



Speech by

Hon. HENRY PALASZCZUK

MEMBER FOR INALA

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APPROPRIATION BILLS—ESTIMATES COMMITTEE G

Hon. H. PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries and Rural Communities) (6.11 p.m.): I thank all members of the committee, chaired by the member for Mackay, the committee secretariat, officers of the Department of Primary Industries, QRAA employees and Safe Food Production Queensland employees for their participation in the Estimates Committee G hearing.

As minister, I welcome the opportunity to detail the government's investments in the portfolio. The DPI is far more relevant now to more Queenslanders than it was five years ago. That fact is borne out by the wide-ranging questioning by government members, the members for Clayfield, Gaven and Southport, and non-government members, the members for Hinchinbrook, Warrego and Gladstone.

The only disappointment from the estimates hearing this year is the member for Hinchinbrook's reservation statement in the committee report. I believe the member for Hinchinbrook has been bullied into lodging a reservation statement. All questions were answered during the hearing, and those few questions taken on notice during the proceedings were answered within the time frames prescribed by standing orders. The member for Hinchinbrook has signed his name to the reservation statement and so I will take him to task now on each of the points he attempted to raise.

Let me deal with the points made in his statement under the first heading 'Budgetary Position'. The National Party has recycled an earlier claim about the funding of the DPI over the last five years. The figure is clearly false and shows a lack of credibility on the National Party's behalf. Firstly, the claims ignore what is actually said in the budget papers. Secondly, it ignores the transfer to accrual accounting in the 1999-2000 budget. Thirdly, it attributes QRAA to the DPI. QRAA is under the minister's portfolio but is separate from the DPI. The reference to the current 2003-04 budget period is wrong.

The statement notes that the changes between 2002-03 and 2003-04 reflected the South-East Queensland Forest Agreement Research and Development program, which has been taken up by DPI Forestry, reduced user charges under TFAP due to lower than anticipated incidence of TB, reduced user charges due to drought and an internal accounting standard for DPI's livestock which reduces the bottom line. This reference, too, is wrong.

Let me deal with the points under the heading 'Staffing'. The member for Hinchinbrook raised the issue of the work force renewal program. What the member for Hinchinbrook did not say was that he tried to lobby me to give a DPI officer a voluntary early retirement package. I refused the honourable member's request. The fact is that whatever VER is offered by the DPI the National Party and its spokesperson would want one more VER.

In terms of DPI staffing, the National Party keeps referring to the fire ant eradication campaign. On the one hand, the member for Hinchinbrook claims the government is using the staffing of the fire ant eradication campaign to inflate DPI staffing levels. Then, on the other hand, he claims to be concerned that we plan to reduce the staff of the campaign. The simple explanation is that we will reduce staff in line with the eradication of the fire ant. Then the Leader of the National Party referred to the fire ant campaign at his party's state conference and implied that we had too many staff eradicating fire ants.

Let me put all this nonsense to bed now. As a government, we have been up front about fire ant staffing levels. We have not tried to claim the increased funding or staffing as a boost to general DPI. This is in stark contrast to the former coalition government in which the member for Hinchinbrook served. I draw to the attention of members the papaya fruit fly campaign in the mid-1990s. Not only did

the coalition government claim the extra jobs under the nationally funded campaign as a boost for the DPI; because the campaign was being waged in far-north Queensland the coalition government gave it a name and called it 'DPI back to the bush'. Worse still, when the papaya fruit fly campaign was officially won soon after we came into office, and therefore the positions created for the campaign became redundant, the coalition accused our government of cutting DPI jobs.

In terms of the fire ant campaign, the five-year eradication campaign is funded by all states, all territories and the Commonwealth to the tune of more than \$140 million over five years. To refute the suggestions made by the member for Hinchinbrook and the Leader of the National Party, the campaign is staffed according to the comprehensive plan developed and implemented to eradicate the ants. If the Leader of the Opposition thinks we are doing too much about fire ants, as he seemed to imply in his speech to his party's state conference recently, then I found something that would look forward to a Springborg government in Queensland—the fire ants themselves.

In terms of general DPI staffing, the National Party has refused to accept the transfer of some 270 positions with the Corporate Services Agency. The list goes on. I could go on about drought funding, but—

Time expired.