




Speech By  
**Andrew Cripps**

**MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK**

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Record of Proceedings, 8 August 2017

**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL:  
HEALTH, COMMUNITIES, DISABILITY SERVICES AND DOMESTIC AND  
FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION COMMITTEE**

 **Mr CRIPPS** (Hinchinbrook—LNP) (9.56 pm): For the third year in a row I have attended the budget estimates committee hearing of the Minister Assisting the Premier on North Queensland in an attempt to establish exactly what the minister is responsible for in relation to North Queensland. As a result of previous estimates committee processes we know that the Minister Assisting the Premier on North Queensland is not responsible for any legislation, any budget allocations or any public servants in her role representing North Queensland.

For three years now estimates committees have been expected to scrutinise the performance of the Minister Assisting the Premier on North Queensland without any service measures being included in the state budget papers for her role relating to North Queensland—unlike every other cabinet minister. This is a disgrace. As I have previously observed, this abysmal failure of transparency demonstrates a contempt for the obligation of the executive to be accountable to the parliament.

Given that for the third year in a row there were no service area objectives, no service area descriptions and no service measures in any Service Delivery Statements associated with this minister in that capacity representing the Premier on North Queensland, this year I tried something different. This year I decided to ask the minister a series of questions about key issues impacting on the region that she is supposed to represent and about which she has previously made statements, just to give her a head start. In doing so, what became clear was that this minister has been making unsubstantiated claims that are a long way from the reality of the situation. I did not have a lot of time available, so I decided to concentrate on unemployment, crime and electricity costs, which are all major issues in North Queensland.

The minister made a statement on 24 May this year claiming that the Palaszczuk government's first two budgets had created jobs in North Queensland. Despite this claim, the fact is that unemployment rates in Townsville, particularly youth unemployment rates, have increased. I asked the minister why, but the minister was unable to explain why Labor's policies had failed to lower unemployment rates in North Queensland, despite her statement earlier in the year and despite the fact that they have spent hundreds of millions of dollars on taxpayer funded programs in that region.

On 9 December last year the minister told North Queenslanders that juvenile offenders would be held accountable and made to fix the damage they caused when committing a property crime, and this was an initiative because of the shocking youth crime rates in Townsville and North Queensland. I asked the minister how many youth offenders had been issued with these orders and it turns out that none of the 17 high-risk youth court orders issued since February appear to have involved the young offender fixing the damage they caused to other people's property in the course of their sentencing—zero—despite the minister's claims.

At the estimates committee I noted that on 2 June 2017 the minister had asserted that the Powering North Queensland Plan would stabilise electricity prices in North Queensland and I asked a simple question of the minister: how and when will this occur? In her answer the minister appeared to claim that the government's Powering North Queensland Plan had already stabilised power prices in North Queensland but, despite being asked twice, the minister was unable to advise the committee when this price stabilisation had occurred. The power bills being paid by North Queenslanders would certainly appear to contradict her claim. For three years now I have been saying that the lack of clarity around the role of the Minister Assisting the Premier on North Queensland and in particular the annual estimates process in relation to these particular responsibilities is a complete farce. It finally seems that the minister's cover has been blown. The editorial in the *Townsville Bulletin* on Thursday, 27 July this year made the following observation in relation to the minister's performance at the estimates committee the day before. It stated—

Ms O'Rourke has three ministerial hats—Disability Services, Seniors and 'Minister Assisting the Premier on North Queensland'.

It is in the last role that Ms O'Rourke has bitterly disappointed people in this region—many of whom voted her into a shock win against David Crisafulli in 2015.

And last night we witnessed another bumbling performance that reminded us how out of touch—and out of depth—she is for this role.

When Hinchinbrook MP Andrew Cripps pressed Ms O'Rourke on vital issues to our region—energy and crime—she betrayed an embarrassing ignorance. She could not answer the most basic questions about power prices and law and order.

I table that article for the benefit of the House.

*Tabled paper:* Article from the *Townsville Bulletin*, dated 27 July 2017, titled 'Region loses a powerful supporter' [[1251](#)].

I could not have said it better myself. The minister for North Queensland is a bitter disappointment to the region that she is supposed to represent and she is certainly—

*(Time expired)*