



Estimates Committee G

2007

Report No 2 to the Legislative Assembly

Introduction

On 23 May 2007 and in accordance with Standing Order 167(3), the Legislative Assembly appointed Estimates Committee G and ordered the committee to investigate and report on the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2007 (Qld) for the following portfolios:

- Department of Primary industries and Fisheries; and
- Department of Communities & Disability Services Queensland, Minister for Disability Services Queensland.¹

Estimates Committee G provided each Minister with twenty questions on notice and received responses to these questions.

On 19 July 2007, the committee conducted a public hearing to take oral evidence from the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries and the Minister for Communities, Minister for Disability Services Queensland, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Minister for Seniors and Youth. A verbatim transcript of the committee's hearing can be accessed at:

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

The committee has considered the estimates referred to it by examining information contained in:

- the Budget papers;
- answers to pre-hearing questions on notice;
- oral evidence taken at the hearing;
- documents tabled at the hearing;
- answers to questions taken on notice at the hearing; and
- additional information given in relation to answers.

1. As the committee was required to report on the Legislative Assembly also, in accordance with Standing Order 186(2), the committee has reported separately on the proposed expenditures for the Legislative Assembly: see report no 1.

A volume of additional information provided with the report contains the answers to questions on notice received from respective Ministers prior to the hearing and after the hearing, together with the minutes of the meetings of Estimates Committee G.

Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries

The Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries

The Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries assists Queensland food and fibre industries to increase productivity, sustainability, market growth and adaptability. It delivers research and development, policy leadership, protects industries against pests and diseases and maintains animal welfare standards. The following table sets out details of the appropriation for 2007-08 compared to the previous financial year.

	2006-07 \$'000	2007-08 \$'000
Departmental Outputs	227,813	248,306
Equity Adjustment	11,821	14,369
Administrative Items	16,356	29,589
Vote Total	255,990	292,264

Key elements in the 2007-08 Budget include:

- continuing to develop Biosecurity Queensland as the point of leadership for managing biosecurity risks in Queensland;
- managing and maintaining systems, skills and facilities to prevent and/or detect existing or emerging pest, disease and invasive species, agvet chemical or contaminant issues and meet state, national and international obligations for biosecurity standards;
- minimising the impacts of exotic and endemic pests and diseases and agvet chemical and contaminant impacts on the economy, environment and Queensland's way of life;

- continuing to meet community expectations for animal welfare and keeping, to support Queensland's favourable market access status for primary products; and
- supporting the effective implementation of biosecurity policy by monitoring industry compliance with biosecurity legislation and regulation.

Issues canvassed at the hearing included:

- the budget for total expenditure in 2007-2008;
- VERA offered to staff and employment of staff under a workforce skills agreement;
- retention of scientists employed by the department;
- services provided by the Intensive Livestock Environmental Regulation Unit to meet the needs of the intensive livestock industry;
- investigations into suspected biosecurity incidents;
- assistance provided by the QRAA to primary producers and small businesses affected by Cyclone Larry and drought;
- government assistance provided to primary producers to remove debris caused by Cyclone Larry;
- organisational development approaches implemented to sustain a new agenda for the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries;
- initiatives being developed to boost and retain the department's smart science and emergency response capability;
- benefits to the sugar industry from the FutureCane project;
- initiatives to achieve outcomes under the Reef Water Quality Protection Plan;
- appointment of property management officers under an agreement between the department and industry bodies;
- the VERA program to achieve workforce realignment;
- measures to effect organisational change regarding suggested concerns as to the department's culture, teamwork and morale;
- sufficiency of resources to achieve 100% compliance in biosecurity outputs;
- overtime and weekend work performed by fisheries inspectors;
- advantages to the commercial fishing industry from a new fisheries licensing system;
- steps taken to minimise the impact of ticks and tick fever on the Queensland cattle industry;
- the status of the Fish Habitat Areas program and the benefits of the program;
- the Queensland East Coast Inshore Finfish Management Plan and involvement of industry;
- preparedness for an outbreak of avian influenza;
- allocation for the ongoing control of fire ants in south-east Queensland and the Yarwun area;
- numbers of fishers exiting the industry, the effect of fisheries policy and legislation, and support for the Queensland industry;
- implementation and compliance with the QRAA process and any negative impacts on funding allocations;
- total levels of staffing and the effects of VERA, retirements, resignations and transfers;
- an oil spill in Gladstone and its effects on the public and the fishing industry;
- an import risk analysis by Biosecurity Australia and input from the department;
- responses to an electric ant incursion in north Queensland;
- collaboration and integration with Queensland and nationally-based science agencies;
- actions to capture opportunities to export food and agribusiness to the Middle East;
- support from trading opportunities in Korea;
- the effect on Queensland's agricultural industry of prolonged drought and overseas competition;
- improvement of facilities to develop and evaluate plant biotechnologies;
- support provided to cropping industries for research and development;
- the QRAA and payment of the travelling rebate when stock are taken on stock routes;
- planting of trees by Forestry Plantations Australia to maintain future timber supplies;
- actions to maintain profitability and sustainability for Moreton Bay fishers;

