




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD

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MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Electricity Prices

 **Mr NICHOLLS** (Clayfield—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (12.35 pm): I start by saying what a pleasure it is to congratulate the member for Toowoomba South and his wife, Mel, on the birth of their first son, Samuel, yesterday. On behalf of the House, I congratulate the member for Toowoomba South and his wife on the delivery of their son. I wish them well, and also Charlotte and Elizabeth who now have a younger brother. On behalf of the LNP and I am sure all members of the House, I pass on our congratulations and best wishes.

Before question time, we heard about this do-nothing Labor government's sham of a plan to try to buy votes before the election. We have also heard from the member for Yeerongpilly, the deleter and denier of electricity in Queensland, who stood up and repeated the same old lines and the same old stories. However, what the member for Yeerongpilly and the Premier refuse to say is that under Labor Queenslanders' power bills will still go up. I challenge the Premier and the member for Yeerongpilly to ask every Queensland: 'Will your power bill go up?' It will still go up; it is that simple. Already Queenslanders are paying record power prices because they are being taxed by stealth by a do-nothing Labor government.

Only a week ago, we heard the government urging all Queenslanders and small businesses to use less electricity. They wanted us to set our air conditioners to 26 degrees and turn off lights and applications. That alarming rhetoric underlines the fragility of our electricity system in the hands of this Labor government. As the member for Indooroopilly said, it is 96 cents and 26 degrees. That is what you get out of this Labor government. The LNP knows that there is not a family or business in Queensland not already doing what they can to conserve power in light of the Palaszczuk government's soaring power prices and secret energy tax.

Last week I travelled throughout regional Queensland as part of the LNP's assault on cost-of-living pressures. We listened to families and small businesses talk about the pressures they face from Labor's record-high power prices. At Hoolihans Irish Restaurant and Bar in Hervey Bay we talked with owner Steve Murphy and his patrons and staff, who are worried about their jobs. Steve also runs the ship-lift facility and cool stores at Urangan Bay. He is paying the price for Labor's hidden tax. We met the community group that meets at the Hervey Bay Men's Shed, where we talked to President Ian Jones, who says they have to do fundraising—members will know about the sausage sizzles that people hold at local stores—just to raise money to pay the power bills. That money goes towards nothing else. They cannot use that money to buy equipment or make further investments in their shed. They are using that money just to turn on the lights; it is just to keep the power on.

At the Mundingburra IGA, we talked with owners Maree and Adam Westbury. Whether you are at Sirrianni's IGA in Ascot or the Westbury's IGA in Mundingburra, the problems are the same: high power prices and no relief in sight from this Labor government. At the Atherton Tablelands shed meeting

we spoke with farmers, including Mario Quagliata, about the high cost of power for irrigation because people on the Tablelands have no choice. Now they are talking about installing diesel powered generators, which are cheaper than the power that they can buy off the grid from Ergon.

Whether it was the members of the Innisfail chamber of commerce who had concerns about the impact on their regular retail businesses or Brent from Cairns Car Audio & Auto Electrical who has seen his bill go up by 100 per cent in the last 12 months alone and cannot employ any more people in Cairns, the message we were hearing right across the state was pretty clear. Businesses are hurting, they are not employing and people's jobs are at risk because of Labor's record high power prices. The lights are off at Queensland Labor when it comes to energy. An economy cannot grow if it is weighed down by high costs. One of the biggest costs clearly is electricity.

By contrast, the LNP has the policies to start putting downward pressure on power prices—not subsidies, but actual structural change. We have already committed to build with the private sector a high-efficiency, low-emissions coal-fired power station in North Queensland. That means more jobs, more competition, more supply, better energy security and more certainty for consumers and businesses. The sum total is downward pressure on prices.

The LNP will freeze electricity executive bonuses until power prices decrease. Labor has rewarded executives for record high power prices. That is not fair on families or businesses. We constantly hear the member for Yeerongpilly talking about policy in a display of ignorance that is breathtaking. It is the policy that our government had when it came to executives at Queensland Rail in order to fix up Labor's then rail fail about on-time running and it is the policy that the Deputy Premier has implemented to get exactly the same outcome now—a year after their rail fail. There will be no bonuses until they fix the system.

