



Speech by

**Shane Knuth**

**MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE**

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## **APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL AND APPROPRIATION BILL: ESTIMATES COMMITTEE F**

**Mr KNUTH** (Dalrymple—LNP) (3.52 pm): I rise to speak to the report of Estimates Committee F, which looked at the portfolios of the Minister for Local Government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, the Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Sport, and the Minister for Community Services and Housing and Minister for Women. I will deal with two of the budget highlights and issues considered by the committee within the local government area. We talked about the harmonisation of state legislation and regulations impacting on local government. We talked about volunteer numbers with respect to the Department of Communities.

I visited the Atherton branch of Meals on Wheels last week and listened to the concerns of the volunteers who are becoming burdened with mountains of complex paperwork to comply with the rules and regulations. Red tape and bureaucracy now threaten the survival of the Atherton branch of Meals on Wheels as well as the branches at Tolga, Kairi and Yungaburra, which are also in my electorate. There may be others throughout Queensland in this situation.

They have undergone accreditation and compliance with health and safety standards. They believe that these rules and regulations are enough to ensure they maintain a high standard of food preparation. Volunteers are overwhelmed with the latest new labelling requirements. They are already delivering safe and nutritious food to the older and vulnerable residents in our community. The new labelling is just overkill.

We must not lose sight of the fact that Meals on Wheels is manned by dedicated volunteers who give unselfishly of their time to lend a helping hand to support the vulnerable in our society. Most kitchen staff give five hours of their time per delivery day—those being Monday, Wednesday and Friday and including public holidays. The delivery person gives up to two hours daily depending on the distance to travel. They use their own motor vehicles on a voluntary basis.

Many of the elderly meal recipients are isolated. In many cases, the volunteer delivering their meal is their only contact with the outside world. It is not only the meal delivery that is important here; volunteers fill a void for many. There are times when an advocacy role is fulfilled by them. If it were not for volunteers this country would be broke.

The first Meals on Wheels meals were delivered in Melbourne in 1953. The essence of Meals on Wheels was to provide a traditional hot soup, a hot main meal and a cold pudding to the elderly and disadvantaged. Now this long-established service is being threatened as committed, hardworking volunteers are faced with the daunting task of meeting the new labelling requirements.

I have heard it mentioned that frozen meals could take the place of a hot meal. There are many elderly people who do not even have a microwave oven let alone know how to use one. New labelling poses a real threat to the continuation of Meals on Wheels. I hear volunteers express concern about being able to cope with the additional red tape to comply with the latest labelling requirements.

It would be a sad day for Queensland if we saw the withdrawal of Meals on Wheels from our communities because of the decline in the ranks of our volunteers. They feel that labelling is the last straw.

If we are going to burden them with these labelling laws then we should pay some of the workers to do the labelling. That will reduce the time that the volunteers are putting into this. They would then be able to do what they do best and that is provide a meal and service to their communities.

The Budget Strategy and Outlook Statement talks about environmental and resource management funding grants to local government and mentions the figure of \$14 million. I do not know how much of this is to support Charters Towers set up a bat habitat. We do have a bat habitat. I believe a certain amount has come from the state to do this.

We applied for a permit to remove them by helicopter but the department rejected that on the grounds that we could not prove that bats were not going to be harmed. These things have been living and roosting amongst us for nine years. We are sick and tired of this issue. Money has been spent on this. We are putting up with the filth, the ticks, the parasites and the stench. When we have a golden opportunity to move them out by helicopter, it is rejected on the grounds that we could not prove that the bats were not going to be harmed. We have a moral obligation here. This is a cost issue. Give us the permits and we can solve the problem once and for all.

*(Time expired)*