



Speech by

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APPROPRIATION BILLS—ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

Mr BELL (Surfers Paradise—Ind) (3.12 p.m.): As a member of Estimates Committee B, I rise to support the recommendation of the committee. At the outset, I would repeat the words of the Leader of the Opposition when he said that the chairman and the ministers were efficient and competent. I would like to add the word 'friendly', and I would like to also compliment the clerk of the committee.

That said, I was mildly surprised that, whilst the questions quite properly were wide ranging, I had some concerns from time to time as to whether they were limited to financial matters. I mean no criticism of the chairman of the committee when I say this, but I was in some doubt as to whether I could ask a particular question and whether what others were asking was strictly within the ambit of the matters referred to the committee.

The estimates process is, however, a very useful mechanism by which members on all sides of the House can ask questions of ministers. To that extent, I applaud the estimates committee system and the opportunity that it provides. However, I would not be fair if I did not question the usefulness of the resources in the whole estimates committee procedure. I believe the matter could be dealt with much more efficiently. Perhaps I am used to another form of interrogation in the courts where interrogation proceeds much more quickly and there is more of an ability to ask a whole series of questions and hear much more concise responses—sometimes even yes and no answers.

I felt a bit constrained this year and last year by the mechanisms involved in the asking of questions and by the limited number of questions that could be asked in the time allotted. I felt very distressed at some part of the proceedings at the number of Crown employees who were necessarily in the room in case certain questions were asked. I would have thought another procedure worth considering would be one where questions are much more quickly asked and answered, where there are fewer Crown employees present, where those doing the questioning might be prepared to accept a little more often that answers will be delivered later but where the whole purpose of the estimates committee procedure could be enhanced and a lot more questions over a lot more territory could be asked.

However, it is clear that the report before us from Estimates Committee B is accurate, it has been well drafted and it well covers the matters which were the consideration of the committee. I have no hesitation whatsoever in supporting the committee's recommendation.