



Speech by

Hon. V. LESTER
MEMBER FOR KEPPEL

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL
Committee (Cognate Debate)
Estimates Committee G
Report

Hon. V. P. LESTER (Keppel—NPA) (4.03 p.m.): At the outset, I congratulate those members who participated in the Estimates committee process, in particular the chairman, the member for Lytton, who conducted the proceedings very fairly. I also point out that, despite key differences in many respects, I enjoy a courteous relationship with the Minister for Environment and Heritage and Minister for Natural Resources. I am pleased to say that that courtesy was extended during the hearings of Estimates Committee G. That does not mean to say that we did not get stuck into each other, but we were decent, fair and courteous about it.

Having said that, the State coalition still has a very serious reservation about the State Budget allocations for the 1998-99 financial year to the Department of Environment and Heritage and the Department of Natural Resources, and a number of other departments. The State coalition has also been very concerned about the continued attempts by the Beattie Government to stymie the Gold Coast's chances of hosting Expo 2002. Our concerns were further fuelled when the Minister admitted to the Estimates committee that his department had been asked by the Department of State Development to compile property descriptions and valuations of sites around Brisbane, including the RNA showground site. The admission came despite previous suggestions by the Premier and his deputy that they had no intention of moving the proposed Expo site from Coomera on the Gold Coast to the Brisbane area. The Gold Coast Bulletin carried a very appropriate headline following the Estimates debate titled "Exposed". The State coalition has some concerns. We wonder whether the Government's intentions are as honourable as it claims.

The Government's failure to address environmental issues is further demonstrated with cuts in funding to the Gurulmundi secure landfill site. This site, which in the past has been used as a toxic waste dump, was to be funded to the tune of \$4.9m under the previous coalition Government. This funding was for the rehabilitation of the site and ongoing monitoring as well as an extra evaporation pond. The Government has cut this funding to \$3.9m. However, the Government's slashing of the environmental program put in place by the former Borbidge Government goes even further.

When the Borbidge Government handed down its Budget in May this year, we provided a further 160,000 hectares to be acquired for national parks. Even though the Queensland Conservation Council was critical of that target, saying that it did not go far enough, the Beattie Government has set its national parks acquisition target at 100,000 hectares—some 60,000 fewer than that proposed by the former State coalition Government.

As has become normal for Labor Governments across the nation, it has not taken this Government long to commence its onslaught on rural communities. Nearly \$45m earmarked by the former Borbidge Government for priority water projects has been scrapped. That is a disgrace. Nearly \$30m set aside for the Water Development Incentive Scheme has vanished under the present Government. That scheme was an initiative of the former Borbidge Government and came from an independent water advisory task force. The scheme provided farmers with a 22% subsidy for on-farm water storage.

Earlier this year, the coalition extended the program even further by announcing that the threshold of eligibility would be reduced from constructions costing \$200,000 to \$75,000. Industry groups welcomed this announcement, particularly the grazing and dairy industries, the canefarmers, fruit growers and vegetable growers. Unfortunately, this scheme is no more. Although I acknowledge that the Government has committed to finalising those water projects already under way as a result of the policies of the former coalition Government, it is obvious that future construction will not receive such a priority.

Water is what will drive this State in the future. If we do not have it and if we have not provided for it, we will be so much worse off. This year's Budget shows that over \$14m will be slashed from the budget of the former Government's Category 1 water projects.

Time expired.
