



Speech by
**Hon. BRIAN
LITTLEPROUD**

MEMBER FOR WESTERN DOWNS

Hansard 27 October 1999

**APPROPRIATION BILL
Estimates Committee D
Report**

Hon. B. G. LITTLEPROUD (Western Downs—NPA) (5.39 p.m.): I intend to direct my comments to the Estimates of the Department of Environment and Heritage and Department of Natural Resources. The most alarming aspect of the funding for the departments was the fact that it represents a reduction. The Beattie Government is guilty of not delivering on its promises. The Beattie Government duped the QCC—the Queensland Conservation Council—the Greens and various other environmentally green groups by giving what are now to be seen as "empty promises". It is obvious that the Beattie spin machine works on the principle of "tell them what they want to hear" regardless of the real intent. I would remind members of the Committee that the Goss Government did this, too, and paid the political price.

I know that the Minister, Mr Welford, was personally devastated by this downgrading of the departments' funding allocation. One could say that he has been let down by his Premier. Then again if Premier Peter Beattie has chosen to "pay on performance", many in the rural sector would argue that the Premier has been generous in his funding to this department. Allow me to list what many Queenslanders cite as a lack of worthwhile outcomes from Mr Welford's stewardship of this portfolio—

National Parks

The Goss Government left a woeful mess in relation to the management of the national parks of Queensland. There was a shortage of funding, and 80% of that funding was going on wages. This meant that the rangers lacked money for equipment. They even lacked fuel to drive vehicles. Noxious weeds and feral animal populations were exploding. During the Borbidge Government this malaise was partially corrected with an injection of more funds and a greater share of that increased funding to equipment and materials. The situation still needs even further correction in subsequent years.

I was alarmed to learn that this Minister expressed an intention soon after becoming the Minister to purchase yet another 100,000 hectares of national parks in Queensland. He cannot manage the estate he inherited with the money available now, let alone with less money coming out of this Budget. One does not have to be Einstein to work out that 100,000 extra hectares will need much more money for effective management. Yet the departmental vote has been reduced. It has been brought to my attention also that many temporary park rangers have been, or are to be, dismissed. This can hardly be seen as a responsible way to upgrade the pathetic level of management of the national parks of Queensland. The Minister may care to advise the Committee tonight just how many positions have been revised or are to be revised in the national parks service.

Water Resources

Under the stewardship of Mr Howard Hobbs, the former Minister for Natural Resources, the other States involved in the Murray-Darling Commission had agreed to the construction of both the Condamine and Nangram weirs in my electorate, without the need for the completion of the WAMP process on the Condamine-Balonne catchment. In 1998, in fact, the departmental officers in Toowoomba advised both me and local mayors that the weirs would go ahead as soon as planning matters were complete. These people indicated all planning would be finalised by February

1999—some eight months ago. Under this Minister, the planning is still not complete. Funding previously planned for these two weirs has been lost. There is no sign of it whatsoever in the budget.

The Minister is now hiding behind nefarious claims of salinity, overallocation and other indeterminate arguments to stall, and probably stop, the construction of these two weirs. I remind the Minister—

The previous Government had the agreement of other States to build these weirs.

The middle reaches of the Condamine have undeveloped potential of economic growth based on irrigation, yet still allow a sustainable environmental flow.

I can advise the House that scientific data shows this sector of the Condamine catchment currently impounds only 5% to 6% of the water generated in this area. The development of these two weirs is environmentally sustainable.

This region of Queensland has a proven ability to produce high quality food and fibre.

This region is desperately in need of a financial boost.

It is a proven fact a reliable source of irrigation water generates prosperity. St George, Goondiwindi, Dalby, Emerald and Ayr are perfect examples of this.

If the Beattie Government is going to deliver on its promises of creating jobs and being a Government for all Queenslanders, it is vital for this Minister to be given the funding and the direction by the Premier to build these two weirs. Quite frankly, the Department of Environment and Heritage and the Department of Natural Resources has not only been subjected to a drop in funding, but we have a Minister failing to do much more than talk. Outcomes in Heritage are naturally nonexistent; outcomes in Environment have been very limited; and outcomes in water resources are next to nil. Queensland deserves better.

I was hoping that the Leader of the House might stay in the Chamber because in the time remaining I wanted to talk about this process that we are going through now. I have been a member now for quite some time and have seen Estimates debated from two different perspectives—both as a Minister and as a member of the Opposition. I think that we as an Assembly should think carefully about once again reviewing the process we are going through. I know there is an enormous amount of time and money spent by the departmental officers in preparing themselves for the Estimates committees, yet they are asked only about 20 questions after working for two or three weeks getting ready. I think we can use the resources of our departments better and give access to various members in a much improved manner than we are doing at present.

Time expired.
