



ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B - 2001

REPORT TO THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

INTRODUCTION

On 22 June 2001 the Legislative Assembly referred proposed expenditures contained in the Appropriation Bill 2001 to estimates committees for examination and report. Organisational units within the portfolios of the following ministers were allocated to Estimates Committee B —

- Attorney-General and Minister for Justice
- Minister for Police and Corrective Services
- Minister for Tourism and Racing and Minister for Fair Trading.

The committee has considered the proposed expenditure using the various budget documents and written and verbal evidence from the relevant ministers and public officials. The Additional Information folder tabled with the report includes answers to questions asked on notice before the hearing, answers to questions taken on notice at the hearing, documents tabled at the hearing and minutes of committee meetings.

EXAMINATION OF THE PROPOSED EXPENDITURE

Attorney-General and Minister for Justice

Appropriation Summary

Within the portfolio of the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice (Hon. R Welford) the Appropriation Bill 2001 proposes the following budgets for 2001-2002—

- Department of Justice and Attorney-General \$256 735 000
- Electoral Commission of Queensland \$6 829 000

Issues raised by committee members at the hearing include:

- Drug Court Program
- new Brisbane Magistrates Court complex
- funding for Legal Aid

- review of proceeds of crime legislation and the amount of monies collected by the government
- the State Penalties Enforcement Registry (SPER) system
- the government's review of the legal profession
- Electoral Commission of Queensland - cost of the recent State Election, funding for future commitments
- the workload of courts and the time taken to bring matters before them
- Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions - Fast Track program, Victim Support Unit, staffing and case loads in the Ipswich and Toowoomba offices
- education campaign to be run by the Anti-Discrimination Commission regarding Queensland's new racial and religious vilification legislation
- the implementation of an administrative privacy regime within the Queensland public sector
- alternative dispute resolution
- the domestic violence protocol developed and introduced in the Magistrates Court
- the work of the Justices of the Peace Branch in providing training and information for indigenous communities
- review of the *Coroners Act 1958* and proposals for an office of state coroner
- court projects at Caloundra, Inala and Wynnum
- the Office of the Public Trustee and the Queensland Community Foundation
- the Office of the Adult Guardian and the community visitor program
- criminal compensation payments by the government
- number and future need for more judicial officers
- technological developments to improve the efficiency of the Supreme, District and Magistrates Courts

Minister for Police and Corrective Services

Appropriation Summary

Within the portfolio of the Minister for Police and Corrective Services and Minister Assisting the Premier on the Carpentaria Minerals Province (Hon. A McGrady) the Appropriation Bill 2001 proposes the following budgets for 2001-2002—

- Department of Police \$835 105 000
- Department of Corrective Services \$375 737 000

Issues raised by committee members at the hearing include:

Department of Police:

- speed camera revenue
- State Drug Investigation Group and drug squads
- allocation of police resources to the upcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting
- budget for capital works and plant and equipment
- Tactical Crime Squads, the State Flying Squad, police liaison officers
- plans for new police beats and additional police shopfronts
- funding and activities of the Police Service Stock Squad and the Police Drug Diversion Program
- DNA testing
- crime rates in Queensland
- police numbers
- the introduction of new desktop computer software and hardware
- capital expenditure at Beaudesert and Gatton Police Stations
- recent amendments to the *Weapons Act 1990*

Department of Corrective Services:

- escapes from custody from Corrective Services institutions
- staff numbers in Community Custody Correctional Services
- the cost per day of maintaining prisoners
- Global positioning system (GPS) technology

- dairy industry adjustment package payments received by the Queensland Government in relation to prisons which produce milk
- rehabilitation programs for prisoners
- capital funding for prisoner transportation vehicles
- borrowings by the Department of Corrective Services
- savings to the correctional system due to the government's fines amnesty
- implementation of the *Corrective Services Act 2000*
- assault rates in Queensland prisons

Minister for Tourism and Racing and Minister for Fair Trading

Appropriation Summary

Within the portfolio of the Minister for Tourism and Racing and Minister for Fair Trading (Hon. M Rose) the Appropriation Bill 2001 proposes the following budget for 2001-2002—

- Department of Tourism, Racing and Fair Trading \$73 318 000

Issues raised by committee members at the hearing include:

