



Speech by

Hon. K. LINGARD

MEMBER FOR BEAUDESERT

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APPROPRIATION BILLS—ESTIMATES COMMITTEE F

Hon. K. R. LINGARD (Beaudesert—NPA) (4.43 p.m.): I wish to thank Estimates Committee F and the members who served on it. I found it to be a very pleasant committee. I find it a long day when we deal with all of Public Works, Innovation and Families in one whole day. Then the portfolio of Families is split into the three sections of Families, ATSI Policy and Disability. That virtually means that Families has only one hour for questioning. Therefore, the opposition has only half an hour to question the minister. That is difficult. Quite honestly, I think that next year we need to make that particular section longer.

As the minister knows—the minister has already said it in the parliament—I have had some worries about Stephens Island in the Torres Strait. I have just returned from there. Being a previous Minister for Families, I believe that the problems on Stephens Island certainly come under the portfolio of the Minister for Families, whether she wants to put it under the IBIS legislation, ATSI policy or something else. I believe that it should come under the Department of Families.

Clearly, the store there has closed. The people there have to go across to Darnley Island. It is completely unacceptable. The store is there. The maladministration of that particular store means that the families on Stephens Island have absolutely no access to milk or any fresh goods. Spending three hours going in an open boat across to Darnley Island is completely unacceptable. Regardless of what it costs the government, I believe the Department of Families is responsible for trying to ensure that those people have some access to those fresh goods.

As has already been mentioned in the media, it is going to be interesting to see how the minister handles appointing 25 full-time and part-time SCAN officers when those people were not catered for in the budget. The question was asked why there has not been an increase in personnel in the budget and the minister accepted that there had not been this year and, of course, is now calling on people who have obviously been appointed to say that they will appoint 25 full-time officers. I think it is quite incorrect for them to ridicule the opposition in saying that they are going to appoint 30 people.

There is another section I would like to mention and that is this proposed Child Care Act of 2002 and Child Care Regulation, which commences on 1 September. People within child-care centres have been advised already because under the new legislation licensed child care services will be able to apply for a number of new conditions to be added to their licence. One of these conditions relates to the staffing requirements during the rest periods for children. The documents that have already been presented to the child-care centres say that it will start on 1 September. However, these people have also been told that they can apply for rest period conditions on their licences with such conditions to be optional only. The document states—

... and your service may wish to operate under the standard requirements prescribed in the legislation. Please also note that you can formally apply for a rest period condition at any time once the new legislation has commenced.

It is really saying that the child-care centres must go ahead with their new staffing for 1 September and then try to apply for rest conditions so that they can have approval to have fewer staff during a rest period. That means they have to appoint people for 1 September, go through the process of applying for rest period conditions and then, if they are allowed, clearly—and they have been told—they will just have to put those staff off. It says—

If you do wish to apply for a rest period condition, it should be noted that you must comply with all standard requirements of the current act and, once commenced, the new child care legislation until the department has advised you of its decision in relation to the application. The department is not able to advise licensees of its decision in relation to an

application for rest period conditions until the new legislation has commenced. However, the department will endeavour to process all applications for rest period conditions as soon as is possible.

Regardless of who the minister wants to blame, it is pure bad organisation that this is supposed to start on 1 September, they can get conditions after that and if they have to sack staff, they can sack them afterwards. Quite honestly, I believe it is exactly the same situation as happened with the seniors documents, which arrived in our offices on Tuesday and Wednesday of this week when Seniors Week started last Saturday. Regardless of who is to blame, whether it is the public servants or not, someone has to take responsibility. Quite honestly, the public is sick and tired of ministers in this government saying, 'It is not my responsibility. It is the director-general's responsibility, or it is some other public servant's responsibility.'