



Speech by

Dr LESLEY CLARK

MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL

Committee (Cognate Debate)

Estimates Committee G

Report

Dr CLARK (Barron River—ALP) (4.08 p.m.): I am particularly pleased to participate in the debate on the report of Estimates Committee G, because when I was the Chair of the Parliamentary Committee for Electoral and Administrative Review, that committee unanimously recommended that the Queensland Parliament adopt an Estimates committee system for examining the Budget. I think it has been most successful and I am really pleased to see that it has continued. There are always accusations of it being misused by members on either side of the Chamber, and I will touch on that later.

I was particularly pleased to have been involved in Estimates Committee G, because that committee involved portfolios with responsibilities very important for Cairns and far-north Queensland—environment, tourism, planning, communication, and regional and rural communities. It is important that people of far-north Queensland and Cairns are aware that all of these areas have received additional funding from the Government in this Budget for a range of programs and initiatives that are benefiting our region.

Members would know of my interest in conservation matters, and if I have time I will certainly address some of those issues in the Budget. However, I would like to use my time to examine in some detail what I do consider to be a misuse of the Budget Estimates process by the member for Toowoomba North. During the Estimates committee hearing itself, the member asked a legitimate question in relation to whether or not the Government had actually provided an additional \$5m in this budget. He pointed to what he believed was an increase in the overall budget of the QTTC of an amount of only \$1.2m. On the basis of that, he argued that there had not been this increase of \$5m.

He put a number of questions—very carefully worded questions—to the departmental officers; the CEO of the QTTC and the Director of Finance and Administration were there. For the benefit of the members of this House, I think it is worth while actually giving some indication of the responses that were provided. I refer to the transcripts. It was made abundantly clear to that member that, in fact, the budget of the QTTC, which was for \$47.2m, did include the \$5m Asian response grant from the previous Government. Mr Ronai said—

"The current Government has put another \$5m towards marketing in relation to Asia and in relation to the domestic response, and has also reaffirmed, for another \$4.5m, commitments made by the previous Government."

Mr Gregg went on to try to clarify the situation for the member and he said—

"I think there is confusion because some of our funding in the previous year was in one-off, one-year grants. For this year, that money has been replaced by the Government."

He went on—

"Because the previous funding was a one-off grant, if we did not receive the \$5m replacement from this Government our actual budget would have been \$42m. It would have

been less. The \$5m has been added back into our budget. The previous funding was just for 12 months and it was expiring at the end of July. The incoming Government has provided another \$5m and has reaffirmed the commitments of the previous Government."

This debate went on. To me it was really disappointing that, even knowing the information provided to him and having been offered a briefing by the QTTC, instead of accepting the answer from the departmental people, the member for Toowoomba North travelled the length and breadth of Queensland, including coming to Cairns, creating a story which had headlines "ALP duping tourism over extra \$5m". That he would do something like this, I must say takes the member down in my estimation when he knew full well the facts of the matter. He went public, not allowing the facts to spoil a good story. He wanted to dump on the Government and mislead the tourism industry. I put it to honourable members that he has lost credibility with the tourist industry over this. The industry knows the facts; it knows where this money is being spent, and it is very, very regrettable that, when information was given to him by officers, the member went out and deliberately misrepresented the situation.
