




Speech By
Patrick Weir

MEMBER FOR CONDAMINE

Record of Proceedings, 22 August 2018

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL

State Development, Natural Resources and Agricultural Industry Development Committee, Report

 **Mr WEIR** (Condamine—LNP) (12.14 pm): I rise to speak to the committee report on the estimates hearing into the portfolios under the State Development, Natural Resources and Agricultural Industry Development Committee. I cannot speak to this report without expressing my disappointment with the manner in which the whole estimates process was conducted. As deputy chair, I expressed some of my concerns in the statement of reservation that is attached to the committee report.

Estimates is an opportunity for the non-government members to ask questions of the relevant minister about the expenditure details concerned with their portfolio, or the lack of expenditure, or any implications that may be as a result of the allocated expenditure. Unfortunately, this was not allowed to happen during the 2018 estimates hearing. There was obviously an instruction delivered from higher up to all Labor committee members and chairs to run as much interference as possible during these hearings. The apparent aim was to protect the relevant ministers from being exposed to any questions that they may be uncomfortable with answering. The media coverage was scathing of the process. Chris O'Brien of the ABC reported on 31 July 2018 that—

The constant use of standing orders against questions containing arguments, imputations, opinions or hypothetical matters was the worst since the estimates process began in 1994, according to long time observers.

He also stated—

Former Labor speaker John Mickel said the “protection racket” by Queensland Government MPs at the hearings needed an overhaul to make the process more accountable to taxpayers.

The current Speaker, the Hon. Curtis Pitt, stated—

Members are put on notice that the use of props, framing irrelevant questions and frivolous or tedious points of order which only seek to disrupt the flow of proceedings or unsustainable claims and counter-claims, will be dimly viewed by the Queensland community.

The lasting legacy of estimates 2018 will be the total lack of any openness or transparency from this Palaszczuk government. There was no greater example of this than the protection provided to the minister for agriculture when the shadow minister, Tony Perrett, asked a question regarding the financial impact on agriculture from the changes to the vegetation management laws. The question was declared to be out of order as it did not impact the minister's portfolio. This was despite the fact, which was pointed out to the chair, that on page 4 of the SDS under the ‘Service area description’ it lists the ‘sustainability of Queensland's food and fibre sector’, ‘create long term jobs’, ‘improve the competitiveness of rural business’ and ‘deliver agricultural industry development outcomes’. If that does not cover a serious economic impact to the industry, then what does? This level of protection was not

exclusive to Minister Furner. Minister Dick and Minister Lynham were also the beneficiaries of questions that were ruled out of order or where the wording was only accepted if it allowed the minister to deliver long, rambling replies that did not go to the intent of the question.

During this estimates, we saw a number of documents released that had been concealed from public view, locked up under cabinet confidentiality or so-called commercial-in-confidence. This Palaszczuk government is making an art form of being a government of secrecy and arrogance. The behaviour of the government members in the red chamber, just down the hallway here, during the estimates process was a disgrace. It was a low point in the democratic process of this state.

The Premier can fix this problem quite easily. If the Premier has such little faith in the ability of her ministers to face public scrutiny, then sack them and replace them with someone who can do the job. The estimates hearings of 2018 will be remembered only for the lack of openness and transparency and the protectionist behaviour that was afforded to all government ministers.

I will conclude by thanking the secretariat for all of the hard work they put in in preparing for estimates. I thank my LNP committee colleagues, the member for Buderim and the member for Bundaberg. Members opposite should take a lesson and improve their standard next year.