



Speech by

HOWARD HOBBS

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL APPROPRIATION BILL

Committee (Cognate Debate)

Estimates Committee G

Report

Mr HOBBS (Warrego—NPA) (4.55 p.m.): Firstly, I want to say that the committee worked very well. I thank all the committee members as well as the staff and the public servants, who were able to answer some questions at various times. I thank also the Minister for his professional approach to the Estimates this year. I believe that he did it in a very professional way, and it was quite good. He had difficulty with his voice, and I wish him all the best with his health in the future.

The Minister for Tourism, Sport and Racing questioned the benefits of the Estimates committee process. To a certain degree, I question them as well. I have no problem with going through the process, but at the end of the day all it really does is sharpen up the members and the department. It costs probably \$1m for each department to go through the process, which involves bringing staff from all over Queensland. At the end of the day, what do we get? I ask members: over the past two weeks, what have we achieved? During the Estimates process, for a couple of nights the news headlines related to the Education portfolio and \$2,000 worth of lunches somewhere and a night spent in Townsville on a training issue relating to the Department of Mines and Energy. I referred to a \$10.8m pork-barrelling bid by this Government to get Lorraine Bird re-elected. However, that did not even rate a mention in the news. At the end of the day, I wonder what benefit the Estimates process offers Queensland. During this process, what was exposed? If one considers the news broadcast of the Estimates, nothing! As the Minister said, all the media is interested in is the politics of it, anyway.

I wish to refer to a few issues that relate to the Department of Local Government and Planning. I believe that the Minister has inadequately funded the contaminated landfill sites section. That is a very, very important issue for local authorities to address. It will cost them something like \$500m over the next 10 years. Although the allocation of \$2.5m for 1998-99 and \$5m for 1999-2000—a total of \$7m—is something, I believe that in that second year it will be very, very much short of what is required. In the first year, the Government may get away with that level of funding because it takes a while for any group to get together professional people to do the studies, call tenders and things like that. So the Government may squeak through with that level of funding in the first year. However, it certainly will not in the following year. The coalition estimated something along the lines of \$20m a year, which was what it would have been prepared to put into that program. Obviously, that funding would have been on a sliding scale. So down the track we will be requiring quite a lot more funding for contaminated landfill sites.

I referred previously to the \$10.8m for the Bowen Shire, which was really nothing more than a pork-barrelling exercise. Anyway, during the Estimates committee hearing I also said, "Good luck to the Bowen Shire." I understand that Councillor Bruncker was a bit upset with me for even raising the matter. However, I think that he probably got the wrong impression of what I said from the media. It was something in which I was rather interested. If that shire can obtain \$10.8m to reduce its rates, to reduce its sewerage costs, to reduce its water charges and to reduce its debt and create employment, what are the guidelines for such funding so that other shires can participate as well?

Another important issue that was raised and that we probably need to talk about a little more is private certification and the associated costs to the housing industry. In fact, private certifiers can save Queenslanders \$40m per year. That is quite a substantial amount, especially when one considers that approximately 70,000 houses are built each year in Queensland. Those savings can be made if private enterprise takes over certification for the building code and plumbing. That is a big saving for new home owners. We must assist local governments in reviewing the charges and reaching a stage at which a changeover can occur. There may need to be an inquiry into fees and charges. The Minister assured me that at the moment the department is talking with local government to see how that is going, but we may have to do something a bit harsher than that.
