



Community Affairs Committee

2011

Report No. 1 to the Legislative Assembly: Examination of *Appropriation Bill 2011*

The Community Affairs Committee

1. The Community Affairs Committee (the committee) is a bipartisan portfolio committee established by the Standing Rules and Orders of the Legislative Assembly. The committee's primary areas of responsibility include: Child Safety; Youth Justice; Community Services; Multicultural Affairs; Housing; Women; and Sport. The committee also has oversight responsibility for the Family Responsibilities Commission and the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian.
2. Section 92 of the *Parliament of Queensland Act 2001* provides that in relation to its portfolio area, a committee may-
 - (a) consider Appropriation Bills; and
 - (b) consider other legislation and proposed legislation as provided in section 93; and
 - (c) perform its role in relation to the public accounts and public works as provided in this division.

Referral

3. On 16 June 2011, the Parliament referred the *Appropriation Bill 2011* to the committee for investigation and report.
4. In accordance with Standing Order 177(3), the committee considered the *Appropriation Bill 2011* and the estimates under its areas of responsibility.
5. The committee examined the budget estimates within the portfolios of the following Ministers:
 - the Minister for Transport and Multicultural Affairs, in particular Multicultural Affairs;
 - the Minister for Community Services and Housing and Minister for Women;

- the Minister for Disability Services, Mental Health and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, in particular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships; and
 - the Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Sport.
6. At the request of the committee, each Minister provided answers to 20 questions on notice. The Ministers provided responses to all of the committee's questions on notice.
 7. On 21 July 2011, the committee conducted a public hearing and asked each Minister further questions without notice.
 8. The committee has conducted its examination by considering the *Appropriation Bill 2011*, the answers to questions on notice, the questions asked during the hearing, and the additional questions taken on notice during the hearing.
 9. The answers to the committee's questions and a transcript of the committee's hearing can be accessed online at: <http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/cac/>. The committee has also tabled additional information with this report, which includes its minutes of meetings.

The Department of Communities

10. The committee's portfolio areas of responsibility cover the Department of Communities (the department) excluding disability services and community care services (as these areas are the responsibility of the Health and Disabilities Committee).
11. The appropriation summary for 2011-2012 for the department is outlined in the table below.

Table: Appropriation summary for 2011-12 for the Department of Communities

	Budget 2010-11 \$'000	Est. Actual 2010-11 \$'000	Vote 2011-12 \$'000
Department of Communities	4 633 446	4 357 788	4 384 273

Source: *Appropriation Bill 2011*

12. There are four Ministers responsible for the department. The department has a number of statutory bodies including Stadiums Queensland, the Residential Tenancies Authority, the Family Responsibilities Commission, and the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian.¹
13. The 2011-12 total capital expenditure for the department is \$846.9 million.²
14. The 2011-12 total capital outlays for the department will be \$820.7 million, including:³
 - \$581 million for Housing and Homelessness Services (including \$185.4 million under the Nation Building and Jobs Plan);
 - \$68.3 million for Community and Youth Justice Services;
 - \$17.7 million for Child Safety Services;
 - \$52.4 million for Sport and Recreation Services; and
 - \$43.9 million for other capital expenditure such as office accommodation and information systems.
15. Some of the key funding initiatives for the department in 2011-12 include:⁴
 - An extra \$20 million over 3 years to help re-establish community functioning and networks through community development, community engagement and funding of community events [\$5 million from the Queensland Government as part of the State's share of the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (NDRRA)] and \$15 million from the Australian Government as its share under the NDRRA.
 - An extra \$5.8 million over 3 years to provide financial counselling to disaster affected residents and the broader community, including \$1.14 million from the Queensland Government as part of the State's NDRRA, \$3.5 million from the Australian Government as its share of the NDRRA and a further \$1.16 million from the Queensland Government.
 - An additional \$3.3 million (\$12.9 million over four years) to improve the safety and well-being of people affected by domestic violence.
 - Additional funding of \$3.8 million in 2011-12 to address chronic homelessness and public intoxication in the Townsville CBD with the Australian Government providing \$2.4 million each year for 2011-12 and 2012-13 under the Homelessness National Partnership Agreement.
 - \$1.3 million each year for 2011-12 and 2012-13 to continue the Youth Opportunity Program in Far North Queensland aimed at diverting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from the youth justice system.
 - \$12.6 million as incentives to investors to provide new affordable private rental dwellings across Queensland as part of the National Rental Affordability Scheme.
 - \$2 million additional recurrent funding for intensive therapeutic health services for more than 40 extra children and young people each year with complex and extreme needs in the child protection system.
 - \$3.8 million to fund a health home visiting service and \$1.3 million to establish a Family Support Alliance and streamline referrals for vulnerable families, as part of the Helping Out Families initiative, in Logan, Gold Coast and Beenleigh/Eagleby.
 - \$7.2 million for intensive family support services, in home care and brokerage, and \$2.5 million for domestic and family violence prevention services as part of the Helping out Families initiative noted above.
 - \$2 million towards upgraded lighting to allow premiership season AFL matches to be played at Cazaly's Stadium, Cairns in 2012-13.

