



Speech By
Sandy Bolton

MEMBER FOR NOOSA

Record of Proceedings, 17 August 2022


APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)

Appropriation Bill

Legal Affairs and Safety Committee, Report

 **Ms BOLTON** (Noosa—Ind) (2.36 pm): I rise to make a contribution in support of the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee report on the budget estimates for 2022-23. Instead of speaking about the questions I asked at our hearing, as the responses were self-explanatory and available for anyone to view or read as I posted them, I wish to again highlight the importance of ensuring the estimates hearings and process meet the expectations of Queenslanders. The operations of parliament are a key part of how our Queensland democracy works and its committees are one of the key avenues that provide scrutiny and accountability of the government.

As honourable members are aware, reforms to the committee system were undertaken in 2011. Ten years later, in 2021, I was on a live streamed panel with the architects of those changes, former members Judy Spence and Lawrence Springborg, as well as our Speaker, Curtis Pitt MP, sharing insights on the system.

As I and others have articulated throughout the 57th Parliament, the committee system and the estimates process need tweaking to improve their effectiveness for Queenslanders. Issues highlighted again this year include the limited time for a diversity of questioning. For example, in a 45-minute session, non-government members receive half of that time after the minister's opening remarks of up to six minutes are taken out, leaving 19 minutes. The crossbench, 17 per cent of the opposition, receives understandably 17 per cent. This is actually just over three minutes as a standard. With ministers allowed three minutes to make responses, members can see this is not practical or equitable, leaving possibly only one question to be shared between the three very diverse parties and one Independent who make up the crossbench. The diversity of the communities represented cannot be accommodated in one question.

Therefore, for a second year in a row I attempted to circumnavigate the missing out by submitting two questions on notice to other committees—unsuccessfully, I might add, due to those standing orders. However, there are opportunities for change, as summarised in my statement of reservation. Firstly, the Coaldrake report recommended expanding the oversight role of the committees, specifically that integrity bodies' independence be enhanced by involvement of parliamentary committees. How this is done is important, leading to my question at our hearing regarding the role of committees as key stakeholders in implementing the Coaldrake recommendations.

Secondly, on the first day of hearings it was stated that for the accountability of government the parliamentary committees had not necessarily been discharging some of the things that were envisaged in the 2011 review. Anyone who listened to the live stream would have heard what they were. Hence, it is important that the Committee of the Legislative Assembly consider our previous request for a review of the committee system and the estimates process, taking into account the submissions that were made by me and other current and past MPs. This, along with the implementation of the Coaldrake review, provides an opportunity for real change and an end to the arguments that go backwards and forwards in this chamber. As I have said previously in this place, we have nothing to lose and everything to gain by seeking an efficient, transparent and equitable committee system and process.

In closing, I thank the Attorney-General and Minister Ryan for their fulsome responses. Even though there was no time to pursue matters further during the hearing, I have now submitted questions on notice to obtain clarification. I thank departmental staff for their hard work over many weeks, as well as those in attendance at our hearing. I make special mention of our chair, the member for Toohey, for providing 'unallocated time' for the crossbench and opposition to ask extra questions.

I wish to provide some clarity around the member for Caloundra's comment that I said the word 'sufficient'—it was not. The word that I used was 'appreciated'—and it is. There should be a standard which allows sufficient time. It should not be something that is at the discretion of individual chairs of different committees. We should not have to go cap in hand to sneak in an extra question. In conclusion, I express to all of our front liners our ongoing gratitude for what they do every day.