



Speech by

**Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM**

**MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE**

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Hansard 25 February 2003

**INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES GROUP, QUEENSLAND RAIL**

**Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM** (Gladstone—Ind) (11.50 a.m.): I rise to speak in relation to a QR issue in my electorate. I thank the QR workers for inviting me along to a discussion last week at which an efficiency review was put on the table for the workers to comment on. The representative from QR who outlined the process stated at the beginning, and restated on a number of occasions, that this was the consultation stage and that nothing was set in concrete as yet. However, the majority of the workers felt that the decisions had been made and that the consultation was merely so that the process appeared acceptable.

Many of these workers are men who have worked at QR for many years and have a lot of experience and knowledge. Across the ISG in Queensland, 391 positions are to go. The projections are that voluntary separations will be 312 and other cessations will be 79. In the Rockhampton district that will make up 51 people; in my electorate of Gladstone, 11. Some of the issues discussed as strategies for reducing the number included the finalisation of apprenticeships when apprenticeships are completed and additional resources are not required. That raised the spectre as to whether QR was intending not to continue its apprenticeship program. I think the government has a flagship role to play in setting an example to business in terms of continually renewing apprenticeships and having an intake each year to ensure that at the end of the apprenticeship cycle there are new and qualified practitioners for our region.

One of the other methodologies discussed was the decommissioning of old machinery without replacement. The Infrastructure Services Group—ISG—workers were told the group was operating at a loss of \$45 million. I noted, though, that there was no justification for that figure and the guys were just asked to accept it. In relation to decommissioning older machinery, it was explained that once the use-by date was reached the machines would not be maintained or fixed; they would be sold and the particular work area would have to justify a replacement. Some of the necessary QR equipment costs hundreds of thousands of dollars—track-laying equipment, et cetera. The workmen told the meeting that QR's rates for internal hire are much cheaper than those of external contractors. That is how the men believe QR is looking to make savings, that is, by getting rid of equipment and hiring it from private contractors. At the end of the meeting, more than a half a dozen blokes told me how inefficient that was; that it might look fine on paper and the theorists in Brisbane would be able to justify getting rid of QR equipment, but the problem is that in reality it does not work.

The union representatives indicated that at no time was the restructure of the track section supervisors and the TDS put on the agenda for prior discussion. The two union delegates there stated that they were not interested in the restructure proposal because it had not gone through the right channels. The significant part of the meeting which dealt with this restructure did not even have union support.

In respect of my region there is one matter that I wanted to raise because of its lack of logic. My concern is not only for the workers in my region but for those across the state. I am concerned that this illogical view could be driving the reductions in worker numbers and that in the long run this will be detrimental. In the Rockhampton region the thermit gang—the welders—are going to be reduced from five to three. We had sufficient work in my area for Rockhampton welders to come down last year, and there was still sufficient work for those welders to be gainfully employed. The earthworks gang is going

from six to zero, yet in wet weather it deals with slippages. I know we have been going through a lot of dry weather. In dry weather they look after the clay holes and look after sections where there is potential for the line to drop. I am told that in the Rockhampton district 20 kilometres of clay holes have already been identified, but the gang can do only 150 metres a week because of the type of work involved. It is illogical to dismantle this gang.

Time expired.