- government review of thoroughbred racing in Queensland
- TAB turnover
- funding regarding the crossing at Eagle Farm race track
- country racing in Queensland
- Training Track Subsidy Scheme
- government backing to the racing industry
- Internet wagering
- budget and performance of the Office of Fair Trading
- Queensland government's role in the implementation of a national consumer alert and complaint sharing system
- illegal sales of X-rated videos and amyl nitrate
- lottery scams, pyramid selling schemes
- implementation of the *Property Agents and Motor Dealers Act 2001*

- government funding for Tourism Queensland and specific funding for tourism promotion in the lead-up to the Goodwill Games
- draft Queensland Cruise Shipping Plan, proposals for cruise terminals in Brisbane and the Gold Coast
- legislative proposals regarding inbound tourism operators
- Growing Tourism strategy
- recent Australian Tourism Exchange held in Brisbane
- Heritage Trails network
- benefits which accrued to Queensland from the Sydney 2000 Olympic and Paralympic Games
- Queensland's involvement in the See Australia Campaign
- Tourism Aviation Strategy
- number of licensing officers working in indigenous communities
- under-age drinking

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Mr Geoff Wilson MP (Chair)

Mr Lawrence Springborg MP (Deputy Chair)

Mr John English MP

Mr Bill Flynn MP

Ms Jan Jarratt MP

Mr Peter Lawlor MP

Mr Jeff Seeney MP

SECRETARIAT

Mr Andrew Timperley (Research Director)

Ms Merle Lockett (Executive Assistant)

The transcript from the hearing held on 11 July 2001 is available on the internet via the Hansard site at

www.parliament.qld.gov.au

RECOMMENDATION

The committee recommends that the proposed expenditure, as outlined in the Appropriation Bill 2001 for the organisational units in the portfolios referred to it, be agreed to by the Legislative Assembly without amendment.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The committee thanks the ministers and departmental officers for their cooperation during the estimates process. The committee also acknowledges the support and assistance of the committee's secretariat and those other officers of the Parliamentary Service who contributed to the conduct of the estimates process.

Mr Geoff Wilson MP
 Chair
 July 2001

RESERVATION STATEMENT - DEPARTMENT OF POLICE AND CORRECTIVE SERVICES

Acknowledging it is the Government's responsibility to apportion expenditure to programs within each portfolio, the National Party Opposition nevertheless holds reservations with a number of aspects of the 2001/2002 budget for the Department of Police and the Department of Corrective Services.

Department of Police

Budgetary Position

While there has been an overall budget increase of \$68.8 million forecasted for 2001/2002 this has not benefited the major responsibility of the police service, the Preservation of Public Safety, which according to the Budget Papers is responsible for minimising and reacting to civil disturbances within the community. The estimated funding for this output is \$10.1 million down on the \$126.4 million budgeted for 2000/2001, a target which the Government failed to meet with actual spending down by \$15.9 million. In contrast, the actual estimate for Traffic Policing, Speed Management and Camera Operation realised a budget blow out of \$7.2 million and as a result this output will experience an 11.7 % increase on the \$118.9 million budgeted for in the 2000/2001 budget.

Given the objective of keeping Queensland's communities safer is a primary service that is provided by the Police, this reduced level of funding demonstrates that the Beattie Government's priorities for the provision of public safety are not as highly regarded as the monitoring of traffic, speed management and camera operation which has the potential to net significant revenue.

Drug Squad Funding

The Beattie Labor Government has to be questioned over its priorities for the Department when an estimated \$133 million will be spent on traffic policing this year with just \$5 million spent on Queensland's Drug Squad, as revealed in an answer to a question on notice. Funding for the Police Service's Traffic Policing, Speed Management and Camera Operations branch has been increased by \$14 million this year to \$132.9 million, which equates to 15% of the entire Police Budget. This large gap in spending is reflected in the 1,691 police employed as part of traffic monitoring operations in comparison

to only 68 staff in the State Drug Investigative Group.

Over the last decade, armed robbery offences have increased by 61%, which the Criminal Justice Committee has attributed in large part to the illicit drug problem. During the same period, the total rate of reported drug offences increased by 117% to 1,010 offences per 100,000 population. Given that the Minister's response with regards to funding was that 'it is all a matter of priorities', surely the destruction drugs are causing and the huge cost of the drug problem to society justifies a more focussed effort than that being made by the Beattie Government in its expenditure allocation for the State Drug Investigative Group.

Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting

When questioned on how much specific funding would be allocated to cover the cost of CHOGM activities and what the operational plan for local stations and regions would involve, the Minister refused to provide an answer. While an offer was made to brief the Opposition on the relevant plans for the meeting in October, that in itself should not preclude the provision of such information to the Committee. The Opposition holds particular concerns with regards to whether there are sufficient plans in place for security and how the operation will impact on the budgets and staffing of regional districts.

