




Speech by

Hon. Glen Elmes

MEMBER FOR NOOSA

Hansard Wednesday, 31 October 2012

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL AND APPROPRIATION BILL: HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

 **Hon. GW ELMES** (Noosa—LNP) (Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs and Minister Assisting the Premier) (11.01 pm): Mr Deputy Speaker Berry, thank you for the opportunity to reply to the estimates committee report for the portfolio of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs. I would like to thank the chair, my good friend the member for Redlands, and the five members of the Health and Community Services Committee who attended the hearing for their diligence and competent conduct of the hearing. I would also like to place on record my disappointment that the remaining two members—the members for Bundamba and Woodridge—did not see fit to attend the hearing of the committee regarding my portfolio. This is especially concerning because the member for Woodridge is the opposition spokesperson for multicultural affairs. I will come back to that point later.

I would like to thank my ministerial and departmental staff for the time and effort which went into preparing for this important element of government. The estimates process is a bit like cramming for an exam. I certainly know far more about my department now than I did at the start of the process.

The committee's report summarises the large number and diverse range of issues that were covered at the hearing. I note a dissenting report has been provided. It is signed by the two Labor committee members—the members for Bundamba and Woodridge. All I can say is thank heavens for *Hansard* because without *Hansard* the two members would have had no idea what went on at the hearing because they were not there.

I would also like to thank the members who were there for the breadth of questions they asked covering a broad range of departmental activities. For example, there were some excellent questions about the work being done to review alcohol management plans, the work of the Family Responsibilities Commission and the Cape York Welfare Reform Trial, the benefits for Indigenous people from the Remote Indigenous Land and Infrastructure Program Office, funding provided to multicultural groups and the new week-long multicultural festival. These are all important programs which should be open to public scrutiny and comment.

Unfortunately, a couple of trivial questions from opposition members used up time which could have been better spent on valid multicultural affairs issues. I suppose they did their best putting up a brave front in the absence of the opposition spokesperson. Even the opposition leader, who makes such a fuss of her own commitment to multicultural affairs, did not step into the breach. It just shows the complete lack of serious attention that this opposition pays to multicultural issues. Rather than talk about the range of programs which assist migrants and promote diversity within our community, they chose to focus on how many multicultural events I and my assistant minister had attended.

Multicultural affairs is one of my four ministerial responsibilities, and I take all of them seriously. By far the largest of them is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. I made it a priority in the early days of my ministry to get out and visit as many Indigenous communities as I could before the wet season set in.

Mrs SCOTT: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. It is one of the rules of this House that a member should not make an announcement about a member being absent. I was on legitimate business during that time. I would ask you to withdraw.

Mr ELMES: I withdraw.

Mrs MILLER: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. My point of order is similar to that of the member for Woodridge. I was also on legitimate business and that is why I was not in the chamber. I feel personally offended by the member's comments and I ask him to withdraw.

Mr ELMES: I am terribly sorry that the member for Bundamba feels so slighted, so of course I will withdraw. As part of this process, the opposition decided that they would question the number of multicultural events that I had attended.

Mr Byrne: What about the Australian South Sea Islanders question?

Mr ELMES: Yes, indeed about that. I had a look at the amount of time that I have spent with Indigenous communities during the time I have been the minister. Forgetting about all the meetings in Brisbane and so forth, I have spent 23 full days either in front of Indigenous leaders or in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities since I became the minister. That is a bit of a commitment on the other side.

The opposition also decided that it was going to put out a press release about the fact that I was not attending too many multicultural events. Guess what? I found out about that the afternoon I got off a plane in Mackay to attend the Global Grooves multicultural festival in the member for Mackay's electorate. That is when I found out about that.

In terms of a commitment to multicultural affairs, one of the things this government has done is establish a department that covers Indigenous people in this state and covers multicultural affairs in this state. I think we do a damn good job at it. Can I also say that Assistant Minister Rob Cavallucci does an excellent job of getting around to many multicultural events in this state. I wish to place on the record that I congratulate Rob and his wife on the birth of their daughter a few hours ago. Congratulations to Rob. A commitment to multicultural affairs on that side of the House is completely nonexistent.

Mrs Miller interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Berry): Order! Member for Bundamba, you are warned.