



Speech by

**Dr DAVID WATSON**

**MEMBER FOR MOGGILL**

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Hansard 21 October 1998

**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL**

**Committee (Cognate Debate)**

**Estimates Committee A**

**Report No. 2**

**Dr WATSON** (Moggill—LP) (Leader of the Liberal Party) (12.45 p.m.): I begin by congratulating the Chairman of Estimates Committee A on conducting a fair process. As did the previous speaker, I congratulate the staff for providing to the committee a fair representation of its deliberations. I think those things are important.

I was going to say a little about the policy unit of the Premier's Department, but that has already been covered by the Leader of the Opposition and members on the other side of the Chamber. I will restrict my remarks to some of the things that went on in relation to Treasury. I found Treasury's representatives before the committee somewhat disappointing. In fact, based on my recollection of the last few years, I think it was one of the poorer performances of Treasury before the committee.

**Mr Lucas:** You sound like you are grading New Faces.

**Dr WATSON:** It is disappointing that the quality seems to have deteriorated. I will mention some of the issues that I think are worth raising. I hope that in the future we will not have the same kind of lacklustre performance.

When the Treasurer appeared before the committee, I requested more details on the break-up of capital outlays between the Consolidated Fund and the trust funds. I had previously asked a question on notice on this matter, so Treasury and the Treasurer should have been well aware that it may have been raised at the committee hearing. The answer they gave to my question on notice was unimpressive and quite obvious. The exact figure was there on page 219 of Budget Paper No. 2—not the estimate they gave when they answered the question on notice. Of course, they failed to provide the details.

I requested the details from the Treasurer. I thought it was instructive to note that when I first asked the question the Treasurer said, "We are making sure that we have the right answer." The first question, with respect to franchise fees—I believe that is on page 11 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements—he got wrong. He said, "We are trying to make it right", but he got it wrong. He proceeded through the next series of questions to provide the wrong answer. How do we know the answers were wrong? Because the correct information was provided in an answer to a later question on notice.

I thought theirs was a particularly poor performance. They should have known these questions were coming. They should have had the details. If it was Treasury's fault, they should have advised the Treasurer. If it was the Treasurer's fault, he should have known better. That is referred to on page 7 of the committee's report.

The second thing I thought was disturbing was the fact that the Treasurer, in answering a question that I presume was without notice asked by the member for Logan, was able to spell out for the committee a requirement for replacing the taxation and dividend streams from QIDC and Suncorp through an amount of \$948m that was going to be required to be invested to replace the dividend and taxation streams. The important thing about this is that the \$984m is a derived figure. We cannot get to the \$984m without knowing the answers to a whole series of other questions. When that question was asked, neither the Treasurer nor anyone from Treasury could immediately provide the answer. And

when we requested the information on notice, it took four full working days, together with numerous phone calls from the committee staff, to get it. That information should have been available immediately, because we could not derive the Treasurer's figure without having it. And when we did get the information, it read like a concocted answer to satisfy the figure that the Treasurer gave. I believe that is poor. It is not only poor on the part of the Treasurer, but it is also poor because that information was not available to the committee straightaway.

The member for Logan has already mentioned that one staff member from Treasury was not able to attend the committee hearings. I was concerned about that at the time. More importantly, I was concerned when I tried to follow up some questions that the CEO of the QTC would have been able to answer. The Deputy Under Treasurer tried to answer it towards the end, but he got the figure wrong, unfortunately.

Time expired.

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