



Speech by

Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

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APPROPRIATION BILL

Estimates Committee A

Report No. 2

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central— ALP) (Premier) (12.36. The Opposition has sought to use the statement of reservations to rewrite the history of its management of the native title issue. I thought that was quite extraordinary. The Opposition is seeking to deny the freeze it imposed on mining leases by asserting that the freeze continued under my Government. That is simply untrue. I use my response here to correct what was in the statement of reservations.

The Borbidge Government refused to issue leases and permits on land on which native title may exist unless the proponent indemnified the Government for any compensation. Only in exceptional circumstances, such as the Century Zinc project, was the right to negotiate process initiated. Even then, the Borbidge Government delayed by five months the initiation of that process, resisting requests from CRA to break the deadlock. That is typical of the Borbidge Government's anti-bush approach. We see a continuation of that in Opposition. The Leader of the Opposition refused a pair for Mr McGrady to go to Canberra. For the information of the Assembly, I table a letter I have written to John Anderson, the Leader of the National Party federally, explaining why Mr McGrady will not be able to attend that conference.

Turning to the issue of our approach, by contrast my Government has initiated more than 200 right to negotiate processes while we await the passage of the alternative State provisions. We have acted to get exploration happening again in areas where only a small proportion of the land is subject to native title. The Opposition is correct in pointing out that processes will work more smoothly after my State-based native title regime becomes law. I welcome the endorsement of my regime. Unlike the coalition, we are not putting the mining industry into deep freeze. The industry itself has publicly acknowledged that we are doing all we can to get exploration and mining activity moving again.

The Opposition contests the fact that it took a litigious approach to native title in Government. The reality was that it was not willing to acknowledge native title anywhere except on vacant Crown land, despite the Wik decision. That was a decision of the High Court. If one needs any evidence of the coalition's willingness to waste taxpayers' money, which was the consequence of the decision to which I just referred, one needs only to look to the Court Government in Western Australia. Richard Court spent \$6m fighting the native title claim over the Kimberleys, the Miriuwung Gajerong claim. The Western Australian taxpayers were stripped of \$6m for a fruitless action. The Federal Court determined that native title existed. No wonder the Court Budget is in deficit.

In contrast, by the end of this year my Government will have saved Queensland taxpayers up to \$15m and will save tens of millions of dollars more over time by negotiation and avoiding litigation in the courts. We are about getting money out of lawyers' pockets and into services.

The Opposition also ignored the facts I presented to explain the apparent growth in expenditure in my department. It continues to peddle half-truths and deliberate misrepresentation of information provided. It has no credibility in the community because this is its modus operandi. The Opposition attempted to compare the financial operations of two very different departments with very different operational responsibilities and different accounting methodologies.

The variations in funding provided to my department reflect basic changes in departmental structures, additional funding responsibilities and significant new initiatives such as funding for the Criminal Justice Commission, \$24.6m; funding for the South Bank Master Plan \$18.9m; the Cultural Heritage Trails, \$15.8m; Centenary of Federation, \$11.1m; and the Cairns Esplanade redevelopment, \$4.5m. I make no apology for funding any of those vital initiatives. I would have thought the Opposition Leader would be supportive of those new initiatives of my Government.

The Opposition also tried to make something out of an apparent increase in staffing in the Policy Coordination Division. The Budget papers clearly show that an additional 46 full-time equivalent positions in the Native Title Services Unit were transferred to that division. Furthermore, the Policy Coordination Division has had to establish several project teams to address specific issues on behalf of the Government to save them money, as I mentioned before. As a result, departmental staffing numbers will fluctuate, depending on the number of issues needing to be addressed. As jobs are finished, people will leave the department.

The Opposition really needs to take a good look at itself in respect of its participation in the parliamentary process. Its performance in Estimates was nothing short of appalling. It is letting down the public of Queensland by taking a shallow and superficial approach to scrutiny of the State Budget. When Labor was in Opposition, we took our responsibility seriously. We analysed Budget information closely and attempted to reconcile changes to ensure that the differences and changes of policy we talked about were real and not just the outcome of accounting adjustments.

Time expired.
