



Speech by

# STUART COPELAND

MEMBER FOR CUNNINGHAM

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Hansard 2 August 2001

## APPROPRIATION BILLS [ESTIMATES COMMITTEE G]

**Mr COPELAND** (Cunningham—NPA) (4.17 p.m.): It gives me great pleasure to rise to speak to the report of Estimates Committee G. This is obviously my first participation in the estimates process. It was certainly interesting. I thank the chair of the committee, the member for Mount Ommaney, for her patience while we worked through the process to get the committee up and running. She certainly handled it capably.

During the estimates committee process we raised a number of points of concern. Certainly, those concerns are legitimate and they will be ongoing. I know that the government will try to address them and hopefully some of the points can be addressed. One of the issues that came up—and the problems that exist with the Department of Families and Disability Services have been well reported—was performance bonuses, which also came up in Estimates Committee A as a result of some of the Premier's answers. As the member for Mirani said yesterday, performance bonuses and measures can be a very important way of increasing the efficiency of the running of a department, but there certainly has to be some clarity and accountability in terms of that process to make sure that it is working optimally. It is a device that is used widely in the private sector and I think there is certainly a role for it in the government sector, but it must also be fairly open and accountable to make sure that it is being used properly and that there are some benefits to be gained out of it.

During questioning regarding performance bonuses for the director-general of the Department of Families, the minister said that she had nothing to do with the assessment of the director-general's meeting of the performance criteria. I think that is a real concern. All of the responsibility for all of the performance bonuses for all of the directors-general lies with the Premier. That then begs the question: does he set the criteria without consultation with the minister? Does he then measure the performance against the criteria? Who provides him with the data to check that the directors-general are actually meeting the performance measures? I think the statement from Minister Spence that she had nothing to do with it opens up a real concern. While it is a useful tool, I think there needs to be very close scrutiny to make sure it is achieving the objectives that it set out to achieve.

One of the initial concerns that we had, especially during that week, was that the Minister for State Development laid the blame for the blow-out in the cost of the pedestrian bridge on changing the design to meet disability access concerns. That was a real concern to me because in blaming disability access, he was trying to hide the costs that were incurred because the design was not appropriate in the first place. Given a previous Labor government's problems with disability access to the convention centre when it was being constructed, that should be a major priority for any design of any public access for a project being constructed by the government.

In this case, Minister Spence said that her department quite rightly recommended to the Department of State Development the Australian standard that needed to be met. Then once construction had already begun it was discovered that the design was not adequate for the provision of access to people with a disability. That is a real concern because, once construction has started, any redesign of a major project like that is going to cause a much greater increase in costs than would have been the case if the design had been correct in the first place. That is a real worry.

In terms of staffing the department, the member for Mount Ommaney has already said that front-line staff have a real workload problem in terms of meeting the workload and case loads that are expected of them. The Forde inquiry recommended that \$103 million per annum was required to bring Queensland into line with the rest of Australia to make sure that child protection workers were adequately staffed to meet those requirements. In this year's budget the government is \$73 million short. That is a long way short of the \$103 million that was recommended back in 1998. Cumulatively,

by the end of next year, it is going to be around \$250 million short. That is a real indication of the problems that the front-line staff are experiencing. It is very well reported that those staff have been unable to cope with the workloads that they are expected to cope with.

In terms of disability services, the minister has given the undertaking that the Basil Stafford Centre will remain open but, unfortunately, it is open for only 15 places. Basil Stafford provides a very useful service and it is the most preferred option for a number of people. It concerns me that there will be only 15 places, because those 15 places will be filled by the people who are already in residence there. There simply will not be the facility for those people with a disability who want to be cared for in that sort of environment. That is going to have to be looked at by the government as well.

Time expired.

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