¹ State Budget 2011-12, Capital Statement, Budget Paper No. 3, p. 23.

² State Budget 2011-12, Capital Statement, Budget Paper No. 3, p. 23.

³ State Budget 2011-12, Capital Statement, Budget Paper No. 3, p. 23.

⁴ State Budget 2011-12, Service Delivery Statements, Book No. 3, pp. 3-3 & 4.

- \$2.5 million to support the Townsville 400 motor racing event and \$6.5 million to support the staging of the Gold Coast 600.
- Additional funding of \$1.6 million to assist with the continuation of the Cape York Welfare Reform trial (including the Family Responsibilities Commission) in 2012-13 in the Aurukun, Coen, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge communities. This allocation is subject to the outcomes of the community consultation and a final decision about extending the trial.

Minister for Transport and Multicultural Affairs

16. During the hearing the committee discussed the following Multicultural Affairs matters with the Minister:
- budget variation due to the apportionment of shared service arrangements for the Department of Communities;
 - new budget measure for translation and interpreter services;
 - additional funding for new multicultural policy; and
 - whole-of-government multicultural action plan.

Minister for Disability Services, Mental Health and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships

17. During the hearing the committee discussed the following Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships matters with the Minister:
- budget for the Family Responsibilities Commission (FRC);
 - the development of the FRC's exit strategy and continuing agency notifications;
 - activities to improve school attendance rates in FRC communities;
 - training for FRC Local Commissioners;
 - services provided to FRC clients;
 - community feedback on the operation of the FRC;
 - support programs for parents in FRC communities;

- school enrolment notifications in FRC communities;
- indigenous home ownership;
- alcohol restrictions and provision of drug and alcohol support services;
- services available for victims of crime; and
- community safety plans.

Minister for Community Services and Housing and Minister for Women

18. During the hearing the committee discussed the following matters with the Minister:
- pensioners and public housing;
 - cost impact modelling in relation to the proposed federal carbon tax;
 - community perception of social housing tenants;
 - new dwellings under the National Rental Affordability Scheme;
 - jobs arising from Building the Education Revolution stimulus projects and state government-funded housing;
 - innovation in housing design;
 - investment in indigenous housing;
 - homelessness;
 - total expenditure on capital works;
 - investment in housing under state-federal arrangements;
 - capital grants to non-government organisations;
 - vacancies in social housing across the regions;
 - rehabilitation programs for young offenders;
 - drug testing for young offenders;
 - youth justice conferences;
 - departmental efficiency saving targets;
 - community recovery;
 - assistance for young reoffenders;
 - numbers of departmental staff at SES level;
 - public liability and non-government organisations;
 - support programs for victims of Cyclone Yasi;

- assistance to victims of domestic violence;
- programs to re-engage young people in school;
- cost of services and supplies for non-government organisations;
- Office for Women;
- employment opportunities for women in trades and positions of leadership;
- the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, and the Community Visitor Program;
- the timeframes for processing of blue cards for volunteers; and
- appeal rights of blue card applicants with prior criminal convictions.

Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Sport

- child safety officer case loads and vacancies;
- out-of-home care services and licensing;
- assistance provided to those affected by natural disasters;
- indigenous over-representation in the child safety system;
- effectiveness of safe houses;
- audit of performance measures;
- number of young people in care;
- number of children subject to ongoing intervention;
- trends in substantiations data;
- program evaluation;
- analysis of the implementation of new adoption legislation;
- children self-placing whilst in care;
- early intervention and prevention;
- initiatives for young people transitioning from care;
- increase in the number of intakes;
- reading and literacy programs for vulnerable children in care;
- indigenous-specific foster and kinship carer recruitment strategies;

- preliminary modelling on the impacts of the federal government's proposed carbon tax on Queensland sporting clubs;
- key performance indicators for local sport and recreation coordinators;
- funding for Queensland athletes;
- social and health benefits of sport and recreation;
- sport and recreation activities in indigenous communities; and
- monitoring of the development approval condition on Suncorp Stadium.

