



Speech by

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GOVERNMENT OWNED CORPORATIONS

Ms LEE LONG (Tablelands—ONP) (9.59 pm): The corporatisation of public entities has been a sorry part of government policy on both sides of politics for many years now. It has led to the loss of essential parts of the very foundation of our country and our state and reaped a harsh toll on ordinary Queenslanders. Corporatisation is not some kind of magical answer to the supposed inefficiencies of public sector management. It has impacted on everything from the water supply to power generation, from railways to port operations and the list goes on.

I have never believed that just because something is managed by the public sector it is automatically badly managed. Everyone in this place would agree that our public servants are, on the whole, dedicated, professional and easily the equal of their private sector counterparts. So why are we so ready to accept that they cannot manage things equally well?

The mad drive to corporatise has nothing to do with the management skills of public servants. The difference between public sector entities and corporate entities rests on just one factor. Public sector entities take into account the public interest in their decisions. Corporate entities, including GOCs, do not. Instead they bow down to the all-powerful profit motive. The public good disappears as an issue compared to the lucrative siren song of higher and higher profits and earnings. The dollar is everything and be damned anyone who might have to suffer along the way to generating a bit more revenue.

Of course, that suits the government. Any unpopular decisions a corporatised body makes can be put at arms-length. Just look at the handwashing that went on over the state of Brisbane's power grid. But the profits, that is a different matter. The profits generated by the harsh decisions of government owned corporations keep on flowing to government. That is what corporatisation is all about. When, eventually, these government owned corporations are sold off into the public sector, for even more profit to government, as shown in the fate of Telstra, for example, the ordinary people simply get an even worse deal.

But that cannot be a surprise, surely, when the whole point is to take public interest out of the decision-making process and replace it with the mighty dollar. When these kinds of corporations are established we do not see them employing hundreds more Queenslanders. Instead, time and again, we see them rationalising their workforces and putting Queenslanders out of jobs. Again for one simple reason: to make as much profit as possible and be damned whom it hurts. The government, as the shareholder, cannot wait to get its hands on the resulting profits.

I believe there is a very clear role to be played by governments, especially state governments and federal governments, in nation building. It is a role that has been largely abandoned. It is a role which GOCs will never undertake. While the public good was sufficient reason for the Snowy Mountains scheme to go ahead or the Ord River region to be opened up, I do not believe either of those iconic projects would have gone ahead if the profit motive had been the sole driving reason. Leaving decisions about how we build this state and this nation at the mercy of profit driven executives is, I believe, a recipe for disaster.