



Speech by

**Mrs D. PRATT**

**MEMBER FOR BARAMBAH**

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Hansard 2 August 2001

**APPROPRIATION BILLS [ESTIMATES COMMITTEE E]**

**Mrs PRATT** (Nanango—Ind) (2.45 p.m.): I congratulate the Minister, Mr Robertson, and the government on combining the state's major natural resources under one portfolio. The new arrangements should improve the effectiveness of the government's resource management programs and should make the government's job a great deal easier.

According to the information that I read in *Hansard* relating to Estimates Committee E, different areas of Queensland are paying different amounts for water from the same company, SunWater. I believe that it is calculated scheme by scheme and that the minister, Mr Robertson, would not answer how the community service obligation was calculated. That is something that I would like to know.

The water users, through their water charges, pay the community service obligation to SunWater. Some of these water charges are so high that the people in the Burdekin are actually refusing to pay their bills. Why is it that the Burdekin's water prices are so high compared to water prices in other places throughout the state?

There is no representative from the irrigation industry on the SunWater board. I ask Mr Robertson: why is this so? Also, why do there seem to be no practical, hands-on people on the board? Australia will experience a water shortage for all purposes by the year 2020. Why does it take so much time and money to develop water resource plans? Governments across-the-board—not just this one—seem to fund plans and schemes. Why do they not just go ahead and implement a good one? As members know, we are fast approaching a drought in my electorate. Even now most towns in my electorate are suffering water restrictions. Those water restrictions are becoming the expected rather than the occasional.

I turn to the Health portfolio. The minister, Mrs Edmond, and her department are endeavouring to do a few good things. However, despite all their efforts to bring down waiting list times, it still is not good enough. At this moment there is a four-year waiting period for dental care. I have had people walk into my office and tell me that they are losing their teeth because they cannot get to a dentist quickly enough. One constituent has stated that he was in such pain that he was taking three pain-killers every two hours. As we know, that is not a recommended practice. That man was told that he would get help only if he went to the dental clinic at a certain time. Three years ago he was told that the waiting list was three and a half years long. It has now blown out to four years and is getting worse by the month. This man has already lost three teeth since 1996 because he could not get in to see a dentist. Each tooth has fallen out by itself and he has suffered pain because this government is not getting its priorities right.

Money that should be going to the public health system is going towards constructing sporting fields and walking bridges. Nearly every party's election platform is to improve health services for regional, rural and remote Queensland, yet I do not remember seeing any major budget allocation for any facility west of Toowoomba. That town is not the be-all and end-all of the great south-west of this state. There are a lot of places out there that are being sadly neglected. There are long waiting lists because there are not enough medical staff, particularly in regional, rural and remote Queensland. Queensland Health has launched campaigns to rectify this problem. I hope that they will go some way towards resolving some of the problems.

As every member of this place knows—I have spoken about it many times—Tarong Coal's Meandu Mine is located about 180 kilometres north-west of Brisbane. The work force lives in the surrounding towns of Kingaroy, Nanango and Yarraman. Approximately 180 people are directly employed in the open-cut mine and coal-washing plant and a further 400 to 600 people are employed indirectly locally throughout the area. Further flow-on effects of that mine extend far wider than my electorate.

Tarong Coal has seen a year of considerable success. It has signed a 10-year supply agreement with Tarong Energy, and the strong performance of its environmental initiatives and the growth of the Tarong Coal Community Development Fund are ongoing. Tarong Coal is now part of our community; it is not just a financial contributor. The community expects more and more of it each and every year. Tarong Coal presented its first social and environmental report in 1999 so that we, the community, can understand it a little better.

I have often spoken of St Aubyn's Hospital, which officially closed on 29 June 2001. Around 40 staff were made redundant after the management of Uniting health care closed the hospital down. The Health Minister, Wendy Edmond, confirmed that patients with private health insurance would be hospitalised at Wondai. That is not good enough.

The minister blamed the Health Department's problems on Queensland not receiving its fair share in funding. She said that if we had we would not be stretched to the limit providing health fund services in rural areas or anywhere else. She said that, while we do not have the money rolling in, we would not get it anyway because it simply increases the profits of health insurers. She said that that has to be the worst outcome for the public dollar that she has seen in health in Australia. That should be a national scandal. In fact, it is a scandal. The federal government and the state need to do an awful lot more to get health in line.

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