



Speech by

Jack Dempsey

MEMBER FOR BUNDABERG

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL AND APPROPRIATION BILL: ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

Mr DEMPSEY (Bundaberg—NPA) (2.32 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the report of Estimates Committee B. Firstly, I would like to thank the hardworking and dedicated staff of the Bundaberg Base Hospital. I would also like to thank the health minister for giving Bundaberg one of the best district managers in the state in Mrs Patti Scott. I would also like to thank the patient liaison officers who do fantastic work under very trying conditions.

But what the government has not given this community is adequate health services to meet the needs of the growing population of Bundaberg and its surrounding district. The health service area has been increased to cover north Burnett. That has taken the population of the service area from 80,000 people to 120,000 people. A proper operating budget is required to meet those needs.

Bundaberg Base Hospital is unique and has endured years of neglect to provide health services to the community. This hospital is not just bricks and mortar but an icon for the community. It is a pivotal part of the community's future direction. The staff and the patients of Bundaberg Base Hospital need to be supported by new infrastructure and resources to meet these changes. They also need to have confidence restored in our health system. These people need a commitment to their future, not glossy advertising and media managers wasting precious dollars that can be used more effectively.

The Beattie Labor government is not delivering on its health promises. It is simply unacceptable that on a number of occasions Bundaberg Base Hospital is still operating at over 100 per cent capacity. During the 2006 state election campaign, Premier Peter Beattie claimed that no community was more deserving of improved health services than Bundaberg and that the people of Bundaberg deserved all the improvements in health care that his government could offer. After almost a year since the Premier made these promises, I am still getting complaint after complaint about local health services and how patients are having to be outsourced to private hospitals. It is just not good enough. I will say again that the hardworking staff and patients of Bundaberg Base Hospital deserve better.

An example of the human face of this lack of funding occurred recently when a man was transferred to Bundaberg Base Hospital to recuperate after having surgery in Brisbane for fluid on the brain. This elderly gentleman arrived at Bundaberg Base Hospital after being transported by ambulance from Brisbane. But then he had to sit in the foyer until midnight before he was allocated a bed. I understand that large numbers of admissions are made regularly at this hospital. But the fact remains that a sick man recovering from brain surgery, who was taken to the hospital by ambulance, had to wait several hours before getting a hospital bed. That is just unacceptable.

The Beattie Labor government promised a \$41 million upgrade of Bundaberg Base Hospital and that it would be finished by early 2008. But in the 2007-08 state budget only just over \$2 million was allocated. I have the utmost respect for the staff of Bundaberg Base Hospital who are doing their best with the limited resources that they are given by the Beattie Labor government. It is time this government started delivering on its promise of improved health services.

In relation to surgery, the figures provided by Queensland Health on a year-to-year comparison show that in June more elective surgery patients were treated at Bundaberg Base Hospital and that the waiting time was significantly shorter. That is very positive. The staff at Bundaberg Base Hospital need to be commended for that. However, on the negative side of things there are still more than 3,600 patients waiting to get on the waiting list to see a specialist.

In March 2006, adding the surgical and medical outpatient figures together, there were 3,662 Bundaberg Base Hospital patients waiting to see a specialist. As at March 2007, there were 3,685 patients—an increase of 23. So, although it is pleasing that there are fewer people having to wait longer than they should to get their surgery, there are still far too many people who are waiting to get an appointment with a specialist. That signifies that Bundaberg Base Hospital needs help in the short term as well as in the long term.

Another interesting figure to note is emergency department attendances. Over the past year Bundaberg Base Hospital had a 12 per cent increase in the number of people attending the emergency department—one of the highest increases in the state. Again, that is another example of how busy the emergency department has become and how disappointing it is that the state government allocated only \$2 million in this year's budget out of the \$41 million promised to upgrade the hospital. This dramatic increase in attendances to the emergency department shows how crucial it is for the state government to upgrade this hospital now and not in two or three years time. The upgrade needs to follow a master plan that will address the future needs of Bundaberg and its surrounding district.

Time expired.