Capital Works

The Budget Papers show that the capital works budget has been cut by \$4.4 million on last year's actual spending. For the first time the Department has been forced to borrow money to pay for capital works to the amount of \$22.2 million at an interest cost of \$547,000 this year alone. At the same time the Government's equity injection has fallen from \$20.6 million to less than \$1 million. As a result of the Department's Output Receipts from Treasury increasing, \$420 million was estimated to have been saved through the Department reducing their capital injection and replacing it with borrowings.

In responding to this question in the hearing, the Minister sought to avoid explanation by claiming that the question should have been addressed to the Treasurer. As the management of the Department's Finances is a core responsibility of the Minister's, the Opposition does not accept this issue of financial management being passed on. Further, the hasty answer provided by the Minister does not provide

any detail in to why the expenditure for capital works has received a significant cut in this budget.

Department of Corrective Services

Dairy Payment

The Minister's lack of knowledge on a range of issues within the Department was demonstrated by his inability to appropriately respond to a question of whether five prisons throughout Queensland that produce milk had been impacted upon by dairy deregulation, in the same way as other dairy enterprises in the State. While technically these prison dairy farms may have been entitled to access Dairy Structural Adjustment Payments on the basis of milk quotas held prior to deregulation, the prison dairies are not exposed to the market to the extent that dairy farmers are. The Opposition registers its strong objection with the Government's actions, given it was the Beattie Government that abolished market milk quotas and that, in effect, a Government Department has profited at the expense of Queensland dairy farmers.

Prison Debt

Queensland prison debts have risen to \$226 million following the Government's decision to slash a \$100 million equity injection from the Department's budget. This is an example, similar to the Department of Police, where the Corrective Services Department has been forced in to debt due to the Beattie Government's inability to provide sufficient funding from government sources. The Budget papers reveal that the Department has been forced to borrow nearly \$142 million in the last two years to pay for the upgrading of the State's prison facilities, taking its total debt to \$226 million.

Due to the Government's failure to provide half of the \$105 million equity injection it promised in last year's budget, reducing its contribution to just \$4.4 million, it is appalling that the Department will have to borrow money from the Government to administer the State's prisons. Such financial mismanagement will place increasing pressure on future projects and future budgets and the Opposition can not support this practice.

Escapes

It was confirmed that there had been 41 escapes and absconds from Custody Correctional Services in the past year, an unacceptably high number which the Minister must take greater responsibility for. In

response to a question taken on notice, the Committee has learnt that there are still a further 3 escapees and 10 absconds at large within the community. Asked to provide the cost of returning these escapees and absconders to custody, the Minister refused to take the question on notice, instead passing it on off as a matter for police operations. As a matter of accountability, the Minister should, at the very least, attempt to provide that figure to allow for more informed scrutiny of current custody programs and preventative measures.

Electronic Monitoring

According to the Minister, extending the electronic monitoring of up to 50 offenders on the home detention program will be stalled until the outcomes of the trial are known. It is disappointing that more prisoners have not been exposed to the current trial, with only 10 of the possible 50 offenders participating.

The government has already conceded that electronic monitoring gives non-violent, non-sexual offenders the opportunity to move into the community, thereby reducing the costs of holding that person in custody. Given the cost effectiveness of this form of monitoring, at \$48 per prisoner for home detention compared to more cost intensive supervision, and the number of escapes from the work release programs, this trial should be expanded to ensure community safety and more effective use of tax payers' money.

Funding has been allocated for project development and research and also for the procurement and commissioning of an electronic monitoring system. However, following a less than comprehensive explanation by the Department during the hearings, the Opposition maintains a level of doubt as to the veracity of the Government's projections that applying this technology to the work release program would cost \$85 million.

Conclusion

The Budget Papers for the Departments of Police and Corrective Services underline the failure of the Beattie Government to provide adequate funding for what should be the major priorities of the portfolio areas; the preservation of public safety, rigorous action to address serious community problems such as illicit drugs and necessary capital works. The Departments increasing reliance on borrowings will limit the revenue available for both important

capital works projects and operational programs in future budgets. Accordingly, the Opposition can not support a Budget that has failed at the first hurdle to manage the Department's expenditure.

Jeff Seeney MLA
Shadow Minister for Police and Corrective Services
Member for Callide

25th July 2001