



Speech by


**Tim Mulherin**

**MEMBER FOR MACKAY**

Hansard Wednesday, 31 October 2012

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

 **Mr MULHERIN** (Mackay—ALP) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (10.41 pm): I rise to speak on the report of the Health and Community Services Committee. We do not believe the time allocated to the Minister for National Parks, Recreation, Sport and Racing was sufficient to properly examine the department's \$380 million budget. The limited amount of time available was further squandered by the minister's stunts. It is extremely disappointing that the minister did not respect the intent of the estimates process. The minister sought to abuse the estimates hearing by demanding the opposition provide information to him. The minister then refused to furnish the committee with details of what sporting events he and his assistant minister have attended in corporate boxes and who extended the invitation. In addition, the minister repeatedly refused to rule out the reintroduction of government corporate boxes despite the Premier's stated intention to not reintroduce government corporate boxes.

We are disheartened that the minister was unable or unwilling to shed any light on his plans for the racing industry. This was once again brought about partly by the limited amount of time allocated for questioning and partly by the minister's approach of dodging questions. Unfortunately the non-government members of the committee express reservations as to the expenditure in the racing portfolio given so little information has been provided. Under questioning the minister was unable to confirm during the hearing if Racing Queensland's appointment of Mr Allan Reardon to the position of Director of Steward Development had received government approval. The non-government members of the committee find it concerning that neither the minister, his chief-of-staff, nor departmental officers were able to answer this question during the hearing considering the directive issued after the election that Racing Queensland must obtain government approval before employing, engaging or terminating staff. The minister elected to take the question on notice. When the answer was returned to the opposition four days after the hearing it was revealed that the government did provide approval.

We are concerned with the scarcity of information provided in a number of questions on notice in relation to National Parks. Most notably, the minister failed to provide any relevant information at all for questions on notice 16 and 20. Question on notice 16 concerned new recreational and tourist activities likely to be introduced in Queensland national parks. The minister failed to provide an answer, instead using it as an opportunity to attack the previous government using out-dated figures. Question on notice 20 revealed that apparently the department does not hold any information on flora and fauna mapping for the national park estate. This beggars belief. If true it is evidence that the latest machinery of government changes have created unworkable and confusing divisions of labour between departments. During the hearing it became evident the minister ignored departmental advice that the abolition of a number of temporary positions would have detrimental effects on front-line service provision. This stands in direct contradiction to the minister's earlier statements that every front-line service under national parks will be looked after.

The non-government committee members were disturbed by the fact both the minister and the director-general refused to answer simple and direct questions on the percentage of protected areas

covered by a management plan. The minister deliberately misled the committee on the previous government's legacy by stating that a 2010 figure for the percentage of protected areas covered by a management plan was current. The minister was unable to explain the meaning of the cardinal principle for national park management. It is troubling that the minister could not articulate that national parks exist to provide to the fullest extent possible for the preservation of an area's natural condition. This is a clear indication that the cardinal principle is no longer a factor in the management of Queensland's national park estate. In addition the minister stated that the Newman government is determined to open up national parks to motorbikes, four-wheel drives, horse riding, logging and mining, as well as assorted other damaging activities with little to no scientific assessment and without applying the precautionary principle which has traditionally been considered.

Due to the insufficient amount of time allocated to the examination of the budget estimates for the portfolio of National Parks, Recreation, Sport and Racing we must express severe reservations. Moreover, the conduct of the minister raises legitimate questions as to his suitability to oversee the expenditure. Evasion is not a substitute for reasoned and diligent policy development and delivery.