



Speech by

Mike Horan

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL AND APPROPRIATION BILL: ESTIMATES COMMITTEE G (REPORT NO. 2)

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (8.59 pm): I join with our chairman in thanking the secretariat staff Julie Copley, Amanda Honeyman and Michelle Benham. They did an excellent job. I would also like to congratulate our chairman, Evan Moorhead, the member for Waterford. He did a very good job and it was a pleasure to work with him. He helped with the smooth running of the estimates committee hearing and all the meetings beforehand and afterwards.

In the time available for questioning, this estimates process showed some very serious problems that exist in terms of the functioning of the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries—none more so than the budgetary and staffing problems that that department has. The overall budget process has shown that by the year 2010 the debt of this state will be \$53 billion. That is almost \$10 million every single day of every single week of every single year that Queensland has to find. That amount has to be found at the start of every single day.

To find that \$10 million in interest obviously charges are going to go up and budgets are going to be cut. The Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries has seen its budget cut year after year. Our questioning was able to show that on a true comparison the cut was about six per cent to \$332 million. That is a cut of \$19.5 million in the DPIF budget of five years ago. The only reason the minister has been waltzing around saying that the budget has increased is due to the fact that there was a transfer of almost 200 staff from Department of Natural Resources and Water to primary industries in order to have a more complete biosecurity unit. When we look at this accurately it shows a cut in budget.

So bad have been the ongoing cuts in experienced staff that there have been some 300 VERs over recent years. They are bringing in people who have no experience in DPIF. So bad has been the loss of corporate knowledge, experience and morale in DPIF that the minister has had to resort to establishing an alumni to try to get those people who have the corporate knowledge back so that they can pass on a bit of knowledge. Some of these people did not have their contracts renewed. They are very senior people. Some of these people with many years of knowledge of the department of primary industries were pushed out, got VERs or did not have their contracts renewed. Now the minister has resorted to an alumni.

It was interesting that the minister also spoke during the hearing about the fact that he needed local mayors to help with the biosecurity problems that can bob up. Now there will be a reduction in mayors across the state. We have lost the leadership, we have lost the local knowledge—all the important things that result from having mayors and councillors who know their areas. That is gone. When they have a biosecurity exercise the first person they ring is the local mayor. Now they will all be gone.

We showed a lot of things through our questioning. The Intensive Livestock Regulation Unit has been operating for the past 12 to 18 months at about 50 per cent of its operational staff. It has not been able to service north Queensland, or sale yards or dairies. It has had a 100 per cent turnover of staff. The minister wrote a letter to the editor last week in the *Country Life* saying that it has now almost got its full

complement of staff—that is, nine or 10 staff. What happened over the last 12 to 18 months? He does not like to talk about that. That was what his web site showed.

We were also able to demonstrate that there was a memorandum of understanding to put on 20 property management officers 12 months ago. Only three of those have been put on. This is an example of snails pace administration. One of the major items in the fisheries budget is fuel for patrol boats, and we were able to show that that particular part of the budget has been cut. The minister was not able to answer why he has curtailed overtime and weekend work by fisheries inspectors. Obviously he hopes that any problems that occur happen between nine and five on Monday to Friday.

The biggest problem we saw as a result of our questioning was the minister's confusion about the numbers of staff that he has got and how many have resigned. He mumbled answers and got all confused about who was permanent, who was temporary, who was semipermanent, who was casual. He did not conclude the answer on those numbers because he was too embarrassed to conclude it. Overall we were able to show that the department had missed its forestry target.

Time expired.