



Speech by

Mr T. MALONE

MEMBER FOR MIRANI

Hansard 23 August 2000

APPROPRIATION BILL, ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

Mr MALONE (Mirani—NPA) (12.56 p.m.): I, too, would like to thank and congratulate the chairman, Pat, for his excellent role in chairing Estimates Committee B. I am pleased to have taken part in the questioning. I would also like to repeat the sentiments of the member for Warwick in terms of the huge costs involved in preparing for Estimates—the number of staff involved in actually supporting the Minister. At the end of the day one wonders at the quantity and quality of replies we get back.

Mr Foley: I can't say much about the questions.

Mr MALONE: I have to say that none of the questions were answered. That is one of the problems we have. The Opposition seemed to ask very pertinent questions but, unfortunately, we got very inappropriate answers or no answers at all. At the end of the day, as an Opposition we are not getting value for money. I believe that we really do need to have another look at the way in which Estimates work. It is a huge cost to the departments, it is a huge drain on resources and I just wonder where we are going with it.

I would just like to congratulate the Minister, Mr Robertson, on the way in which he handled the Estimates committee. After endeavouring to answer my question this morning, he is getting a bit of a reputation as a Minister who is not able to answer a question, and it was a similar situation in the Estimates committee. As I said, I just wonder where we are going with Estimates in this respect.

One of the issues we raised during Estimates in respect of the QAS was the fact that the QAS overspent by \$3.8m. That may not be a huge amount, but we certainly have to question the fact that there has been a fairly substantial increase in head office staff, but we are not seeing that reflected in numbers of people on the ground. It is quite amazing when we really think about the fact that a clause in the regional executive directors' contracts demands that they come in on budget. I know that in some areas that was certainly not the case and I am not sure whether their salaries were reduced as a result. I have received information that officers in charge of ambulance centres were unable to spend more than \$50 without higher approval. That goes to show that when it comes to the people on the ground, they are not getting the support or the resources to do what they have to do, yet it seems that there are plenty of resources at a higher level.

In common with his ministerial colleagues, the Minister refused to answer questions in regard to performance bonuses paid to QAS executive staff. Obviously this money comes out of the budget. I would have thought that under normal circumstances this would be a question that should be answered and it was very disappointing that it was not.

In relation to the question in regard to rural fire brigades and supply vehicles, it seems that the coalition policy of supplying and equipping rural fire brigades with vehicles is ongoing. It is good to see that the Government is doing that. However, I did ask a question with regard to veteran fire appliances, which now receive an exemption in respect of their registrations, and the suitability of fire tenders, particularly this year when there is a large amount of vegetation out there and it is drying off very quickly. Some of the fire attack vehicles do not carry a lot of water, whereas a lot of the older vehicles had a high water carriage capacity. There seems to be a need to change our priorities a little to ensure that they have access to sufficient amounts of water. Insufficient water can be a real problem with a big fire. I am sure we are going to see more and more of that, as we are already seeing it now and it is virtually the end of winter.

There is a concern right across the State that SES volunteers are not being recognised to the extent that they should be. Certainly the change of name to the Counter Disaster and Rescue Organisation has not helped at all. I think the Minister needs to go back to grassroots in this respect. I am still hearing reports that SES groups are unable to access uniforms, boots, hats and other very basic items.
