



Speech by

Hon. D. WELLS

MEMBER FOR MURRUMBIDGE

Hansard 21 August 2003

APPROPRIATION BILLS—ESTIMATES COMMITTEE E

Hon. D. M. WELLS (Murrumbidgee—ALP) (Minister for Environment) (4.13 p.m.): I would like to thank everybody involved in Estimates Committee E in relation to the Environment portfolio. I would particularly like to thank the honourable member for Pumicestone for her grace and aplomb in the manner in which she conducted the committee. She was scrupulously fair, I thought, giving all spare time to opposition members to enable them to ask questions. I think she performed the job of chairing the committee with considerable distinction.

I would like to thank the other members of the committee—the honourable member for Noosa, the honourable member for Thuringowa and the honourable member for Charters Towers. I would like to thank the member for Southern Downs, who treated other members of the committee with considerable courtesy. I also thank him for putting on record a number of issues relating to the environment that needed further discussion.

I would like to thank the honourable member for Keppel for his contribution and the honourable members for Warrego and Callide who, by their masterful inactivity and their completely silent participation, added more lustre to the committee than they would have if they had opened their mouths. I would like to thank the staff of the committee. I would also like to thank my departmental officers, who burned the midnight oil, and my ministerial staff, who burned even more midnight oil in order to prepare for the estimates committee process.

I turn to some of the issues raised by honourable members on the other side of the House in this debate. With respect to Sun Aqua, the member for Southern Downs said that the EPA should be more involved. The EPA is as involved as the statutory process allows us to be. At the moment, the Coordinator-General has called for submissions. The EPA, which is in my department, will be making a submission, and that submission will state the views of the department.

If the Coordinator-General were to decide, having received the submissions on the environmental impact statement, that the matter needed to be taken any further, then it would come to my department and my department would have a statutory role. That statutory role would be to make a determination as to whether it is a good idea to have this kind of industry in the middle of a marine park. That is the appropriate statutory process. I have no more intention of leaning on a statutory decision maker in this case than I did in respect of the Bluewater development. Where a statutory decision has to be made, the post-Fitzgerald way is to allow the statutory decision maker to make that decision without any dictation. That is the process that has been set up, that is the process we are going through, and I am sure honourable members could guess at the result.

With respect to the second matter raised by the member for Southern Downs—that is, the quarries on the Koala Coast—I can confirm that my department has contacted some quarries as a result of the audit which has been undertaken and has indicated that further action may be taken against them. I am not aware of any land offsets that have been offered. Nothing like that has come before me. Obviously the information which the honourable member for Southern Downs has is from sources other than official ones. If such a matter were put to my department, it would be dealt with in the usual way. Environment offsets are sometimes considered, but that is not something that has been before me.

I would like to thank the member for Southern Downs for his support for the low-interest loans that are proposed to be available to those who have heritage houses. Low-interest loans are proposed

to be available from the Bendigo Bank, which has previously distinguished itself with green loans. I think this could be a significant and very valuable contribution being made by the Bendigo Bank to the preservation of our heritage.

I would like to address some matters raised by the member for Keppel in this debate. His concern about feral animals I think is a little misplaced. The 140 additional rangers that we have put on have released a large number of rangers for feral animal control. In his own electorate at Mount Archer there was a significant program of pig trapping which has been quite successful. I am surprised that the honourable member continues to raise that matter given that we have addressed it so much more. However, if there are outstanding matters in the honourable member's electorate or elsewhere, I am very happy to discuss it with him and consider it further.

Time expired.