



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR SPRINGWOOD

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APPROPRIATION BILLS [ESTIMATES COMMITTEE G]

Ms STONE (Springwood—ALP) (4.33 p.m.): As a member of Estimates Committee G, I take this opportunity to say how impressed I am by this democratic process. This is an open and transparent process. It is now quite obvious that this budget is for all Queenslanders and the investment of their future. I also take this opportunity to compliment the chairperson and parliamentary staff on their efficient handling of all the procedures involved. I congratulate the staff of the various departments whose budgets were under examination for their professionalism. I imagine this process is quite nerve-racking for them.

It gives me great pleasure to speak in support of the adoption of the report of Estimates Committee G. As this was my first experience with the estimates process, I must say again that I was very impressed. This process is fair and gives a fair go to all. It allows opportunities for opposition members to raise questions in areas where they have concerns and allows them to scrutinise such an important document as the budget. I did not waste this great opportunity. I asked the questions I wanted to ask the ministers and I asked the questions that were asked of me by some of my constituents and got detailed answers for them. Like other members of the government, I found a lot of positives from this process.

For the very first time in Queensland the gross value of the state's primary industries is forecast to exceed \$7 billion in 2000-01—and this is predicted to rise to \$7.89 billion in 2001-02—while the gross value of sugarcane is expected to increase by 66 per cent to \$1.05 billion in 2001-02. The Queensland Sugar forecast for the 2001 season pool price is in the range of \$330 to \$360 per tonne, which is up \$100 per tonne. The flow-on benefits from this forecast increase are likely to be considerable. One of the most important factors has been the funding used to facilitate the progression of long-term industry strategies.

But it is not just about products and industries. It is also about focusing on people. Women play a critical role in Queensland primary industries, but that is not always recognised. I am pleased to report that the DPI is working to create a more balanced rural sector by encouraging more women to become involved in leadership roles by investigating the barriers preventing women to take on these roles and implementing strategies, such as the development of a list of mentors and champions to work with women in the agriculture sector.

Child protection is something that is important to all members. I am extremely pleased to see the announcement of 50 new child protection workers. This means the Beattie Labor government will meet its commitment to deliver an additional 250 direct delivery staff by the year 2003. The additional 50 staff included in this budget is 24 more than originally planned and adds to the 169 new staff already in place. But this government not only recognises the needs of the future; it has also responded to the recommendations of the Forde commission of inquiry and is supporting victims of past abuse through the Forde Foundation. This government has injected a further \$1 million in this budget to the foundation. The department has also established a team dedicated to assisting former residents and regularly communicates with them on the implementation of recommendations and new services available to them.

This budget has increased spending in the area of disabilities by 11.6 per cent and families by 12 per cent, the biggest percentage increase in any department. I take this opportunity to acknowledge

the hard work done by the minister, the Honourable Judy Spence, who has been working hard to represent the significant issues in these areas. This massive increase is obviously the result of her dedication and representations.

A greater number of retirees will have access to government concessions and business discounts through a fairer Seniors Card means test. From 1 July, the Queensland government has made provision for an increase in the electricity concessions to assist pensioners and seniors. This makes a welcome change for the people of Queensland, who are tired of having basic services and resources slashed at the hands of a mean-spirited federal government. Finally, I pay tribute to both ministers who were questioned by the committee for hours. For Minister Spence it was for many hours, even more hours than the Premier or the Treasurer. Both ministers answered the questions with great detail and showed a thorough understanding of their portfolios. It was a privilege to be a part of Estimates Committee G. I commend the report to the parliament.
