



ESTIMATES COMMITTEE G – 2001 REPORT

1. INTRODUCTION

Estimates Committee G was appointed on 30 May 2001 to examine and report on the proposed expenditure set out in the Appropriation Bill 2001 for the organisational units within the portfolios of:

- the Minister for Primary Industries and Rural Communities; and
- the Minister for Families and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Disability Services.

The committee has considered the estimates referred to it by examining the budget papers and Ministerial Portfolio Statements, considering answers provided by Ministers to pre-hearing questions on notice, taking evidence at a public hearing on 19 July 2001 and considering answers to questions taken on notice at the hearing.

Pursuant to leave granted by the committee, Mr Vaughan Johnson MP, the member for Gregory, asked questions at the committee's public hearing directed to the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy.

During the inquiry the committee examined a wide range of issues, including those which are listed in this report. For details on these issues the committee directs readers to:

- the volume of 'additional information' (tabled in the House) that contains the committee's questions on notice, the Ministers' answers, and minutes of the committee's meetings; and

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

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

2. MINISTER FOR PRIMARY INDUSTRIES AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

The total appropriation for the Department of Primary Industries and Rural Communities for 2001-02 is \$260.298 million (2001: \$260.478 million).

A summary of the Department's outputs for 2001-02 follows:

Output	Total Cost \$'000
Food and Fibre Science and Innovation	151,063
Market Access and Development	52,254
Rural Community Development	30,045
Fisheries	39,784
Policy Analysis and Industry Development	25,803

Source: State Budget 2001-02, Minister for Primary Industries and Rural Communities, Ministerial Portfolio Statements, 2001-02 Output Summary.

Future developments for the Department include:

- Implementation of a five-year eradication plan for the Red Imported Fire Ant.
- Development of the Queensland aquaculture industry through commercial breeding and aquaculture production initiatives.
- Technological development for climate prediction and crop modelling systems.

- Continuation of the East Coast Trawl Management plan.

During its public hearing the committee questioned the Minister regarding a wide range of matters, including:

- emergency control and eradication programs for the Red Imported Fire Ant;
- levels of lending and borrowing for the Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority;
- staffing arrangements and associated costs for the Department, including domestic and international travel undertaken by departmental officers;
- future direction and strategic developments for the Department;
- the Northwatch early detection initiative, the response to exotic plant and animal pests, and the application of biotechnology in the surveillance and diagnosis of pests and diseases;
- the commercial impact of the Department's technical research and innovation, including the use of bio-pesticides, the development of new fruit varieties and atmosphere control storage;
- development of long-range climate forecasting software and decision making tools;
- the development of sustainable production systems, including water use efficiency activities;
- the role and direction of the Queensland Food and Fibre Science and Innovation Council;
- information technology developments and the delivery of departmental services on-line;
- future prospects for Queensland food and fibre exports;
- strategies and issues relating to the development of rural communities;
- funding arrangements for the East Coast Trawl Management plan;

- issues relating to the development of the pig, grain, sugar and aquaculture industries in Queensland;
- animal care and protection legislation and associated standards for animal welfare;
- the management and protection of Queensland fisheries and the role of the Fishing Industry Development Council;
- issues relating to the proposed sale of the Brisbane Markets;
- funding arrangements for the FarmBis program;
- opportunities for women in the primary industries sector in Queensland;
- funding arrangements for the Burdekin catchment area; and
- expansion of private forestry in Queensland.

3. MINISTER FOR FAMILIES AND MINISTER FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER POLICY AND MINISTER FOR DISABILITY SERVICES

3.1 Department of Families

The 2001-02 appropriation for the Department of Families is \$405.161 million (2001: \$417.075 million).

