

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE D

REPORT TO THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF QUEENSLAND

1998

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE D

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page no.
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. EXAMINATION OF THE PROPOSED EXPENDITURE	2
2.1. ESTIMATES FOR THE MINISTER FOR PRIMARY INDUSTRIES	2
2.1.1. <i>Agriculture Industry Development Program</i>	2
2.1.2. <i>Animal and Plant Health Service Program</i>	2
2.1.3. <i>Papaya Fruit Fly Eradication</i>	3
2.1.4. <i>Sugarcane Smut Quarantine Restrictions</i>	3
2.1.5. <i>Fisheries Program</i>	3
2.1.6. <i>Aquaculture</i>	4
2.1.7. <i>Rural Industry Business Services Program</i>	4
2.1.8. <i>Access to information technology by primary producers</i>	4
2.1.9. <i>Forest Production Program</i>	5
2.1.10. <i>Regional Forest Agreement structural adjustment</i>	5
2.1.11. <i>Corporate Performance and Strategies Program</i>	5
2.1.12. <i>National Competition Policy</i>	6
2.1.13. <i>Millennium bug</i>	6
2.1.14. <i>Other matters</i>	6
2.2. ESTIMATES FOR THE MINISTER FOR FAMILIES, YOUTH AND COMMUNITY CARE AND MINISTER FOR DISABILITY SERVICES	6
2.2.1. <i>Child care</i>	7
2.2.2. <i>Multipurpose community centres</i>	7
2.2.3. <i>Seniors Card Motor Vehicle Registration Concession scheme</i>	7
2.2.4. <i>Gaming Machine Community Benefit Fund</i>	8
2.2.5. <i>Gambling Help-Line</i>	8
2.2.6. <i>Relocation of people residing at the Challinor Centre at Ipswich and the Basil Stafford Centre at Wacol</i>	8
2.2.7. <i>The Child Protection Bill 1998</i>	8
2.2.8. <i>Community Juvenile Justice Centres</i>	9
2.2.9. <i>Youth Advisory Forums</i>	9
2.2.10. <i>Corporate Services Program</i>	9
2.2.11. <i>Other matters</i>	10
2.3. ESTIMATES FOR THE MINISTER FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER POLICY AND MINISTER FOR WOMEN'S POLICY AND MINISTER FOR FAIR TRADING 10	
2.3.1. <i>Departments' formation costs</i>	11
2.3.2. <i>Responsibility for the Shop Retail Leases Act 1984</i>	12
2.3.3. <i>Queensland Building Tribunal</i>	12
2.3.4. <i>Fair Trading offices</i>	13
2.3.5. <i>Office of Women's Policy</i>	13
2.3.6. <i>Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy</i>	14
2.3.7. <i>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Infrastructure Program</i>	14
2.3.8. <i>Other Matters</i>	15
3. RECOMMENDATION	15
4. OBSERVATIONS ON THE ESTIMATES PROCESS	15
5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	16
STATEMENT OF RESERVATIONS	Error! Bookmark not defined.



1. INTRODUCTION

On 15 September 1998, the Legislative Assembly appointed seven estimates Committees to inquire into the proposed expenditures contained in the *Appropriation Bill 1998* and the *Appropriation (Parliament) Bill 1998*.

Under the Sessional Orders adopted by the Assembly on that day, this committee was allocated the organisational units within the portfolios of the following ministers:

- Minister for Primary Industries;
- Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care and Minister for Disability Services; and
- Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Women's Policy and Minister for Fair Trading.

Estimates Committee D has now considered the estimates referred to it and has met in public session to receive evidence from the relevant ministers and supporting officers. Accordingly, Estimates Committee D presents this report to the Legislative Assembly.

Further information, received as a result of questions asked before and during the public session, will be presented to the House as a volume of Additional Information accompanying this report. That volume will also include the minutes of the committee's meetings.

The committee asked twenty pre-hearing questions on notice of each of the three ministers. Five questions were taken on notice at the public hearing by the Minister for Primary Industries, five by the Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care and Minister for Disability Services and four by the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Women's Policy and Minister for Fair Trading.

One non-committee Member, Miss Fiona Simpson MLA, was granted leave to attend the committee's public session and asked questions of the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Women's Policy and Minister for Fair Trading.

2. EXAMINATION OF THE PROPOSED EXPENDITURE

2.1. ESTIMATES FOR THE MINISTER FOR PRIMARY INDUSTRIES

The committee examined proposed expenditure of \$381.029 million, an increase of \$7.707 million over actual outlays for 1997-98, and an increase of \$9.956 million over the budget allocation for 1997-98.

2.1.1. Agriculture Industry Development Program

The committee inquired about how the department is addressing the possible implications for Queensland primary producers arising out of the USA's current approach to farm viability. The minister informed the committee of initiatives that the department is pursuing to assist farm viability in Queensland, including:

- refocussing the *Futureprofit* Program (formerly Property Management Planning) to a whole-systems approach, enabling producers to apply strategic planning skills to the social, financial, natural resource and production aspects of farm management;
- emphasising market diversification for Queensland producers, including in Eastern Europe and the Middle East; and
- conducting programs such as chemical residue audits of high risk livestock properties to maintain and enhance Queensland's reputation as a supplier of clean and 'green' food.