Recommendation

The committee recommends that the proposed expenditure, as detailed in the *Appropriation Bill 2011*, be agreed to by the Legislative Assembly without amendment.



Mr Paul Hoolihan MP
Chair

1 August 2011

Committee Members

Mr Paul Hoolihan MP (Chair)
Member for Keppel

Ms Fiona Simpson MP (Deputy Chair)
Member for Maroochydore

Mr Michael Choi MP
Member for Capalaba

Mr Peter Dowling MP
Member for Redlands

Mr Aidan McLindon MP
Member for Beaudesert

Mr Jason O'Brien MP
Member for Cook

Secretariat

Dr Kathy Munro (Research Director)

Ms Erin Pasley (Principal Research Officer)

Ms Stephanie Cash (Executive Assistant)

STATEMENT OF RESERVATION
COMMUNITY AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

General Comments on Estimates Process

The LNP Members of the committee welcome the recent changes in the Estimates Committee process as an improvement. However, we offer the following comments on the reformed Committee procedures in the spirit of ensuring Estimates Committees are able to truly examine the Government's appropriations and ensure the Executive is held to account.

Notwithstanding our ability to hold the government much better to account, a number of Ministers and some senior officers still tried to avoid answering questions on what should have been straight forward issues.

We bring attention to the ongoing issue that the Budget Papers are generic in nature and the outline for the forward years of expenditure is often lacking in detail sufficient to have confidence in government's planned expenditure, showing the Bligh Government is living for the moment rather than forward planning for Queensland's future.

Across portfolios there have been many announcements made by the Government since the Appropriation Bills were introduced that were not included in the Budget Papers. Such announcements underline the out of control spending and the lack of accountability that continues to add to a budgeted debt of \$85 billion in 2014-15.

In addition, it should be noted that concerns are held that the questioning by Labor Members failed to hold the Bligh Government accountable for waste, poor planning, and a lack of transparency.

COMMUNITY SERVICES, HOUSING AND WOMEN

Fiona Simpson MP, Shadow Minister for Waste Watch, Communities, Housing and Women, Member for Maroochydore

With respect to the portfolio in relation to the Communities; Housing; Women; and Commission for Children, Young People and Child Guardian hearings scrutinized by the Committee, the following reservations are made:

The Communities Affairs Portfolio has four ministers and one Director General. This complicated structure and lack of clarity of roles in the structure, also undermines accountability.

As a result, disputes arose in the Estimates process raised by more than one Non-Government Member about who the appropriate ministers were to answer questions after several questions were ruled out of order.

While this problem could be overcome by reframing questions or seeking to ask the correct minister as advised, the timeframe imposed on committees can inhibit this follow up at the Estimates stage.

Further, on the issue of transparency and accountability, it was surprising that the Minister for Communities and Housing could not easily answer basic questions about the Budget, for example how much money had been spent on the capital program or services by June 30 2011. These indicative figures should also have been published in the Budget Papers. As this is a multi-million dollar portfolio with a significant asset base, such important acquittals should be published in the Budget Papers and not considered an extraordinary request.

In relation to housing, the Minister refused to deny that the proposed carbon tax compensation package for pensioners would be used as income in the calculation of social housing rents. This additional payment to pensioners would generate more than \$4 million in additional rent for the State Government each year, despite it nominally being to decrease the cost of living for pensioners amid carbon tax related price rises.

Similarly, the Minister could not identify the capital cost that would be added by a carbon tax to the Department's building program. With thousands expected to be added to the cost of each dwelling, this would place a considerable additional cost on the capital budget, yet there has been no modelling undertaken to date.

In terms of Indigenous housing, the Minister would not identify the budgetary impact of the \$3.1 million penalty for failing to complete the *National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing*. *This was to come out of the 2010-11 and 2011-12 budgets, and the Minister would not identify whether the funds would be replaced from other sources or not.*

Despite the rhetoric on homelessness, it was revealed that the statistics relied upon by the Minister and Department for homelessness are five years old, with no compilation of data occurring at the State level. Instead, the data is only sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics' census data. This is of concern as it means capital and services are not being directed towards identified need.

The capital budget as a whole for the housing section lacks accountability and transparency by the lack of reporting of acquitted monies in each relevant section of the budget. With no requirement to state the amount spent to date, projects are not able to be fully examined, nor that of their completion rate.

