



2022-2023 Budget Estimates

**Report No. 18, 57th Parliament
Community Support and Services Committee
August 2022**

Community Support and Services Committee

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Acknowledgements

The committee thanks:

- the Honourable Leeanne Enoch MP, Minister for Communities and Housing, Minister for Digital Economy and Minister for the Arts
- the Honourable Craig Crawford MP, Minister for Seniors and Disability Services and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, and
- the Honourable Leanne Linard MP, Minister for Children and Youth Justice and Minister for Multicultural Affairs.

The committee also acknowledges the assistance provided by the departmental officers who contributed to the work of the committee during the estimates process.

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Chair's foreword

This report presents a summary of the committee's examination of the budget estimates for the 2022-23 financial year.

Consideration of the budget estimates allows for the public examination of the responsible Ministers and the chief executive officers of agencies within the committee's portfolio areas. This was undertaken through the questions on notice and public hearing process.

The committee has recommended that the proposed expenditure, as detailed in the Appropriation Bill 2022 for the committee's areas of responsibility, be agreed to by the Legislative Assembly without amendment.

On behalf of the committee, I thank the Minister for Communities and Housing, Minister for Digital Economy and Minister for the Arts; the Minister for Seniors and Disability Services and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships; and the Minister for Children and Youth Justice and Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and their departmental officers for their cooperation in providing information to the committee throughout this process.

I would also like to thank Chair Corrine McMillan MP and members of the committee for their hard work and valuable contribution to the estimates process, and other members whose participation in the hearing provided additional scrutiny of the estimates.

Finally, I thank the committee's secretariat and other Parliamentary Service staff for their assistance throughout the estimates process.



Linus Power MP

Acting Chair

August 2022

1 Introduction

1.1 Role of the committee

The Community Support and Services Committee (committee) is a portfolio committee of the Legislative Assembly which commenced on 26 November 2020 under the *Parliament of Queensland Act 2001* and the Standing Rules and Orders of the Legislative Assembly.¹

The committee's areas of portfolio responsibility are:

- Communities, Housing, Digital Economy and the Arts
- Seniors, Disability Services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships
- Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs.

Section 93(1) of the *Parliament of Queensland Act 2001* provides that a portfolio committee is responsible for examining each Bill and item of subordinate legislation in its portfolio areas to consider:

- the policy to be given effect by the legislation
- the application of fundamental legislative principles
- matters arising under the *Human Rights Act 2019*
- for subordinate legislation – its lawfulness.

The committee also has oversight functions in relation to the Family Responsibilities Commission.

On 24 June 2022, the Appropriation Bill 2022 and the estimates for the committee's area of responsibility were referred to the committee for investigation and report.²

On 4 August 2022, the committee conducted a public hearing and took evidence about the proposed expenditure from the Minister for Communities and Housing, Minister for Digital Economy and Minister for the Arts; the Minister for Seniors and Disability Services and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships; the Minister for Children and Youth Justice and Minister for Multicultural Affairs (relevant Ministers) and other witnesses. A copy of the transcript of the committee's hearing is available on the committee's webpage.

1.2 Aim of this report

This report summarises the estimates referred to the committee and highlights some of the issues the committee examined.

The committee considered the estimates referred to it by using information contained in:

- budget papers
- answers to pre-hearing questions on notice
- evidence taken at the hearing
- answers to questions taken on notice during the hearing.

Prior to the public hearing, the committee provided the relevant Ministers with questions on notice in relation to the estimates. Responses to all the questions were received.

¹ *Parliament of Queensland Act 2001*, s 88 and Standing Order 194.

² Standing Order 177 provides for the automatic referral of the Annual Appropriation Bills to portfolio committees once the Bills have been read a second time.

Answers to the committee's pre-hearing questions on notice, documents tabled during the hearing, and answers taken on notice during the hearing are included in a volume of additional information tabled with this report.