The minister was asked whether the intensive livestock industries are operating on an environmentally sustainable basis. The committee was advised that the department is assisting with the development of environmental codes of practice in a number of intensive livestock industries, including the pig industry and the dairy industry. The minister informed the committee that the development of the codes of practice will assist the industry to comply with the *Environmental Protection Act 1994*. In addition, the department is undertaking research to achieve a better understanding of the nutrient value of animal wastes and their utilisation as alternative fertiliser sources.

2.1.2. Animal and Plant Health Service Program

The minister informed the committee that the integrated pest management program for the control of strawberry mites has encountered problems, due to detrimental quarantine protocols imposed by southern states for the control Queensland fruit fly. Nevertheless, it is conservatively estimated that 30% of strawberry producers are involved in the strawberry mite integrated pest management program.

The committee was informed that an allocation of \$1.07m for 1998-99 will be made to the Northwatch program. The program is a new initiative to enhance the protection of agricultural industries from pest and disease incursions in remote

areas of Queensland, including the Cape York Peninsula and the Torres Strait Islands.

2.1.3. Papaya Fruit Fly Eradication

Quarantine restrictions relating to the Papaya Fruit Fly Eradication Program were lifted in August 1998, and the program is expected to be completed in the middle of 1999. The committee notes that this completion date is a year ahead of schedule.

During the committee's public hearing, the minister informed the committee that the final cost of the Papaya Fruit Fly Eradication Program to the Queensland Government is estimated at \$13.5m. In answer to a pre-hearing question on notice, the minister advised the committee that the reduction in the overall budget of the Animal and Plant Health sub-program for 1998-99 results mainly from a decrease of approximately \$9m in the allocation for the Papaya Fruit Fly Eradication Program. Nevertheless, an allocation of \$2m for 1998-99 will allow ongoing monitoring of the region through the coming wet season to validate area freedom from Papaya Fruit Fly, and gain international recognition of eradication of the pest.

2.1.4. Sugarcane Smut Quarantine Restrictions

The committee inquired whether the minister was satisfied with the measures put in place to ensure that the integrity of Queensland's quarantine response to the outbreak of sugarcane smut in the Ord River region of Western Australia is not compromised by the movement of tourists and visitors from that area to Queensland through Queensland airports.

The minister informed the committee that he was not satisfied with the initial measures implemented in response to the outbreak, and had directed that the protocols be revisited. Subsequently, regulations were gazetted under the *Plant Protection Act 1989* to prevent the entry of sugarcane smut contaminated materials. The regulations require that those entering canefields in the Ord River region must wash clothing and shoes before returning to Queensland. In addition, the department has erected targeted signage in Queensland to create awareness among the travelling public, and has alerted tour operators who conduct tours to the Ord River from Queensland of the quarantine requirements. The minister informed the committee that, to date, there is no evidence of any sugarcane smut in Queensland.

2.1.5. Fisheries Program

A fishing industry management plan is now in place in the Gulf of Carpentaria. The plan involves industry paying a levy in order to contribute to a buy-back scheme of commercial fishing licences. The committee was informed that the department will at least match the money generated by the Gulf fishing industry through the levy payments.

The minister advised the committee that the implementation of the plan in the Gulf is in line with the department's longer term approach to resource protection in the fishing industry.

The minister informed the committee that Queensland's recreational fishing services continue to be supported by a levy of \$12 on the annual registration fee for private vessels (introduced in 1995-96), which raises \$1.6m annually. The revenue is assigned to the department for distribution. Due to a small carryover from previous years, \$1.7m is allocated for the support of recreational fishing services in 1998-99. In 1998-99, \$1.013m of these funds has been allocated to the Queensland Fisheries Management Authority and \$0.652m has been allocated to DPI Fisheries.

2.1.6. Aquaculture

The minister informed the committee that priority had been given to the Northern Fisheries Reef Fish Research Project, including the redevelopment of the Northern Fisheries Centre in Cairns and the further development of the Green Island Reef Fish Aquaculture Facilities, through a funding allocation of \$0.5m in 1998-99. The minister advised the committee that it was decided that the western Queensland aquaculture initiative, aimed at encouraging producers to diversify into freshwater aquaculture, was appropriately given a lower priority until two national projects which will contribute to an understanding of inland aquaculture are under way.

The committee notes that total funding for marine and freshwater aquaculture is \$7.549m in 1998-99, an increase of \$1.536m from the \$6.013m actual allocation for the aquaculture and industry development sub-program in 1997-98.

2.1.7. Rural Industry Business Services Program

The minister advised the committee that the review of the State Drought Policy and the Drought Rural Adjustment Scheme is ongoing, and is scheduled to be completed by the middle of 1999. Nine percent of Queensland remains drought declared. The minister informed the committee that, as a consequence, completion of the review at this stage would not yield relevant or worthwhile information and might cause confusion amongst producers who are accessing assistance under present arrangements.

The committee inquired about how the department has incorporated into the Rural Market Development program the potential impact of the USA's initiative to revive its rural economy through exports. The committee was advised that the department is seeking to counter the effects of the US drive by continuing to focus on seeking new markets through gathering intelligence on alternative markets, gaining better market access for agricultural products, keeping up to date with events in existing markets and providing sufficient information to producers for them to act upon.