After requests, the Director-General provided the amounts of funding spent to 30 June, stating that \$892 million had been spent in the last financial year on housing capital. The 2011-12 budget totalled \$581 million (a Commonwealth contribution of \$333 million; state funds of \$86 million; and others of \$162 million), a decrease of \$311 million in the 12 months. This financial year also represents the final tranche of the Future Growth Fund, leaving great uncertainty over the future of capital funding in the housing portfolio.

Non-Government organisations were left without full answers too, as the ever increasing burden of paperwork, red tape and compliance was dismissed by the Minister. The cost, in financial and staff terms, of compliance is very keenly felt by many organisations, and it is of great concern that the Minister does not recognise this impost with a program with clearly identifiable performance benchmarks for improvement.

The concern is magnified when it is noted that the Department itself is increasing its spending, with one example being a 30 per cent increase in one year on the spending on supplies and services. This line in the budget increased from \$531 million to \$693 million, at the same time that non-Government organisations are being instructed by the Minister to find 'efficiencies'. These organisations have received indexation of 3.75 per cent but are expected to deal with the onerous burden of red tape.

Examination on youth justice issues raised a number of issues. These included the fact that there had been no drug testing of youth offenders in the previous year; that there is no forward planning within the Department; and that there is incredibly no process for reporting reoffending rates from participants in youth justice conferencing. Without such a basic measure, any claims of success of the system must be implausible.

In a year which has seen many domestic violence homicide incidents in the public eye, and in which Queensland claimed the horrendous title of domestic violence homicide capital of the country, there was little reassurance from the estimates examination of domestic violence that any progress is underway to curb the trend.

In terms of the examination of the portfolio of Women, the Minister sent mixed signals in regard to the Mason review into the office of women. At the estimates committee last year, the Minister stated the department was moving forward on adopting recommendations of the report. This year, the Minister was downplaying the importance of the report, and stating that it was not a blueprint. This may be because so many of the recommendations of the report, including passing over industry-specific programs such as Women in Hard Hats to more relevant agencies have been ignored.

The session on the Commission for Children raised some very important topics.

The cuts to the Community Visitor program, as high as 45 per cent in some areas, were raised.

The blow out in the waiting time for blue cards now endures as long as six months. This is putting great pressure on many non-government organisations, as they struggle to retain volunteers through such a lengthy wait, and have to bear the costs of the paperwork.

While these organisations and volunteers have to endure long waits, on the other hand a blue card was granted to a man convicted of manslaughter following an appeal to QCAT. This loophole raises very grave concerns.

CHILD SAFETY

The LNP Members of this Committee make the following statement on behalf of Tracy Davis MP, Shadow Minister for Child Safety, Disabilities and Mental Health, Member for Aspley with which we agree

With regard to Child Safety, there were a number of issues of concern. In relation to case loads, the Minister boasted of a reduction in the average case load from 32 to 22 per officer, but ignored the fact that many officers still bear burdens of up to 32.8 cases.

The Minister also relied on an announcement of new staff, particularly Child Safety officers. While this would be a valuable announcement, the Minister ignored the staffing problems that have left the department with long-term vacancies, including 18 currently unfilled Child Safety officer positions, and the high turnover of staff. The lack of continuity and the pressure on staff are fundamental problems within the department, and lead to a less effective level of service.

On the issue of investigations and assessments, the Minister could not provide an answer for the processes that were undertaken when up to 100 per cent of cases were not completed in the target time frame. The Minister simply blamed families and children 'actively avoiding' Child Safety officers.

In terms of children placed with unlicensed out-of-home services, the Minister admitted there were 24 such services accepting placements. The fact that licensing cannot be undertaken in time to meet placement demand is of great concern.

Many important measures were discontinued in this year's Service Delivery Statement, including many that were implemented just last year. While the Director-General stated that the measures needed to be an "actual reflection of issues that are within the control of the department", it is hard to see why the number of children in care, and by type of placement, is either not a reflection of the work of the department or beyond its control. It is a central measure to the operation of Child Safety. Similarly, the discontinuation of measures after just 12 months indicates a lack of planning and direction within the department.

There has been a further three per cent increase in the number of children in care in the last 12 months. The duration of care is also increasing. These statistics highlight the need for more urgent action in addressing the crisis, not a discontinuation of statistics.

The Minister seemed to be unfamiliar with a number of crucial statistics and figures central to the portfolio, such as the breakdown of substantiated notifications into abuse or neglect. Without this understanding, it cannot be possible to adequately target funding and services.