Outputs for the Department for 2001-02 are summarised as follows:

Output	Total Cost \$'000
Services for Children and Young People	180,354
Families and Community Support	78,179
Services for Youth Justice	63,180

Source: State Budget 2001-02, Minister for Families, Ministerial Portfolio Statements, 2001-02 Output Summary

Future developments for the Department include:

- Funding for services that support the recommendations of the Forde Inquiry, and increased funding for the Forde Foundation.

- Increases in the basic foster care allowance, and the clothing allowance.
- Recruitment of a further 50 service delivery child protection, and 8 support, staff.
- Establishment of new Youth Justice Services at Maryborough/Hervey Bay and Caboolture/Redcliffe.
- The establishment of youth crime prevention programs in seven major regional centres.
- Capital upgrades for community facilities in regional Queensland.

3.2 Public hearing

During its hearing, the committee inquired into a number of issues, including:

- funding for domestic and family violence protection initiatives, including indigenous family violence;
- implementation of strategies to address the needs of older Queenslanders;
- staffing issues within the Department, including child protection officer case loads;
- refurbishment of the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre;
- proposed amendments to the domestic violence legislation;
- funding to implement the recommendations of the Forde Inquiry, and initiatives to support victims of past abuse;
- Maryborough/Hervey Bay and Caboolture/Redcliffe Youth Justice Services;
- the Woolloongabba Sexual Abuse Counselling Service;
- proposed child care legislative reform and initiatives in the child care sector;
- funding of child protection; and
- funding for community disaster recovery.

3.3 Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy

The total 2001-02 appropriation for the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy is \$94.638 million (2001: \$85.230 million).

A summary of estimated Departmental outputs for 2001-02 follows:

Outputs	Total Cost \$'000
Strategic Policy Advice	9,384
Community Development	69,140
Community Governance	28,906

Source: State Budget 2001-02, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, Ministerial Portfolio Statements, 2001-02 Output Summary

Future developments for the Department include:

- Implementation of the Justice Agreement, including development of regional and local structures, and procedures for monitoring, reporting and evaluating the Agreement.
- Construction of a purpose-built Diversionary Centre in Cairns.
- Continuation of funding programs to improve basic water and waste disposal arrangements in remote Indigenous communities.

3.4 Public hearing

During its hearing, the committee inquired into a number of issues, including:

- the Kupai Omasker project;
- strategies to reduce the number of indigenous young people in the criminal justice system and initiatives to reduce the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in jail;
- strategies to address the recommendations of the Women's Task Force on Violence report, including community consultation processes;
- support for economic development projects;
- the Community Expansion Program;

- the Island Industries Board (IBIS) stores upgrade program;
- proposed new infrastructure projects for remote communities; and
- risk management strategies for grant scheme administrators, and monitoring strategies for capital works programs.

3.5 Disability Services Queensland

The total 2001-02 appropriation for Disability Services Queensland is \$210.646 million (2001: \$191.391 million).

Departmental outputs for 2001-02 are summarised as follows:

Outputs	Total Cost \$'000
Support for Adults	182,094
Support for Children and Families	99,149
Community and Infrastructure Support	22,825

Source: State Budget 2001-02, Minister for Disability Services, Ministerial Portfolio Statements, 2001-02 Output Summary

Future developments for the Department include:

- Funding to support an additional 262 adults with high support needs.
- Funding to support post school services for an additional 160 young people with high support needs leaving school.
- Funding for Institutional Reform initiatives.

3.6 Public hearing

During its hearing, the committee inquired into a number of issues, including:

- disability access for the Brisbane River pedestrian bridge;
- funding for institutional reform processes;
- new respite/emergency accommodation in Ipswich, and respite family support services for children who are carers and people living in regional, rural and remote communities;

- funding of disability service provider organisations; and
- services for people with a psychiatric disability.

4. RECOMMENDATION

The committee recommends that the proposed expenditures, as stated in the Appropriation Bill 2001 for the organisational units within the portfolios of—

- the Minister for Primary Industries and Rural Communities, and
- the Minister for Families and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Disability Services,

be agreed to by the Legislative Assembly without amendment.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The committee thanks the Ministers and their departmental staff for their cooperation and assistance during the estimates process.

