




Speech By
Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE

Record of Proceedings, 10 September 2014

**ELECTRICITY COMPETITION AND PROTECTION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT
BILL; NATIONAL ENERGY RETAIL LAW (QUEENSLAND) BILL**

 **Mr KNUTH** (Dalrymple—KAP) (4.50 pm): I do have reservations about these electricity bills. I recall that in around 2006 or 2007 the then Labor government privatised the retail arm of our energy sector, with the support and backing of the LNP, in the belief that it would increase competition and decrease electricity prices. Since that time we have seen electricity prices double, if not triple. We were continually told that this would be good for Queensland. I do remember that the LNP members had a spring in their step. They were very excited, too. The only disappointment they had was that it was the Labor Party that was introducing it and not them.

Time and time again we have been told the benefits of privatisation and, likewise, of giving more autonomy to the big corporates to make these decisions, but it has not worked. That is the case across-the-board—whether it is the sale of Telstra or the sale of the Suncorp bank. They are all ripping us off. But we do have a protective safeguard—that is, to ensure it can be retained in government hands by whatever means necessary. I know that Peter Beattie admitted in the *Courier-Mail* that the greatest mistake he made was the privatisation of the retail arm of our energy sector. He admitted that, but he admitted that he did not believe that the greedy corporates would rob the poor old pensioner, the consumers and those paying the electricity bills, as they have to this day. The same thing will happen under privatisation. I believe that this bill is laying the foundation for the privatisation of our retail arm.

People do not trust these retailers. I know that a member earlier criticised our lack of trust in them. We do not trust them. We do not trust government. At the same time, the LNP is telling us to trust these retailers, to trust these corporates: 'Don't worry. They will look after it. They will care for you and they will be responsible. So we are going to push this bill forward to give more responsibility to the market based retail contracts.' I know that an old lady will have a lot of difficulty bargaining over a contract with these electricity giants. We need to ensure the minister retains the responsibility to regulate prices or plays a part in retaining that responsibility.

Those in rural and regional Queensland are concerned. We have been pushing for a base load power station for the last 20 or 25 years. One of the main reasons is that we are importing our power from Gladstone and down south and it is costing us an extra \$600 million a year. But it has been subsidised by the state government—the taxpayer—which is a good thing. But that would never need to happen if we had a base load power station in North Queensland and we had the Tully hydroelectric scheme and the Penton project available. Our biggest fear is that if there is privatisation then a person living in the bush will be paying for the power to be transmitted to their rural property, which will increase their costs.

I cannot not criticise the LNP for pointing the finger at the Labor Party over the privatisation of this, because they did have a spring in their step when the retail arm was privatised. At the same time, they are going to the next election on the grounds of selling and privatising the energy network. I do not believe this will be good for anyone or good for Queensland. To see that, we only need to look at the facts and at what has occurred in the past. If we give more autonomy to these big corporate buyers to sell us electricity, they will not go out there and say, 'We will care for you. We will look after you by whatever means necessary.' They are about profits. That is why I cannot support these bills.