



Speech by

Hon. JUDY SPENCE

MEMBER FOR MOUNT GRAVATT

Hansard 28 October 1999

**APPROPRIATION BILL
Estimates Committee G
Report**

Hon. J. C. SPENCE (Mount Gravatt— ALP) (Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Women's Policy and Minister for Fair Trading) (3.48 p.m.): I rise in support of the report of Estimates Committee G. I begin by thanking members of the committee. The reports I have had from my ministerial staff and from the department certainly were favourable. They had very positive dealings with the committee. I thank the chair and the committee members for that experience.

I also acknowledge the hard work that was put in by my departments and statutory authorities in preparation for the committee this year. I think all Ministers would acknowledge that this was a particularly difficult year because of the change to accrual budgeting. From a Minister's point of view, and certainly from a department's point of view, it was a new set of figures to understand. I think we are in the swing of it now and hopefully in future years we will all be able to sail through that process with more ease than was experienced this year.

While working with the committee was a positive experience, there were some negatives on the day. As Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, I was particularly disappointed that the Opposition should choose to ignore that department and that policy area in the committee debate. The Opposition chose to spend three hours debating the budget for the Department of Equity and Fair Trading, a budget of just over \$40m, but chose to completely ignore the budget of the department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Development, a budget of over \$100m.

I believe that indigenous people in Queensland should find that insulting. The Queensland community should find insulting the fact that they have an Opposition in this State that cannot even be bothered to do its job as an Opposition, that is, to scrutinise the Government's budget. The Opposition failed to scrutinise a \$100m budget—a budget of a whole department. These are the very same people—and I include One Nation members and Independents in this—who go out into the Queensland community and criticise accountability in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and how the Government spends its indigenous money. Yet when given the opportunity to have some understanding and to ask us questions, they passed us by. We do not believe that the Opposition has a shadow Minister for this department or for this portfolio. At least, no-one turned up on the day.

On a positive note, though, I was pleased that the Department of Equity and Fair Trading received a favourable report from the Opposition; that there was no dissenting report. I believe that this is a vote of confidence in my performance as a Minister and certainly in my departments and the statutory authorities that I administer. I thank the committee for that. Obviously, the Opposition, like the people of Queensland, appreciates that the Department of Equity and Fair Trading is doing a very good job and recognises that.

Moving on to the Office of Women's Policy, a number of members of the committee have drawn attention to the poor performance of the honourable member for Maroochydore, who came along to ask a few questions about the Women's Policy budget. I would say to those members who were disappointed that I think the member for Maroochydore is more to be pitied for her ignorance than scorned for her bad manners during the committee. The member for Maroochydore clearly displayed that she had no understanding of the Office of Women's Policy or its budget. She chose to waste her

time asking me about the budgets of other Government departments and rarely touched on that particular policy budget.

The Equity and Fair Trading Department was pleased with the level of questions, particularly by the Government members, who fully understand the great achievements in increasing the budget of that department, particularly in the area of education. We were able to draw a stark contrast, because even in a tight fiscal year we were able to increase the budget allocated to the education branch of the Equity and Fair Trading Department. Of course, that was an area that was sadly neglected by the coalition when in Government. We believe, in the Equity and Fair Trading Department, that it is more important to educate Queensland consumers than to prosecute people who are doing the wrong thing. Last year and next year, we will see more of that education.

Time expired.