Julie Attwood MP

Chair

26 July 2001

MEMBERS

- Mrs Julie Attwood MP, Chair
- Mr Marc Rowell MP, Deputy Chair
- Mr Stuart Copeland MP
- Ms Carolyn Male MP
- Ms Rachel Nolan MP
- Mrs Dorothy Pratt MP¹
- Ms Barbara Stone MP

STAFF

- Ms Meg Hoban, Research Director
- Mr Paul Coonan, Research Officer
- Ms Sandy Musch, Executive Assistant

¹ Mr Howard Hobbs MP was appointed by the Leader of the Opposition as a substitute member for the public hearing in place of Mrs Dorothy Pratt MP under the provisions of Sessional Order 15.

STATEMENT OF RESERVATION

NON-GOVERNMENT MEMBERS

DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY INDUSTRIES AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

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 Primary Industries.

Budgetary Position

There has been an overall budget decrease of \$4.7 million forecasted for 2001/2002. This current cutback comes on top of the \$40 million cut that the Beattie Government made to DPI's research and development Institutes last year and the \$26.6 million cut to the DPI Budget in 1999/2000. Given that primary industries generate \$6 billion for the State economy, this further demonstrates the Beattie Government's lack of vision and commitment to investing in primary industries.

Staffing

The Minister displayed little credibility when questioned on the Department's cut in staff numbers, dismissing the official figures provided in the 2001/2002 Budget papers which clearly display that another 118 staff had been shed since last year's Budget and taking the overall staff sacked or displaced over the last three years to an unacceptable total of 534. The Minister announced in the Estimates hearing that 400 temporary staff would be employed to control the imported red fire ant outbreak. However, this short-term employment will not replace the loss of permanent, professional jobs from the department and the wealth of experience and knowledge that these DPI offices will take with them. The Acting Director of the Food and Fibre Sciences and Innovation Output confirmed to the

Committee that there had been a decline in staff, to assist the department in meeting the Government's agenda. It was indicated at this present time there are 120 vacancies that have yet to be taken up. No footnote was provided for these positions. It is to be hoped this is a budgeted and achievable item.

Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority (QRAA)

The 2001/2002 State Budget reveals that QRAA's total liabilities for borrowing will increase by 85% in two years, from \$62.2 million in 1999/2000 to \$115 million this financial year. Over the same period, QRAA loans to primary producers have not increased. Rather, they have been maintained at \$36 million and \$34 million for the last 2 financial years respectively, with the projection for 2001/2002 at \$33 million.

The Beattie Government's withdrawal of the Authority's \$53 million reserve last year has clearly left it increasingly reliant on borrowings from Treasury in order to maintain its lending schemes and assistance programs. QRAA had a cash reserve of \$11 million at the end of 2000/2001 and if not for the \$31 million borrowed, would not now be viable.

It was difficult to make a complete assessment of QRAA's financial position due to the glaring absence of explanatory footnotes and the insufficient level of information provided during the Hearings. The title in the Explanation of Variances for the Statement of Financial Position was more a Statement of Financial Performance. These matters concerning the set out of the budget should have been resolved prior to the Estimates hearings.

The Opposition is unable to support the Government's budgeted position for QRAA.

FarmBis Funding

Given the lack of a dedicated State Government grant, QRAA will also have to find \$15 million from internal sources for the second round of the FarmBis scheme – an added cost that will also have implications for QRAA's financial position.

