



Speech by

CARRYN SULLIVAN

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APPROPRIATION BILLS—ESTIMATES COMMITTEE E

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN (Pumicestone—ALP) (3.15 p.m.): I am pleased to rise today to speak to this report as the chairman of Estimates Committee E. Earlier this week I tabled in parliament the report of the committee relating to estimates of expenditure referred to it and contained in the Appropriation Bill together with additional information provided to the committee.

The committee consisted of the following government members: the member for Noosa, Cate Molloy; the member for Thuringowa, Anita Phillips; and the member for Charters Towers, Christine Scott. The committee also consisted of the following opposition members: the member for Callide, Jeff Seeney—who I acknowledge is in the House and who I note must have been very satisfied with the process because I did not receive a dissenting report from him—the member for Warrego, Howard Hobbs, who is also in the chamber, as is the member for Keppel, Vince Lester. We also had as a guest member the member for Southern Downs and Opposition Leader, Lawrence Springborg. I believe we all worked well together to scrutinise the 2003-04 state budgets for the departments of Natural Resources and Mines, the Environment and Local Government, and for that I congratulate them all.

I would like to place on record my sincere thanks to all of those who were involved in the process, particularly the research director, Rachelle Stacey, our executive assistant, Carolyn Heffernan, and all other parliamentary staff. Their assistance and patience allowed the day to run very smoothly and I know everyone appreciated their valuable support.

Whilst I was a member of Estimates Committee E in 2001 and 2002, this was the first time that I chaired an estimates committee. I may never get another opportunity, so I do believe it is necessary to make a few comments about the process.

Ms Keech: You did an excellent job.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: I will take that interjection. It might be the last one I get, too. The estimates committee process, for those who may have short memories, was introduced by a Labor government in 1994. It allows for the democratic process of government and the institution of parliament. Estimates hearings are a process which allows the expenditure of ministers and their departments to be debated in an open, accountable and transparent way. The process did not exist under the leadership of the Nationals prior to its introduction by Mr Goss in 1994. Obviously government members on the day did their very best to not only protect but also ask positive questions of the ministers. However, if it was the intent of the opposition to embarrass individual ministers, I believe it failed to do so. On the whole, questions by the opposition did focus on the money, but there were times when a minister was more of the focus. That is not the function of the estimates committee.

There were only two dissenting reports—one from the member for Keppel and one from the member for Warrego—but I do not believe that they were terribly detailed. They focused on issues that I believe to be minor and were covered by sessional orders, for example, the time given for ministers to respond to questions on notice.

Sessional orders state that the ministerial responses need to be handed in 24 hours prior to the hearing. While we would all have liked to have had those answers earlier, the fact that the opposition members caused a stir about not getting the answers is one thing. But the real difficulty is that the questions asked by the opposition were so long and so involved and contained so many parts—which is against sessional orders—that the amount of time the staff would have needed to research the answers would have had to be very lengthy.

I need to make special mention of two of my colleagues who assisted me before the estimates hearing. I acknowledge in the chamber the member for Kawana, Chris Cummins, who chaired Estimates Committee E last year and who I turned to for some advice. He was very willing to give me that advice. I also acknowledge the member for Albert, Margaret Keech, who is also in the chamber and who has chaired Estimates Committee A for the past two years, which is a most difficult job. Her experience was invaluable and I am grateful for the time she spent with me on going over the finer points of the process.

Ms Keech: It was a pleasure.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: Thank you. Being part of the estimates process is a lot of work, but it was certainly a team effort in 2003.