A trend that is of great concern is that of self-placement for children in care aged 12 and over. This is a potentially dangerous practice, made even more risky by the Minister's admission that there is no compulsory checking of the person with whom the child self places. The rules and checks for foster carers are stringent, and need to be to ensure

the best outcomes for the children. The lack of similar enforcement for children who are self placing is very troubling.

MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS

The LNP Members of this Committee make the following statement on behalf of Scott Emerson MP, Shadow Minister for Transport, Multicultural Affairs and the Arts, Member for Indooroopilly with which we agree

The State Budget includes a reduction in proposed expenditure for Multicultural Affairs Queensland, despite prior expenditure deferrals in the previous fiscal year. As part of that funding is a reduction in proposed expenditure for interpreter and translation services. It is also troubling to note an announcement of an extra \$500,000 per year as part of a new multicultural policy is not accounted for in the budget. Given Labor has set Queensland on a path to \$85 billion in debt in 2014-15, this type of expenditure without proper planning does nothing to arrest the enormous debt Queenslanders will have to pay. The announcement, just one month after the Budget was released, is a poor reflection on Labor's ability to plan over the long term and manage the State's finances responsibly. Concern is held about the inc the Appropriation Bill when such expenditure is not even included.

SPORT

The LNP Members of this Committee make the following statement on behalf of David Gibson MP, Shadow Minister for Local Government and Sport, Member for Gympie with which we agree

Carbon Tax impact on Sport in Queensland

The LNP members of the Committee were surprised at the Chair's efforts to deflect questioning about the Carbon Tax due to its proposed implementation date of 1 July 2012. However, this approach is reflective of the Labor Government's apathy on this issue across portfolios. When it comes to the Carbon tax, Queensland Labor has thrown its support behind the tax, taking the view that it is best to 'wait and see', and hope that Queensland businesses and communities can cope, and will put up with the impost of this great big new tax.

As with other Departments across government, the Director General confirmed that no modelling has been undertaken in terms of the huge impact that the Carbon Tax will have on Queensland sporting groups, their electricity costs, the cost of equipment and uniforms, their membership and participation numbers, and the profitability of club facilities which will all be affected statewide as this noxious tax spreads. It is worthy of note that most sporting clubs are volunteer organisations with no financial capacity to undertake economic or social modelling on imposed issues like Carbon Tax.

Failure to disclose KPIs for government sport co-ordinators

In principle, LNP Members of the Committee are supportive of the Government's Local Sport and Recreation Jobs Plan, under which \$38 million has been allocated to employ local sport and

recreation coordinators to provide advice and support to local organisations on fundraising, volunteer support, promotional activities and sponsorship.

We note that there are already 111 local sport and recreation coordinator positions across the state, set to cost a total of approximately \$17.3 million over the next three years. This confirms that each of these positions, on average, will cost the taxpayer around \$50,000 per year.

The Minister failed to adequately answer questions about key performance indicators that are and will be used to ensure these coordinators are achieving the correct outcomes, their oversight, and how those KPI measurements will be reported to the Department and the Parliament.

With consideration of this Labor government's disgraceful record of administering sports grants and funding, LNP Members of the Committee will continue to closely monitor the operation and outcomes of this program to ensure funds are distributed fairly, appointments are above board and, above all, that its outcomes represent value for money for Queensland sporting clubs and communities across Queensland.

We acknowledge the Minister's commitment to include KPIs and outcomes for each local sport and recreation coordinator in the Department's annual report.

Cap on large events at Suncorp Stadium

LNP Committee Members note that Stadiums Queensland has applied to the Minister for State Development, seeking that a development condition limiting to 24 per year the number of events at Suncorp Stadium that attract 25,000+ people be permanently removed or addressed in accordance with his powers under the Sustainable Planning Act.

Rockhampton stadium commitment

LNP Committee Members note that no request has been made of Stadiums Queensland to date by Government to begin preliminary community consultation, feasibility studies and/or planning for a new stadium in Rockhampton.

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER SERVICES

The LNP Members of this Committee make the following statement on behalf of Dr Bruce Flegg MP, Shadow Minister for Education and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Member for Moggill with which we agree

Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders deserve the same opportunities in life as every other Queenslanders. The LNP believe that Indigenous Queenslanders want to see their children receive the best possible education and have the best possible future in life. The LNP will support initiatives that achieve the objectives of closing the gap, of improving Indigenous living standards, economic sustainability and in particular education.