Finding \$5 million to pay for FarmBis over each of the next 3 years out of PIPES interest revenue is a tall order. For instance, it would take \$100 million at a 5% profit to make \$5 million. It is difficult to envisage this happening given the Government has stated that money is lent to producers at 1% above the Treasury Corporation's borrowing rate. To compound the doubt of how PIPES will finance FarmBis, the Minister explained that PIPES loans were less than outlays under the program in 1999/2000 due to the buoyancy in the cattle industry and the difficult circumstances in the sugar and dairy industries. In other words, a mixture of some primary industries doing well while others were experiencing difficulties, which is not an unusual phenomenon. It is also open to speculation as to whether, in fact, the reduction in loans taken up has been due to the increase in the PIPES interest rate from 6% to 7.68% last year.

In short, there remains a lack of clarity as to how DPI will raise the funding for FarmBis. The Minister's flippant "don't you worry about that" was far from reassuring knowing how difficult the Department's financial position is after having to fund the government's unbudgeted \$10 million contribution to the East Coast Trawl Management Plan solely from DPI resources.

Trawl Plan Interest Payments

In negotiating the \$10 million State's contribution to the buy back of commercial fishing licences under the East Coast Trawl Management Plan, Premier Peter Beattie dumped the cost of the scheme onto the DPI without any financial support. Throughout the Ministerial Portfolio Statement (MPS) the cost cutting measures employed to fund the Plan have had a demonstrable impact on a range of DPI

programs. As the Committee learnt, this will continue until the debt plus \$1.5 million in interest is paid back to Treasury – a clear demonstration by the Premier how he values the contribution of primary industries to this State.

It is likely that the cost of loans will increase. The Minister remained coy when asked to respond further to a non-government question on notice, in which he stated that the Treasury loaned \$10 million to the DPI in 2000/2001, to be repaid over 5 years, to fund the East Coast Trawl Management Plan. As the debt is to be funded from the sale of assets and operational cost cutting, there will be a greater reduction of services and more assets sold if paid off in a lesser time.

Brisbane Markets

Despite the Budget papers stating that the Department held responsibility for implementing the Government's policy in regard to the sale of the Brisbane Markets, the Minister claimed he was unable to provide the Committee with the most up to date financial statement of the Brisbane Market Corporation. It is synonymous of the overall budget presented for DPI that the Minister has now passed on the management of the sale of this asset.

Even if the question was accepted on notice the Committee should have been provided with an update on the market's financial position. Minister Palaszczuk is one of the two voting shareholding investors in the Brisbane Market Corporation. Although the Treasurer is now managing the disposal of the markets, surely Minister Palaszczuk would have an understanding of the value of the assets and the benefit, if any, that would flow onto the horticultural industries.

Aquaculture

The Minister's lack of knowledge on a range of issues within DPI was well emphasised in his inability to acknowledge, let alone respond, to a comment made by the President of the Australian Prawn Farmers' Association describing the

\$6 million contributed to developments in Innisfail as “poorly targeted” and a missed opportunity to create real jobs in Queensland. This Association represents an integral component of the Queensland aquaculture industry the Minister’s inability to comment on what was touted as a Budget highlight without the assistance of a well-prepared brief was again unacceptable.

Conclusion

There were a number of issues raised during the estimates for the DPI that were not appropriately clarified during the hearing and for that reason I find that I cannot support the funding allocation as a whole. There is an extraordinary burden being placed on the Department as a result of the funding arrangements imposed by the Premier to fund the East Coast Trawl Management – a contribution that should have been funded by the whole of government. The reduction in a range of activities will further reduce the ability of this already under-funded department to provide services to primary industries in this State.

Marc Rowell MP

**Shadow Minister for Primary Industries
Shadow Minister for Northern Development
Member for Hinchinbrook**

25 July 2001

DEPARTMENT OF FAMILIES DISABILITY SERVICES QUEENSLAND

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 Families and Disability Services.

Disability Services Portfolio

The failure of the Pedestrian Bridge to initially conform to disability access requirements was the first issue raised with the Minister, resulting from comments by the Minister for State Development saying that compliance was the reason for the blow-out in cost of the footbridge. The Minister acknowledged that her Department was consulted during the design process, yet was unable to say to what level. On further questioning, the Minister alluded that compliance to disability access did cause the construction cost to rise. The Opposition still believes that not enough consideration was given during the planning stage to disability access thus causing the re-design of the bridge. We believe that the Government has failed in its duty to conform to national planning laws which require all new constructions to provide adequate disability access.

