




Speech By
Michael Hart

MEMBER FOR BURLEIGH

Record of Proceedings, 8 August 2017

**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL:
PUBLIC WORKS AND UTILITIES COMMITTEE**

 **Mr HART** (Burleigh—LNP) (10.58 pm): The estimates process for the Public Works and Utilities Committee was nothing short of a debacle. It was a protection racket. It was a secret society. The LNP were mostly prevented from asking questions about the very important issues revolving around the electricity sector in this state. We have seen wholesale electricity prices rise by over 70 per cent since this government has been in power. Would one not think that, in a portfolio that consists of well over \$60 billion worth of assets that has income and expenses in the billions and billions of dollars, we would get the opportunity to talk to and question the CEOs of our major GOCs and our ministers? Unfortunately, in this instance we had a minister missing in action. He has been stood down because he is under suspicion of corruption and is being investigated by the CCC. In his place we had the Treasurer filling in in his portfolio, a Treasurer who had had five days to go over the portfolio and had just arrived that morning from Asia. It was very interesting when we endeavoured to ask the minister questions about those particular things.

To educate the member for Kallangur about the processes of estimates hearings it probably helps to read part of what happened on that particular day. I was talking to the CEO of Stanwell. I said—

Mr HART: Wholesale electricity prices have spiked by 60 per cent in 2016-17. Has Stanwell been using its market power to drive up electricity prices?

It was a fairly straightforward question. He replied—

CHAIR: I think there is a bit of an imputation in that question. Can you rephrase it?

Mr HART: I am sorry, but there is no imputation in that question. It is a clear question.

CHAIR: I believe there is.

Mr HART: In recent days, the chair of the ACCC has said that government owned corporations may well have been gaming the system by altering their bidding practices to push up the price of electricity. Do you agree with that statement from the chair of the ACCC?

CHAIR: I am sorry, member for Burleigh, but you are asking for an opinion. Also, you are not allowed to ask them—

Mr BAILEY: I rise to a point of order. It is the ACCC not the ACC.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Farmer): Order! There is no point of order.

Mr HART: I said ACCC. The chair went on to say—

Also, you are not allowed to ask them about their business. They run their business as they see fit.

Is that something we should be looking at during estimates committee hearings—how our GOCs run their businesses, how they make money for the people of this state and how they spend the money of this state? Is that not exactly what we are doing at estimates? No, we are stopped by the chair from asking those questions. I said to him—

Mr HART: I am sorry? I am not allowed to ask about their business?

CHAIR: You are allowed to ask questions that will otherwise assist the committee to determine whether public funds are being spent efficiently or appropriate public guarantees are being provided. I ask you to rephrase the question.

It went on and on from there. Later in the day I tried to elicit from the Treasurer whether he was aware that the electricity generators in 2015-16 had earned \$382 million, their budget in the next year 2016-17 was \$482 million but they had in fact made \$892 million. One would think that as the Treasurer of this state he would not be waking up one day and saying, 'I have an extra \$420 million lying under my pillow or in my bank account. What am I going to do about this? Where has this money suddenly come from? Why are the generators suddenly earning so much money? Maybe they are gaming the system. Maybe they are doing something to push up the income here.' This government has been taking advantage of the people of Queensland for far too long. It is about time that the people of Queensland were made aware of exactly what they are doing. Instead of that, they run a protection racket at estimates, they stop the LNP from asking legitimate questions and they stop the people of Queensland from finding out exactly what they are doing to this state.