



Speech by

**Hon. R. WELFORD**

**MEMBER FOR EVERTON**

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Hansard 22 October 1998

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

**Committee (Cognate Debate)**

**Estimates Committee G**

**Report**

**Hon. R. J. WELFORD** (Everton—ALP) (Minister for Environment and Heritage and Minister for Natural Resources) (4.30 p.m.): It is my pleasure to join in this Estimates debate. I thank the chairman of the committee and the members of the committee for their very thorough examination of the Estimates for my two departments. I also thank the Opposition spokesman for his constructive participation in the debate, although I must say—as I am about to point out—that there are a number of errors in the assertions that he has been making. And as to some of the statements that he has been making in the media—I would not for a moment suggest that he was deliberately saying things that he knows to be untrue, but the fact is that many of the things that he has said are untrue, and I will come to those in a moment.

The two departments under my portfolio have between them a budget of just over \$800m—\$188.5m for the Department of Environment and Heritage and \$611.9m for the Department of Natural Resources. The funding that we are providing to these two departments will carry out a very important role, and bringing the departments together gives us an opportunity to achieve some synergies and economies of scale from having the departments work more closely together. We have been able to do that, in a sense, by maintaining the previous Government's budget, but probably not increasing it to the extent that I would have desired or, indeed, some of the constituencies that rely on the work of these two departments might have desired. But the budget will, of course, grow in future years. Nevertheless, we have retained some very important initiatives in both portfolios, and I would like to outline a couple of them now.

Firstly, we have already made a start on the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency which, contrary to the media statements that the Opposition keeps releasing, is not a new layer of regulatory bureaucracy; it is, indeed, a transformation of the existing department into a much more industry focused and a much more proactive agency which members of the public will identify as a high-profile protector of their quality of life.

In addition, we will be re-establishing—probably as a subdepartment with its own lines of accountability and reporting—the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service to be a front-line environmental education agency, not just to manage our national parks and the natural heritage which they contain for future generations but also to provide high-quality interpretive services so that all Queenslanders and, indeed, all visitors from around the world can have the opportunity to understand and enjoy the great diversity of flora and fauna within our national parks. \$5m was earmarked as a new initiative this year in the budget for capital works in national parks, including new walkways and amenities. This will be on top of the roughly \$4.25m of combined base funding and unspent moneys from last year. So a total of more than \$9m will be injected into capital works in our national parks this year. That is probably the biggest single expenditure on capital works for national parks ever.

Key environmental priorities also include improving air quality and water quality, reducing greenhouse emissions with a \$1.5m allocation to address climate change issues over the next four years, and a special allocation to address coastal protection and coastal management issues, which will be part of the important environmental planning function of the new EPA.

The Department of Natural Resources, as other members have indicated and as members opposite who have rural constituencies would well appreciate, has a very important role in providing water infrastructure and managing the other resources of rural areas—land and vegetation. The budget of the Department of Natural Resources has not been cut in any of the respects that Opposition members have suggested. The figures that they used in relation to cuts in funding for water infrastructure seem to be plucked out of the air. The Opposition spokesperson used one batch of figures, and the member for Callide used another batch of figures, but none of them squared up and none of them were accurate. The allegations made about cuts in funding for water infrastructure are simply untrue.

What has happened is that some of the budget that still exists has been put into the out years, that is, it is well acknowledged—and the previous Government was simply inflating artificially the figures it was putting in the budget in an unrealistic expectation that that money would actually be spent; but the money is all still there in the budget, and it will be spent in future years.

Time expired.

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