



Speech by

Hon. RUSSELL COOPER

MEMBER FOR CROWS NEST

Hansard 28 October 1999

APPROPRIATION BILL
Estimates Committee G
Report

Hon. T. R. COOPER (Crows Nest—NPA) (3.02 p.m.): Firstly, I place on record my appreciation of the work of David Thannhauser, the committee research officer, and the other committee staff involved in the investigation of the Primary Industries portfolio. Others will speak on the portfolios that they are interested in.

I acknowledge the work of Brad Henderson of my office who did an enormous amount of work in preparing for the Estimates hearing. I acknowledge the officers of the Department of Primary Industries who attended the hearing. They quite obviously put in an enormous amount of background work so that they could answer the questions that were put to them, which, of course, is their job. I think that does a lot of good in that it ensures that all departmental staff are on top of their work. However, I acknowledge that the Estimates process does take an enormous amount of time.

Various members of the media and other interested people listened to the Estimates hearings, although one would not even know that they were on unless one was wandering around the building at the time. The comment from the media and elsewhere was that the hearings were unutterably boring. People were getting around with glazed eyes, wondering what on earth it was all about and commenting on the time that it was taking. I am not blaming anyone for that. I think that the idea of an Estimates process is right and the accountability factor is proper and appropriate. However, we have to come up with some improvements to the system so that the hearings are more interesting and more informative, regardless of which side of politics is in power.

I met a fellow who had been sitting in the gallery during the Estimates hearing. I ask the Chamber not to hold me responsible for his language, but his words epitomised what a lot of the Estimates hearings were about. When I asked what he thought, he said, "Boring as bat shit." I said, "That might be so and I guess a lot of people would agree with you. In fact, most would agree with you. If the bats are offended, they could always say that things are as boring as the Queensland parliamentary Estimates hearings." Members from all sides of Parliament have said that, as have Hansard and the media. Therefore, somehow we must improve the system. We could look at what other Parliaments do. We do not have to reinvent the wheel. We have come this far.

In some cases, the adversarial side of the process comes to the fore. It is okay if people want to indulge in that sort of thing. However, I have always taken the view that we need to ask questions to elicit information so that we can do something constructive with the information. That is the way that I have approached the process and the Minister has responded accordingly. I have to play my part in trying to improve the system and I am quite happy to study the processes that operate in other States so that we can make our system better.

I am greatly concerned at the reduction of \$26.6m in the DPI's 1999-2000 budget when compared to the actual figure from last year. That is of extreme concern. The equity return is, in fact, an assets tax that will be felt by all departments. The Primary Industries Minister and other Ministers will find that to be the case. When we were in Government, we also found that Treasury would try various things from time to time. That can put an enormous strain and stress on a department when it is trying

to manage a budget and continue to support its programs. There is not a shadow of doubt that some programs within Primary Industries will be hurt, and that will unfold as time goes by. We will keep an eye on that. However, our main concern is that the people in the industry will be hurt, and that too will unfold.

I will have more to say on these matters as time goes by. Five minutes is not a lot of time to address all of the issues that were raised during the Estimates hearing. These things will be ongoing. A Budget is not forgotten in 24 hours. It is in place for a full 12 months and we will most certainly be taking a keen interest in it over that period. I reiterate my thanks and appreciation to all of the people who made our task of investigating the Estimates of the Department of Primary Industries a little easier.
