




Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Record of Proceedings, 21 August 2024

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL
APPROPRIATION BILL
Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)
Appropriation Bill

Community Support and Services Committee, Report

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (3.35 pm): I like estimates. I think it is a great time. I want to acknowledge the secretariat and members of the committee. I think we do a good job on our committee. Our estimates hearing examined the proposed expenditure in the Appropriation Bill 2024 for the portfolio areas of the following ministers: the Minister for Treaty, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Minister for Communities and Minister for the Arts; the Minister for Child Safety, Minister for Seniors and Disability Services and Minister for Multicultural Affairs; and the Minister for Tourism and Sport. We heard of critical funding for: Closing the Gap initiatives; wellbeing and community safety programs; and reconciliation, truth-telling and healing. Closing the Gap targets are a major concern and we should all acknowledge that we need to do better.

Repatriation of ancestral remains was a focus of the estimates process, in particular intensive travel and the associated costs. Questioning relating to cultural agility training inevitably returned responses referencing Path to Treaty. The training being offered by the Department of Resources was explained. What was of interest were revelations that many departments are working around native title and handing back land and renaming of locations. It was interesting to me, as someone who participated in the Path to Treaty inquiry, that we heard an expanded list of agenda items for the new truth and treaty body: displacement; dispossession; settlement; the management of lands, seas and waters; assimilation and protection; missions and reserves; the separation of children and other family members; control over personal property; control over wages; policing and the criminal justice system—and the list goes on. Alcohol management plans were discussed, and the issue of sly grog was acknowledged as being complex and serious.

Delay in the delivery of the performing arts venue was again a topic for estimates this year. There was great news. After many years of advocating for a new neighbourhood centre in Agnes Water, there was confirmation in the budget papers and twice in estimates that six neighbourhood centres across Queensland, including Agnes Water, will occur.

Clarification and discussion around youth in residential care highlighted the complexities of overutilisation. School attendance of young people in care highlighted a lack of data. Equally, data on children in residential care reported as missing was lacking, with reports that the only data is manual data being kept locally in these institutions or residential homes. We again received information that the department has no data on children in the care of Child Safety participating in extracurricular activities.

I was pleased the issues associated with level 3 supported accommodation providers were raised in estimates. The importance of these providers and the circumstances they find themselves in is of major concern. Our committee was privileged to do a significant amount of work over the last year on this issue and we have to turn our minds to what we do with these vulnerable Queenslanders going forward.

We concluded with the portfolio areas of tourism and sport. The issues of delays for the Wangetti Trail were scrutinised. It was revealed there have been significant underspends and continued delays, and there were references to stalled negotiations with Indigenous land use agreements and commercial operators. The Whitsunday Skyway project was also highlighted as being significantly delayed and tied up in red and green tape. It has been four years since that announcement.

Questions regarding the cancellation of the iconic King of the Mountain event in Pomona on the Sunshine Coast—it has been held for over 40 years—were asked. There were serious concerns raised about the 2017 election commitments of \$25 million for the rejuvenation of Great Keppel Island. Estimates exposed that only \$5 million has been spent to date and that the complexities of dealing with the council up there proved difficult. Let us hope Great Keppel can be what it was and what we all aspire it to be.

With the importance of tourism, it was prudent to expose these issues: underspends in the Binna Burra Lodge rebuild; underspends in the North Stradbroke Island futures program; the \$3 million underspend in the activate ecotourism capital grants; underspends in the Year of Accessible Tourism funding; underspends last financial year of \$65 million in tourism development expenses; zero dollars being spent on Great Barrier Reef marine infrastructure despite a budget of \$3 million; and a reduced budget for the Growing Indigenous Tourism in Queensland Fund. Another project, the Paluma to Wallaman Falls Trail, is delayed for two years as negotiations with traditional owner groups continue. The Cooloola Great Walk and the Thorsborne Trail on Hinchinbrook are now slowing and not progressing.

In contrast, it was highlighted that other states, including New Zealand, are delivering ecotourism projects in bountiful amounts and the questions to both the minister and director-general, we feel, failed to provide responses that would instil strong confidence in the tourism sector. That said, there were a lot of issues raised also, particularly by the director-general, about delays that are relevant—tradies and materials, wet weather and other things—that contribute to the complexities of building in some of these areas. All in all, good luck in estimates next year to everyone.