- reasons for the introduction of fees for property and brands registration;
- preparedness for the implementation of the stop movement system;
- assistance provided to the dairy and sheep industries regarding the costs of NLIS tags; and
- actions to upgrade research facilities to enhance Queensland's livestock industries by way of improvements to productivity to maintain global competitive advantages and addressing the threat of bioagents.

Minister for Communities, Minister for Disability Services, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Minister for Seniors and Youth

The Department of Communities

The Department of Communities is a human services agency that performs a range of statutory, regulatory and support functions to foster strong Queensland communities. The Department provides service to the community, develops policy on community engagement, supports and monitors the provision of quality services to children and families, seniors and young people. The following table sets out details of the appropriation for 2007-08 compared to the previous financial year.

	2006-07 \$'000	2007-08 \$'000
Departmental Outputs	359,671	468,628
Equity Adjustment	15,446	71,244
Administrative Items	152,384	149,841
Vote Total	527,501	689,713

Key Elements in the 2007-08 Budget include:

- the allocation of \$20 million, including capital gains grants to assist community-based providers, to establish early childhood services, as part of the Queensland Government's The Best Start – Supporting Families in Early Years election commitment;
- funding to strengthen the department's ability to licence and monitor the growing number of child care centres through additional staff, training and support;
- a review of the Child Care Act 2002 to ensure that legislation supports the diverse and changing needs of families and protects the best needs of children receiving child care;

- funding to complete the Early Years Centres capital works to provide a range of prevention and early intervention services for families with children upto eight years old;
- the monitoring, support and evaluation of Safe Haven services on Palm Island, Cherbourg, Coen and Mornington Island
- funding for the delivery of three Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander domestic and family violence counselling services in Cooktown, Thursday Island and Cherbourg, providing outreach services to the Torres Strait, Hopevale, Wujal Wujal and Laura communities; and
- the establishment of a Community, Youth and Arts Development Centre in the Sunshine Coast Region.

Disability Services Queensland

Disability Services Queensland is the Queensland Government department responsible for providing leadership and policy in disability services and programs for people with a disability and their families and carers. The department funds and provides a range of programs and services for people across the state. The following table sets out details of the appropriation for 2007-08 compared to the previous year.

	2006-07 \$'000	2007-08 \$'000
Departmental Outputs	498,509	726,942
Equity Adjustment	42,016	39,171
Vote Total	540,525	766,113

Key Elements in the 2007-08 Budget include:

- \$13 million recurrent and \$0.6 million equity funding to commence establishing a contemporary approach to the delivery of disability services in Queensland;
- \$4 million to establish new accommodation support and day services for people with a high and complex support needs, where gaps exist in location and/or type of service provided through the service;
- \$2.4 million to provide grants to non-government service providers to enable them to support people with a psychiatric disability and moderate to high support needs;
- \$5 million to meet the needs of adults with intellectual disability, particularly for those who are ageing, requiring high level support and receiving accommodation support and respite services from the department;

- \$1 million to assist people with spinal cord injuries to transition into community living;
- \$3.6 million to deliver the department's Forward Capital Program and Strategic Asset Management System;
- \$2 million to assist young people with a disability to make the transition from school life to an adult through the Post School Services Program;
- \$2 million to assist young adults with a disability known to be exiting the care of the State through the Young Adults Exiting the Care of the State Program;
- \$0.3 million for the Facilitated Communication strategy which uses innovative techniques to assist people who have a movement disorder and complex communication needs to communicate more effectively;
- \$35.6 million from the Queensland and Australian Governments for the Home and Community Care Program which provides domestic assistance, social support, personal care, home maintenance and modification, meal services, respite care, transport services, allied health services and community based nursing for frail older people and younger people with moderate to severe disabilities; and
- \$2.6 million to support non-government service providers to assist people with mental illness and their families and carers, enabling them to participate actively in the community.

