



ESTIMATES COMMITTEE D

2001

1. INTRODUCTION

The Estimates Committees Process adopted by the Legislative Assembly on 30 May 2001 established seven estimates committees to consider proposed expenditure under the Appropriation Bill 2001 and the Appropriation (Parliament) Bill 2001. Each committee was given the responsibility for scrutinising the estimates for particular ministerial portfolios.

The Legislative Assembly appointed Estimates Committee D to examine and report on the proposed expenditure for the organisational units within the portfolios of the:

- Minister for Local Government and Planning;
- Minister for Emergency Services; and
- Minister for Environment.

The committee conducted a public hearing on Friday, 13 July 2001 to take evidence from these ministers and their respective officers.

For the purposes of examining the proposed expenditure for the organisational units allocated to it, the committee considered information obtained at the public hearing in conjunction with:

- Budget Papers and Ministerial Portfolio Statements (MPS);
- Ministers' written responses to the committee's questions on notice prior to the public hearing; and
- Ministers' written responses to questions taken on notice at the public hearing.

The transcript of the committee's public hearing is available on the Hansard web-page at:

<http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au>

Accompanying this report is a volume of "Additional Information" presented by the committee to the Legislative Assembly. The additional information includes the minutes of the committee's meetings and answers to questions asked before and during the public hearing.

2. DEPARTMENT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND PLANNING

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The Department of Local Government and Planning's mission is to create better communities for the people of Queensland.

The total appropriation for the Department of Local Government and Planning in 2001/02 is \$483.881M. The MPS provides the following output summary.

Output	Total Cost \$'000
Advice and Services for Good Local Governance	4,664
Funding for Local Government Infrastructure and Facilities	180,603
Planning and Development Services	15,774
TOTAL	201,041

2.2 ISSUES CONSIDERED BY THE COMMITTEE

During the course of its inquiry the committee examined a range of issues including:

- budget implications of machinery of government changes;
- promotional, public awareness and advertising expenditure of, or administered by, the department;

- consultancies and other out-serviced advice to the department;
- staff estimates;
- funding provided specifically to local government, across all state government portfolios and programs;
- the reclassification of National Competition Policy payments from controlled to administered;
- qualified audit reports to councils;
- the possibility of conduct of future local government elections by the Electoral Commission of Queensland;
- legislative reform in response to issues arising from the March 2000 local government elections;
- requirements enacted by the *Local Government and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2001* that councillors vacate office on becoming a candidate for Commonwealth elections;
- references to review local government boundaries to the Electoral Commission;
- the electronic local laws database;
- issues surrounding *Integrated Planning Act 1997* (IPA) schemes, including:
 - the level and forms of assistance to councils to help them prepare new schemes by the statutory deadline of 30 March 2003;
 - reviews of schemes;
- the current status of the IPA Operational Review and draft legislative amendments;
- recent operational changes to the Integrated Development Assessment System;
- demand for and provision of seminars and workshops held outside the Brisbane/Moreton Statistical Division;
- programs in relation to which funds were carried over from the 2000/2001 financial year;
- programs, grants and subsidies and advisory services funded in 2001/2002 in comparison to those funded in 2000/2001;
- natural disaster relief arrangements;
- the Landfill Remediation Assessment Program, and use of funds allocated to that program;
- the Security Improvement Program;
- the Rural Living Infrastructure Program;
- SEQ 2021;
- funding of the Major Infrastructure Program in the Torres Strait;
- the Smaller Communities Assistance Program;
- review of the operational arrangements and framework for the Aurukun Alcohol Law Council;
- methodology to determine the Queensland Grants Commission funding to local government;
- the Queensland Government submission to the Commonwealth on the Review of the Grants Commission funding;
- local government grants and subsidies;
- the Local Governing Bodies' Capital Works Subsidy Scheme;
- the Showground Subsidy Scheme;
- revenue powers of local governments;
- regional planning projects;
- proposed new building and plumbing codes;
- regulatory framework for development under the IPA, the *Building Act 1975* and the *Sewerage and Water Supply Act 1949*;
- water supply and sewerage infrastructure;
- water pricing reforms;
- use of funds allocated to the National Action Plan on Salinity and Water Quality;
- the Advanced Wastewater Treatment Technologies Scheme; and

- commercialisation of the Townsville – Thuringowa water supply board.

3. DEPARTMENT OF EMERGENCY SERVICES

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The Department of Emergency Services is a public safety agency that either directly delivers or funds a range of emergency and counter disaster services.

The total appropriation for the Department of Emergency Services in 2001/02 is \$205.420M. The MPS provides the following output summary.