2.1.8. Access to information technology by primary producers

The minister informed the committee that access to information by primary producers has been improved through a \$0.2m investment to establish a mobile

training room attended by qualified lecturers and equipped with 12 laptop computers. The committee was advised that DPI Web Services is actively building the quality and range of information that can be accessed through the department's web sites.

2.1.9. Forest Production Program

The committee was informed that the 1998-99 target of 450 hectares for the expansion of farm forestry plantations reflects increased expressions of interest and equity sharing by private landholders, and is up from 335 hectares in 1997-98. The Hardwood Plantation New Initiative will promote the growth of a sustainable timber industry, and has a funding allocation of \$0.8m for 1998-99.

The committee was advised that during the latter part of 1998 or the early part of 1999, the department will proceed to call for expressions of interest in the purchase of a major volume of uncommitted exotic pine resources from the Gympie-Maryborough plantations. This will be undertaken once DPI Forestry has completed its strategic review of management options to increase supplies of exotic pine resources in late 1998.

2.1.10. Regional Forest Agreement structural adjustment

The minister informed the committee about funding allocated to provide assistance to the forest industry for structural adjustment costs relating to the implementation of the Regional Forest Agreement in south east Queensland. The program is a joint initiative with the Commonwealth Government aimed at promoting sustainable development of the native hardwood forest resource. In response to committee questioning about why the allocation for the program over four years of \$12m in the Coalition's May 1998 budget had been reduced by \$1m to \$11m in the current budget, the minister advised that \$11m had been budgeted over four years, with only \$2m allocated in the first year (rather than \$3m under the Coalition budget plans), because of a delayed start to the program. The minister added that the reduced allocation in the first year does not necessarily indicate reduced support for industry assistance or structural adjustment by the Government, as it was always intended that this aspect be further considered in the overall RFA outcomes.

2.1.11. Corporate Performance and Strategies Program

The minister informed the committee that the conference facilities that had previously been planned for Kingaroy had now been downgraded to meeting facilities attached to the Kingaroy DPI office. The minister advised that he had been informed by members of the Kingaroy community that, if the department proceeded with the planned \$2m conference facility, it would stall development of a large privately-funded motel complex with its own conference centre. The committee was advised that the funding previously allocated to the Kingaroy facility had been redirected to the Heliopsis initiative, funding for which had been agreed to by the former Coalition Cabinet at its meeting of 12 May 1998 but had not been included in the Coalition's Budget of 14 May 1998.

2.1.12. National Competition Policy

The committee was advised that National Competition Policy reviews will be undertaken in 1998-99 in relation to the *Farm Produce Marketing Act 1964*, *Fisheries Act 1994*, *Forestry Act 1959*, *Agricultural Chemicals Distribution Control Act 1966/ Chemical Usage (Agricultural and Veterinary) Control Act 1988*, *Sawmills Licensing Act 1936*, and the *Veterinary Surgeons Act 1936*. Reviews have been completed in relation to the sugar industry, the dairy industry and the grains industry.

2.1.13. Millennium bug

In relation to year 2000 information technology issues, the department has: approached the vendors of micro-chip controlled equipment for statements of compliance; obtained advice from those vendors on the action necessary to achieve compliance; requested compliance statements from suppliers of critical goods and services; upgraded, modified or replaced business systems as necessary; and developed a range of contingency plans.

2.1.14. Other matters

The minister informed the committee that funding of \$5.2m over four years has been provided for initiatives relating to the Government's response to Greenhouse climatic change. Key elements of those initiatives are the development of a State-wide land use and forestry database and an interactive Geographic Information System. Vegetable management will be facilitated to meet greenhouse targets, biodiversity objectives and sustainable development objectives.

2.2. ESTIMATES FOR THE MINISTER FOR FAMILIES, YOUTH AND COMMUNITY CARE AND MINISTER FOR DISABILITY SERVICES

The committee examined proposed expenditure of \$621.571 million, compared with the \$537.703 million reported budget allocation for 1997-98 and \$575.144 million in actual outlays for 1997-98. The two largest components of the department's 1998-99 budget—the Community Care Program and the Disability Program—have been respectively allocated \$225.009 million and \$226.762 million for 1998-99.

Key issues for the department in 1998-99 include:

- developing, passing and implementing the Child Protection Bill 1998;
- strengthening the partnership between the department and the community sector in delivering core services;
- relocating residents of the Challinor Centre at Ipswich and providing alternative accommodation for residents of the Basil Stafford Centre at Wacol;
- addressing unmet needs for people with a disability and their families (with funding of \$126m over four years) and delivering those services in a manner

that is specifically targeted to remote areas of the State ('local area co-ordination');

- re-integrating the juvenile justice program; and
- committing funds totalling \$25m over four years to help non-Government organisations funded by the department meet new industrial awards and increases in mandatory employer superannuation schemes. (The committee was advised that these funds include \$2.205m in 1998-99 and \$3.075 on a recurrent basis thereafter for the Crisis Assistance and Supported Housing Award; and \$2.256m on a recurrent basis for the Social and Community Services Award.)

2.2.1. Child care

The Minister informed the committee that an additional \$17.4m over four years would be provided by the department to improve child care services. This consists of the following funding.

