



Speech by

Stuart Copeland

MEMBER FOR CUNNINGHAM

Hansard Thursday, 20 April 2006

URANIUM MINING

Mr COPELAND (Cunningham—NPA) (6.13 pm): I rise to support the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition. I remember on numerous occasions in this parliament we had debates with Labor members of the government railing against the levels of HECS contributions from the federal government. I always remember the former member for Moggill saying that the debate was not about whether there should be HECS or not but about the quantum, because the Labor Party introduced HECS. So both sides agreed that there should be HECS and we had the debate about the quantum of what that should be.

The same could be said for uranium mining. This debate is not about whether there should be uranium mining or not, because both sides agree that there should be; it is only the quantum we are debating. The Labor Party believes that there should be only three mines, none of which are in Queensland. It is okay for us to mine uranium; it is just not okay for Queensland to mine uranium. That is the fundamental debate that we are having. That is the fundamental debate that the Labor Party needs to have, because at the moment the Queensland Labor Party is shutting Queensland out of the economic promise that uranium now holds in the year 2006—not 1996, not 1997. The world has changed enormously in that decade. If one looks at the article written by the member for Hervey Bay, they would see that he acknowledges that. It is now that we are facing the energy crisis world wide, it is now that the opportunities exist for uranium mining, and that is why we are having the debate about whether Queensland should be able to participate in that economic growth.

That is what this debate is about, not about whether we should have it or not; that debate was had decades ago and both sides of politics supported it—the Labor Party and the coalition. Let us have none of this nonsense about the Labor Party not wanting to support uranium mining; the Labor Party does support it but just not in Queensland—just do not give Queensland a cut of the pie, do not let Queensland capitalise on the demand that is there world wide in the year 2006. That is the point that we need to be debating, that is the point that the federal government has recognised in signing the deal with China and that is what Queensland needs to recognise in a hurry so that we can take advantage of the opportunities that now arise.

There are members of the government who do support an expansion to uranium mining. I know that you, Mr Speaker, have come out in favour of it. I know that the member for Hervey Bay has come out in favour of it. I know there are others in favour of it who have not come out publicly. Labor members in other states, such as Mike Rann, are very heavily promoting it. Bob Hawke, the former prime minister, is in favour of it. Not only that, he wants to have Australia set up to earn export dollars by becoming the place to store the uranium waste.

The member for South Brisbane, the Deputy Premier, said that no-one wants to have the storage. For decades we had it stored at the Kangaroo Point Cliffs under the Story Bridge. Low-level nuclear radioactive waste was stored at Kangaroo Point in a flood area. These debates have certainly gone on and the Premier, in usual form, is trying to spin his way out of what he finds a difficult political situation because of the dynamics within the Labor Party.

There is the argument that is being run by the Premier and other ministers that have spoken tonight that we cannot have uranium and coal. Of course we can have uranium and coal. Everyone recognises that, including the Queensland Resources Council and, importantly, the federal shadow resources minister, Martin Ferguson. On 31 March Martin Ferguson stated—

I actually think as a nation we can walk and chew gum at the same time, potentially sell coal and uranium.

But obviously our Premier cannot walk and chew gum at the same time; he is not going to explore the options regarding uranium because of the detrimental effects to the coal industry. We have a very successful coal industry and that will continue to be the case regardless of what happens with the uranium industry.

This issue is not going to be resolved by the Labor Party until April of next year, in the hope that this all goes away until after the state election and the Premier does not have to worry about it and worry about the ructions within his own party. I see that Andrew Detmar, the state secretary of the AMWU, said that this is going to be debated at the ALP state conference on 10 and 11 June.

The Premier has a responsibility to state what the state Labor government's position is on this issue. It is not acceptable to simply duckshove it to the federal Labor conference and say, 'We are going to be dictated to by the federal Labor Party. We are not going to worry about Queensland.' That is an indictment on this Premier.