The member for Yeerongpilly does not believe in it. I thought they were in the same faction. I thought they would at least scurry off into a corner and the member for Yeerongpilly say, 'Well, Jackie, what do you reckon? Is this going to work or not?' She would have said, 'You bet you, Mark, of course it is going to work.' He would have said, 'If you say so, Jackie, I am doing it.' We know that is how it works in the Left faction—in fact, across the caucus. He continues to deny reality. At least the Deputy Premier had the sense to adopt the LNP policy in relation to the rail fail, which she continues to preside over. The member for Yeerongpilly cannot see that the same policy should be implemented in terms of the power companies' executive bonuses.

We will scrap Labor's extreme 50 per cent renewable energy target that will cost jobs, shrink the economy, increase prices, drive up taxpayer funded subsidies and cause the sort of energy insecurity that foreshadows blackouts. How do we know? We have seen it happen in South Australia.

Mr HINCHLIFFE: I rise to a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. The Leader of the Opposition is anticipating the debate which his shadow minister foreshadowed moving a motion about at 6 pm tonight. I ask that you direct him to move on to other matters.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Crawford): Leader of the Opposition, obviously you are aware of tonight's debate so please continue.

Mr NICHOLLS: Tonight's debate refers to the 50 per cent renewable energy target of the federal Labor Party and not the current state Labor government's 50 per cent renewable energy target. I say to my friend the Leader of the House, for whom I do have some respect—as one of the surviving members of the AWU—that I am very careful with my motions.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Pause the clock. Leader of the Opposition, I am reading the motion for tonight and it does not say anything about the federal government's 50 per cent renewable energy target—

Mr NICHOLLS: I will move on.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I have not asked you to move on yet. We cannot anticipate debate on tonight's motion. Based on what is in front of me, the notice of motion moved by the member for Burleigh this morning does not talk about the federal government. It talks about the Palaszczuk government ditching its similar ideology driven policy that will hurt Queensland families.

Mr NICHOLLS: The LNP will work with farmers—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I have not asked you to continue. I am directing you not to anticipate debate on tonight's motion.

Mr NICHOLLS: The LNP will work with farmers through our agriculture and energy water council to tackle tariff reform and support our farmers. We will actually do what Labor do not do—that is, bring consumers into the room to talk to ministers and talk to the chiefs of these electricity companies and say, 'This is the impact of the decisions that you make.' That is what a proper government would do

with consumers, not appoint an acting acting agriculture minister to sprout off two weeks afterwards about some idea that he obviously cannot explain because the member for Yeerongpilly cannot explain it.

We will give consumers a voice by putting consumer representatives on the boards of Energy Queensland and Powerlink so there is a people driven focus on reducing electricity prices while maintaining reliability. The LNP is committed to providing Queenslanders with reliable power at a price they can afford. It is only the LNP that has an energy policy to put downward pressure on prices, to actually solve the problem and create more jobs for Queenslanders.

What is the legacy of the Palaszczuk Labor government over this term? The facts are this. Queenslanders are paying the highest power prices ever under a do-nothing Labor government. Queensland currently derives just four per cent of its power from renewables yet spends more than any other state propping up green schemes. Labor uses power bills as a secret tax. The fact is that if Labor get back in, we will have another term of soaring power prices, unreliable power and reckless policies which will leave Queenslanders in the dark.

It was the LNP that reported Stanwell to the ACCC for price gouging while the Premier stood by as Queensland families were ripped off. We acted to give Queenslanders a fair go. Just last week, in light of the LNP's advocacy, the ACCC interim report confirmed what Queenslanders have long known—the Premier's failed power policies have been front and centre of the great power rip-off. The report showed Labor's policies resulted in record electricity prices for all Queensland families, businesses and industries.

It is a tale of two Annas—Bligh who gold plated the network and Palaszczuk who has gone even further with extreme green schemes, her secret power tax and her union-friendly pay deal. All of Labor's policies are increasing electricity prices, whether it is the three per cent wage increase for electricity workers—more than that for teachers, nurses and ambulance officers—the 50 per cent renewable energy target—

(Time expired)