- \$14m over four years for capital and equipment grants to non-Government community based child care providers, particularly those who have had their Commonwealth operational funding withdrawn. The funding will assist child care organisations to obtain such things as play equipment and to enhance their facilities.
- \$2.4m over three years for construction of three new work-based child care facilities for employees at major public sector workplaces, such as hospitals and TAFE colleges (making available 150 new places).
- \$1m over four years to expand the Outside School Hours Activities for Young People Program for 13 to 15 year olds (making available 350 places).

2.2.2. Multipurpose community centres

In response to the committee directing the minister's attention to the reduction of allocated funds for multipurpose community centres—from the 1997-98 actual expenditure of \$2.179m to a 1998-99 estimate of \$1.597m—the minister responded that the existing program to build such centres at Miles, Acacia Ridge, Nambour, Edmonton and Cannonvale was nearly completed, with construction of the centres being almost finalised. The minister informed the committee that there is no budget allocation at this stage to expand the program beyond those five centres.

2.2.3. Seniors Card Motor Vehicle Registration Concession scheme

The committee noted that the Budget included the proposal in the Coalition's May 1998 Budget to assist at least 28,800 older people through the reintroduction of the Seniors Card Motor Vehicle Registration Concession. Under the scheme, older people will benefit from a 50% reduction in the motor vehicle component of the motor vehicle registration fee, which equates with a saving of approximately \$100 per vehicle.

2.2.4. Gaming Machine Community Benefit Fund

The minister notified the committee that the increase in the number of projects funded by the Gaming Machine Community Benefit Fund—from 2,298 actual projects in 1997-98 to 2,400 estimated projects in 1998-99—was due to an expected increase in gambling revenue for the Fund, rather than a greater number of smaller allocations.

2.2.5. Gambling Help-Line

The minister stated that \$300,000 has been allocated for a toll-free Gambling Help-Line being piloted in Mount Isa, Rockhampton and Cairns, with \$100,000 allocated for each of the pilots.

2.2.6. Relocation of people residing at the Challinor Centre at Ipswich and the Basil Stafford Centre at Wacol

The closure of the Challinor Centre and the relocation of the 59 people still residing there as at September 1998 remains an on-going project for the department. Sixteen of the residents will be moved to community-based accommodation. The remaining 43 will be moved to two smaller centres (each with the capacity to accommodate up to 24 people) to be constructed. An allocation of \$2.1m has been made in the 1998-99 budget for the construction of these two centres. A site has been located in Loganlea (Brisbane South) for one centre, whilst the department is looking for a site in the Ipswich area for the second centre. The minister outlined the process the department has undertaken, and continues to undertake, to consult the communities living near the identified sites about the proposed centres.

In relation to assisting residents of the Basil Stafford Centre to relocate to community accommodation, the minister advised that funding totalling \$11.6m has been provided over four years. \$1.279m is allocated for 1998-99; \$2.281m for 1999-2000; \$6.411m for 2000-2001; and \$1.619m for 2001-2002 and following years. Up to 65 people will relocate from the centre over three years.

2.2.7. The Child Protection Bill 1998

The minister expects to introduce the Child Protection Bill 1998 into the Legislative Assembly during 1998-99. The committee questioned the Minister about what the department was doing to implement the draft Bill and what funding had been allocated for implementation. The Minister informed the committee that implementation of the Bill would involve two phases. The first phase relates to education/consultation about the proposed legislation prior to its proclamation. This first stage has begun, and involves:

- the department holding information seminars in Brisbane (already held), Cairns, Townsville, Rockhampton, Mount Isa and Toowoomba to provide non-Government agencies, peak groups and other interested persons with information about the proposed legislation and an opportunity for them to provide feedback;

- identified stake-holders being provided with information kits on the proposed legislation (500 sent to date);
- the minister holding two 'round table discussions' with peak agencies and welfare groups and individuals working in the child protection area (one discussion has already been held);
- regional officers undertaking targeted consultation with key interest groups in their own regions; and
- advertising for public submissions.

The minister stated that funding for the first stage of implementation is coming from the base funding for the Families Program. Because the minister expects that the Bill will be introduced but not be proclaimed within this financial year, funding for the second, post-proclamation phase of implementation will come from next year's budget.

2.2.8. Community Juvenile Justice Centres

The minister told the committee that funding of \$6.3m will be provided over four years to establish three pilot Community Juvenile Justice Centres. The centres will be strategically located at Logan City, Townsville and Ipswich. The centres will, amongst other things, aim to integrate recidivist young offenders subject to court orders into the community by addressing the causes of their offending behaviour.

2.2.9. Youth Advisory Forums

Between mid-July 1998 and early September 1998, Youth Advisory Forums were conducted in the following shires: Crows Nest, Cloncurry, Ilfracombe, Boonah, Clifton, Pittsworth, Kingaroy, Nanango, Miriam Vale (Agnes Waters), Banana (Biloela), Monto and Whitsundays (Proserpine). The locations were selected by a Steering Committee of the Local Government Association of Queensland to give priority to rural and remote young people. Also in early September 1998, the Apunipima Cape York Health Council conducted a Youth Advisory Forum. That forum targeted young indigenous people from 16 communities in the Cape York Peninsula.

