



Speech By
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MEMBER FOR TRAEGER

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)

Appropriation Bill

State Development and Regional Industries Committee, Report

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (3.39 pm): With regret, I say that since I have been a member of this place, I have observed a deterioration in the integrity of the estimates committee process. I remember initially I observed ministers sweating under the collar. I remember vividly Jeff Seeney, who was someone I did not share a strong relationship with, once saying, 'Thank goodness that is over.' That was my memory of the estimates process at the start. The profound image I have now is of ministers comfortably walking in, delivering written speeches and written responses and then walking comfortably back out. I think everyone loses from that. I even think the government loses from that. Everyone wants to see interrogation of the budget and some real rigour around that. If government MPs come in and ask the soft questions of their ministers who give a Dorothy Dixier response, everyone loses; no-one wins.

That is not promoting the budget. The government has a huge advertising budget to promote and celebrate its budget, but it should not do it in the House where we are trying to interrogate it. It should not burn that time. The government has a great proportion of the time. There are not hundreds of thousands of people watching what we are doing in estimates. That is our opportunity to really interrogate the budget. I think a good government should welcome that because it is not always going to get it right. There will be people like myself who come from a remote part of Queensland who are given an opportunity to fix things and identify where things may be wrong. I think I got five to 10 minutes every hour to an hour and a half. I got 30 seconds or maybe a minute if I was lucky to ask a question. Instead of me getting to ask a second question, the minister just read a response and burnt up all my time to ask questions giving a response that was pretty vanilla and did not really answer the question asked.

I will say there were some exceptions in the water portfolio. The director-general did a really good job of trying to engage. I did not like the answers she was giving, but she did try to engage and give a real response. I appreciate that and I give her credit for that. I fear that we are heading to a point where if the government is trying to disconnect people from the political process and stop them watching estimates, well done, it has succeeded. If it really wants to build up the integrity of this parliament it has to think about how it is managing that. That has been done in an increasingly poorer way and it is way too soft on the ministers.

I will start with the water portfolio, which I was really interested in prosecuting after the Flinders tender. I think it requires a hell of a lot of scrutiny. We locked horns about property rights. There are some ridiculous conditions in the tender that are requiring people to get agreement from everyone downstream before they can proceed. The director-general was saying that is just like a property right. My response was that of course people had property rights when you are trying to build a bridge or a highway. That is why there is compulsory acquisition. If it is the direction and the judgement call by the government of the day to see this progress, it needs to facilitate that. It cannot be left up to proponents to work everything out themselves. Just saying that they are their property rights and they are enshrined in everything and no-one should touch them—that does not happen; that is not the real world. If so, governments would never build any dam, highway or bridge. I was talking about triggers for compulsory arbitration in that process.

I challenged the integrity of the flow stream data for the Flinders, which everyone on the ground knows is rubbish. I flew over those 2019 floods, which were biblical floods, at 5,000 feet and could see water 30 kilometres that way and 30 kilometres the other way. Honourable members should look at what the flow stream records say, and I know councils were not even reporting some of the daily flow stream figures. We are told rigidly that we cannot compromise the flow stream in the Flinders and we can only take so much percentage. However, the integrity of the data is rubbish and we know that. That needs to be prosecuted in a place like this, but we do not get the time and the opportunity to do so because we are bogged down listening to promotion of the government's position on things.

I also talked about the Longreach agriculture college. That was an absolutely disgraceful decision by the government.

Ms Boyd interjected.

Mr KATTER: A private entity was going to take it over again and start delivering training. Does the member opposite know how many people have graduated from TAFE with a Certificate III in Agriculture? There has been one a year—that is one a year in North Queensland. That is an absolute disgrace. Members opposite should be ashamed about that. That is when they should listen to what we are saying and say, 'Crikey, maybe we should address this.' Private industry was sitting there and they offered \$2 million more than the next highest offer and the government cut them out at the first run. That was a silly decision and the government needs to be held to account. I did not get a good response on that.

I also did not receive a good response on biosecurity. We were talking about lumpy skin disease with the Indonesians. If the government was doing its job in terms of biosecurity it would say, 'We had our sentinel herds there. We checked them. They were clear.' Bang, there would be no argument. It could not do that because guess what? I know how they have been checking in the Northern Territory. They were doing 20 to 30 checks when we were only doing five. If the Territory can do that, surely—

(Time expired)