



Speech By
Aaron Harper

MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

Record of Proceedings, 31 August 2021


APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)

Appropriation Bill

Health and Environment Committee, Report

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (5.23 pm): I rise to contribute to the 2021-22 budget estimates in relation to the portfolio areas we cover, health and environment. On behalf of the committee can I start by thanking the Minister for Health and Ambulance Services and the Minister for the Environment and the Great Barrier Reef and Minister for Science and Youth Affairs, and all departmental officers for their cooperation in providing information to the committee throughout the estimates process. I also thank members of the committee for their work and contributions to the estimates process. I saw that our breakdown of non-government questions exceeded government questions by an hour and a half, so I think I was a little too generous there. Perhaps I will have to rein it back next year. I think it depends on how people behave, but we will get to that.

Everyone knows the health crisis that is being referred to by the opposition, and I will touch on that in a minute, but COVID-19 has had a serious impact on Queensland, and the way we have managed it has been outstanding. I want to especially mention our Chief Health Officer, Dr Jeannette Young, who did her last estimates. She has kept Queensland safe and also kept the Health and Environment Committee informed on changes in managing COVID through the relevant extensions of COVID-19 public health orders. We wish her well in the future. I also acknowledge QAS Commissioner Russell Bowles. It was his last estimates as well as he goes into retirement after 40 years, 10 years as commissioner. I thank the secretariat and all who participated in the estimates process.

We noted there was an increase of \$685 million, or almost 3.4 per cent, for health in the 2021 budget. That related to increased expenditure, including workforce requirements to meet the ongoing growth for demand in frontline health services, including the ongoing response to COVID-19, and an additional \$485 million included to continue the COVID-19 response which is delivering fever clinics, contact tracing, testing capability and the vaccination program, compliance activities, the facilitation of quarantine and government arranged accommodation, COVID-19 contact centres and wellness checks for people in mandatory quarantine. There were some definite highlights—but I only have a couple of minutes to go—including \$482 million to address pressures in emergency patient flow through public hospitals.

I think I will just go straight to the statement of reservation from the non-government or LNP members. They mentioned that our waiting lists have ballooned and the time taken to be seen in emergency departments has lengthened, but throughout their entire questioning—for which they had

ample time—not one question was asked about why, the impacts of more people going into emergency departments, and whether it is experienced throughout Queensland and in fact throughout the nation. Perhaps they could have asked what percentage of people can afford private insurance in Queensland. Well, 55 per cent cannot; it is just unaffordable. That increases pressure on our public hospitals significantly. They did not ask about funding for aged care, the people who are waiting for aged-care packages. What happens when they do not get their aged-care packages? They generally call the Queensland Ambulance Service and they end up in an emergency department. They did not ask about the 600—the minister will probably give us closer numbers—beds being used by people who could get care in residential aged-care facilities but are taking up public hospital beds. They did not ask about that. They did not ask about increased funding from the federal government—

Ms Bates interjected.

Mr HARPER: Member for Mudgeeraba, here we go again behaving just like you did in estimates. They did not ask about funding from the federal government for palliative care services in Queensland, and they are responsible for subacute and aged-care funding in that cohort. Nothing! They did not ask that. They continue to blame the Labor state government, which I think has done an outstanding job in Queensland in managing COVID-19. Just look at what is happening across the border. I commend our report to the House.