Issues canvassed at the hearing included:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships -

- allocation for enhancement of existing diversionary programs to reduce the contact of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders with the criminal justice system;
- monitoring and reporting of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody recommendations;
- strategies to address child sexual abuse in Aboriginal communities;
- allocation for property construction, including upgrades, in Cape York and Torres Strait Island communities;
- implementation of the 65 recommendations of the Palm Island Select Committee;
- child-care services provided for Indigenous children;
- the purposes of domestic and family violence initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities;
- benefits from investment in leadership programs for young Indigenous people;
- reparations paid and funds remaining from the Indigenous wages and savings reparation process;
- strategies in place to deal with alcohol issues in Indigenous communities;
- initiatives in service delivery to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities;
- guarantees regarding access and affordability following the divestment of retail stores in Aboriginal communities;
- allocation to the Partnerships Queensland program and projects contemplated;
- the intention and benefits of the Indigenous Partnership agreement and its relationship with local partnership agreements;
- actions to address the underpayment of award wages to former mission workers;

Communities, Seniors and Youth -

- allocation for initiatives regarding family support and wellbeing, including early intervention and the prevention of neglect;
- allocation to address problems regarding sexual offences committed by young people who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander;
- underspending of \$10.9 million by the department in 2006-2007;
- actions taken to lead a whole-of-government framework in respect of interaction with non-government organisations;
- actions taken to ensure effective information systems regarding performance monitoring, reporting and evaluation practice of funding administration to the non-government sector;
- differentiation between a social capital approach for grants and a shopping for service approach;
- improved services from an increase in spending on child care;
- spending on the Best Start commitment;
- reasons for a review of the *Juvenile Justice Act*;
- the bail support program and actions taken to address recidivism;

- programs to keep children and families out of the child protection system;
- a redress scheme to provide *ex-gratia* payments to victims of abuse in Queensland's children's institutions;
- availability of community support, early-intervention and assistance for at-risk-families in areas outside south-east Queensland;
- in the Seniors budget, allocation to programs to help older Queenslanders in tangible ways;
- the success of youth justice conferencing;
- delivery of the Our Place, Our Future, a Blueprint for the Bush initiative;
- benefits provided by the Strengthening Rural Non-Government Organisations funding program;
- the Young Adults Existing the Care of the State Program and support for young adults who are not high needs and not suitable for a supported workplace;
- the cost in supplies and services for all promotional material and advertising, in particular for *Share Your Story* calendars;
- deidentified feedback from the *Have your say* consultation;
- demand and management of demand for HACC related services;
- the *Growing Stronger: Investing in a better disability system* and identification, support and development of and for respite needs;
- the location and objectives of planned disability forums;

Disability Services Queensland -

- per capita spending on disability services in Queensland;
- strategies for staff retention in the disability services sector;
- allocated funding for the Adult Lifestyle Support Program;
- planned structured care facilities for people who exhibit challenging behaviours;
- allocation for overnight residential facilities in rural and regional Queensland;
- DISQIS and areas of high need and unmet demand;
- causes of underspending on capital expenditure;
- a proposed centre for best practice in service infrastructure for people with an intellectual or cognitive disability;
- management of accommodation arrangements in response to the Carter report;
- enhancement of accommodation support and day programs;
- reception of Disability Action Week by people with a disability and the wider community;
- benefits of holding the Shared Vision conference in 2006;
- implementation of the Carter Report recommendations;
- benefits of and future plans regarding the Post School Services Program;
- benefits from implementation of recommendations from a review of Accommodation and Support and Respite Services;
- negotiations for a fourth CSTDA;
- proposed action to address increasing community expectation that government support people with a disability;
- progress with the implementation of the new Disability Services Act and communication of changes; and
- funding of family packages following the Have your say consultation.

Recommendation

The committee recommends that the proposed expenditure, as detailed in the Appropriation Bill 2007 for the organisational units and portfolios allocated to it, be agreed to by the Legislative Assembly without amendment.

