 billion, because the government knows that it is going to cost an absolute motza.

We have already had admissions that to fix the Brisbane CBD alone, or at least start down that path, it is going to cost at least \$139 million. We had today in this place Mr Mackenroth repudiate calls from the Nationals to stop taking the dividends until such time that our electricity distribution system in Queensland is in a healthy state. Why would he repudiate that? Why if you are serious about fixing this problem would you vote against any moves whatsoever that would ensure that that money stayed with Ergon and Energex and assisted them in being able to meet the distribution needs of power consumers in Queensland?

We now know that this government is becoming more and more reliant on the proceeds of those dividends just to balance its budget. That is why it does not want to give it away. So the government is going to have a trickle-feed system in Queensland providing a second-class distribution system for power in this state because it does not want to take its hands out of the pockets of Ergon and Energex. If the government was serious, it would actually do that.

I refer to what the Productivity Commission said with regard to the dividend take and the take from Energex in particular.