It is a legitimate role for the Opposition to question the resources allocated to projects like the Family Responsibilities Commission. The principles of this project received LNP support. That is that parents and families should take responsibility for their children's attendance at school, that communities should take responsibility for the behaviour of particularly young people and that clearly child safety issues and tenancy breach issues should be taken very seriously.

The question is whether this expensive program has delivered lasting results sufficient to justify its further extension both in time and to additional Indigenous communities.

The LNP looks forward to assessing the final outcome of the trial to see what benefits it has yielded in the target communities.

It is noted however that the trial cost \$7000 for every man, woman and child in the subject communities.

The referrals to the Commission were well in excess of Government Budget expectations from last year particularly in relation to school truancy and referrals from Magistrates Court and the like. This is indicative of serious underlying problems.

Congratulations is extended to the Commissioner and senior staff of the Family Responsibilities Commission for the frank way they have assessed the problems confronting them in delivering services and achieving the objectives of the Commission. Such frankness is an essential starting point if we are to genuinely grapple with and improve these significant problems.

It is noted however reports from the Commissioner that highlight the difficulty of maintaining reliable staff and that indicate the scarcity of resources particularly in mental health and child services. Further it is noted that their comments about the significant increase in mental health, substance abuse and violence issues over the Christmas holiday period and their call for greater resources to be applied.

The Commission itself has indicated that without better services and resources the full potential of this initiative may not be reached.

The LNP will work constructively with Indigenous stakeholders to try and ensure that the lives of Indigenous people are improved, that their children are able to achieve their potential in education, that they are able to live in safe communities and that child safety and housing issues are given the priority they deserve.

We look forward to assessing the results and participating in the debate about the most effective and cost effective way of continuing to deal with these issues in Queensland's discrete Indigenous communities.

Thanks are offered to Mr Rod Curtin for standing in for the Commissioner and giving honest answers and full cooperation to the Committee.

In relation to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships it is strongly noted by the LNP that the Minister had difficulty answering questions around areas like housing and education because they did not fall in his portfolio. It is the view of the LNP that in relation to discrete Indigenous communities whilst many government agencies and ministers will have a vital role to play that an oversight role taking into account all of the issues and social parameters affecting these communities should rest with one minister otherwise we risk severe lack of coordination and duplication of responsibility. There is some evidence already that the government's piecemeal approach to Indigenous affairs particularly in relation to discrete Indigenous communities may be suffering these sorts of problems to the detriment of Indigenous Queenslanders.

It is noted in particular that Director-General Ms Apelt indicated that home ownership is still not a realistic possibility for most Indigenous Queenslanders living in communities. The LNP is strongly of the belief that Indigenous Queenslanders should have the same right to home ownership as every other Queenslander and that the government has shown a serious lack of leadership on this issue.

Indigenous people are often criticised for the state of housing, disrepair and the like. How can we criticise when government policy has "disenfranchised" people from the realistic prospect of ever having personal home ownership.

In relation to school attendance a matter which myself and the LNP are deeply concerned it should be noted that a notification to the Family Responsibilities Commission only occurs if the child has been absent from school for more than 3 days and also if there is no reasonable excuse. Despite this very low bar there were an astronomical number of notices in relation to school attendance. This suggests we are not winning this battle.

The Minister indicated he was unable to answer some questions on notice in relation to school attendance because it was not his portfolio. This is surely part of the problem. Notifications to the FRC are not of themselves going to give a clear picture. It is necessary to have clear data about the average number of days absent for children at each of the subject schools. It is important data to have to see how many children in actual fact had full attendance at school. It is the case that regular absence but not to the degree that would bring severe attention could still sufficiently disrupt the education and literacy and numeracy learning of Indigenous students. It is understood the average number of days absent is very high. However with the Minister unable to answer vital questions in this area, important questions still remain unanswered.

The consideration of the Budget in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships was severely curtailed by loss of time when the Committee adjourned to consider a procedural matter. As a "visitor" to the Committee the Shadow Minister was not party to those considerations and so can make no comment except to say that quite a number of matters that regard of importance to Indigenous Queenslanders and the impact that the current Budget will have on that community were unable to be considered because of the loss of time.

One matter that was considered however was that of Indigenous housing. It is noted with particular disappointment that the admission that achieving personal home ownership is really non-existent for most, if not all of Queensland's Indigenous communities.



FIONA SIMPSON MP
Shadow Minister for Waste Watch,
Communities, Housing and Women
Member for Maroochydore



PETER DOWLING MP
Member for Redlands