




Speech By
Michael Hart

MEMBER FOR BURLEIGH

Record of Proceedings, 15 June 2016

ELECTRICITY AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr HART** (Burleigh—LNP) (5.32 pm): I rise to add to the debate on the Electricity and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016. It is always a pleasure to follow the member for Logan and his highly unusual rants. He has just spent something like 10 minutes talking about relevancy. This is a bill to merge two major companies in Queensland. According to the 2015 annual report of Energex, it is a \$11.5 billion asset to the people of Queensland. Ergon, as of September 2014, is a \$13 billion enterprise that the people of Queensland own via the Queensland government. Merging those two together means we are forming \$24.5 billion worth of new company here. This is the only opportunity members of this House will have to look at this situation, put it through the committee system and thoroughly investigate whether it is a good idea for the people of Queensland. That is why it is so important for us to debate this particular issue, to discuss the committee process and to figure out what has gone wrong with that committee process. I fully support the members on this side of the House who have spoken tonight and said that the committee process in this particular case was absolutely flawed.

The member for Logan should look at the transcripts of his own committee hearing. He should look at the explanatory notes of the bill that came to his committee. He should look at his minister's speeches. If he did any of that, he would see that everything that has been mentioned here tonight is on the public record. If he chooses to write to the Speaker about the issues that were raised in the House tonight, I think he is going to come to a very short stop on that one because all of this is on the public record.

I listened closely to the minister's second reading speech yesterday and I would like to quote what he said. He said—

This bill is to help facilitate the operations of Energex and Ergon following the implementation of the electricity distribution businesses merger. It is not a bill implementing the merger itself.

That is exactly right. This is a bit of facilitating legislation. It puts in place necessary bits and pieces to make this new company a GOC. That is what this is about, but this is the only opportunity that we are going to get to talk about whether the merging of these two vital companies in Queensland is a good idea—to see whether it is a good idea to form a \$24.5 billion entity for the whole of Queensland. The Transport and Utilities Committee were unable to reach agreement on that part of the bill. Those of us on this side of the House will be opposing the bill in its entirety because the committee could not agree that the merger of these two entities to create this \$24.5 billion new entity was a good idea. That recommendation does not appear in their report and that is why we are not supporting this bill in its entirety.

This government has a habit of coming into this place and telling us how accountable they are, how transparent they are and how much consultation they do. What have we seen with this bill? We have seen absolutely no consultation with the people of Queensland. Labor members one after the other are getting up in this place and telling us that the people of Queensland did not need to talk about

this bill and that the committee did not need to travel to North Queensland. During the committee process, we did not hear from Ergon or Energex—the two companies that are being merged here. I wonder why that was. Were they directed by the minister to not in fact put in submissions? Possibly. Why was it that they did not put in a submission? Why was it that the committee did not have the opportunity to talk to the heads of Ergon and Energex about whether this merger of their two companies was a good idea? I do not know but it is certainly a question worth asking. We heard from the member for Logan that he thought this was a diligent committee process. If that is his view of a diligent committee process, I certainly have a different view.

This bill was put to the parliament on 16 March and submissions closed on 7 April, so people had only two or three weeks to look at whether this \$24.5 billion merger was a good idea and put in a submission. Is there any wonder there were only a few submissions? There was a public hearing on 20 April, the report was tabled on 12 May and here we are tonight, a short while later, debating this legislation and the merging of \$24.5 billion worth of state assets.

Let us have a look at the committee process. I read all of the transcripts and I stepped through diligently thinking that this was a major merger of a major entity worth \$24.5 billion so there was going to be quite a bit of discussion over this. The committee process started on 20 April at 9.09 in the morning and was scheduled to run for an hour. There were only two government entities there that presented to the committee. They gave their five-minute opening remarks. Half the members had their opportunity to speak and then the non-government members had their opportunity to ask questions. We saw very quickly that the questions that were asked by the members on this side of the House were shut down. They were shut down by the chair of the committee—

Mr Power interjected.

Mr HART: If the member up the back would like to read the transcript, it is open to him to review his committee's transcript and have a look and see that the chair of the committee kept—

Mr Power interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Elmes): Member for Logan, you are getting very close to a warning.

Mr HART: The chair of the committee on several occasions pointed out that time was running short, that time was running out, that they had to move on with the process, that they could not be asking those questions. What is it that the Labor Party are trying to hide in this whole process? That is what we have to ask.

Since I have been the shadow minister for energy, biofuel and water supply, I have travelled around the state quite a lot and I have spoken to quite a few independent sparkies. In fact, I have one in my family who is very concerned about this new entity that could be put in place by this merger. They are scared. I know the Master Electricians have been quoted quite a bit during the debate tonight. I will table a press release that they made wherein Mr Richards, who has been quoted a few times tonight, says—

Today is a very dark day for a lot of small businesses and the people they employ.

Tabled paper: Media release, dated 2 June 2016, from Master Electricians titled 'What ever it's called, new energy body spells trouble for businesses and jobs' [942].

I have spoken to a lot of small electrical companies that are really scared about this new business that may be formed out of this merger resulting in a \$25.4 billion company. They are worried about the future for their employees. Any members opposite who think this is a trivial issue might want to watch this space over the next couple of days. I have spoken to some of these people who are very close already to laying off staff. Because of the lack of infrastructure spending that this government is making at the moment, they are very close to laying off staff and this bill we are debating tonight will just tip them over the edge if it is passed and the merged company is formed.

In my few remaining minutes I would like to comment on the new name. The brains trust across the chamber have come up with a very flash name, Energy Queensland, and they have this wobbly looking logo. This is something that the member for Woodridge might have thought about after six o'clock at night I am sure. It is just a squiggly line on a bit of paper. It looks a bit blurry to me. I table that as well for the benefit of the House.

Tabled paper: Document, undated, depicting Energy Queensland logo [943].

(Time expired)