Mr Evan Moorhead MP

Chair

August 2007

Committee Members

Mr Evan Moorhead MP (Chair)
Mr Mike Horan MP (Deputy Chair)
Mrs Liz Cunningham MP
Hon Ken Hayward MP
Mr Peter Lawlor MP
Hon Kevin Lingard MP
Mrs Jo-Ann Miller MP

Secretariat

Mrs Julie Copley (Research Director)
Ms Amanda Honeyman (Research Officer)
Ms Michelle Benham (Executive Assistant)



Estimates Committee G

2007

Dissenting Report

Hon Kev Lingard MP, Member for Beaudesert

Statement of Reservation

Mr Mike Horan MP, Member for Toowoomba South

Dissenting Report
ESTIMATES Committee G
Hon Kev Lingard MP
Shadow Minister for Communities

Mr. ER Moorhead MP
Chair
Estimates Committee G

Dear Mr. Moorhead

I refer to the report of Estimates Committee G and dissent from the committee's decision to endorse the proposed expenditures as set out in the *Appropriation Bill 2007* for the organizational units and portfolios allocated to it without amendment.

I would like to place on record my thanks to the Committee chair as well as to the Committee Staff for their professionalism throughout the entire process.

Communities

The primary reason for my dissent is the lack of practical support for vulnerable families at risk of entering the child protection system. These deficiencies include delays in the development of the Early Service Centres which were promised last financial year and the shift in emphasis from providing them to high need areas in 2006-07 to high growth areas in 2007-08; inadequate early intervention programs and crisis accommodation for vulnerable families; and the \$10m under spend during 2006-07 which had been allocated to provide such desperately needed programs to vulnerable families as Safe Havens, A&TSI Childcare Infrastructure upgrades, family support, community support, domestic violence prevention and homelessness across the state.

Peak representative bodies and academics opine that the huge increase in the number of children in out-of-home care is an unintended consequence of separating Department of Child Safety from the Department of Communities and that, since more children now enter the child protection system for neglect than abuse, the Department of Communities needs to provide more family support and wellbeing measures. Clearly this budget does not provide the level of support necessary to significantly impact outcomes for those vulnerable children and families.

Disability Services

With regard to the Disability Services Queensland (DSQ), the Minister avoided addressing serious stakeholder concerns reflected in the questions with regard to both the 'Growing Stronger' document and the Government's implementation of the Carter Report recommendations. Furthermore, the de-identified feedback from 'Have Your say: On improving disability services in Queensland' was not tabled by the Minister despite the claim that he was doing so. Importantly, answers to questions concerning the Government's ability to accurately quantify unmet need were very disappointing. Obviously it is very difficult to measure either the effectiveness or inadequacy of any service program if the level of unmet need is unknown, however, anecdotal evidence from peak representative bodies, non-government providers and individuals strongly suggests that Queensland has a high level of unmet need for disability services which needs urgent attention but is not reflected in this budget.

Once again, I would like to thank the Committee Staff.

Hon. Kevin Lingard MP
Member for Beaudesert
Shadow Minister for Communities, Seniors and Youth

Statement of Reservations

Estimates Committee G

Mike Horan MP

Shadow Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries

Mr Evan Moorhead
Chair
Estimates Committee G

Dear Mr Moorhead

I refer to the draft report for Estimates Committee G and submit a statement of reservations on the report and some general comments on the process of Estimates Committees hearings.

The Estimates Committee process this year again highlights the significant weaknesses in this process as a mechanism for proper scrutiny of the expenditures of Government Departments and agencies. In particular, I express the following general reservations in relation to the Estimates Committee Process:

- The entire structure of the whole Estimates Committee process does not allow detailed analysis of the expenditures provided for in the Queensland Budget.
- There is simply not enough time provided to enable proper and detailed consideration of individual Ministerial Program Statements given the number of programs and expenditure. An entire day per portfolio would still not provide sufficient time given the breadth of some portfolios.
- The limited number of Questions on Notice allowed to be asked on each Ministerial Portfolio Statement prevents the pursuit of important issues.
- Receiving responses to Questions on Notice less than 24 hours prior to the actual commencement of Committee hearings severely limits the capacity to further research the completeness and accuracy of answers provided.
- In addition to limited time provided for questions, the avoidance tactics of Ministers who reply to questions in such a way as to evade the issue being scrutinised was a consistent theme throughout the hearings. Despite numerous follow up questions, Ministers either avoided answering questions or simply read prepared briefing notes on subjects not related to the issues raised in the questions.
- The structured nature of the Committee proceedings into blocks of questions with set times from Government and Non-Government Members prevent Members being able to follow a line of questioning in a logical and consistent manner to finality.
- The inability of Estimates Committees to directly ask questions of Senior Public Service administrators.
- The pedantic nature of some Ministers in the interpretation of standing orders to avoid scrutiny of the portfolio they represent.
- The integrity of the Estimates Committee process is grossly compromised due to amendments made to the Criminal Code Act 1889 (Qld) in June 2006, which abolished the crime of knowingly providing false evidence to the Legislative Assembly or a committee.

