



Speech by

**Tony ELLIOTT**

**MEMBER FOR CUNNINGHAM**

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Hansard 28 October 1999

**APPROPRIATION BILL  
Estimates Committee G  
Report**

**Mr ELLIOTT** (Cunningham—NPA) (3.22 p.m.): I would like to challenge the Minister for Primary Industries here today. Before doing so, I would like to say that I personally find him to be a good bloke. He tries to be helpful. I would like to thank him and his good officers for their support in respect of Bush Connection in Toowoomba both in the immediate past and in anticipation of his continuing championing of that particular cause along with his colleague the Honourable Anna Bligh.

What we are doing there is very important and I am sure it cuts across all political boundaries. It is a tremendous amount of work and it is not going to decrease. Bush Connection have a tremendous role to play. They are doing a fantastic job and I think it is very important that we all continue to support them. I would also like to thank the Minister for the bipartisan support that has been given to the Centre for Climate Applications in Toowoomba. I think that is also very important. I would like to go on record as saying those two things. However, I would like to urge him to use his best endeavours to stop the drift back to the purge of the Goss days when we saw Ed Casey absolutely gut the DPI. We saw some 700 or 800 places within the DPI go during that period. Surely this Minister does not want to go down in history as having presided over another such purge where we just continue to decimate the services of the DPI out in rural centres.

One wonders whether anyone ever learns anything from history. If Government members do not look at what happened in the past and the tremendous political reaction against the ALP, I do not know what we have to do or say or what figures we have to point out to them to bring them to their senses. The services offered by the Department of Primary Industries are part and parcel of the lifeblood of inland and rural centres. They just cannot continue to slash and burn and rationalise, no matter what flag they like to fly it under—the level playing field, National Competition Policy or something else.

I know there are members opposite who are just as opposed to National Competition Policy and the purge of rural support-based services such as the DPI as we on this side are. This Minister, who has done a lot of travelling, who has done his level best to try to understand the Department of Primary Industries, goes out there and talks to people and makes a good impression generally. I find it very hard to understand that he cannot see what will happen if we continue to undermine those essential parts of the Department of Primary Industries, particularly the extension services. If members look back to the days when the coalition was in power in the seventies and eighties, they will see that that extension service played a tremendous role. In particular, it fossicked for information from people who were travelling overseas, from those doing their own research or from those who were purely and simply smarter than the rest of us.

We used the extension offices to glean that information. We worked out what it was they were doing that was so successful and then extended that through to all of the other farmers who were willing to listen and take that support and assistance. We ensured that the lowest common denominator was lifted closer to that of a person who was excelling in a particular field. That is really one of the main roles of the extension services of Primary Industries. If we do not have those people out there walking around the paddocks with their feet in the dirt, then we will not have that service working properly and we will not have the research that we are doing ourselves. There is some wonderful research being done down at Hermitage Research Station. Paul Johnson and all of the people down there are working on barley, chickpeas, sorghum and goodness knows what. They are

dedicated people. They know what they are doing. They do absolutely fantastic work. The Government should not let their work be wasted by not disseminating it back into the community to ensure that it lifts the productivity of primary industries right throughout this State.

I urge the Minister to build on the things that he has done well. As I mentioned, he has done well with Bush Connection and the Centre for Climate Applications in Toowoomba. He should build on those. He should not let Cabinet members and others undermine what he is doing in respect of these other areas.

Time expired.

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