



Speech by

**Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM**

**MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE**

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Hansard 28 October 1999

**APPROPRIATION BILL  
Estimates Committee E  
Report**

**Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM** (Gladstone—IND) (11.51 a.m.): At the outset, may I thank the member for Mackay for his work as chairman of the committee. I also thank Veronica and the other committee staff for their professional and very dedicated work. I thank the Ministers and their officers for their work and their input.

The role of the Mines and Energy portfolio is to "maximise the sustainable net benefit to Queensland from the identification, development and use of its mineral and energy resources". There would be many in my electorate—and I am sure in other electorates as well—who would add, "not to the detriment of those people who live within the affected community". I would again put on the record the unresolved issues between QCL and EEMAG members and an emerging potential problem between Suncor/SPP and residents at Targinni.

I commend the allocations in the budget in relation to alternative energy, including the \$5.5m rebate program for remote area power supply schemes. Those of us on mains power do not realise the impost of not having a 240 volt supply to the house.

One issue of emerging concern is community service obligations. In question time today, the Minister reaffirmed the Government's commitment to tariff equalisation. I am sure all honourable members support the Minister in that reaffirmation.

Before the Estimates committee, the Minister and Mr Boyle referred to the 1998-99 Budget blow-out with regard to community service obligations and referred to the more difficult estimating process for CSOs in the competitive electricity market. It was projected in the Government's first Budget that CSOs would be at \$90.5m. The actual amount climbed to \$419m. That is a huge over-cost to have to cover in any Budget. The current estimate for this year's Budget is \$259m. It is critical that the community service obligation is fully funded in order to recognise the diversity and interdependence of our State.

The Health portfolio is always an emotive area because health is a fundamental issue to the quality of life of people in all electorates. Concerns were expressed about staffing levels—particularly the number of nursing staff. The Minister acknowledged the difficulty of recruiting nursing staff. In my area, there was an increase in the number of staff in the administration area as opposed to the nursing area. There may be a good reason for that, but people in hospital would much rather see an increase in trained nursing staff numbers.

In all areas there is a need for highly trained nursing sisters. Some years ago there was a change of focus and the result was that university qualifications were needed for nursing training. I am probably from the old school because I believe that in-ward-trained nurses had a very compassionate approach to patient care. Whilst I acknowledge the need for good educational qualifications in this area, this must be balanced with good patient care skills.

I am sure everyone in my electorate would say that the hospital staff in my area are wonderful. I commend each and every person involved, whether they are in the private or public sector. But there is

one area of emerging need on which I could not receive a definitive response from the Minister. I refer to community nursing. With Federal case mix funding, patients are being discharged earlier. I asked the Minister for an indication of the amount of dollars that had been allocated to community nursing for early discharge post-acute care in the community, as well as those who are discharged from day surgery. I could not get a dollar figure from the Minister. I was concerned to see that that allocation was increased in real terms.

The Minister confirmed that there were increases in community health in the areas of mental health, youth health nursing and child health. I would not say that that is not necessary, but there is a critical need to increase the funds allocated to community care nursing as a result of the early discharge of patients. The staff are stressed and are overworked. They are compassionate people who see the need of the discharged patients. They often work extra hours in an endeavour to ensure good quality of life for those patients.

I have expressed, and continue to express, concern at the equity return. I heard the responses from the Ministers. I thank the Premier for the briefing that he organised with Treasury—

Time expired.

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