1.3 Participation by other Members

The committee gave leave for other Members to participate in the hearing. The following Members participated in the hearing:

- Mr Jarrod Bleijie MP, Member for Kawana
- Ms Amanda Camm MP, Member for Whitsunday
- Mr John-Paul Langbroek MP, Member for Surfers Paradise
- Dr Amy MacMahon MP, Member for South Brisbane
- Mr Tim Mander, Member for Everton
- Dr Christian Rowan, Member for Moggill.

2 Recommendation

Pursuant to Standing Order 187(1), the committee must state whether the proposed expenditures referred to it are agreed to.

Recommendation 1

The committee recommends that the proposed expenditure, as detailed in the Appropriation Bill 2022 for the committee's areas of responsibility, be agreed to by the Legislative Assembly without amendment.

3 Minister for Communities and Housing, Minister for Digital Economy and Minister for the Arts

The Honourable Leeanne Enoch MP, Minister for Communities and Housing, Minister for Digital Economy and Minister for the Arts, is responsible for the Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy (DCHDE). The Minister is also responsible for the following statutory bodies:

- Library Board of Queensland
- Queensland Art Gallery
- Queensland Museum
- Queensland Performing Arts Trust, and
- Residential Tenancies Authority.

In addition, the Minister is responsible for the following commercialised business units: Queensland Shared Services, the Corporate Administration Agency and CITEC.³

3.1 Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy

The DCHDE provides or funds services through 4 service areas:

- Arts Queensland – to enhance Queenslanders' access to arts and culture, through investment in the creation, development and presentation of arts product, cultural experiences, and cultural infrastructure
- Community Services – to support communities to thrive by building their resilience, providing aid in recovery from natural disasters, improving the social and economic inclusion and wellbeing of all Queenslanders, and preserving community history
- Customer and Digital Services – to benefit Queenslanders and their businesses by delivering and improving government services and investing in a digitally enabled economy
- Housing and Homelessness Services – to benefit Queenslanders and their communities by providing housing and homelessness services that are responsive, integrated, and accessible, and enrich the lives of Queenslanders.⁴

³ Queensland Budget 2022-23, Service Delivery Statements, Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy (DCHDE), p 18.

⁴ Queensland Budget 2022-23, Service Delivery Statements, DCHDE, p 1.

The following table taken from the Appropriation Bill 2022 compares the appropriations for DCHDE for 2021-22 and 2022-23.

Appropriations	2021-22 Budget \$'000	2021-22 Est. Actual \$'000	2022-23 Vote \$'000
<i>Controlled Items</i>			
departmental services	1,223,496	1,130,554	1,283,257
equity adjustment	246,731	123,390	279,044
<i>Administered Items</i>	172,499	170,988	200,889
Vote	1,642,726	1,424,932	1,763,190

Source: Appropriation Bill 2022, Schedule 2, p. 9.

3.1.1 Budget highlights

The total estimated expenditure (Controlled and Administered budget expenses) is approximately \$2.320 billion.⁵

The DCHDE derives its income from appropriation revenue, user charges and fees, grants and other contributions and other revenue. In 2022-23, the DCHDE income is expected to be approximately \$1.825 billion.⁶

The total investment in the capital program in 2022-2023 for the DCHDE will be \$566.2 million.⁷ This includes \$431.3 million to increase the supply of social housing, upgrade the existing social housing property portfolio and further invest in infrastructure projects across the community, arts and cultural facilities. The 2022-23 capital grants budgeted expenditure of \$134.9 million will principally increase the supply of social housing and upgrades for existing housing properties in partnership with community housing providers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councils.⁸

In 2022-23, a budget of \$592.1 million is allocated for concessions and rebates administered by the DCHDE.⁹

In 2022-23, DCHDE has been allocated \$21.9 million, as part of total program funding of \$125.6 million over 4 years to strengthen the community and social service sector with a focus on elevating the role and functioning of neighbourhood and community centres, and to support delivery of the government's response to the committee's Inquiry into Social Isolation and Loneliness.¹⁰ Across the 4 years, funding has been provided for:

- \$51.8 million to increase neighbourhood and community centre base operational funding, ensuring the ongoing viability and maximum benefit from this social services infrastructure

⁵ Queensland Budget 2022-23, Service Delivery Statements, DCHDE, pp 12 and 15.

