



Speech By  
**Melissa McMahon**

**MEMBER FOR MACALISTER**

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Record of Proceedings, 22 August 2023


**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL**

**APPROPRIATION BILL**

**Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)**

**Appropriation Bill**

**Economics and Governance Committee, Report**

 **Mrs McMAHON** (Macalister—ALP) (12.29 pm): I rise to make my contribution to this debate and reflect on the Economics and Governance Committee's estimates report. I must admit that the estimates process still baffles me to some extent. I understand the intent behind it. It is an opportunity to examine the appropriation bills tabled in parliament on budget day. It represents an opportunity to scrutinise the spending of departments and to ask questions of ministers, directors-general and chief executives. It is an opportunity for members to ask 'any question which is relevant to the examination of the appropriation being considered'. It is right there under standing order 181. I think the one word doing the heavy lifting during our committee's estimates hearing was the word 'relevant' because, quite frankly, I could see very little relevance in the majority of the opposition's questions—'relevant to the examination of the appropriation being considered'.

Our estimates sitting appeared to be merely focused on planes, trains and automobiles and we are not even the transport committee. The opposition had a laser-like focus on the fleet of Queensland Government Air, specifically about the divestment and acquisition of airframes. QGAir is operated by the Queensland Police Service and the director-general did outline details of a report which showed significant maintenance and availability issues and a decision made to divest QGAir's Hawker. I can understand this line of questioning—it is about expenditure and I think it is relevant to understand the reasoning behind the investment in new airframes. However, we had the member for Maroochydore posing a question as to whether the Premier just wanted a new set of wings, knowing such a question was not in line with the standing orders. Such a line of questioning from someone who should know better about the standing orders—just to throw out a defamatory remark and then withdraw it—shows that this had nothing to do with relevant questions of appropriations; it was just showboating. The fact that there were media releases by the police minister containing all this information—which opposition members did not seem to be aware of—shows either a lack of serious consideration of the issue or maybe just plain laziness.

We did see that the opposition can be interested in media releases when it suits them—just not the figures in the budget papers. When the Premier was questioned about the train spending, the Premier attempted to outline the budget procedures and the contracts being signed but was cut short

and interrupted because she was referring to the budget when the opposition were more interested in the drafting and signing off of a media release. They were not interested in the budget and not interested in appropriations. It was not relevant but it went on.

But, wait, there were questions about the Governor's automobiles—questions on spending that did not occur. There was a significant period of time devoted to questioning the Office of the Governor's consideration of converting one vehicle to an electric vehicle. It was considered and ruled out due to cost. There was a quote, and the executive team within the Office of the Governor chose not to proceed. We were then subjected to an attempt to make a tenuous link to government ministers attempting to influence this decision. The question line could have been mercifully cut short had members listened to the response by the Office of the Governor that they are independent from the Premier's office and ministers, yet it continued.

Now we spend today talking again more about the process of estimates rather than the outcome of the appropriations. Those opposite say that they want to improve the estimates process. Well, we know how they improved it last time they were in government, so what is their plan this time? Are they going to be open and transparent about how they plan to implement this? We did hear that having an independent chair is going to make the difference—someone like the Speaker. I can tell the House straightaway what problem they might find with that—that is, the Speaker will have far less leniency with the unparliamentary language, the unparliamentary questions, the reflections on the chair and the arguments with and disrespect of the chair. None of them would last an entire day on the committee. They would be ejected. Sure, let us have an independent chair like the Speaker in there and we will see how long they last asking such unparliamentary questions and raising questions which are offensive to the standing orders.

I have been a servant of natural justice for my entire career. There are processes in place when people want to make allegations about the behaviour of public servants. Tabling anonymous emails containing absolutely no evidence in an attempt to besmirch public servants is not natural justice.