



Speech by

Hon. V. LESTER

MEMBER FOR KEPPEL

Hansard 23 August 2000

APPROPRIATION BILL, ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A

Hon. V. P. LESTER (Keppel—NPA) (11.53 a.m.): An area of concern which was raised in the Estimates committee relating to Aboriginal and Islander affairs was the situation with regard to the IBIS store on Cape York. That facility has lost \$3m in funding since the Minister took office. This occurred even though the Minister had a representative appointed to the IBIS board. This is a tragic situation. Either the Minister was not watching the activities of the board or she was not liaising with her representative on the board. For the Minister to have allowed that to happen in such a short period reeks of incompetence. I cannot kindly say it any other way. I would like to, but I cannot. I also point out that since then the board has been dismissed. The Auditor-General was very scathing indeed. Quite obviously, it was not one of the Minister's best efforts. As a result, people have lost their jobs. In fact, the price of goods has gone up and the selection of goods is not as great. That is the sorry result. However, let us hope that in this great world of ours things will improve. That is what we have to look at doing.

I believe that the Minister will need to keep an eye on the councils. She was gracious enough to accept a couple of amendments from us when legislation was brought in to tighten the running of Aboriginal community councils. We suggested some amendments to tighten it. I believe that the Minister showed commendable discretion and accepted what we had to say. We were not being political; we just wanted it tightened. It was nice to know that that was accepted in the Parliament. I thank the Minister for that.

In relation to Aboriginal and Islander affairs, there is a heck of a lot of work to be done. However, at the same time, there is a road ahead which is laden with possible achievements if we all put our backs into it and work as hard as we can. Strenuous efforts are being made in many of the Aboriginal and Islander community centres and teachers are being trained on the spot. This means that they can then take their place in mainstream schools such as schools at Hope Vale and other places. I had the opportunity to look at one of these programs. I thought it was particularly good. However, I would also like to see nursing training for indigenous people expanded throughout the State. I refer to the pilot program at the centre at Murgon. I believe we should expand this program so that nurses or nurses aides can do a course which will give them one year towards accreditation for a full nursing course at a university. That would provide them with training on the spot in a hospital and assist them from there.

There are other areas, though, in which we need to do more for the staff who work at these centres, whether it be Woorabinda, Hope Vale or the very far north. Many of these people work in fairly isolated communities. Anybody who has driven a four-wheel drive from Cooktown to Wujal Wujal will know that it is an experience on its own. It is even an experience to drive further south, but it gets better the closer to Cairns one gets. Many people in those areas are doing a lot of good work, but they are isolated and it is not easy for them to travel out of the area. I ask the Minister to pursue this issue with the Minister for Transport and Minister for Main Roads, in whose electorate those towns are located, to do something about the roads in that area, because they are pretty poor. A lot more effort needs to be made.

Time expired.