



Speech by

Mr BRUCE LAMING

MEMBER FOR MOOLOOLAH

Hansard 23 August 2000

APPROPRIATION BILL, ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

Mr LAMING (Mooloolah—LP) (2.35 p.m.): I join the cognate debate on the Appropriation Bills to speak to the Estimates Committee B report. One of the major areas of expenditure in the Police budget is of course salaries for police officers. The former Minister, the member for Crows Nest, commenced a long-term program of increasing police numbers in Queensland, including the establishment of the Townsville academy. The benefit of these initiatives continued to flow when the Beattie Government took office. I call on the Minister to redouble his efforts to get Queensland's police population ratio close to the national average.

Raw police numbers are not the whole problem. On a number of occasions in this Chamber I have highlighted the shortcomings of the police staffing allocation model. Let me say quite clearly that it is essential that a non-political staffing allocation system is kept in place and only adjusted when necessary to ensure equity across regions. However, any system must be objective right across-the-board. Approximately 40% of police numbers are allocated as "givens" on the basis of existing police stations, leaving only 60% to be allocated by statistical factors included in the model. This is obviously a shortcoming as it perpetuates longstanding inequities as populations move into new growth areas in Queensland's regions.

The Minister has already responded to me that any amendment to the model would probably not have much impact on currently disadvantaged areas within the north coast and, I suspect, south-eastern and metropolitan south regions. This is not good enough. As Queensland is already well behind the national average, any inequitable distribution within the State can be quite critical, as is the case in districts such as the Sunshine Coast. How can a police to population ratio of one to 750 persons possibly deliver an equivalent service as that delivered in interstate regions which average one officer for 466 persons? Expressed in another way, Sunshine Coast officers have a very much higher percentage workload than their interstate colleagues.

The concerns that I raise here are not simply numbers; I bring them to the attention of the Chamber because of the effect that low police numbers have on the delivery of police services, particularly in areas of great disadvantage. When we see that property offences have increased by 7.6%, any further stretching of the thin blue line is going to result in an overload on the officers in those areas. Recently I had the opportunity of talking to a senior officer on the Sunshine Coast who advised me that the coalition's initiative of school-based policing had been recognised as one of the best programs yet devised to tackle the root causes of youth crime. What a disappointment to learn that this program has not been increased.

Once again, it is those districts with the lowest per capita police numbers which are hardest hit, as such programs may be seen as discretionary by hard-pressed OICs. There would be little debate here that we must come to grips with youth problems, including drug use, which lead to initial criminal offences. I am reliably told that this program makes a difference. I call on the Minister to reconsider his commitment to school-based policing and redouble his efforts for the benefit of not just the schools and the students but also their families, the at-risk kids and the whole community.

Another issue I must raise is the situation faced by Sunshine Coast Water Police. I have raised the issue of inadequate accommodation in the past. Moving these police away from the water and down to the Kawana station might solve the space problem, but it would take the officers away from the

culture in which they are vitally involved. This situation is at great variance with that in Cairns and on the Gold Coast. It should be rectified.

I suggest to the Minister that he afford a higher priority to an appropriate base for the Water Police on the Sunshine Coast. This could be achieved by negotiating a joint facility at Mooloolaba with the Queensland Transport maritime division and perhaps DPI Fisheries. Both Kyle and Steve of the Water Police do a great job on the Sunshine Coast and they should be assisted by being located at the harbour, with a rapid response boat facility near at hand.
