

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A

REPORT TO THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF QUEENSLAND

Legislative Assembly

Report No. 1

October 1998

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Report to the Legislative Assembly

Estimates Committee A presents this report to the Legislative Assembly in relation to the estimates of expenditure for the Legislative Assembly of Queensland.

1.2 Sessional Orders dated 15 September 1998

The Legislative Assembly, pursuant to Sessional Orders adopted on 15 September 1998, appointed seven estimates committees to inquire into the estimates of expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 1998 and the Appropriation (Parliament) Bill 1998.

This committee, being Estimates Committee A, had the following organisational units allocated to it:

- Office of the Governor;
- Legislative Assembly;
- Queensland Audit Office;
- Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations;
- Criminal Justice Commission;
- Department of the Premier and Cabinet;
- Department of State Development ;
- Treasury Department; and
- Any other organisational units within the portfolios of the Premier, the Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development and Minister for Trade and the Treasurer.

Sessional Order 30(2) requires that Estimates Committee A presents two reports; one for the Legislative Assembly and another for the other organisational units allocated to it. The committee has reported separately in relation to the other organisational units allocated to it.

The committee has now considered the estimates referred to it in relation to the Legislative Assembly and has met in public session to receive evidence from the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly. The committee will be tabling separately in the Legislative Assembly additional information which it has received and the minutes of the committee's meetings.

2. OVERVIEW

The Legislative Assembly of Queensland consists of 89 Members who discharge a range of important legislative and constituency responsibilities.

The mission of the Parliamentary Service, established under the *Parliamentary Service Act 1988* (Qld), is to pursue excellence in providing services to the Queensland Parliament and its Members.

The committee notes that a new program structure for the Parliament has been introduced in 1998-99 in order to facilitate the transition to Managing for Outcomes for 1999-2000. However, there will be no significant change in management structure as a consequence of this change.

The total budget estimate for the Legislative Assembly in 1998-99 is \$43.91M, which is an increase of approximately 3.8 per cent over the previous year's budget. A number of those areas to which this increase relates are elaborated upon in this report.

The 1998 estimates process was a little unusual because, as the Treasurer outlined in his Budget speech, the current Government retained the essential core of the previous administration's May budget. As a consequence, the committee did not, in some portfolio areas including the Legislative Assembly, undertake such a detailed examination of the estimates as would normally have been expected, and this is reflected in the committee's report.

3. MAJOR INITIATIVES FOR 1998-99

The committee discusses below, under relevant program headings, specific issues it raised with Mr Speaker.

3.1 Legislative, Information and Education Services

The committee notes that the budget estimates include an amount of \$0.4M to meet the salary-related costs for the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Criminal Justice. At the hearing, the committee was advised that additional funding in the order of \$0.3M to \$0.35M is expected to be made available in the half-yearly review to meet the actual running costs of the Office.

The committee sought further information at the hearing concerning the school and public tours program. Mr Speaker advised the committee that the free Sunday public tours of the parliamentary precinct had been well received and would continue during 1998-99. Under the program, which commenced in May 1998, over 80 Sunday tours had been conducted to date. Mr Speaker stated that there would be no charge for tours and expressed his belief that the Parliament should be as accessible to the community as possible.

3.2 Accommodation and Hospitality Services

Mr Speaker advised the committee that the important work on the preservation of Parliament House would continue through the Stonework Restoration Program. The

committee notes that the second part of stage 4 is scheduled to be completed in 1998-99. The committee also notes that the Legislative Assembly's budget allocation for this work in 1998-99 is \$0.1M and that the Department of Public Works and Housing will contribute \$0.5M towards the project.

The budget provides an amount of \$2M in 1998-99 to continue the refurbishment of the Parliamentary Annexe which will be conducted in accordance with the Parliamentary Service Physical Asset Strategic Plan. In answer to a question at the hearing, Mr Speaker advised that the internal refurbishment of Levels 15-18 would proceed this financial year and that an additional block of four meeting rooms on Level 5 had just been completed. Mr Speaker further advised that additional office accommodation would become available on Level 6 as a consequence of the refurbishment.

3.3 Constituency Services

At the hearing, the committee sought from Mr Speaker further information concerning resources for Members' electorate offices. The committee was pleased to hear that the additional funding for extra part-time staffing introduced during 1997-98 would continue during 1998-99.

3.4 Corporate Services

The committee is pleased to note that the budget provides additional funding of \$0.4M to improve the functionality of the Parliament House computer network. This initiative will greatly enhance Members' access to technology and allow them to more effectively serve their constituents. The plan involves replacing the current computer network cabling in the Parliamentary Annexe and Parliament House with fibre optic cabling to provide a solid infrastructure with sufficient bandwidth to develop and expand information technology communications within the parliamentary precinct.

4. CONCLUSION

The committee supports Parliament's independent administration of its own affairs and believes that a separate Appropriation Bill for the Parliament is essential to ensure the separation and independence of the Parliament from the Executive.

The committee appreciates the cooperation afforded to it by Mr Speaker and officers of the Parliamentary Service during the estimates process.

A number of general comments as to the estimates process are contained in the committee's Report No.2.

The committee has agreed to the proposed expenditure referred to it, without amendment.

5. RECOMMENDATION

The committee recommends that the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

John Mickel MLA
Chair