



Speech by

PAUL LUCAS, MLA

MEMBER FOR LYTTON

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL

Committee (Cognate Debate)

Estimates Committee G

Report

Mr LUCAS (Lytton—ALP) (3.58 p.m.): This afternoon it is with great pleasure that I speak to the report of Estimates Committee G during the Committee stage. Before I commence, I wish to comment on various aspects in relation to the Estimates committee. I thank the committee staff—our research director, Les Dunn, and our research officer, Cassandra Adams—for the excellent job they did. I thank also Hansard. I thank my fellow committee members from both sides of the Chamber. Both sides approached the job in a constructive and cooperative fashion. Not only was it conducted in that spirit; it was also conducted in a pleasant and cheerful manner. It is always nice when we can get on with people while at the same time undertake a serious task. As the member for Kurwongbah indicated, there was no dissenting report. That is clearly a pat on the back for the committee and for the Government's Budget. I thank also the Ministers and their departmental staff for the cooperation and assistance they gave to the committee.

The portfolios of three different Ministers were examined by the committee. Firstly, I wish to speak about the Department of Communication and Information, Local Government and Planning. Under the proposed budget, there has been a 17% increase in expenditure to \$90.5m. One of the very important things that Minister Mackenroth has achieved in his administration of this portfolio is the amalgamation of five functions in information technology over a number of agencies into one department. I understand that Queensland, through the Labor Opposition and then Opposition Leader Peter Beattie, was the first State in Australia that proposed having an information technology portfolio. That information technology portfolio has been adopted subsequently by many other States and the Commonwealth. That just shows how a good idea from Queensland Labor is being adopted and administered throughout the country.

We have a very decentralised State, and we have seen a number of commitments to increase rural access in the budgetary documentation. Technology can be a great leveller. The Minister and the department will put a lot of effort into looking at competition up and down the State, from Brisbane to Cairns, in relation to our fibre-optic capacity. At present, Telstra has a monopoly. In Brisbane there is plenty of competition. However, we need to have competition up and down the State so that people in rural and regional communities can have a fair go.

In particular, I support the Information Industries Branch under the leadership of Liz Manning. A lot of effort goes into assisting information technology and computer programs to be developed within this country to be sold both here and overseas. Also, in Local Government and Planning we have seen a \$45m increase in expenditure, with \$12.4m for Planning. Regional and rural communities are very important in the State of Queensland. Eight new QGAP offices will be built in 1998-99. I was lucky enough to inspect the Mirani site with Bruce Flemming, the Director of Rural Communities. I was very impressed with the facilities that are being offered for people in rural communities. Access to those facilities is important. They are being brought together in the one place by working with the local community. I note that the Minister for Public Works and Housing is agreeing with me. He takes particular interest in rural and regional communities in this State.

Mr Seeney: I agree with you, too.

Mr LUCAS: I know that the member for Callide agrees with me, too. On many occasions he has told me how he really does support the initiatives that this Government has come up with.

Mr Seeney: I support that one.

Mr LUCAS: I know that the member supports that initiative. It is very good of him to recognise that.

Mr Schwarten: He is a nice bloke.

Mr LUCAS: He is a nice bloke. I look forward to his recognising that in a number of other debates.

The Minister for Tourism, Sport and Racing is in the Chamber at the moment. I congratulate him on being a Minister with a real commitment to and a real idea about the policy future of this State. We have had a \$59.3m increase in Consolidated Fund expenditure in the last Budget. Tourism is the second largest industry in this State. One in 12 Queenslanders is directly employed—not indirectly—in tourism, and it contributes 10% to gross State product. That is almost double the contribution of mining, at 5.4%, or agriculture, at 5.5%. We have only to look at the benefits of Indy that the Minister has indicated to see the great initiatives that this Government has taken in this area.

I do not have a lot of time left, but I wish to mention one very disturbing issue that came up in the Estimates committee hearing, and that was the expenditure by the previous Government on sports facilities. We heard the outrageous information that \$5.5m was spent in Joan Sheldon's electorate for the benefit of her electorate. I understand that there are only three tartan tracks north of Brisbane, and two of them are in Joan Sheldon's electorate. That is outrageous.

Time expired.
