



Speech by


Hon. Jeff Seeney

MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

Hansard Tuesday, 5 June 2012

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Alpha Coal Project

 **Hon. JW SEENEY** (Callide—LNP) (Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development, Infrastructure and Planning) (9.42 am): A week ago today the Coordinator-General approved a key piece of Queensland's economic future—the Alpha Coal Project in the Galilee Basin. On the same day I reported to this House the huge economic benefits to Queensland and the nation. The very next day—that is, Wednesday last week—the federal environment minister, Tony Burke, was reported in the *Australian* as 'fuming' over the approval of the Alpha Coal Project. He asserted Queensland was 'reneging' on a deal to streamline the approvals process. He said that we had 'failed to complete' the assessment of the Alpha mine properly and that the Coordinator-General's evaluation report was somehow 'deficient'.

Over the next few days Minister Burke fired a series of requests, demands and ultimatums requiring public statements from me and a reopening of the Coordinator-General's evaluation of the Alpha Coal Project. Throughout these exchanges I continued to ask Minister Burke to detail his areas of concern, to give us some detail. Despite his assurance that his department would provide this information by the 'earliest possible time' on Friday, it was not until mid-afternoon Friday that a response was finally forthcoming from Mr Burke's department. And what did we get in the end? We got nothing—we got nothing new and nothing significant. We ended up where we had started.

After examination of the material that was supplied, we find that it is a rehash of comments already provided by Commonwealth departments and already considered by the Coordinator-General throughout the evaluation process about issues that have been addressed in the Coordinator-General's report, which provided conditional approval for the Alpha Coal Project. However, I am informed by the Coordinator-General that he will respond to the Commonwealth requests later this week.

But what occurred here was the Commonwealth playing political games with this important project. Minister Burke accused our government of not conducting the approvals process properly. He accused the Coordinator-General of not doing his job and of lengthening the approvals process rather than streamlining it. The opposite, of course, is the reality. It is Minister Burke and the Commonwealth government that are constantly delaying approvals for projects that are of great economic importance to the Queensland economy and of great importance to Australia.

Is this the way our national government should perform? Is this the way a minister in the federal government should act? Are ultimatums, demands, and the leaking of public servants' emails an appropriate way to behave when considering approvals for projects that are critical to the state and the national economy? Anyone looking at this episode in an objective fashion could not fail to conclude that Minister Burke is trying to delay the Alpha Coal Project by seizing on any flimsy excuse available. Some observers might even conclude that Labor is more concerned with pandering to its Greens party allies than making decisions in the best interests of the state and the nation.

Alpha Coal is about opening up a vast new coal resource within Queensland and in so doing providing thousands of new jobs and billions of dollars in export earnings, taxes and royalties. It is projects

like Alpha Coal that will pay for the schools, the hospitals, the services that future generations of Queenslanders will need. The former state Labor government understood this, and Julia Gillard and her government have long talked about supporting Galilee Basin coal developments, as they should—as any sensible politician should. However, their comments are in stark contrast to the actions of Tony Burke in his handling of the approvals process last week.

One example of that is in July last year when Mr Burke's ministerial colleague Martin Ferguson said—

... the creation of a whole new coal corridor in the Galilee Basin ... is about real jobs in Australia. It is about our resource and energy sectors driving our future and they will continue to expand. Just think about the expansion of jobs.

It comes as no surprise to see that there is a split in Labor ranks on this issue. Julia Gillard and Martin Ferguson say one thing, but Tony Burke does the opposite. The question remains: does Minister Burke support the views of Prime Minister Gillard? Does he support his fellow minister Martin Ferguson? The federal Labor government need to stop playing politics with Queensland's economic future. They need to stop playing politics with the approvals process for major economic projects such as Alpha Coal, and they must complete those approval processes within the stipulated time frames laid down in the EPBC Act. They had 30 days—there are just 26 remaining.