



Speech by

Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL AND APPROPRIATION BILL: COMMUNITY AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Ms SIMPSON (Maroochydore—LNP) (7.30 pm): Breaking the cycle of poverty and helping the most vulnerable in the community is an important role of government in partnership with the community. The estimates hearing of the Community Affairs Committee presented an opportunity to examine the expenditure on projects and services for some of the most vulnerable and at-risk Queenslanders and the people who assist them. On delays for blue cards, the impact of the carbon tax, the overall lack of accountability within the department and a lack of effective review of measures, the minister failed to provide adequate explanations. The Community Services budget papers provide next to no information. There are a total of two measures in the Community Services section.

I want to address an issue that the chair attacked me for, which related to a document that I tabled and which was actually supplied by St Vincent de Paul Queensland in relation to the delays in blue cards being processed here in Queensland. This issue is worth bringing again to the attention of the parliament because, despite what was said in the committee and despite what has been claimed in parliament previously, I am still hearing from organisations such as St Vincent de Paul Queensland that the information they provided, unfortunately, is correct—that is, in some circumstances up to six months can pass before their volunteers receive their blue cards. This situation is making it very difficult for organisations that care for the vulnerable in our communities and look after those communities generally, as they are finding that their volunteers have to wait months and months to get the appropriate blue card protections in place. Since the estimates process I have again raised the issue with Commissioner Elizabeth Fraser, and I will continue to raise it until it is appropriately addressed by the government and by the commission. Voluntary organisations and good volunteers who want to be involved should not be stopped by a government that has failed to address those concerns. I am really disappointed that, instead of addressing the issue, I have been attacked for raising it on behalf of St Vincent de Paul Queensland.

In these documents for the Department of Housing, housing capital costs are not reported in terms of expenditure by year but in rolling budgets. Essentially, this is about avoiding scrutiny of underspends, delays and failures to deliver. I find it extraordinary that in the budget papers for a multimillion dollar department there are no actuals or estimated actuals for the capital program, that we do not see a year-by-year comparison of the actual spend with a summary of supplies and services. I asked for that information during the estimates process, even though one would think it basic information. It is expected in the private sector, it is expected of community organisations when they report to their boards and it is expected of NGOs supplying services, but the government thinks it is above that. We believe that basic standards of reporting should be put in place in respect of this multimillion dollar budget.

What I found out was interesting. I questioned what the actuals were for supplies and services. There had been a 30 per cent increase in the amount spent by government on supplies and services. That was post merger. That is interesting when you compare it with what the government is offering to the NGOs, who are doing the heavy lifting, the service delivery and the caring for people in the community. They have an indexed 3.75 per cent increase per year. It is all very well for the government to turn around

and say to the community and the NGO sector, 'Go and be more efficient,' but we do not see that in the way that this government administers the budget that is in its hands. That is unfortunate, because this is a very important portfolio that deals with an area where people's lives are in crisis.

We see a lack of security of forward funding indicated in the budget papers to address the 30,000— an ever-increasing number of people—waiting on the social housing list. I raised the homelessness situation in respect of how the government is tracking the problem and addressing it in the community. Still they point back to the 2006 ABS figures. No funding has been provided or identified for many regions in Queensland. People are living rough in many regions of Queensland, but we have not seen an allocation of homelessness funding. This government does not recognise the homeless unless they popped up in the 2006 ABS census. In real terms, we see no forward allocation once the Smart Futures Fund funds run out or an indication from government as to how it will address this issue.

I have talked about the impact on the building program of the carbon tax that the government wants to deny. That is going to be a significant slug given that it is an \$8,000 cost per home.

(Time expired)