2.2.10. Corporate Services Program

At the hearing, the committee questioned the minister about the increase in funding for the Information Management Sub-Program of the Corporate Services Program from actual expenditure in 1997-98 of \$10.522m to an allocation of \$12.366m for 1998-99. The committee was advised that the increase consisted of \$0.305m allocated for year 2000 information technology projects; \$0.163m for the 2.5% supplementation from Treasury for enterprise bargaining initiatives; \$0.2m for administrative work associated with the Forde Inquiry; \$0.209m for anticipated machinery-of-Government changes; \$0.404m for implementation of a system for anticipated changes to juvenile justice (carried over); \$0.295m for additional payroll,

finance and information technology staff relating to new departmental initiatives; and 'minor adjustments' of \$0.232m.

The committee was also provided with information about where, and at what cost, ten area offices were expected to be relocated or upgraded during 1998-99.

The committee also questioned the minister about the 1998-99 budget figures relating to capital outlays for the Corporate Services Program's office accommodation fit-outs (\$70,000) and the Disability Program's office accommodation fit-outs (\$535,000). The committee asked why those figures differed from the Coalition's May budget figures for the same items (\$170,000 and \$635,000 respectively). The committee was informed that the reason for the difference was that the May budget figures were based on 1997-98 estimated actuals and expectations that the office fit-out program would not be completed, with a carryover of \$100,000 in office fit-outs for both programs. However, the department managed to complete its office accommodation fit-out projects and the carryover of \$100,000 for each Program did not eventuate.

2.2.11. Other matters

Other matters examined by the committee included the following: recent departmental consultancies; the components of the 1998-99 budget allocation for the Forde Inquiry; staffing levels in the office of the director-general; training for community workers to conduct parent education courses for vulnerable families; amendments to the *Child Care Act 1991* and its regulations aimed to better protect child care users; the processes involved in non-Governmental agencies applying for departmental funding; (lack of) funding for the Shaftesbury centre; the Moving Ahead Program; strategies for increasing the participation of youth across government and the community, including the Youth Charter; prevention initiatives in relation to youth suicide, self-harm and offending; amendments to domestic violence legislation; and Y2K compliance.

2.3. ESTIMATES FOR THE MINISTER FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER POLICY AND MINISTER FOR WOMEN'S POLICY AND MINISTER FOR FAIR TRADING

The estimates allocated to Estimates Committee D for the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Women's Policy and Minister for Fair Trading are administered by two departments: the Department of Equity and Fair Trading (DEFT) and the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development (DATSIPD).

In relation to DEFT, the committee examined proposed expenditure of \$46.273m, compared with the \$36.259m reported budget allocation for 1997-98 and \$31.862m in reported actual outlays for 1997-98.

DEFT comprises the Office of Fair Trading, formerly the Office of Consumer Affairs with the Department of Justice, and the Office of Women's Policy, formerly the

Office of Women's Affairs with Queensland Treasury, together with a newly created Corporate and Executive Services area, shared with DATSIPD. Of the \$46.273m DEFT budget for 1998-99, \$41.510m is allocated for the Fair Trading Program and \$4.763m is allocated for the Office of Women's Policy.

In relation to DATSIPD, the committee examined proposed expenditure of \$104.397m, compared with the \$85.363m reported budget allocation for 1997-98 and \$92.553m in reported actual outlays for 1997-98.

DATSIPD is made up of the former Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Infrastructure Program and the Office of Indigenous Affairs, together with a newly created Corporate and Executive Services area, shared with DEFT. Of the \$104.397m DATSIPD budget for 1998-99, \$55.384m is allocated for the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and \$49.013m is allocated for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Infrastructure Program.

Both departments represent the amalgamation of a number of entities previously supported by other areas of Government.

2.3.1. Departments' formation costs

In response to a pre-hearing question on notice about the costs associated with the formation of the departments in their current form as separate entities, the minister provided the committee with the following estimated costs. The total cost for the formation of DEFT is \$2,090,263. This total cost is made up of the following components:

- project team costs (salary and administrative cost of the team needed to set up the corporate support arrangements) of \$300,000;
- IT migration/support costs (moving the Office of Fair Trading's IT system from the Department of Justice to a system compatible with the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care, and providing IT support in 1998-99; and salary support costs) of \$1,448,000;
- SAP (financial system) set-up of \$136,800;
- relocation of the Office of Women's Policy to 18th Floor, Mineral House at a cost of \$45,241; and
- fit-out of 18th Floor of Mineral House to house the director-general and officers from both DEFT and DATSIPD of \$160,222.

The total cost for the formation of DATSIPD is \$550,015. The (related) components of this total are: project team costs—\$200,000; IT migration/support costs—\$152,000; SAP set-up—\$91,200; and fit-out of 18th Floor of Mineral House—\$106,815.

In response to questions asked at the Hearing, the minister advised the committee that the ministerial office budget for the shift to Mineral House amounted to \$368,399. However, the minister said that this was not necessarily a ministerial

office upgrade but rather a relocation allowing the minister to be near the heads of each departmental agency (themselves brought together from 5 different locations). The minister informed the committee that rent for the former Environment Minister's office was still being paid by Queensland Property Management and that such rental has not come out of the department's budget thus far.