Output	Total Cost \$'000
Counter Disaster and Rescue Services	42,266
Ambulance Services	235,841
Fire and Rescue Services	239,431
Total	517,538

3.2 ISSUES CONSIDERED BY THE COMMITTEE

During the course of its inquiry the committee examined a range of issues including:

- promotional, public awareness and advertising expenditure of the department;
- consultancies and other outsourced advice to the department;
- staffing of the Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS) and Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority, including staff estimates, rates of stress leave within the QAS, counselling services and indigenous Australian representation;
- service delivery in remote and rural Queensland;
- prevention strategies, including community disaster awareness and education activities, the Road Awareness and Accident Prevention Program, and delivery of fire safety programs;

- the Economic Costs of Disaster in Regional Queensland Project;
- disaster management training programs;
- funding for Surf Life Saving Queensland, the Royal Life Saving Society, the Volunteer Marine Rescue Association of Queensland, the Volunteer Coast Guard, SES Cadets and the Youth Action Program;
- equipment and support for volunteers, including the State Emergency Service, and Rural Fire Services;
- safety of marine rescue volunteers;
- QAS response times;
- customer satisfaction with the QAS;
- the ambulance fleet, including purchase and refurbishment of vehicles and conversion of ambulance vehicles ordered from the United States of America;
- the impact of free ambulance cover to pensioners on the QAS budget;
- QAS service delivery in isolated communities and the Cape York Peninsula area;
- Local Ambulance Committees;
- Queensland Ambulance subscription scheme;
- major event skills training and development of QAS paramedics in preparation for the Goodwill Games and CHOGM;
- location, construction and refurbishment of ambulance and fire stations;
- urban fire and rescue vehicles;
- vehicles in rural fire brigades;
- support and training for rural fire brigades, and awards for high quality volunteer service;
- Building Fire Safety Task Force;
- Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority training and professional development programs;
- Fire and Rescue Training Academy;

- Fight Fire Fascination Program;
- crew of Emergency Helicopter Services;
- estimates for emergency incidents;
- funding and safety audits for community helicopter providers;
- chemical hazards and emergency management information and advisory services; and
- counter disaster and rescue services.

4. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The Environmental Protection Agency has the responsibility for the integration of environmental values and performance in the economic and social development in Queensland.

The total appropriation for the Environmental Protection Agency in 2001/02 is \$272.279M. The MPS provides the following output summary.

Output	Total Cost \$'000
Environmental Protection	102,374
Parks, Forests and Wildlife	214,949
Total	317,323

4.2 ISSUES CONSIDERED BY THE COMMITTEE

During the course of its inquiry the committee examined a range of issues including:

- machinery of government changes;
- consultancies and other out-serviced advice;
- promotional, public awareness and advertising expenditure;
- prosecutions initiated by the EPA;
- establishment of programs through partnerships to support the development of sustainable industries;
- a biodiversity strategy for Queensland;
- endangered species management;
- transfer of state forests and timber reserves to the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service;
- finalisation of a master plan for Queensland's Parks System;
- management of national parks, including monitoring of ecological integrity, visitor access to facilities, capital works and park maintenance;
- capital and recurrent funding allocation for national parks;
- access to national parks by commercial operators;
- fire prevention measures in national parks, and fire management equipment;
- the Great Walks of Queensland Program;
- the South East Queensland Forest Agreement;
- pest and weed control in national parks;
- damage mitigation permits;
- policy to control dingoes including dingo baiting;
- management of dingoes on Fraser Island;
- government response to a recent lyngbya outbreak;
- environmental protection user charges;
- youth traineeships;
- the Review of the Medium Term Management Requirements of Queensland's Protected Areas and Marine Parks;
- land acquisition of critical coastal lands;
- access to the Great Barrier Reef Islands by commercial operators;
- the State Coastal Management Plan;
- the Moreton Bay Waterways and Catchment Partnerships Strategy;
- use of treated effluent sewage waste;
- the destination of Brisbane's waste water;

- monitoring of air quality;
- environmental monitoring of mining;
- renewable energy systems, including wind generated power, and the Remote Area Power Scheme;
- use of alternative fuels; and
- protection of places and buildings of heritage value.

5. RECOMMENDATION

The committee recommends that the proposed expenditures, as stated in the Appropriation Bill 2001, for the organisational units within the portfolios allocated to Estimates Committee D for examination, be agreed to by the Legislative Assembly without amendment.

6. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The committee thanks the Ministers and their officers for their assistance and cooperation throughout the estimates committee process.

Tim Mulherin MP
Chair

30 July 2001

MEMBERSHIP

Mr Tim Mulherin MP (Chair)
Mr Howard Hobbs MP (Deputy Chair)
Mr Chris Cummins MP
Mr Ray Hopper MP
Mr Ted Malone MP
Ms Cate Molloy MP
Mrs Carryn Sullivan MP

SECRETARIAT

Ms Veronica Rogers (Research Director)
Ms Andrea Musch (Executive Assistant)

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE D

STATEMENT OF RESERVATION

EMERGENCY SERVICES

Acknowledging that it is the Government's responsibility to apportion expenditure to programs within each portfolio, the Opposition nevertheless holds reservations with a number of aspects of the 2001/2002 Budget for the Department of Emergency Services.

