



Speech By
Dale Last

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

Record of Proceedings, 23 August 2023


APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)

Appropriation Bill

Legal Affairs and Safety Committee, Report

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (12.53 pm): I rise to speak to the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee's report into the 2023-24 budget estimates. I, too, would like to put on the record my thanks to the committee for granting me leave to appear at the hearing and to the respective staff and officers who participated in that process. The portfolios of police and corrective services and fire and emergency services has, at its heart, the safety and protection of Queenslanders. What this year's estimates clearly showed us is that under the watch of this minister, there are red flags across all aspects of this portfolio—issues around officer safety, recruitment, strategic direction, resources and importantly leadership—and you only need to look at police numbers where attrition is outstripping recruitment to understand that something is not right within the QPS.

I will start with corrective services. The men and women who work for Queensland Corrective Services make a huge contribution to Queensland's justice system and, in return, this government has a responsibility to keep them safe, a responsibility that this government has failed to achieve. During the 2022-23 year, we saw the number of victims of assault and serious assault in Queensland's correctional centres increase, and there were disturbingly 4,422 incidents of contraband items being located. Let's not forget this is inside prison. It is extremely concerning that we have no idea how many people were prosecuted or even charged for assaults on staff, and it is extremely concerning that no indication could be given as to whether the number of contraband items has increased. Even more concerning is that this minister has run out of ideas. When questioned on what he was doing to address staff assaults, the minister referred to expenditure rather than victims, once again illustrating the fact that this government is more focused on announcements than ensuring the safety of staff.

Just four years ago, residents of Townsville faced flooding like they had never seen before and among those responding were QFES staff, some of whom we learned during the hearing would be based in a facility built in a flood zone and subject to being inundated by up to two metres of floodwater during an extreme event. Our firefighters, whether they are paid or volunteers, rely on the equipment provided to do their job and to keep them safe, but instead this government has failed to provide rural fire appliances and has failed to fit equipment that could save the lives of Rural Fire Service volunteers. It is this government that failed to ensure QFES has the resources needed to adequately combat electric vehicle fires. It is this government that still has questions to answer when it comes to the testing of new helmets and communication systems.

Yet another example of this government's failure to keep Queenslanders safe is that in the middle of a youth crime crisis there has been a reduction in the number of sworn police officers. In the last financial year, the number of police officers in Queensland reduced by 202 officers, more than halfway through a commitment to increase police numbers by 1,450—yes, that is right—fewer police on our streets compared to 12 months ago and finally an admission by this minister that police numbers have gone backwards under his watch. Every day Queenslanders are seeing the effects of fewer police officers and the effects of \$8.7 million being wasted on the failed service delivery program. It means fewer resources to keep Queenslanders safe from youth crime and on our roads where, despite an increase in road fatalities, we have seen the number of random breath tests reduced by almost 900,000. It is not only the safety of Queenslanders that is under threat but also the concept of separation of powers that is under threat, thanks to the actions of this minister.

The estimates process provides for the scrutiny of the government's expenditure proposals and scrutiny of the government as a whole. That scrutiny has confirmed that when it comes to the services that Queenslanders rely on, this government has run out of ideas, has failed to deliver and has wasted millions of dollars.

When you look at the portfolios of police, fire, emergency services and corrective services, it is absolutely paramount that those particular organisations are tasked with keeping Queenslanders safe. It became clearly apparent during that estimates process that that is now under serious threat. If we have a look at crime figures, which are increasing at such a rapid rate, then we would have to question whether this government is actually fulfilling that commitment.