




Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE

Hansard Wednesday, 31 October 2012

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL AND APPROPRIATION BILL: AGRICULTURE, RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

 **Mr KNUTH** (Dalrymple—KAP) (8.40 pm): The foundation of the 2012 budget was the Commission of Audit conducted by former Treasurer Peter Costello which recommended to immediately reduce the size of the Public Service and cut government expenditure. The audit also recommended a continued privatisation and asset sale agenda. The Appropriation Bill 2012 endeavours to follow two of those recommendations. This has led to the loss of 14,000 full-time workers and the abolition of a raft of programs that the government decided were redundant. I assume that the government is itching to follow the third recommendation, which is the sale of our remaining assets.

Prior to the 2012 election the LNP stated that it would be Public Service friendly and reduce the Public Service through natural attrition, and it committed to retain services in rural and regional Queensland. Yet we have seen an unprecedented loss of services in rural and regional Queensland. During the AREC estimates hearing, I questioned the rationale of cutting funding from the farm financial assistance program, moving Townsville's biosecurity lab to Coopers Plains and removing five positions from the Charters Towers Tropical Weeds Research Centre, amongst other things.

I believe that the response to those questions, while fitting the government's agenda of cutting costs, indicated there has been very little consideration of the broader economic and social costs of these decisions. The decision to close the Townsville Tropical and Aquatic Animal Health Laboratory has demonstrably not been fully evaluated. The minister has provided very few answers on how the government believes that the Coopers Plains facility is better placed to deal with an incursion of diseases such as foot-and-mouth in the Far North and Gulf Country.

Modelling has indicated that a delayed response to a foot-and-mouth incursion could mean the difference between a contained outbreak in Queensland and devastation of the whole Australian lamb and beef market. In 2002 the DPI demonstrated that a worst case scenario would involve key beef and lamb export markets being closed for 15 months. The cost of a foot-and-mouth disease incursion would be between \$8 billion and \$13 billion of gross domestic product and the consequences would be felt 10 years after the event. Even an isolated outbreak that was brought rapidly under control was estimated to potentially cost \$3 billion of gross domestic product.

The government promised to recognise agriculture as one of the four pillars of the Queensland economy, but it has demonstrated that it is not prepared to invest in protecting primary industries and is willing to expose Queensland to unacceptable levels of risk, all for the sake of a few dollars. The anger of the region is demonstrated by the petition I tabled yesterday with nearly 4,000 signatures calling for the retention of the Townsville Tropical and Aquatic Animal Health Laboratory facility in Townsville. The four members representing the Townsville area have been dodging, weaving and hiding to the point of invisibility. The four members representing the Townsville region should never call themselves representatives. Representatives would fight tooth and nail to stop a vital service being moved to Brisbane. Moving this essential front-line protection against disease outbreak in Far North Queensland to South-East Queensland is negligent.

I also questioned the amount of water released for the Flinders River Agricultural Precinct. I welcome the initiative and the minister's response; however, CSIRO studies have shown that a 100,000-megalitre irrigation extraction from the Flinders River is just 2.1 per cent of the annual flow—just a drop. To attract investment to the region, stakeholders have indicated that there needs to be enough water to support the construction of food and fibre processing plants such as the \$12 million cotton gin at Julia Creek.

I also appreciate the fact that I had the opportunity to talk to the minister in relation to bats. I acknowledge that the minister has acted in good faith and has said that he is prepared to work with me, work with the council and direct his department to find solutions to the bat issue. The minister did come to Charters Towers and say that he will remove the bats by whatever means possible. The bats are still there. It was on the front page of the Charters Towers newspaper—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Ruthenberg): Order! The member's time has expired.

Mr KNUTH: The minister has acted in good faith, instead of—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member's time has expired!

Mr KNUTH: That is far greater than what has been offered in the past.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Dalrymple, I called you three times to cease speaking. Members, this chair needs to be respected. If members continue to disrespect the chair, I will talk with Madam Speaker. Please, members, respect other people in this chamber with regard to your time.

Mr KNUTH: I withdraw those comments and I apologise.