



Speech by

Vaughan Johnson

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

Hansard Wednesday, 8 August 2007

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

Mr JOHNSON (Gregory—NPA) (9.37 pm): At the outset I thank the chairman of the committee, the member for Waterford, Mr Moorhead, and committee members for allowing me to participate in the hearing. I direct my comments to the area of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, which the minister is responsible for.

In relation to this portfolio I asked questions mainly on the area of the allocation and enhancement of existing diversionary programs. I believe that one of the most important functions of government at the moment is to recognise the need for diversionary centres in the Aboriginal communities. As I stated in questions at the estimates hearing that day, and the minister rightfully agreed, there are too many Indigenous people in our prisons. Diversionary centres have to be built, maintained and upgraded. It is not about building prisons; it is about trying to cure the problem.

The fact of the matter is that in the end the women and kids seem to become the perpetrators as they try to protect themselves. The minister and I have discussed this in the past. I hope that we can work in a bipartisan way to get satisfactory outcomes to stop the rot and enhance the opportunities of those women and their children, as well as the men of those communities.

I have said before that the CDEP programs are not working. They are not working because the guidelines have been changed and there is no purpose in the programs. While those programs may work in some places, a lot of homework is yet to be done in relation to them.

The other area I touched on was monitoring the reporting of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. The minister did touch on that. This is a program that is ongoing and something which the minister promised they would continue to do reporting on. I am grateful for that but, again, Indigenous people are different from non-Indigenous people. They have a different culture, live in a different environment and have different spiritual beliefs and fears that we do not have. I really believe one of the main problems confronting Indigenous communities today is that non-Indigenous people do not really understand the culture they are dealing with. I think that is one reason we have to take this softly, softly and get the outcomes in question.

Another issue I touched on was the sexual abuse of Indigenous children. Sexual abuse, unfortunately, is not only applicable to Indigenous children but also applicable to non-Indigenous children. This is probably one portfolio area that I do not envy any minister being in control of, or any department, and it is again one that I think we are all responsible for. I can assure the minister that I want to see outcomes here. I certainly support the federal government's initiative in relation to the territory. The minister said in answer to my question that he did not think it was applicable in Queensland. However, in large part this problem is created by alcohol and people having nothing to do. Being a member of the Palm Island Select Committee—as were two of my colleagues up the back, the member for Southport and the member for Kallangur, and a couple of other members of this House—I understand that fully. The issue of alcohol management is something that we have to get right.

I have always been one for zero tolerance, but I think we have to look at minimum tolerance with those management strategies. If someone says to you, 'No, you can't have that,' then you are going to try to find a way around it. I think that is one of the big problems with Indigenous communities today. I really believe that we can get some resolution in those areas.

Another area I touched on is the allocation of properties for the Torres Strait and Indigenous communities and the cost of housing. Regardless of where they are, when it comes to black people we will double the price or triple the price because most times it is the government that will be shovelling the money in to pay for this construction. It puts them at a total disadvantage before they even start. If members want my honest opinion, some of these people should be subjected to a full-scale inquiry as to how they can in all conscience be ripping these people off. The price of concrete is 500 or 1,000 per cent more than what it is in mainstream areas. I think we have a long way to go with this area in question, and I look forward to being positive and to making some of those outcomes become a reality over the next term.