



Speech by

Mrs D. PRATT

MEMBER FOR NANANGO

Hansard 21 August 2003

APPROPRIATION BILLS—ESTIMATES COMMITTEE E

Mrs PRATT (Nanango—Ind) (4.02 p.m.): I rise to address the chamber on the report of Estimates Committee E, which covers Local Government, Planning, Natural Resources, Mines and the Environment, and bring to the House ongoing concerns that need to be addressed in the budget.

Many councils and the Local Government Association of Queensland expressed concerns about the decline in funding from the government for weed and pest management. It appears that the government believes that by introducing harsh laws and penalties for non-compliance with state imposed legislation it will clear many weed, tree and pest problems by shifting the onus on to land-holders and councils without increasing funding.

I firmly believe that government legislation, especially over the past couple of years, relating to water, tree clearing and weed and pest control shows to some degree a lack of understanding of the issues. LGAQ and SEQROC reinforced their concerns with one of their key recommendations being—

In view of the high level of public benefits, government investment in the management of declared weeds and pest animal initiatives should be increased. If expenditure is not increased it should at least be maintained to ensure the protection of Queensland's natural resource.

They went on to add—

SEQROC strongly recommends that DNRM consider increasing funding for weeding and pest management given the implications of decreased funding for pest management as highlighted in the Economic Analysis of Queensland Weed and Pest Management report. Also any increase must adequately fund weed and pest management on private and state controlled land as local government cannot be expected to take on an increased share of the burden.

Councils are very conscious of the devastation lack of control has and will continue to have in the state. The partnership between state and local government has proved in the past to be effective, yet both parties need to maintain contributions to the base funding to ensure that adequate control is carried out. It is hoped that the state government supports these councils in their efforts but that that support is not confined purely to lip-service.

I hope that the Premier's recent visit to Mitchell brought home land-holders' concerns, which have not been taken into account when the many pieces of legislation that affect rural land-holders are brought into play. I hope that it brought home the need to look more closely at these problems from both sides; that is, what a legislative framework can do to achieve the aims of legislation without alienating landowners. In simple terms, it all comes down to one main point: funding to implement any changes imposed by legislation on land-holders and shire councils in the future.

A far more extensive and therefore effective eradication program with increased state funding would in the long term be more economical to the state. The quicker the problem is fully addressed, the quicker we will move towards solving the problem. I do not suggest that it will not be an ongoing problem, but a concerted effort now will increase more effective management in the future.

Small rate based councils are being overwhelmed by the problem of lack of funds. Small rural councils are doing their best, but their resources are stretched. If the government is serious about eradicating weed and animal pests, it has to listen and not just legislate.

With large areas of land locked up and the summer fire season just around the corner, with its already high predicted fire status, property owners abutting locked-up areas are very concerned, as should be all of those who fight for the preservation of our native vegetation. Areas permitted to build

up large amounts of combustible material such as those controlled by the department have been described as having been mismanaged through neglect.

Australian vegetation generates through seed pods bursting and ejecting the seed when a quick fire passes through. Unfortunately, the rubbish build-up is such that the ensuing fire not only is intense but also burns longer. It in fact destroys the seed by burning it. It is recorded that these areas take considerably longer to regenerate, and the estimates surrounding the recovery of areas decimated by the Canberra wildfires attest to this.

State grazing permits were the perfect tool to control rubbish build-up, feral animals and weeds. The beauty of these SGPs is that graziers actually paid the government to do the work for them. Sadly, many permits have already been or will be revoked. Due to lack of financial resources, insufficient patrols of these areas are undertaken by the department.

Twenty years ago Bald Knob on Bunya Mountains had its permit revoked. Now the area is infested with pests, vegetation and feral animals of not only the four-legged kind but also the two-legged kind. It is riddled by trail bike and quad bike tracks as youngsters go up there and just have a damn good time. They do not care. The feral pig damage is quite extreme and the wattle that is growing over Bald Knob is just horrendous. It looks nothing like it did before. The Aboriginal people looked after the area well, as did those who followed, and none of these things were in existence while they were around. Now it is just riddled with all of these pests.

The removal of the SGPs is a major expensive blunder, and a reconsideration of a balanced trade-off between SGP holders and the government departments must be made in the best interest of all—those who care for and work the land and those who believe that they are protecting the land. I acknowledge the Minister for Local Government for her actions in ensuring the people of Blackbutt enjoy a regular, consistent water supply.

Time expired.