



# Estimates Committee A

## 2008

### Report No. 1 to the Legislative Assembly

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#### Introduction

The Legislative Assembly appointed Estimates Committee A on 1 May 2008, in accordance with Standing Order 167(3), to investigate and report on the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation (Parliament) Bill 2008.<sup>1</sup>

On 15 July 2008, the committee conducted a public hearing to take evidence about the budget estimates from Mr Speaker and his advisors. A verbatim transcript of the committee's hearing can be accessed at:

<http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/view/committees/EC.asp>

Prior to the public hearing, the committee provided Mr Speaker with twenty questions on notice about the estimates for his portfolio. Mr Speaker provided responses to all the committee's questions.

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

- Budget papers;
- Answers to pre-hearing questions on notice;
- Evidence taken at the hearing; and
- Additional information given in relation to answers.

Mr Speaker's responses to the committee's pre-hearing questions together with the minutes of the committee's meetings are included in a volume of additional information tabled with this report.

#### Legislative Assembly and the Parliamentary Service

The Legislative Assembly of Queensland consists of 89 Members who discharge a range of important legislative and constituency responsibilities. The Parliamentary Service established in accordance with the *Parliamentary Service Act 1988* provides administrative and support services to the Legislative Assembly.

The following table taken from the Appropriation (Parliament) Bill 2008 compares the appropriations for the Legislative Assembly for 2007-08 and 2008-09.

Appropriations	2007-08 \$'000	2008-09 \$'000
<i>Controlled Items</i>		
Departmental Outputs	65,230	67,434
Equity Adjustments	(960)	(2,879)
<i>Administered Items</i>	0	0
<b>Vote</b>	<b>64,270</b>	<b>64,555</b>

Source: Appropriation (Parliament) Bill 2008, p.6.

The appropriation for 2008-09 includes \$3.553 million for capital expenditure.

#### Budget Highlights

According to the Service Delivery Statements, the budget highlights for the Legislative Assembly for 2008-09 include:

- Playing a leading role in hosting a regional sitting of Parliament in Far North Queensland. The Far North Queensland sitting, to be funded by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, will be held in Cairns in October 2008 and will provide an opportunity for Queenslanders in the region to engage in the Parliamentary system in practice;
- Hosting an official ceremony for the swearing-in of the new Governor of Queensland;
- Planning official activities to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Queensland Parliament in 2010;
- Implementing a range of electorate office security initiatives following a comprehensive security review conducted in 2007-08;
- Replacing significant air conditioning plant in the parliamentary precinct as a critical component of the Parliament's Water Efficiency Management Plan;
- Refurbishing existing toilet and shower facilities in the Parliamentary Annexe to improve functionality, address changing needs and ensure compliance with contemporary disability access guidelines; and

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<sup>1</sup> As the committee was required to report on other portfolios in accordance with Standing Order 186(2), the committee is reporting separately on the proposed expenditure for the Legislative Assembly.

- Implementing a range of Information Communication Technology reforms.<sup>2</sup>

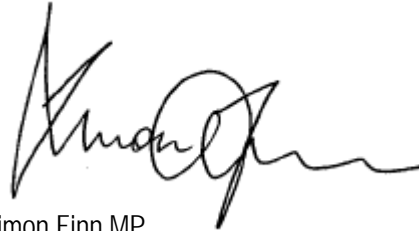
**Issues raised at the public hearing**

Issues the committee raised with Mr Speaker at the hearing on 15 July include:

- The security audit of electorate offices;
- Items confiscated from visitors by Parliamentary Security personnel;
- Improvements to workplace health and safety, including safety assessments of the Parliamentary Annexe loading dock and electorate offices and the Parliamentary Healthsmart Program;
- The major kitchen refurbishment program conducted during 2007-08, and recommendations from the independent review of the Parliamentary Catering Service in 2006;
- Expansion of the Queensland Parliamentary Internship Program to encourage participation by regional universities;
- The April 2008 youth parliament held in Ingham and hosted by the Abergowrie College;
- Parliamentary Education information resources and new fact sheets, historical booklets, changes to the parliament's website and a distinctive marketing brand for the Queensland Parliament;
- Establishment of a Speaker's Advisory Committee under section 9 of the *Parliamentary Service Act 1988*;
- The training program for electorate office staff;
- Increasing lift traffic in the Parliamentary Annexe;
- The potential impact of the North Bank redevelopment on parliamentary car parks; and
- International parliamentary and government delegations hosted at Parliament House.

