



Speech by

Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL (ESTIMATES COMMITTEE F)

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (4.10 pm): After participating in this estimates process, it became clear that small business has a minister who has no department and at many times no idea of what his specific responsibilities are or for how many people he is responsible. We do know that he is now responsible for one piece of legislation, and that was from about February this year.

The state coalition believes policy areas of small business, ICT and multicultural affairs are of great importance to the state. However, their presentation in the Ministerial Portfolio Statements is poor and amounts to window-dressing, given the minister's inability to be able to explain his area of responsibility. The Ministerial Portfolio Statement of the Minister for Small Business, Information Technology Policy and Multicultural Affairs is misleading. After coalition questioning in the estimates process, it is now clear that the minister is not responsible for all of his financial statements and that his area of responsibility is substantially less than the \$210 million budget presented in that MPS. This is despite page 1 of his MPS which states—

The ... MPS includes financial and performance output information for the Department of State Development, Trade and Innovation's Business Market Development and ICT initiatives. These initiatives report to the Minister for Small Business, Information Technology Policy and Multicultural Affairs. Information relating to these outputs also appears in the MPS for the Deputy Premier, Treasurer, and Minister for the Department of State Development, Trade and Innovation.

Minister Cummins's MPS statement under Output Income Statement on page 1-11 is identical to the statement in the Deputy Premier's MPS on page 3-19, with \$50 million of employee expenses and \$119.6 million of grants and subsidies. However, after questioning the minister we found that most of these budget items are not administered by Minister Cummins but by the Deputy Premier and minister for state development. Furthermore, Minister Cummins's MPS does not provide a breakdown of the cost of the items he is responsible for. When questioned about whether the minister was in fact responsible for the \$50 million worth of employee expenses in his MPS in the state development department, as listed in the MPS, the minister took the question on notice and only answered at the close of the hearing to confirm that he was not responsible for all of this expense but that his staff expenses were a subset of the \$50 million.

He did not provide any information as to the quantum of that subset. However, it was confirmed earlier in the estimates that he was responsible for 44 staff in the state development department and 21 in Premier's—a total of 65 staff. Yet he is a minister with a full ministerial expense package. In fact, he has a greater expense package than the Attorney-General, who administers a significant amount of legislation and has a far heavier workload.

When questioned about the quantum of the grants and subsidies the minister for small business was responsible for, given that his MPS mentioned \$119.6 million, the minister confirmed that he was only responsible for the grants referred to in an answer to a coalition question on notice, which when you add it up totals about \$1 million.

The state coalition believes that small business is too important to be stuck with a junior minister who does not even have a department. It is not about a title; it is about substance. Unfortunately, this MPS

that was presented to this parliament is misleading. There is not a real breakdown of the amount of funding that the minister is responsible for. We found that when asked basic questions about his responsibilities he had to take them on notice, even though there were some 38 staff in the room—one of the largest contingents of all the estimates processes. Surely in this so-called Smart State we can see some smart business done in the way that this portfolio is administered, rather than the window-dressing which was just a joke. It was most disappointing and expensive for this parliament that no accurate MPS was produced for these units. In fact, it was only about a press release opportunity for the minister rather than about informing us as to what his real areas of responsibility were.

Small business is too important to be treated this way, as are these other areas and portfolios. It is time that it was put with a minister who is responsible for a department, who knows how that department runs and who knows the elements that pertain to good ministerial management.