Emergency Helicopter Services

A question was asked of the Minister as to the effect on Queensland's emergency helicopter service of rising fuel costs. The response from the Minister was unacceptable as, while he acknowledged the problems the service is experiencing, he said that he would not look at increasing funding to offset this increased expenditure until the mid-year budget review. The Opposition finds this response very shortsighted and believe this issue must be rectified immediately.

Of particular concern is the question of safety audits for community helicopter providers and the need for new service agreements to be implemented immediately. Currently there is no requirement for community helicopter providers to undertake safety audits, something which the Minister assured the Committee would be rectified with the new service agreements.

Queensland Ambulance Service

The Opposition is concerned about the lack of funding to address critical issues within the Queensland Ambulance Service. These issues include the provision of an adequate number of vehicles, unsafe vehicles, inadequate equipment in vehicles and staff shortages. The Minister failed to allay the Opposition's concerns on any of these issues claiming that the increase in funding to the Queensland Ambulance Service would rectify all problems.

The Minister did not seem to realise that the provision of one staff member for this year was not going to address the critical staff shortages especially considering the current number of staff being absent from work on stress leave or for other reasons. The Opposition will continue to pressure the Minister to provide more staff for the Ambulance Service.

The problems with the converted ambulances was also raised by the Opposition, with the Minister downplaying the problem. The Opposition was not satisfied with the Minister's assurances and will monitor the situation closely.

The Opposition also questioned the Minister as to the extra provision of staff and equipment for both CHOGM and the Goodwill Games. The Minister claims that the Ambulance Service will cope with the extra workload, however the Opposition has doubts considering the inherent problems that are currently being experienced by Queensland Ambulance officers.

Rural Fire Brigade

The problems of the Rural Fire Brigade had been raised in the media prior to the Estimates hearings ie inadequate equipment, inadequate training and unsafe vehicles. All of these

issues were raised with the Minister yet the Opposition believe that the answers given during the Estimates process did not satisfactorily address the problems.

The Minister continues to believe that the current replacement rate of vehicles is proving successful, yet when some volunteer firefighters are utilising vehicles without brakes, the Opposition cannot agree. The Opposition also queried with the Minister the issue of legal liability for volunteer firefighters who might be involved in an accident with private citizens while in unroadworthy vehicles, the Minister failed to address this problem and we will ensure that he provides a more adequate answer as soon as possible. We urge the Minister to fast-track his replacement program to avoid any possible disasters that may happen while volunteer firefighters are carrying out their duties.

The Opposition also expressed their concern about the state of equipment being provided to the Rural Fire Brigades. We ask the Minister to increase the funding for equipment to ensure all of our volunteer brigades have an up-to-date, adequate level of equipment.

TED MALONE MP
Member for Mirani
Shadow Minister for Emergency Services,
Public Works and Housing

STATEMENT OF RESERVATIONS

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT

The Department of Environment has the essential role of overseeing the health of Queensland's Environment and National Park Estate. The importance of this role can not be underestimated.

The Opposition found, however, the quality of the accounting and Ministerial responses disappointing. It is critical that the Queensland people, through the Parliament and the budgetary process, are given transparent and accountable information. Unfortunately, the budget papers presented for examination could not be described as such and the Minister failed repeatedly to give satisfactory explanation of the deficiencies.

The Opposition Members note with reservations the Minister's responses to questioning during the examination of the department of environment estimates. In particular we note with reservation;

- The considerable underspend of the operational budget of the QPWS by \$1 per hectare. While the Minister has explained this shortfall by repeatedly citing a consideration for depreciation and the equity return no satisfactory explanation was given by the Minister why this consideration was not figured into the original anticipated amount. It appears the operational budget was underspent by at least approximately \$7 million in 2000-2001.
- The Opposition members would also like to express reservations regarding the fact that the Minister could not give a reckoning of what the base cost of each National Park is to the taxpayer. While we understand natural disasters are unpredictable, transparency and good government is not served by the non-release of this detail. At the least the Opposition members believe an accounting of what each National Park cost in the previous year should be available.
- The Opposition Members hold reservations regarding the Ministers answer regarding the "Additional New Works on Parks" line item in the Environment Capital Statement. In the past year this program was underspent by \$1.5 million. The Minister answered that this funding had not been lost, but had been carried over. The Minister did not address the question regarding fall in the total estimated funding for this project of \$2 million – from \$11.2 million to \$9.3 million. No satisfactory answer has been given in regards to this reduction.
- The Opposition condemns the Ministers response to question on why "Release of draft South East Queensland Regional Nature Conservation Strategy" was claimed two years in a row. The Ministers answer was "I do not get to launch very many things in my own electorate". Opposition Members do not believe such a reason is sufficient to excuse the misuse of budget documents.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Opposition Members express their appreciation for the efforts of departmental staff, Hansard and Committee secretarial staff.

Mr Howard Hobbs MP
Member for Warrego
Shadow Minister for Local
Government and Planning,
Shadow Minister for Regional
and Rural Communities