



Speech by

Mr BRUCE LAMING

MEMBER FOR MOOLOOLAH

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL
Committee (Cognate Debate)
Estimates Committee C
Report

Mr LAMING (Mooloolah—LP) (4.59 p.m.): As the Government's budget for Public Works and Housing has to a large extent followed the pattern of sound fiscal management displayed in the coalition's excellent Budget delivered in May, my attention was predominantly directed to those areas in which the Government has decided to take an alternative approach. The main area is the deamalgamation of the former Department of Public Works and Housing into two separate departments. It is a challenge to accept that such an initiative can be achieved without incurring extra costs.

At its meeting of 12 October, the committee was given the opportunity to direct further questions to Mr Col Clapper, Mr Tony Woodward, Mr Warren Pashen, Mr Ian Fulton and Mr Eric Carfoot. I acknowledge their assistance in providing further advice to clarify issues raised in the Minister's answers to questions taken on notice during the hearing. The committee was advised that the total funding from consolidated revenue has not changed between the two Budgets. There may be some prioritisation between the different units but, overall, the increases associated with the new initiatives are funded from other parts within the corporate area and within the organisation. They still have to operate within the total budget.

The committee was also advised that the budget criteria for the deamalgamation costs was that the total corporate costs would remain exactly the same and that the director-general and assistant director-general positions were created in Housing but funded from savings elsewhere. The prime consideration was that the corporate budget would still remain the same. I look forward with interest to ascertaining next year that the Minister's intentions in this regard are fulfilled.

On a number of occasions in this Chamber I have spoken about unemployment and its associated issues. I can only applaud any genuine efforts by any Government to create new jobs, particularly if those efforts prove to be successful. In the Governor's Speech, we were advised that the Department of Public Works would be employing most of the 500 public sector apprentices within Q-Build. In response to a question on notice, the Minister advised that the proposed intake of apprentices for 1998-99 will be 140. I applaud the increase, but the department will have to sustain this level of intake each year to reach the target of 500. The next challenge will be to keep them all gainfully and efficiently employed. The introduction of female indigenous apprentices into the ATSI Housing Program as additional staff is also welcomed.

One can only wonder, though, what effect all of these contributions will have on the Premier's 5% unemployment target. Then again, how serious was that 5% bid? The dust had hardly settled from the State election when all the escape routes from delivering on that undertaking were trotted out. There was the Asian economic crisis, which was quite apparent before the election—in fact, it was apparent as far back as September 1997. Then there was the Prime Minister's tax reform package. I can recall the Premier's words on radio, "The GST will make the 5% job target almost impossible." Similarly, the tax reform package, including a GST, was clearly on the agenda prior to the Premier's 5% unemployment target claim during the State election campaign. It might have been foolhardy to claim a 5% target, but to renege so quickly is, to say the least, very disappointing. I believe those unemployed

who are genuinely seeking work would have preferred the commitment, however unrealistic, to the cop-out.

Very briefly, in relation to the other portfolio areas of Estimates Committee C, that of Main Roads and Transport, I acknowledge the Minister's assistance, but I cannot let the comments of the Minister on the Sunshine Motorway pass unchallenged. The motorway is a good road; it is the kind of good road that all Queenslanders expect to have in their own area in return for their taxes. It is not an interregional alternative route. Motorists cannot move effectively on the Sunshine Coast without using it. I acknowledge the Minister's undertaking that the tolls will not be reintroduced.

Secondly, during the committee hearings I raised the question of the Camcos study into future transport corridors on the Sunshine Coast. I will be contacting the Minister again to request a full feasibility study into what modes of public transport will be the most efficient from a commercial, social and environmental perspective. This must be done prior to final corridors being decided. I also acknowledge the ongoing assistance of the Minister and his staff with the continuing problem of the powerlines over the Sunshine Coast University.

Finally, I thank the Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing for his responses to questions on notice, questions during the hearings and questions taken on notice. I thank the large number of public servants who assisted by providing detailed information at and following the hearing; the parliamentary staff, in particular Rob Hansen and his crew; the chairman, the member for Greenslopes; and my parliamentary colleagues on the committee.