The portfolio of Primary Industries and Fisheries was scrutinised by the Committee and the following reservations are raised:

The Queensland Coalition found through questioning that:

- The budget for the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (DPI & F) has decreased on a true comparison by nearly 6 percent to \$332.5million which is a cut of \$19.5million from 5 years ago when the budget was \$352 million;
- When examining Voluntary Early Retirements (VERs), staff appointments, staff resignations and staff terminations the Minister has attempted to confuse and hide from the true facts. In answers to questions from both myself and the member for Gladstone, he has attempted to cover up and confuse the number of job losses through resignations and terminations to hide from the continual staff losses suffered by the Department;
- The loss of experienced DPI & F staff has been so serious that the Minister has resorted to forming an Alumni to bring in former departmental staff who were forced out by non-renewal of contracts, retrenchments and VERs to act as mentors to current employees lacking this experience;
- The Intensive Livestock Regulation Unit was an example of the state of crisis that exists within the DPI & F. This is one of the most important biosecurity units within the department and it was shown in questioning that it has been operating with 50% of its operational staff for 12 to 18 months, more than 100% turnover and had a serious lack of experience. It was shown that, as a result of the resource problems, the unit has been unable to oversee regulations in dairy, saleyards or service northern Queensland and has failed its obligations under the Memorandum Of Understanding with the Environmental Protection Agency;
- The minister was unable to explain why 5 cases of swill feeding to pigs in Central Queensland that were known to the department had not been prosecuted;
- Almost one year after the minister agreed to 20 property management officers in an agreement with Queensland Farmers Federation, only three have been appointed in a glaring example of snails pace management;
- The Minister may have mislead the Committee in relation to the 100% compliance rate in accordance with defined criteria stated in the MPS 1-25. There is evidence that in the Central Queensland area alone there were 5 cases of swill being fed to pigs and yet there have been no prosecutions;
- Concerns have been raised that the phenomenon of industrial cruelty (first seen in the era of Wayne Goss and Kevin Rudd) where staff were placed in “the gulag on Gregory Terrace” with nothing to do, is still in place with experienced people pushed out of positions and then refused VERs and left with nothing to do in order to force them to leave the department;
- The Department’s cultural surveys showed staff had moved into a defensive rather than proactive mode. This defensive attitude has occurred as a result of the cancellation of contracts of experienced staff, around 300 VERs and replacement of senior DPI & F staff by personnel brought in from outside the Department with little or no DPI & F experience;
- The lack of resources and staff in the Department has meant that recommendations and monitoring of effluent running into the Baron River and Westbrook Creek had been shelved. We had the pathetic statement by the Minister that he had appointed ambassadors around the state to provide such intelligence;

- There have been serious cuts in the fisheries budget and in particular cuts to the supplies and services budget which includes the major item of fuel for patrol boats. The Minister was unable to answer why he had curtailed overtime and weekend work by fisheries inspectors. It seems that the department believes that breaches of the regulations occur from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday;
- They are so embarrassed by the loss of staff that they are attempting to cover up what they have stated publicly such as the comments on the ABC, when talking about the 120 VERs that were supposed to be replaced by 100 staff the Minister stated that they had been replaced by 440 appointments. In reality, these 440 were replacing permanent, temporary and casual retirements, resignations and terminations;
- There has been a failure by the DPI & F to apply for available grants of Soybean breeding research from GRDC on behalf of the Queensland Soya bean industry, the CSIRO and DPI & F. It was also found that the NSW Department of Primary Industries made similar application and were granted funds. Questioning further brought out that the Department's application was squashed within DPI & F as part of a continual process to withdraw from and abandon grains research;
- The government is failing seriously to meet forestry targets it has set of 34,500 hectares of plantations by 2009. Only 14,000 hectares of land has been purchased and the Minister could not answer how much of this had been planted;
- The DPI & F is about to introduce fees for the registration of properties and brands. This service has previously been free and the new charge will be introduced on top of the increased costs to producers in having to pay for NLIS electronic ear tags;
- The cost to be faced by the sheep industry and the dairy industry with electronic NLIS ear-tagging of sheep and bobby calves is highly expensive compared to the value of the animal.

Mike Horan MP
 Member for Toowoomba South
Shadow Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries