



Speech By  
**Stephen Bennett**

**MEMBER FOR BURNETT**

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Record of Proceedings, 23 August 2023


**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL**

**APPROPRIATION BILL**

**Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)**

**Appropriation Bill**

**Community Support and Services Committee, Report**

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (3.05 pm): The Community Support and Services Committee estimates hearing did highlight the cost of living and we identified a series of other issues putting pressure on households across Queensland. With the claims of allocation of funding and resources across the board in areas such as health, housing and infrastructure, estimates did uncover some areas of concern that, as has been said, we need to work on. I take this opportunity to thank the director-general of housing for agreeing to meet with a not-for-profit charity to discuss their endeavours to construct some crisis accommodation.

The Family Responsibilities Commission's annual reporting made reference to two communities during estimates—Aurukun and Doomadgee—and the issues around school attendance rates. I take this opportunity to acknowledge just how complex this issue is and the work that the Family Responsibilities Commission is doing. We all should be applauding their work and continuing to support them and the outcomes. The minister is working with other ministers across education and other portfolios to address this issue. The commission needs our support. I acknowledge the opportunity that I had to travel to Aurukun recently with the chair to witness the work happening in a very complex community. As I said, we are very proud of everything that is going on in that space.

The Family Responsibilities Commission report also referenced sorry business as affecting school attendance in Doomadgee and Aurukun. Unfortunately, we witnessed some of that personally. During estimates we asked what progress has been made on a protocol for sorry business as it is important that we focus on outcomes.

I take this opportunity to talk about some of the child justice triggers that we all need to continue to work on. Former commissioner Glasgow and Commissioner Williams in their annual reports both highlighted amendments to the Youth Justice Act. We want to keep this on the agenda to make sure we are supporting the work of the commissioners and the department.

The commissioner raised concerns with section 20 of the act that deals with exclusions. We have to make sure that there are opportunities for recruitment of local commissioners across the Northern Peninsula Area in discrete communities to maintain the numbers to ensure that this important work continues. We put that on the record.

We would like to again talk about the four-point plan introduced after the riots as the community have asked us to make sure that the government remains focused on their issues. As it was budget estimates, I put on the record that we would love to get to the bottom of funding a hub. This is really important in connecting community and it really needs our intervention.

Because I can—and I do it every year—I want to talk about neighbourhood centres as part of this portfolio. Again, we did not get funding for a neighbourhood centre at Agnes Water, but I put on the record that the Agnes Water community deserves a centre. We should not forget about this community of 6,000 people. In the state budget \$39 million was allocated over three years to upgrade and construct neighbourhood centres across the state which is very welcome, but we need to remember Agnes Water. For years we have been fighting for a dedicated centre in the region and I am determined to work with the Minister for Communities to see this project become a reality.

Neighbourhood centres are a universal and vital point of access for community members. Our centres are essential local infrastructure. Like I said, with a population of 6,000 people, there is funding only for one person a few days a week to operate out of a three-by-three-metre office space. We are again calling on the minister to help the Discovery Coast fund a purpose-built neighbourhood centre. Out of the estimates process we did learn the formula for how they calculate neighbourhood centres. It is now up to us to convince the department that that is the reality.

With regard to housing, the evidence has established that we are struggling in this state. The homeless must wonder about what could have been, but the private sector now is enabled. The committee managed to travel around the state and have a look at some of the good work that is going on. As a state, we have a lot of opportunities to provide solutions for those who need our help. We do know that many Queenslanders—even many working Queenslanders—are either couch surfing or living in cars and tents. The situation is desperate. We have to make sure we are not peddling the false hope that solutions are easy or do not exist. People in my region would recall that prior to the last election we did not have 30 families living under our bridge and people camped in our parks. Six families are now permanently living at the Strathdees boat ramp car park. This is a legacy we cannot be proud of. Our community deserves better. More focus on housing is an essential part of what the Bundaberg region needs.