



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR CUNNINGHAM

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**APPROPRIATION BILL
Estimates Committee D
Report**

Mr ELLIOTT (Cunningham—NPA) (5.29 p.m.): In this debate on the report of Estimates Committee D, I wish to concentrate on the Departments of Environment and Natural Resources. Amazingly, over the years both sides of the Chamber have experienced dramas when creating new national parks either by purchasing primary producers' properties or turning over forestry areas to national parks. However, there are never any funding increases for the management of those new parks.

As a former Minister responsible for that portfolio, I can tell honourable members that that is a recipe for disaster. There will be more problems with feral animals, rubber vine and so on in our national parks and we will have neither the rangers nor the money to fix them. As was pointed out earlier in the debate, there will be no money for overtime payments. How will the Government manage these new parks with the same number of or fewer rangers and if those rangers are precluded from performing overtime? We do not have to be Einsteins to work out that that is a recipe for disaster.

This Government supposedly came to power as the champion of the green movement. It will be interesting to see what sort of scorecard the Government is given at the end of the current three-year term—if it lasts that long. I find it nothing short of staggering that it would not have realised what is involved in those areas. The field staff are demoralised. I still have lots of friends among the National Parks staff and they talk to me on a regular basis. They are totally demoralised by the Government's actions. They had an expectation that the Beattie Government would come to power as a Government that was very interested in and committed to that movement; that there would be increased allocations to staff and for maintenance and improving facilities within parks.

This is not a political issue. All honourable members recognise that Queensland has a unique opportunity to encourage ecotourism. We have to harness our parks and wildlife for the good of all Queenslanders and all tourists—be they from overseas, interstate or intrastate. We have all been to national parks or taken our kids camping in them. Alternatively, we might have stayed in up-market or down-market accommodation. We have all had that experience and we all know how important the parks are to the tourist industry in this State. The Minister for Tourism knows how important they are to this State. We have spoken about this issue on many occasions. It is not a political issue.

If the Government does not look after these parks—for instance, if the rubber vine is not kept out of the parks in the north or if feral pigs are not controlled in the western parks—it will have a big problem. That would not only cause the parks to degenerate; it would also create a problem for their neighbours. It would create massive dislocation, disruption and dissatisfaction among the surrounding land-holders. If the Government thinks that they will just sit back and cop it ad infinitum, the Government has another think coming. We used to have our share of fun at times. We had problems with the Broadwater National Park, which is in the electorate of my colleague the member for Western Downs. Pigs were coming from the forestry areas, through the national park and onto land-holders' properties. We got the blame for the feral pig problem—and we will always get the blame. The Government ought to look very hard at its water and timber policies and its tree-clearing guidelines.

Time expired.
