



Speech by

**Mr TIM MULHERIN**

**MEMBER FOR MACKAY**

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Hansard 22 October 1998

**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL APPROPRIATION BILL**

**Committee (Cognate Debate)**

**Estimates Committee E**

**Report**

**Mr MULHERIN** (Mackay—ALP) (12.24 p.m.): In speaking to the report of Estimates Committee E, I would like to thank the Deputy Chair and member for Burnett, Doug Slack, the committee, Ministers and their departmental officers for their cooperation and contributions during the Estimates process. I would also like to commend the staff of the committee secretariat—Mr Chris Garvey, the research director; Mr Andrew Timperley, research officer; and Ms Mandy Elcome, executive assistant—Mr Alan Watson, the staff of Hansard and the parliamentary attendants for their valuable support and assistance during the Estimates process.

The committee examined the budget of Queensland Health and the Department of Mines and Energy. The Department of Mines and Energy Consolidated Fund budget for 1998-1999 is \$160.6m, an increase of \$5m over the 1997-1998 budget. During 1998-1999 the department will continue to promote gas, mineral and petroleum exploration using modern geological techniques, improved data extraction and enhancement, and imaging of exploration reports. During this financial year, the department will rehabilitate abandoned mine sites at Horn Island, Gympie and Charters Towers, and improve the environmental performances of the mining industry.

In the area of mine safety, the department will employ an additional eight inspectors to undertake inspections and safety audits within the industry. The employment of these additional eight inspectors will be welcomed by the industry, especially in the area of coalmining as it has the highest accident frequency rate of any industry in Australia. Available statistics show that the coalmining industry in Queensland accounted for more accidents and fatalities than the remainder of the mining industry within recent times. In 1996-1997 there were 335 accidents and three fatalities in underground coalmines and 237 accidents and fatalities on surface coalmines in Queensland. This level of injuries and fatalities is unacceptable. It causes economic loss and grief to the families of workers who are employed in the industry.

The electricity industry will expend \$820.7m on capital works, including the expansion of the Callide and Mica Creek Power Stations as well as enhancing the transmission system from central Queensland to southern Queensland, which will reinforce electricity supply to Brisbane. The Minister for Mines and Energy inherited from the coalition an industry in a mess which has led to load shedding due to plant failure and the cancellation of the Eastlink transmission line, which would have provided additional electricity supply to Queensland. The Minister outlined his strategies in the short, medium and long term to reform the industry so that the State has a competitive but reliable supply of electricity for industrial, business and domestic consumers. I commend the Minister for his determination to make the Queensland electricity industry the leader in this country.

I now turn to the Queensland Health budget for 1998-99 of \$3.722 billion, which is an increase of \$288.4m on the 1997-98 budget. The key priorities for Health include continuing to reduce elective surgery waiting times, improving health service infrastructure, enhancing mental health services and maintaining the level and quality of services in the face of reductions in Commonwealth funding. The abolition of the former Health Minister's capital charge—or the Horan tax—on capital works has been welcomed throughout Queensland. This insidious tax would have seen a reduction in health services

across Queensland. In Mackay, this tax would have meant that \$1m a year would have been ripped from the budget of the District Health Service, affecting service delivery to the people of the Mackay region. Capital works spending this financial year will provide some 9,000 full-time equivalent jobs within the building and construction industry.

The Minister demonstrated throughout the Estimates process that she was on top of her portfolio and, unlike the former Minister, she has brought down a budget in which the commitments are fully funded and do not burden our public hospitals and public health system. The Minister has a huge task ahead of her: to clean up the mess left by her predecessor, the member for Toowoomba South.

The statement of reservation by the coalition members of the committee was a bitter personal attack on the Minister for Mines and Energy and the Minister for Health, who have demonstrated their knowledge of their portfolios and a vision for the future. The coalition offered no positive alternatives to the Government's agenda. I commend the report to the Chamber.

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