



Speech by

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APPROPRIATION BILL; ESTIMATES COMMITTEE C

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (4.05 p.m.): It is with great pleasure that I take this opportunity to speak in debate on the report of Estimates Committee C. I was pleased to be a part of what I felt was in some aspects, at least, a very pleasant and, in turn, productive committee. I thank the chairman of the committee, the honourable member for Ferny Grove, the other members of the committee, the two ministers and all of their departmental staff as well as members of the parliamentary secretariat for the work that went into this important process.

I will begin by speaking briefly about the estimates process itself. Since its inception, the estimates process has matured into the very productive process that it is today. Although there are some unavoidable elements of the process that see as much time spent on advertising or promotion of the portfolio by the minister as there is spent on actual scrutiny, these are by-products of the party political system. On the whole, Queensland's process is a very good yardstick. When comparing it to other states it certainly stands up well—very well, considering that our Victorian counterparts on the Public Accounts Committee have to do all the estimates committee work. That is a task I certainly would not relish. I know that Madam Chair Jarratt, as another member of the Public Accounts Committee who went to Melbourne recently and saw the work that its Public Accounts Committee has to do, is thankful, as we all are, that we do not have to conduct all the estimates committee processes in Queensland.

I do agree with my non-government colleague and deputy chair, the honourable member for Hinchinbrook, Marc Rowell, when he outlines in his statement of reservation the need for perhaps a more timely delivery of answers to questions on notice. In preparations for the estimates hearings it would be of great benefit to have the answers to those questions readily available at an earlier stage.

In relation to the ministers and their answers to questions, I was concerned at times that questions that had been asked were not answered to a sufficient level of detail as the process intended to allow. Three minutes is not always a great deal of time to answer a question which may require a detailed answer for it to be answered properly. Therefore, that question needs to be answered as succinctly as possible. Both ministers, I feel, were guilty of using a paragraph when a sentence would have sufficed.

This becomes a worry because information that is not vital to the answer is included as filler and information that is being sought is omitted from the hearing. One example of this outlined in the statement of reservation was the answer that the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations gave with regard to the compliance rate of amusement rides. His answer contained sweeping comments about what is being done in this field without actually answering the question to the degree of detail that was sought. In fact, the omission of information regarding programs to raise the level of compliance for amusement rides could be misconstrued to have one believe that such programs do not exist. While this is not what I am suggesting, I would like to know what is being done in this important field. We are now looking forward to the Gold Coast show as the show men move south. I commend their performance at the Ekka. There were no major incidents—though with such a low compliance rate, as was found out in the estimates process, this may have been more a matter of good fortune rather than good management.

The Education Minister was perhaps less guilty of answering questions in a sweeping manner. However, some of the answers baffled me. For example, when asked about the accountability for money provided for arts grants the minister provided a satisfactory answer outlining the processes involved. At the end of her answer, though, she added comment that for the electorate of Surfers Paradise total arts funding is \$3 million. I went back to my electorate office and thought, 'My goodness, I do not remember seeing that grant come through. I would love to be part of the photograph opportunity with the person who got the \$3 million.' I asked my intrepid electorate officer Josie Stinson to do some research. She gave me the arts grants application forms and I said, 'No, they were not quite right.'

My office then rang the minister's department. I thought, 'There must be some wonderful street art'. When we finally inquired about it with the relevant departmental officials, I was told that the figure of \$3 million was in fact the arts funding for all electorates throughout the state. The Surfers Paradise electorate receives \$50,000 of that \$3 million, for which I am sure the people in the artistic community are very thankful—some 1.7 per cent of what Ms Bligh had originally quoted we received. As I also stated in the statement of reservation, I was concerned by the reasoning the Education Minister used for the poor performance of Queensland students in national tests. I want to stress this point once more. Ms Bligh stated that the year difference in age between Queensland students and southern students was the main reason for these poor performances. Further to this age argument, Ms Bligh argued that the prep year would solve this problem. This answer was not qualified to say that age affected one aspect of the testing over another; rather, it was an across-the-board answer.

As I explained in the statement, there is no problem with the achievement rates in literacy yet there are problems with the achievement rates in reading. If age was the problem, there would be similar problems across-the-board. In the absence of information telling us that age affects the ability to learn how to read more than it does the ability to learn literacy skills, I do not take the argument that age alone is the sole cause of the problem and consequently that the prep year alone will fix the problem. The government needs to look at a more global approach of overhauling those syllabus that are falling behind. Once again, I thank the ministers, members and staff involved, and I congratulate all on the outcomes of the proceedings.