



Speech By  
**Jennifer Howard**


**MEMBER FOR IPSWICH**

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Record of Proceedings, 15 September 2015

**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL**

**Agriculture and Environment Committee, Report**

 **Ms HOWARD** (Ipswich—ALP) (5.49 pm): I rise to speak in support of the motion that the Agriculture and Environment Committee's report No. 5 on the 2014-15 budget estimates be adopted. Our committee recommends that the proposed expenditure for the committee's areas of responsibility as detailed in the Appropriation Bill 2015 be agreed to by the Legislative Assembly without amendment.

I thank my fellow committee members for their contributions to what was largely a constructive and effective day of estimates hearings in August. It was our privilege to welcome the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries and the Minister for Sport and Racing as well as the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef to appear before us in our public hearings. I congratulate the ministers on their impressive attention to detail and knowledge of their portfolios which greatly assisted the committee in its deliberations. I also thank the directors-general, CEOs and advisers for their professionalism during the hearing. I need to make special mention of our committee secretariat, particularly research director Rob Hansen but also Megan Johns, Maureen Coorey and Carolyn Heffernan. I thank them for their extremely capable assistance which ensured a smooth running of proceedings.

In a unicameral parliament like Queensland, the committee system is absolutely essential to the proper functioning of democracy. From my position as chair, I found myself impressed by the great opportunity the estimates process affords non-government members to scrutinise appropriations. In their arrogance, the former LNP government tried to avoid this scrutiny by condensing a two-week process down to two days. They did this for no other reason than that they thought their large majority meant they could get away with it. We all know how that went! Unlike the previous government, the Palaszczuk government is committed to the integrity of our parliamentary process. We returned the estimates process to its two-week schedule. I take great pride in being part of a government that has delivered on its commitment to restore estimates to its rightful place in our parliament as a crucial and effective measure of accountability.

During public hearings our committee examined items of government expenditure across a range of vital portfolios. I was pleased that the serious issue of fire ants was raised during my committee's hearings. The impact of this invasive species was brought home in my electorate last year when the Ipswich Knights Football Club's main soccer field at Bundamba was closed due to infestation. Sadly, when I attended the opening of their 2015 season earlier this year the young players from Ipswich Knights were forced to move their game to another field in neighbouring Ebbw Vale. That is why I am pleased to see this government funding measures to help eradicate this biosecurity threat, which has had a direct impact upon the people of Ipswich.

I was also pleased to be a part of the committee's examinations relating to our government's measures to protect the Great Barrier Reef. The Palaszczuk government has committed an additional \$100 million over five years to protect this iconic part of Queensland's environment, the protection of which is one of our primary goals. These and many other important matters were aired in our hearings, and it was fantastic to see our committee's vital accountability role in action. However, I was disappointed that certain members of the opposition saw the hearings as nothing more than an opportunity to score cheap political points. These members repeatedly interjected and disrespected the committee process. I commend Minister Byrne and Minister Miles for their tenacity and patience in responding during these outbursts.

Overall, I feel that the Agriculture and Environment Committee's estimates hearing was constructive and successful. I once again thank all of those whose participation and efforts were so crucial to the smooth functioning of the hearings and the production of this report. I commend the report to the House.