The committee was also informed that the current director-general had been identified as the most appropriate person for the job and employed on that basis, and that the position had not been advertised. The committee also examined the number of SES positions and temporary positions in the department and the process of selection in relation to them. The committee specifically questioned the minister about the process and timetable followed for the appointment of a person previously engaged as a consultant by the department to one of these temporary positions.

2.3.2. Responsibility for the *Shop Retail Leases Act 1984*

The committee asked the minister about the transfer of the responsibility for the *Shop Retail Leases Act 1984* from what is now the Department of State Development (DSD) to the Office of Fair Trading. The minister stated that, while shop retail lease legislation is often located in fair trading departments in other states, the minister was not convinced, at least at this stage, that the Office of Fair Trading was the appropriate agency to administer the act. The minister also advised the committee that, while the personnel administering the Act had been transferred to DEFT from DSD, interdepartmental discussions were on-going in relation to funding and final, day-to-day responsibilities, in relation to the Act. Nevertheless, the committee was informed that there had been no change in terms of service delivery in relation to the Act and that administration of the Act has continued uninterrupted by the machinery-of-Government change.

2.3.3. Queensland Building Tribunal

The committee questioned the minister about domestic building disputes finalised by hearing (not mediation) by the Queensland Building Tribunal (QBT). In an answer to questions taken on notice by the minister during the hearing, the minister informed the committee of the following.

- In 1996-97, the QBT finalised by hearing 209 cases out of a total of 702 domestic building dispute applications (carried over from 1995-96 plus new). In 1997-98, 141 cases were settled by hearing out of a total of 620 applications.
- In 1996-97, the QBT took an average of 35 days (median 34 days) from receipt of the application to finalise by hearing 50% of domestic building disputes. In 1997-98, the QBT took an average of 36 days (median 35 days) to finalise 50% of such disputes.

The committee was advised that the QBT does not compile costs for each domestic building dispute determined by hearing. The estimated cost to the QBT for a domestic building dispute which is finalised by hearing is \$1,023 (without any pre-hearing mediation costs). This estimated cost is calculated based on staff costs, accommodation and equipment costs, members' fees and registry costs.

2.3.4. Fair Trading offices

The minister advised the committee that there was no funding dedicated in this budget for the establishment of any new Fair Trading offices. Such funding would be deferred to the 1999-2000 budget, after appropriate regional needs analyses were finalised this financial year.

2.3.5. Office of Women's Policy

The minister outlined a number of initiatives designed to benefit women in regional, rural and remote communities. The Rural Women's Consultative Council will be retained and—in response to the wishes of the Council—its secretariat will be relocated from the Office of Women's Policy to the Office of Rural Communities. The Council's funding will nevertheless continue to come from DEFT. In addition, a Women and Reconciliation Program will be established, and \$1.6m over four years has also been allocated to for providing access to information technology to women in rural and remote communities.

The minister informed the committee that the Office of Women's Policy has been allocated \$1m in additional funding in 1998-99 for domestic violence programs. The minister intends to devote half of that money to domestic violence programs for Indigenous people.

The committee asked the minister why the allocation by the Office of Women's Policy for a prevention and treatment strategy for eating disorders (\$0.41m) was half that allocated for the strategy by the Coalition in its May 1998 Budget. The minister replied that she had been informed that a certain amount of funding for the strategy was to be devoted to advertising and that she had been advised that advertising in this area was often counterproductive, if effective at all. The minister advised that the \$.04m not retained for the eating disorder program was redirected to the above-mentioned initiative of providing IT to women in rural and regional Queensland.

2.3.6. Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy

The committee notes the continuing appalling over-representation of Indigenous people in custody. While Indigenous Queenslanders represent 3% of the population, they represent nearly 50% of the population in juvenile justice centres and close to 33% of the people in custody in adult centres. The minister advised the committee of steps being taken to address this situation: annual reports by the department with respect to Aboriginal deaths in custody; preparing Indigenous Justice agreements and other agreements with Commonwealth and other State agencies to address the problem; and the Local Justice Initiatives Program. The minister subsequently forwarded to the committee substantial information relating to the Local Justice Initiatives Program and an assessment of the work done by Community Justice Groups.

During the hearing, the minister also informed the committee about the importance of the department's lead agency role in developing:

- the proposed whole-of-Government anti-racism strategy; and
- culturally appropriate mechanisms aimed at redressing the high rate of youth suicide and youth homelessness amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

2.3.7. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Infrastructure Program

The total allocation for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Infrastructure Program for 1998-99 is \$49m. The 1997-98 budget allocation was \$36.4m and the actual outlay for 1997-98 was \$38.5m. The minister answered committee questions in relation to: measures that are undertaken by the department to ensure that money allocated for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander infrastructure goes to where it is intended; the level of spending of funds allocated for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Infrastructure Program since its establishment in late 1995; and why infrastructure projects in Indigenous communities are often delayed or take longer than similar projects in other parts of the State.

