




Speech By
Dale Last

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

Record of Proceedings, 14 October 2015

MOTION

Electricity Industry

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (6.21 pm): I rise to speak in support of the motion moved by the member for Glass House. When it comes to electricity prices the time has come to say enough is enough. My constituents, and that includes large electricity consumers, are at the stage where they are coming to me with proposals to go off grid because they can no longer afford the skyrocketing electricity prices in Queensland.

The government's decision to raid the dividends from Energex and Ergon to prop up its budget should be seen for what it is—a blatant rip-off. Queenslanders are hurting enough without facing the ever-increasing price rises in electricity which are sending many businesses and farmers to the wall.

I recently visited the Sun Metals refinery in Townsville, one of the largest consumers of electricity in Queensland. It is a business with an annual electricity bill between \$50 million and \$60 million a year. It is a business that employs several hundred employees and is integral to the Townsville economy.

Falling commodity prices coupled with skyrocketing electricity prices mean this business is facing a bleak future. There is only so far we can pull the belt in before we choke the life out of an organisation. I fear for the future of this refinery and the staff who work there. They are not the only one. The neighbouring copper refinery owned and operated by Glencore is in a similar position.

In case members have been living under a rock, our resources sector is doing it tough at the moment. One of the biggest contributing factors is the price of electricity. These companies and others like them are central to Queensland's economy, particularly in regional Queensland. We need to be looking at every avenue to help them in these trying times. That should start with electricity prices.

I cannot believe this government is pulling nearly \$3.2 billion out of energy suppliers and the hip pockets of Queenslanders. Unlike Labor, the LNP worked hard to drive down the cost of living by removing \$7 billion of expenditure from the electricity companies. These efforts were reflected in the Australian Energy Regulator's draft determination for the 2015 to 2020 period to keep costs low. The federal regulator will soon be bringing down the Queensland decision regarding prices and we should expect more bad news for our consumers.

I recently had a delegation of farmers attend my office to express their dismay with the exorbitant electricity prices they are being forced to pay and lack of interest from this government in examining ways to reduce these costs. These farmers are so desperate they are resorting to diesel pumps which are now cheaper to operate than electric pumps. They produced electricity accounts showing increases in the order of 300 per cent over the past 10 years, with most of that increase coming in the past 12 months.

Our farmers are the backbone of our country and in the middle of a screaming drought the last thing they need are crippling electricity bills. It does not stop there. Our sporting clubs, charities and

community organisations are all feeling the pinch at a time when there has never been a greater need for their services.

Unlike our southern counterparts, we have no choice in North Queensland when it comes to electricity providers. We have Ergon and that is it. North Queenslanders have been told to grin and bear it. Let me say that the revolt is coming. They are now coming into my office looking for relief. All they are seeing on the horizon is dark clouds.

This government talks about economic development and diversifying our economy, yet they are happy to turn a blind eye to the electricity providers who, like sharks in a feeding frenzy, are feasting on ordinary Queenslanders so that they may deliver ever increasing dividends to this government. The more the government pulls out of the Energex and Ergon coffers the more these providers are looking to gouge ordinary Queenslanders.

I have a very simple message for the government: stop using our families, our pensioners, our farmers and our businesses to fund your election commitments and pay down your debts. Electricity should not be seen as a cash cow that can be milked at whim. If this government is fair dinkum about easing cost-of-living pressures then I would suggest reducing electricity prices would be a good place to start.