



Speech by

Lawrence Springborg

MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

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ENERGEX; MR G. MADDOCK

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (11.31 a.m.): I rise to make some further comments and observations surrounding the tragic death of the former CEO of Energex, Greg Maddock, and also about the overall issues relating to Energex. As I have talked to people over the past 10 days, it has become very apparent to me that Greg Maddock was very much respected across a whole range of fields. He was not only dearly loved and is going to be sadly missed by his family but also he was dearly loved and is going to be sadly missed by his work colleagues. Greg was highly respected by the staff and board members of Energex. He was highly respected within the business community because of his professionalism, because of his contribution to business and because of the way in which he went about not only his personal administration of Energex but also the administration that he previously carried out in jobs he held throughout the country. Those particular skills are not easy to replace and they are going to be very, very sorely missed. I again say to Mrs Maddock and to the family: please accept the condolences and all of the support possible that the Queensland Nationals can provide.

I would also like to comment, as did the Premier today, on the story that appeared in the *Australian*. The section that quotes me is a complete and absolute fabrication. It says that I had called for the former CEO of Energex to go and for the Premier to sack him. At no time did I make those comments publicly or privately, nor did I make those comments in a one-on-one interview with any journalist in Queensland or anywhere else throughout Australia. So the Premier and I may be at one on this issue of misrepresentation in that media article. I cannot speak about the Premier's alleged misrepresentation, but I can speak about mine. If I had made that statement, then it would have been carried in the media not only in this state but maybe also interstate. It is somewhat strange that that comment that I was supposed to have made about Greg Maddock having to go did not appear in any media until today. This morning, when we rang the journalist in question—Mr Roberts—he said that it was part of a one-on-one conversation that I had with him and that it was a very significant comment that I had made. That was very convenient. If it was such a significant comment that I was supposed to have made, then why did it not appear in the media at the time when I was supposed to have made the comment, which was in July of this year?

I will be critical of the performance of people. It is my role and it is my duty to do so, just the same as the Premier will be critical of the performance of people, including the performance of members on this side. That is his role. I criticised the government for its role in the Ergon and Energex crises and I criticised some of the board members. At the time, when I was pushed and questioned on who should be sacked or who should resign—and at that time there was a lot of blood lust and diversion—I said that it should be the board members of Ergon and Energex. I said that the government ministers involved have to go first of all, because they were the ones who appointed these people and presided over this crisis at a shareholding ministerial level and then I said that if you are looking for people to go, maybe you could look at the board. At no stage I did ever say that publicly or privately in relation to the paid staff of Ergon or Energex who were just simply carrying out the job of administering what they were supposed to be doing.

That sort of fabrication gives journalism a bad name. I commend the other media in Queensland that, quite frankly, accurately reported the comments that I had made at press conferences or I had made in one-on-one interviews. I do not mind if I am going to be castigated in some way or if I am going to be

affected in the same way in the media because of some comments that I have made. But when it is based on some comments that I have not made, then quite frankly that is beyond fair cop.

This morning in this place the Premier asked: what more could have been done with regard to the issue of Energex and the tragic circumstances surrounding the untimely passing of Greg Maddock? That is a question that a lot of us ask. It is a question that I asked myself a few months ago when I personally went through a similar situation. I think that we need to acknowledge some issues. We need to acknowledge that, to date, the people who have had to take responsibility in this matter have been those who have been the board members of Energex and, in some way also by reflection, the board members of Ergon and in some ways the paid staff. I think that it behoves the Premier to maybe reflect and acknowledge the government's complicity in the energy crisis and the issues and its administration of this entity, of which it has at all times two shareholding ministers. It also behoves the Premier to stand in this place today and acknowledge the responsibility, either shared or individually, of each of those four ministers plus the Treasurer who continue to sit in this place and who at various times have had responsibility for the Energy portfolio in this state.

It would be ludicrous and ridiculous to think that this energy crisis and the circumstances of Ergon and Energex arose because of the actions of the board and the paid staff, including the executive managers, alone. We have shareholding ministers who are responsible for setting the overall policy direction of those GOCs who have not been held accountable, who have continued to hold their positions and who have continued to be promoted in this place. A lot of Queenslanders are asking questions. The Premier could have also said in this place that the government's policy of taking dividends at the level that it has taken dividends—and taking special dividends—was unsustainable and contributed to this crisis and pressure that board members and executive staff and other staff have had to labour under.

The Premier could have acknowledged that the government, by and large, had caused much of this problem. He could have acknowledged that the government had done this because it needed to prop up its budget bottom line. He could have acknowledged that the crisis was still there and needed to be fixed and that the government had contributed to that.

We also have to reflect on the extraordinary pressure under which the staff of Energex and Ergon continue to find themselves. My colleague the Deputy Leader of the Opposition had the opportunity as shadow minister recently to go to the Energex call centre. He reflected and remarked to us about the extraordinary pressure that those people were under and the fact that they were wound up like rubber bands almost waiting to burst and waiting for things to go wrong. He said that they felt like they had been left there alienated and were copping the responsibility for this crisis. We have to acknowledge that pressure. We have to acknowledge that the work they are doing is the best that they can do in those circumstances, and those circumstances need to be made better.

We also know that those people have been short-changed. We know that those people have been blamed. We know that those people have been left to carry the can whether they are in the call centres, whether they are the people who are administering the policy direction of the government and of the boards or whether they are the linesmen who are responsible for a range of duties. We also need to acknowledge that the boards themselves have been put in a ridiculous situation by forcing them almost into a breach of their fiduciary duty—that is, the obligations that they have as company directors not to pay dividends at a higher level than what the company can afford, because if any other company had done that then those people would be before ASIC.

There are unanswered questions. Why did Mrs Maddock make those comments that she made on the day of her husband's funeral? That has not been answered. What about the curious smear of Greg Maddock throughout the media leading up to the circumstances that we see today and in days prior to this about the issues? Who let out that information regarding that investigation? What were the circumstances and the motivation for that?

Time expired.