2.3.8. Other Matters

Other matters examined by the committee included the following: continuation of the production of the Queensland Woman newspaper; legislation to replace the *Auctioneers and Agents Act 1971*; the benefits of annual grants to the Kidsafe organisation; departmental investigations into dubious door-to-door trading; the proposed Register of Encumbered Boats; the development of the Retirement Villages Bill; the Auctioneers and Agents Fidelity Guarantee Fund; implementation of changes to the *Residential Tenancies Act 1994* that commence on 1 December 1998; the Building Services Authority and security of payment to subcontractors; the Indigenous Advisory Council; the Palm Island Mentoring Program; funding for women's health services; funding for domestic violence initiatives across other portfolios; and the Community Jobs Plan issued by the Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations aimed at increasing support for women in rural and remote Queensland.

3. RECOMMENDATION

The committee agrees to the proposed expenditures contained in the *Appropriation Bill 1998* for the organisational units referred to it under the Sessional Orders of 15 September 1998.

4. OBSERVATIONS ON THE ESTIMATES PROCESS

The committee notes that this year's Sessional Orders are—apart from very minor amendments—the Sessional Orders that governed the operation of last year's estimates process. The committee reiterates its support, expressed in its report last year, for the following features of the current Sessional Orders:

- the mechanism introduced two years ago whereby the committee may ask each Minister up to twenty questions on notice prior to the hearing; and
- the continuing removal from the Sessional Orders of an earlier exemption which deemed the proposed expenditures of Government Owned Corporations to be outside the scrutiny of the estimates process.

The committee strongly believes in the aim of the estimates process, namely, that in the interests of transparency and accountability, Parliament has an effective forum to scrutinise the Executive's proposed expenditures. The committee notes that this year, the September Budget retained the 'essential core'¹ of the previous administration's May Budget.

¹ The Honourable David Hamill MLA, *Budget Speech*, 15 September 1998, p.2.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The committee expresses its appreciation of the high level of assistance afforded to it by the various Ministers and departmental officers and acknowledges the valuable support of its staff during this year's estimates process.

Terry Sullivan MLA
Chair

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE D

MEETING ATTENDANCE RECORD						
MEETING DATE	TERRY SULLIVAN	DENVER BEANLAND	RUSSELL COOPER	BRUCE DAVIDSON	LINDY NELSON-CARR	PETER WELLINGTON
16 SEPTEMBER 1998	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2 OCTOBER 1998	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
14 OCTOBER 1998	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓

Dissenting report to Estimates Committee D
Families, Youth and Community Care

1.1 Inadequate response to Questions on Notice

The non-government members note with concern the answers provided by the Minister to a number of Questions on Notice.

Specific concern resides with the answers to Questions on Notice number 16 and 19.

Question number 16 read:

“What was the cost of the administrative changes to your Department with the transfer out of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and transfer in of Juvenile Justice together with any other changes, including costs of signage, printing, etc.?”

In response to this question the Minister answered:

“There were no administrative costs in relation to the transfer of Aboriginal and Torres and Strait Islander Affairs and Juvenile Justice apart from the small cost associated with estimating resources to be transferred from the Department.

There have been no costs incurred in relation to signage, printing, etc.”

In spite of this response, the Minister informed the committee that an amount of \$0.209m had been allocated for anticipated machinery of government changes.

Question number 19 read:

“List all “taskforces” (committees, reviews, taskforces, boards and like bodies) established within your portfolio since 26 June 1998, including details of the anticipated/actual cost of each taskforce; the membership of each taskforce; whether there was a public expression of interest for membership of each taskforce; the anticipated reporting/completion date of each taskforce; and whether the taskforce will be providing a written report; and to whom?”

In response to this question the Minister answered:

“None”.

These answers to the Questions on Notice contradict information provided to the Committee by the Minister at the hearings.

In order to effectively examine budget appropriations, it is important that the Committee is provided with full and correct details for all questions. The aforementioned examples suggest that the Minister has been less than helpful in this regard.

The non-government members believe that this response reflects a serious lack of attention to detail by the Minister. It is to be hoped that such an oversight will not occur in the future.

1.2 Decrease in the staffing levels of Family Services Officers

The non-government members express their concern with an apparent decrease in the number of full-time equivalent Family Services Officers.

Responses provided by the Minister and the Director-General to the Committee have not satisfactorily resolved concerns that, in the transfer of Family Services Officers from the Juvenile Justice sub-program to the Families sub-program, there will be a net decrease of one Family Services Officer.

This decrease calls into question a commitment by the Government to increase staffing levels for child protection services.

1.3 Forde Inquiry

The appointment of Mr Hans Heilpern as an Assistant Commissioner to the Forde Commission of Inquiry is of some concern to the Opposition. The Parliament has been informed that Mr Heilpern was sacked as the Director-General of the New South Wales Department of Youth and Community Services and his record as manager of the Queensland Building Services Authority was marked with a considerable degree of controversy.

In response to a Question on Notice the Minister informed the Committee that the fees for commissioners are \$1,100 per day. The Minister also informed the Committee that Mr Heilpern serves the Inquiry for two days per week.

It is worthwhile noting that the Minister said on ABC Radio on 26 August 1998 that:

"I was so concerned to avoid any possible perception of a conflict of interest in relation to any appointment that I in fact in relation Mr Heilpern's appointment, went interstate to find somebody who had some experience of child protection systems."

Curiously, the Committee was informed that the Government incurred no costs in the recruitment of the commissioners.

The non-government members remain concerned about the appropriateness of Mr Heilpern as a commissioner on the Forde Inquiry. Information provided to this Committee will assist in the continued scrutiny of this matter.

