



Speech By  
**Stephen Bennett**

**MEMBER FOR BURNETT**

---

Record of Proceedings, 24 February 2021


**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) (2020-2021) BILL**

**APPROPRIATION (2020-2021) BILL**

**Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)**

**Appropriation (2020-2021) Bill**

**Community Support and Services Committee, Report**

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (11.51 am): I want to start my contribution by thanking the committee secretariat, who do an amazing job—and it is lot of work to put all of this together. I also thank the other members of the committee, and I think we do get on really well and do our job well. We thank the members who sought leave to attend for their contributions. I want to acknowledge the chair's contribution. Our committee has developed a mutual respect and I need to highlight that the opposition did receive a significant amount of time for questions, and that needs to be acknowledged.

As has been said, our committee examined the portfolio areas of communities, housing, digital economy and the arts; seniors, disability services, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partnerships; and children, youth justice and multicultural affairs. A lot has already been said about process and problems with the estimates process. I do not intend to prosecute those issues again except to say that we can do better for Queenslanders. We in this place should always be looking at systems and processes that make this place function at a high level.

I acknowledge machinery-of-government changes in some cases made lines of questioning less than effective, and we cannot underestimate the effect COVID had on us all. I need to highlight some areas of concern that we discovered during estimates. I will refer anyone who is interested in more detail about these areas to the statement of reservation. One such concern was about housing and communities. The committee, of course, heard the glowing opening statements from the minister about prepared achievements across the portfolio areas. In my statement of reservation I raised concerns about the Housing Strategy, which has just been mentioned, delivering 5½ thousand homes, and I heard this morning about some numbers in a ministerial statement. However, our understanding is that since 2015 the waiting list in Queensland has increased by 10,000, which is 55 per cent. We noted that the minister and the department now refer to a 'housing register' instead of a previous performance indicator of a 'waiting list'.

Further examination reveals that the Palaszczuk government has spent less per capita on social housing and has only increased this stock by a reported 73. The reality is Queensland's waiting list has blown out to an incredible 21,000 people needing assistance, which is up from 16,000 a year earlier. I did take a lot of time to review the issues around the needs assessment, which was mentioned this morning in a ministerial statement as well. Of course, these are issues that are never easy and successive governments have always struggled in this space. A lot has been said about the pandemic,

but we never factored in the population growth during last year. This resulted in a per head spend of \$132, which was down from \$135 in 2018-19, the second lowest spend rate in the nation. On reflection of the issues regarding housing demand, we were still outperformed by Victoria, which experienced that massive lockdown.

The figure of 5½ thousand homes that was mentioned a lot is a part of the \$1.8 billion 2017-2027 Housing Strategy. Our reports are that housing stock has grown by just 627 dwellings since 2017. I would welcome the minister's explanation around the line of questioning that managed to expose that and what we are going to do to make sure that people in Queensland get what they need, particularly in terms of social and affordable housing. There is real concern about the 18,000 people waiting for a home in 2020 who were classed as 'greatest need' applicants under Labor's one-size-fits-all approach to a solution as another 3,000 wait for a transfer to the state's network of 51,000 social housing dwellings.

I move quickly and briefly to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partnerships. There is only one area I want to raise out of a very interesting line of questioning, and I still do not really understand what the department does because the director-general mentioned many times that, 'We don't actually deliver, but we're the glue to bring all this stuff together.' One of the areas of concern is the new Closing the Gap memorandum that has been signed. It now has 16 targets aimed at improving life outcomes for our First Nation people, but the record of the previous Closing the Gap targets has been somewhat disappointing. In 2018 the report card showed only two of the seven COAG Closing the Gap targets outlined were on track, and that was early childhood education and year 12 attainment.

With that, I will wrap up. I wish everyone the best with the committee process. Let's hope we can make it better.