



Speech by

**Mr M. HORAN**

**MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH**

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Hansard 1 August 2001

**APPROPRIATION BILLS—ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A**

**Mr HORAN** (Toowoomba South—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (3.08 p.m.): At the outset, I thank the member for Bulimba for his stewardship of the committee.

**An honourable member:** He did a good job.

**Mr HORAN:** He did a good, firm job. He was ably assisted by his deputy chairman on telephone hook-ups. I thank all the members of the committee. It was a courteous committee and we worked well. I join with the chairman in thanking Leanne Clare.

I wish to speak particularly about some of the issues that I raised in the Statement of Reservation. Firstly, I raise the issue of the role of the Children's Commissioner. I spoke about this because of our concern about the waiting lists for the assessment of young children who are at risk of sexual and physical abuse, so that they can have care and protection. It is very important that one of the roles of the Commission for Children and Young People is to monitor the processes and practices of people who deliver these services.

It was pointed out to us during the questioning that the commission is not a service provider in the sense that the Department of Families is. We certainly recognise that. But it is there to monitor those processes and practices. That is one area that does need monitoring. We would be prepared to support the government if it wants to change the legislative base. But we cannot have a department that has primary responsibility for assessment, care and protection not providing that protection in a timely and urgent fashion.

One of the other aspects of our questioning concerned performance bonuses. The Auditor-General and the Premier indicated that they are going to move to tabling the total amount of bonuses paid to CEOs but not the individual amounts and not any of the detail about the performance targets to be achieved, whether they have been achieved and the criteria for determining whether the CEOs receive the payment. We again used the example of the Department of Families. Is one of the performance targets the timely assessment of these young children who need care and protection? Has that target been met? Was the bonus paid? Even if the bonuses are not paid, it probably means that the performance was substandard and therefore there needs to be some recognition that the CEO is not doing his job. It is not simply a matter of paying or not paying the bonus; it is a matter of whether the job and the prime targets of the government are being achieved.

In relation to the unemployment rate, we made the point that if an average of eight per cent unemployment is to be achieved for the entire 12 months, if in the first month of the year unemployment was at nine per cent it means that it will have to come down to at least seven per cent to try to achieve that eight per cent average. We would like to push the government away from having the worst figures. We should be above average in this state in spite of the labour force growth we have. We have a two per cent growth in employment and a two per cent labour force growth, which cancel each other out. We are going to continue to push the government to provide for more targeted schemes to work out in what regions the unemployment is occurring, what the age groups are and what sort of job creation is needed in those areas to target unemployment and bring it down.

In relation to national competition policy, we saw that \$248 million has been paid to the Queensland government since 1997-98. The Treasurer was unable to outline how the NCP payments

paid in the past financial year and those that will be paid in the current financial year were broken down, because \$134 million in NCP payments was budgeted for 2001-02. He was able to tell us, though, that \$12.9 million was withheld as a result of an adverse assessment of water reform within the state. Our questioning was designed to find out how much was paid because of dairy deregulation and to try to get to the bottom of why this government did not pay a single dollar in assistance to the dairy industry.

Capital works is of great concern to us. Last financial year, \$280 million was not spent on capital works. On a budget to budget basis the actual expenditure on capital works has declined. We were also very concerned that there was an \$820 million deficit for the past financial year compared with a forecast surplus of \$29 million. The previous year had a surplus of \$1,062 million. That surplus of \$1,062 million has become a deficit of \$820 million this financial year, giving a total negative turnaround—

**Mr Mackenroth** interjected.

**Mr HORAN:** It is like having a business that makes \$100,000 one year and the next year loses \$80,000. Those were the concerns we had and which we raised in the statement of reservations.

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