1.4 Children's Commission

The long-term role of the Children's Commission, under the minority Beattie Government, is of ongoing concern to non-government members.

Through specific comments to the media, and the way in which the Forde Commission of Inquiry was established, the Minister has made it very clear that she does not appreciate fully the existing role of the Commission. Further, the Minister has failed to demonstrate that she is able to work effectively with the Commission.

From information provided to the Committee, the actual funding to the Commission in 1998-99 has decreased.

Any reduction in the amount of funding provided to the Children's Commission can only serve to restrict the role it plays in the protection of children. Non-government members trusts that continue to adequately fund the Commission.

1.5 Moving Ahead programme

The Moving Ahead programme has provided valuable post-school support for a growing number of differently-abled Queenslanders. The inception of this program, by the former government, filled a void.

Page 11 of the Ministerial Programme Statement states that a review has been conducted of the Moving Ahead programme and that options will be considered.

Any changes to this programme will be monitored closely.

1.6 Budget for Capital Works

The non-government members note with interest the amount of funding allocated for capital works in the Corporate Services programme of the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care.

At page 100 of Budget paper number 3 it is recorded that capital outlays for the Corporate Services programme are budgeted at \$99,000 for minor works and \$70,000 for office accommodation. However, at page 34 of the Ministerial Programme Statement it is recorded that \$93,000 has been allocated for minor works and \$76,000 has been allocated for office accommodation. Whilst the total of these two amounts is equal, it is important to note that the amount recorded for minor works in budget paper 3 is identical to that estimated in the May budget of the former Coalition government, whereas the amount for office accommodation is exactly \$100,000 less.

The non-government members believe that this is another example of the Minister failing to exercise sufficient oversight of the budget process. Further, in comparison to the May

budget, the Opposition is concerned that there has been a department-wide reduction in the budget for office accommodation.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy; Women's Policy; Equity and Fair Trading

2.1 Ministerial Office Upgrade

The non-government members note with concern the costs associated with the upgrading of conventional office space in Mineral House to accommodate a ministerial office, whilst the former environment minister's office remains vacant and unoccupied in Ann Street.

The response from the minister on this issue displays nothing but contempt for the taxpayers of Queensland claiming there was no ministerial office for her new department, whilst the minister acknowledge that her office was operating out of the former environment minister's office.

This situation is in direct conflict with the pre-election commitments given by the then Opposition Leader in which he stated that his government would not expend any money on ministerial office upgrades. Non-Government members believe the actions of the minister, which she declared are being sanctioned by the Premier constitute a broken election promise by the Government.

2.2 Director General

Concern resides with the appointment of the current Director-General given that she has never previously served nor been appointed to a similar position. This appointment was made despite the fact the position was never advertised and a formal selection process was not conducted.

Non-government committee members are of the belief that this action does not comply with the stated appointment policy for directors-general as outlined by the Premier in Parliament earlier this year.

2.3 Consultant/SES Position

The non-government members believe that the appointment of Mr Kent Maddock to the position of A/General Manager-Business and Executive Services the next working day after having completed a \$10,000 consultancy was not only highly irregular but raises some serious issues.

2.4 Shop Retail Leases Act

In the administrative arrangements on the new government, responsibility for the *Shop Retail Leases Act* was transferred to this minister, yet still there are ongoing discussion with the Minister for State Development as to whom should have administrative responsibility for the legislation. This situation is increasing the uncertainty for small business operators and the community in a time when government needs the small business sector of this state to be focussed on job creation.

The government and the minister appear to be blissfully unaware to the fact that small business is the engine room for job creation in Queensland.

2.5 Fair Trading Offices

The non-government members note with concern that the minister has failed to identify and fund in this year's budget additional fair trading offices in regional Queensland which is in direct conflict with the proposed timetable published in the Minister's pre-election policy statement. It is the belief of non-government members that the minister has broken yet another election commitment given to the Queensland people.

2.6 Women's Policy

Non-government members express their extreme disappointment and concern that the level of funding for domestic violence in the minister's portfolio is 50% below the \$2M promised by the minister in her pre-election policy statement. Yet again, another broken promise by the minister.

2.7 Building Services Authority/Security of Payment for Subcontractors

Non-government members of the committee are gravely concerned for subcontractors and the issues associated with security of payment under the stewardship of the minister. Non-government members are appalled at the non-compliance of the minister with the stated deadline of "the end of August" announced by the Premier upon coming to Government.

2.8 Staffing Numbers

The non-government members are concerned by the serious discrepancy in staffing numbers contained in the *staffing resources table for fair trading*, in which the stated total is 275 FTEs where in fact the total obtained by adding the individual categories come to only 273 FTEs. This serious discrepancy has again demonstrated to non-government member the lack of attention of detail paid by the minister.

The minister appears destined to achieve a public perception of a minister who cannot be believed.

[Original Signed]

DENVER BEANLAND, MLA
Shadow Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care
Shadow Minister for Disability Services
Shadow Minister for The Arts
Member for Indooroopilly

[Original Signed]

RUSSELL COOPER, MLA
Shadow Minister for Primary Industries
Member for Crows Nest

[Original Signed]

BRUCE DAVIDSON, MLA
Shadow Minister for Fair Trading
Member for Noosa