**Recommendation**

The committee recommends that the proposed expenditure, as detailed in the Appropriation (Parliament) Bill 2008, be agreed to without amendment.



Simon Finn MP

**Chair**

August 2008

**Committee Members**

Mr Simon Finn MP (Chair)  
Member for Yeerongpilly

Mr Lawrence Springborg MP (Deputy Chair)  
Member for Southern Downs

Mr Paul Hoolihan MP  
Member for Keppel

Mrs Betty Kiernan MP  
Member for Mount Isa

Miss Fiona Simpson MP  
Member for Maroochydhore

Mr Ray Stevens MP  
Member for Robina

Ms Barbara Stone MP  
Member for Springwood

**Secretariat**

Rob Hansen (Research Director)  
Kellie Moule (Research Officer)  
Erin Pasley (Executive Assistant)

<sup>2</sup> *State Budget 2008-09 Service Delivery Statements Book 4 – Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Queensland*, p. 4-3.

# **STATEMENT OF RESERVATION**

## **Legislative Assembly**

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

This year has once again shown major deficiencies in the Estimates Committee process that has limited the effective scrutiny of the expenditures of Government Departments and agencies. The following general reservations are held with regards to the Estimates Committee Process:

Regarding the portfolios scrutinised by the Committee, the following reservations are raised:

- The overall Estimates process has failed to allow for any real analysis of the expenditures detailed in the Queensland Budget Statements.
- The limited time available to scrutinise each of the portfolios and agencies outlined in session timetables fails to provide the committee and its members adequate analysis of each portfolio's expenditure.
- The limited number of Questions on Notice allowed for each portfolio limits the capacity of members to examine in depth all areas of the allocated budget items.
- The Estimates Committees fail to allow direct questioning of Senior Public Service administrators.
- Responses to Questions on Notice are received less than 24 hours prior to the commencement of Committee hearings. This stunts the capacity of members to assess the completeness and accuracy of answers provided.
- In addition to the inadequacy of the time allocated for questions without notice, the Ministers' scripted replies rarely addressed the substance of the issues put to them. Generally their filibustering responses are orchestrated to consume the time of the committee with trivialities.
- During committee meetings, the requirement for timed blocks of Government and Non-Government questions prevents Members being able to follow a line of questioning in a logical and consistent manner. This is contrived to obstruct the finalization of substantial issues raised by non-Government members in particular.
- The integrity of the Estimates Committee process is grossly compromised due to amendments made to the Criminal Code Act 1899 (Qld) in June 2006, which abolished the crime of knowingly providing false evidence to the Legislative Assembly or a committee.
- As a result, the standard of answers and the accuracy of information provided to Committees in 2007 declined and declined further in 2008. So much false, misleading and/or irrelevant information is now included that the core objective of forming these committees at substantial public cost has been lost.

Following consideration of the Committee's debate the following reservations are held –

**Legislative Assembly -**

- The budget papers are poorly broken down and do not allow for serious analytical consideration of expenditure in each of the areas.
- Members and the public are no clearer on the impact of the proposed North Bank Development on the Parliamentary precinct and whether or not the functions of the parliament and public access to it will be protected in the event that North Bank should proceed.
- Despite questions on notice and without notice, advice to the committee about greatly anticipated progress on recommended improvements to security in MPs offices was not forthcoming.
- The impact of a withdrawal of equity by the Government from the Legislative Assembly was not properly explained, despite admissions that a large portion of the furniture and furnishings in the Assembly annexe is thirty years old and that provision for its replacement within the next five years has not been made.

Signed

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'L. Springborg', written in black ink on a white background.

Lawrence Springborg  
Leader of the Opposition  
Member for Southern Downs