



Speech by

**LEX BELL, MP**

**MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE**

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**FEES AND CHARGES, IDENTIFICATION IN BUDGET PAPERS**

**Mr BELL** (Surfers Paradise—Ind) (6.43 p.m.): I rise to support the motion by the member for Nicklin. I was surprised to hear the honourable member for Chatsworth saying that the government is elected to govern and to hear the Treasurer say in response to the member for Nicklin basically, 'Trust us. Officers are required to ensure that their fees and charges are reasonable.' I would say in response to the Treasurer and honourable members: why then is there an estimates committee process? The estimates committee process is surely not because the government is elected to govern; it is there so that people have the ability to ask responsible ministers and senior officers about the finances of this state and the composition of the expenditure and income of the government.

How can one question fees and charges which on all of the evidence before the House tonight are a substantial amount—hundreds of millions of dollars—as a member of this House? Certainly not at the estimates committee, as the member for Nicklin has pointed out! Yes, it is possible in some cases to have a disallowance motion, but how futile is that? What questions can be asked then of the minister or of the relevant officers as can occur at the estimates committee meetings? As the member for Nicklin pointed out, some matters of fees and charges are not the subject of regulation, such as the Electrical Safety Act and the health services regulations. Indeed, there is no comfort, either, to be found in the regulatory impact statements required for new pieces of subordinate legislation, because in some cases they are not even required if they concur with government policy.

The member for Tablelands and the member for Gregory have brought forward some interesting statistics. I would say that they underline absolutely the need for the fees and charges to be able to be scrutinised by honourable members. Some of us have come through local government and we are used to the fact that fees and charges are part of the budget papers. Certainly, there is a difference between a council budget and a state government budget, but the general principles of openness, fairness, the ability to debate, the ability for people to know in advance and for the public to be able to object at a point when it is relevant to object are just as relevant to this House and to the fees and charges of this state government as they are to local councils.

One of the most glaring aspects of the debate so far this evening, to my perception, is the fact that government members have not put forward any real, cogent arguments against the passage of this motion. The Treasurer basically says, 'Trust us. It's not necessary.' The honourable member for Bulimba says, 'There were too many charges to be brought forward.' The honourable member for Cairns says that it would mean a great deal of work. But generally there is no cogent and compelling reason why this cannot occur. On the other hand, whilst I do accept that the government is genuine in its statements that it wishes to be open and accountable, I cannot understand why the government will not seize this opportunity to demonstrate in one more very necessary and very open way why it is accountable and why it is genuine.

There are very minor reasons against the passage of this motion and there are some very strong reasons why the motion should be passed—accountability, openness, transparency, the discipline of ministers and their senior staff, efficiency and, above all, the supremacy of parliament.