



Speech by

Mrs J. GAMIN

MEMBER FOR BURLEIGH

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

Estimates Committee A

Report No. 1

Mrs GAMIN (Burleigh—NPA) (12.20 p.m.): I did not serve on this particular committee, but I have studied the Hansard and the report. I want to comment very briefly on some matters of concern in the Budget Estimates for the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and to speak in defence of the committee system of the Legislative Assembly.

Although there has been an 11% increase in the Budget for all of the Parliament, I note that there have been severe cutbacks for all parliamentary committees. I know the Speaker said that the committee budgets are not really being cut overall, but in fact all committees have been slashed, and committee members across all parliamentary committees are concerned about these reductions.

The committee on which I serve, the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee—LCARC for short—has had its budget cut from \$289,000 to \$246,000. That is a reduction of \$43,000. This will have a distinct effect on the committee's operations, particularly on the use of consultants as we inquire into matters that come before us, and there will also be a detrimental effect on the committee's ability to travel, even though we are not considered to be a committee that travels extensively.

It is very important for members of Parliament to travel. Parochialism is, of course, not a fault in members as they strive for benefits for their areas, but they need to temper this parochialism with a wider view of State, national and international affairs. Some committees by their very nature travel more than others, but all committees need to attend conferences and seminars, acquire information, meet and exchange ideas with their counterparts interstate and overseas, and generally broaden their outlook to include both the nation and the world at large. When committees travel they also undertake packed itineraries and they fit as much hard work as possible into the limited time available. It will be a great pity to see very important travel opportunities greatly reduced by severe budget cuts.

The Speaker explained that there is an internal review process under way and that the situation where two committees are currently sharing executive assistants is part of that review. Sharing staff is really a very unsatisfactory way to conduct committee business. I am sure that the review when completed will undoubtedly show just how hard our committees work and how important it is for them to be adequately resourced.

The Speaker said that we cannot keep adding staff without any outputs from the committees. I would have thought that over time most committees had met output goals and had certainly not gone backwards. LCARC, for instance, has put out five major reports in the last quarter. Other committees have put out numerous well researched and well prepared reports. Members just have to look at the back of today's Notice Paper to see how hard our committees have worked during the term of this Parliament.

These budgetary reductions will make LCARC committee work hard to handle. We are always trying to save on costs, looking to increase efficiencies in methods of producing reports, for instance, but inquiries need to be conducted and that requires resources. We need to engage consultants. We deal with references from the Parliament. It is very difficult to plan ahead when we do not know what those references will entail, when we are not masters of our own agenda. We do not know how many

public hearings we will need to conduct. We do not know whether it will be necessary for the committee to travel in order to further our inquiries and to broaden our knowledge of subjects which come within our charter.

The Speaker talked about empire building and about not using taxpayers' money to prop up an inefficient committee system. It might have been badly phrased, but I thought it was an unfair reflection on the work of the highly efficient committees of this Parliament. Committees are not about empire building. Committees came about as a result of the Fitzgerald inquiry and are now an integral part of this Parliament and its working process.

Again I come back to the point that it is difficult to understand why it was considered necessary at a time when there has been a budget increase to the Parliament to reduce staffing and other resources made available to the various parliamentary committees, taking into account that up until now a strong parliamentary committee system adequately and properly resourced has been regarded as sacrosanct in the post-Fitzgerald era. I was disappointed to read the Hansard transcript which dealt with the parliamentary committee system. As we do not have an Upper House in Queensland, our parliamentary committees are a vital part of the parliamentary process. They were instituted to compensate for the lack of an Upper House and they deserve the commendation and strong support of all those responsible for the administration of the Legislative Assembly.
