



Speech by

Mr TIM MULHERIN

MEMBER FOR MACKAY

Hansard 23 August 2000

APPROPRIATION BILL, ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A

Mr MULHERIN (Mackay—ALP) (11.47 a.m.): In rising to speak to the report of Estimates Committee A, I note the National Party has had very little to say about the budget for Primary Industries and Rural Communities. I would like to address one point raised by the National Party. It deals with the Office of Rural Communities. The Opposition spokesperson for Rural Communities, the member for Warrego, claimed that the Office of Rural Communities had been disbanded. Nothing could be further from the truth.

As honourable members would know, the Office of Rural Communities was established by the Goss Labor Government. Late last year the ministerial responsibility for the Office of Rural Communities was transferred to the Minister for Primary Industries. The move was about enhancing the role of the Office of Rural Communities. The member for Warrego seems to make issue that the Office of Rural Communities is not referred to in the table of funding allocations in the Budget papers. The reason for this is that the budget is framed on total outputs. The work of the Office of Rural Communities is accounted in the output of rural community development. The Office of Rural Community remains a separate unit.

If only the Federal Government followed the Queensland Government's lead and established its own Office of Rural Communities, perhaps we could have averted the Canberra bungling over assistance for the sugar industry. The need for a Federal Office of Rural Communities was highlighted by the very confused comments made by the National Party member for Dawson, who talked to ABC Radio last week about the failure of the Commonwealth to deliver any assistance for the sugar industry. She said—

"Unfortunately there are city centric views down here in Canberra that we have to prevail against ... Unfortunately I guess you can't control Cabinet ministers and their departments from asking questions and wanting certain assurances."

I know that the Minister's call for an Office of Rural Communities in Canberra has support within the coalition. On another matter, I note the support from the National Party for the transfer of the Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority from Treasury to the Primary Industries portfolio. Earlier this month, the Premier and the Primary Industries Minister announced a concessional loan replanting and establishment scheme for the sugar industry. This scheme is targeted to assist growers to get crop into the ground, increasing throughput to mills and enhancing flow-on benefits to local communities. The scheme will be administered by the Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority.

I also welcome the Government's support for rural women in assuming decision-making roles in the Queensland agricultural sector. The Women in Rural Industries Unit within the Department of Primary Industries aims to increase women's participation in decision-making bodies. The unit creates, supports and publicises activities to build the skills, confidence and opportunities for women and young people to play even greater roles in the future of Queensland rural industries. I believe this is a very important initiative. Encouraging the greater participation of all stakeholders in agriculture can only deliver better outcomes for the industry and regional Queensland. DPI has reported that recent research has found that women are joining Queensland's growing agricultural work force at a faster rate than men, with almost 7,000 more women employed in agriculture now than five years ago. Research

has found that the number of women employed in agriculture in Queensland grew by 28% to 31,400 in 1998-99 compared with a 20% increase to 61,300 for men over the same period.

I will devote what time I have left to making comments on the Office of Fair Trading and some of the initiatives the Minister has implemented to protect the community from the unethical behaviour of promoters of get-rich schemes. I believe the Queensland taxpayer continues to get good value for money from the efforts of the Office of Fair Trading against unethical marketplace behaviour. Some examples where the Office of Fair Trading has acted include dealing with international and domestic scams, problems in the car rental industry and the activities of loan sharks that are detrimental to consumers. The Office of Fair Trading is constantly working to warn consumers about the dangers of falling prey to local and overseas swindlers.

In the past 12 months, the Office of Fair Trading has received more than 800 written complaints and thousands of telephone inquiries from consumers seeking help on what to do about scams. Prevalent scams include the notorious Nigerian letter scam; the UK generated inheritance scam, Estates General Promulgatus; and overseas lottery scams. The Office of Fair Trading was successful in getting the British authorities to act on the Estates General Promulgatus scam and, as a result, the organiser of the scam stopped operating. The old scams of pyramid selling and referral schemes have also been actively promoted in Queensland over the past year. The Office of Fair Trading has been vigilant in informing consumers about the dangers of these schemes.

Time expired.