The Opposition is concerned with the low number of Lifestyle Packages being offered to people with disabilities. Currently there are approximately 6,000 people on the register, yet only 700 people are currently on an adult lifestyle support package. While we welcome the further 1,000 people who are to receive these packages this year, we call on the Minister to increase her department’s support in this area.

The Opposition is concerned about the lack of actual spending on budgeted items in the area of disability housing which appear in the 2000/2001 Budget and have now been carried over to the 2001/2002 Budget. This is especially of concern to the Opposition as there have been instances of a lack of specialised housing, yet the funding has not been spent in this area. For instance, the budgeted amount for respite care was carried, unspent, from the 2000/2001 Budget which is concerning given the need for urgent respite care in places like Ipswich. The Opposition will continue to pressure the Government to provide adequate specialised housing throughout Queensland as we were not satisfied with the Minister’s explanation that these things take time.

The Government's handling of the Basil Stafford facility is of great concern to the Opposition. The Government failed to spend the estimated funding on Basil Stafford in 2000/2001 and are downgrading it for residential accommodation, yet they have provided the exact same funding for 2001/2002 and have now implemented a master plan for the site. The Opposition believes Basil Stafford provides a level of care that many families require and we are concerned that the Government is not recognising this need. We call on the Government to ensure that residential accommodation at Basil Stafford is still available to those families who may wish to access it in the future.

Families Department

The Opposition continues to be alarmed at the lack of commitment by the Beattie Government to implement the funding recommendations of the Forde Inquiry. The Families Department is in turmoil with overworked staff being put at risk personally and their workloads placing abused children at risk. The Opposition is appalled by the recent leaked report from the Families Department which contained frightening statistics on the number of child abuse cases that are not being properly investigated.

One of the recommendations of the Forde Inquiry was that the Queensland Government immediately inject \$103 million into the Families Department to enable 'it to meet the national average per capita welfare spending for children and agree to maintain the increase in line with the national average'. The Government has failed to meet this recommendation – in 1999/2000 the funding commitment was \$93 million short of that commitment; in 2000/2001 it was \$83 million short; and in 2001/2002 it will be \$73 million short and these figures do not take into account the indexation of the \$103 million. The Opposition finds that this lack of delivery on a ironclad commitment appalling and we will continue to call on the Government to meet their commitment in this area of funding. This lack of funding also gives lie to the Government's

assertion in the MPS that they are 'meeting the recommendations of the Forde Inquiry'.

The Opposition has repeatedly called on the Minister for Families to publish caseload data for child protection officers yet this information is still not to hand. Our concerns in this area were raised following media reports that Queensland child protection officers were being forced to 'workload manage' or write-off or ignore nearly 1,400 cases of reported child abuse last year due to a lack of staff. The measurement of caseloads is a recognised term in other states, yet Queensland has to date not adopted any formula to access this measure. The Opposition welcomes the belated assurance of the Minister that Cabinet is now formulating a measurement system in conjunction with Families staff.

Another item specified in the Forde report was the need for improved youth detention centres. The Opposition is concerned that the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre was not completed by the expected date and expected to run over Budget, especially in light of recent problems being experienced with juvenile offenders in the Townsville area. We will continue to pressure the Government to deliver on this commitment.

The Opposition also expressed their concern that the MPS specified that only 85% of licensed child care services receive two resourcing contact visits per annum and that the Department has estimated that only 85% would receive visits in the 2001/2002 period. The Opposition believes that the target in this area should be 100%.

Stuart Copeland MP
Shadow Minister for Families
Shadow Minister for Disability Services
National Party Secretary
Member for Cunningham

30 July 2001