



Speech by

Mr TIM MULHERIN

MEMBER FOR MACKAY

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APPROPRIATION BILL, ESTIMATES COMMITTEE F

Mr MULHERIN (Mackay—ALP) (12.43 p.m.): As a member of the Minister for Mines and Energy's legislative committee, it is a pleasure for me to speak in support of the report of Estimates Committee F. I will use the time allocated to speak on the achievements of the Department of Mines and Energy under the leadership of the Minister for Mines and Energy, the Honourable Tony McGrady.

The electricity corporations within the Department of Mines and Energy will continue their commitment to capital projects within their industry. More than \$1.3 billion in capital works spending has been allocated this financial year for major maintenance upgrades and new construction to ensure that they keep pace with the ever-increasing demand for electricity. This is \$300m more than was committed by the corporations during the last financial year and represents more than twice the amount committed in the coalition Government's last Budget, that being \$0.5 billion. The Department of Mines and Energy will have a total operating budget of \$83.7m in 2000-01. This represents an increase of \$7.8m in spending over last year.

As its commitment to the Queensland energy policy, a Cleaner Energy Strategy, the Department of Mines and Energy will continue to offer programs that will foster the use of a greater diversity of cleaner energy sources. The Solar Hot Water Rebate Scheme will continue. The rebate has been increased to \$750. The scheme will receive funding of \$3m this year. Industry feedback suggests that the increased rebate has raised demand for solar hot water systems by around 100%. Of course, this also generates new jobs in the industry.

\$4.6m has been allocated for the Remote Area Power Supply Rebate Scheme, including the Daintree remote area power supply program. It is anticipated that more than 400 remote area power systems will be approved for rebates this year. In response to the good take-up rate of these systems, the number of formally accredited remote area power supply installers has increased from 12 to 48 and additional employment in the industry has been generated.

\$1m has been set aside for the working properties rebate scheme in 2000-01 which for the first time will provide Queenslanders on remote properties with a realistic option for a reliable, 24-hour power supply. This is a joint program with the Commonwealth Government. \$2.047m has been provided for Queensland sustainable energy innovation fund grants to develop renewable energy technologies.

The Queensland energy policy also seeks to meet the challenge of lower greenhouse gas emissions by encouraging the establishment of a competitive market for gas. \$1.098m has been provided for new systems, policies and processes to be established to support new petroleum and gas legislation in line with National Competition Policy. \$1.9m will also be spent on Stage 1 of a project that will review the benefits, costs and viable pricing options of introducing full retail competition into the Queensland electricity industry. A recommendation will be made to Cabinet. If introduced, full retail competition will extend to small customers the ability to shop around for power supply on the basis of quality and price and will lead to retailers delivering better and more innovative levels of service. This will act as a further stimulus to job and wealth creation in the State as electricity is a key factor input to new and expanding businesses.

Continuing to attract new exploration and mining ventures to Queensland to take advantage of the State's prospectivity remains a priority for the department. \$2.3m has been allocated to continue

with the Prospectivity Plus initiative. This funding will be spent on mineral occurrence mapping, airborne geophysical data acquisition and the development of digital information systems that will promote Queensland as an attractive place to explore and provide a real incentive to potential explorers. Funds of \$0.8m over four years will continue to support the QTHERM coal promotion program in the international and domestic marketplace to take advantage of the 36 billion tonnes of thermal coal resources available in Queensland.

All in all, I believe this to be a good budget that will provide sustainable growth within the mines and energy sector and meet the high public expectation that any development be done in an environmentally responsible manner. The Estimates process highlighted the very real importance of the Mines and Energy portfolio and the very real accomplishments that have been achieved under the Minister, the Honourable Tony McGrady.

I place on record that due to ill health I had to step down as chair, but I congratulate Mr Neil Roberts, the member for Nudgee, and other members of the committee on the work they did. I also acknowledge the research officers, Anita Sweet and Carolyn Heffernan, for the great work they did in assisting the committee to carry out its duties. I commend the report of Estimates Committee F to the House.