⁶ Queensland Budget 2022-23, Service Delivery Statements, DCHDE, p 12.

⁷ Queensland Budget 2022-23, Service Delivery Statements, DCHDE, p 10.

⁸ Queensland Budget 2022-23, Service Delivery Statements, DCHDE, p 10.

⁹ Queensland Budget 2022-23, *Budget Strategy and Outlook*, Budget Paper No. 2, p 191.

¹⁰ Queensland Parliament, Community Support and Services Committee, Report No. 14, 57th Parliament – *Inquiry into Social Isolation and Loneliness in Queensland*, 6 December 2021; Queensland Budget 2022-23, Service Delivery Statements, DCHDE, p 3.

- \$9.3 million for the Neighbourhood and Community Connect Worker program in areas of greatest need
- \$39.0 million for the construction of new neighbourhood and community centres and significant redevelopments of existing centres
- \$9.0 million for neighbourhood and community centre capital upgrades program
- \$4.0 million for a new Innovation Fund that will support the delivery of community-led responses to local issues, with a focus on responding to the causes and impacts of social isolation and loneliness
- \$2.1 million to support the further development of plans and initiatives to address social isolation and loneliness, including development of training and resources to support workers and volunteers in the community and social services sector.¹¹

Other 2022-23 budget highlights for the DCHDE include:

- \$15.0 million in 2022–23, as part of total program funding of \$50.0 million over 4 years to support the delivery of *Grow 2022–2026*, the second action plan of the whole-of-government *Creative Together 2020–2030: A 10-Year Roadmap for arts, culture and creativity in Queensland*
- \$10.5 million in 2022–23, as part of total program funding of \$61.7 million over 4 years for capital asset renewal works, compliance and safety improvements, and security and amenities upgrades at the Queensland Cultural Centre to ensure the continued safety and comfort of visitors
- \$2.8 million met internally by DCDHE in 2022–23, as part of total program funding of \$29.8 million over 4 years to support initiatives to address youth homelessness in Queensland
- \$1.3 million in 2022–23, as part of total program funding of \$4.0 million over 4 years to accelerate the digitisation of print and audio-visual records to help protect and promote accessibility to the 3.5 million records held at Queensland State Archives which tell the story of the last 200 years of Queensland’s history.¹²

3.2 Concession Schemes

The total cost of concessions to be provided via schemes in the Communities, Housing and Digital Economy portfolio is estimated at \$592.1 million in 2022-23. A breakdown of these concessions by scheme is below.

Concession scheme	2021-22 Est. Actual \$ million	2022-23 Est. Actual \$ million
Government Managed Housing Rental Rebate ¹	486.0	541.3
Home Assist Secure	22.9	23.2
National Rental Affordability Scheme ²	26.6	20.3
Queensland Museum – Arts Concessional Entry Fee ³	2.0	2.7
Rental Bond Loans ⁴	1.0	1.2
Queensland Performing Arts Trust – Arts Concessional Entry Fees	1.0	1.0
Arts Queensland – Discount on Property Lease Rentals ⁵	0.6	0.8
Queensland Performing Arts Trust – Venue Hire Rebates	0.5	0.5
Arts Queensland – Venue Hire Rebates	0.4	0.4
Queensland Art Gallery – Arts Concessional Entry Fees ⁶	0.5	0.4

¹¹ Queensland Budget 2022-23, Service Delivery Statements, DCHDE, p 3.

¹² Queensland Budget 2022-23, Service Delivery Statements, DCHDE, p 3.

State Library of Queensland – Venue Hire Rebates	0.3	0.3
COVID-19 Relief – Queensland Museum – Additional Concessions ⁷	0.1	..
Non-government Managed Housing ⁸
Total	541.9	592.1

Notes:

1. The increase is due to an increase in private market rents based on prevailing conditions.
2. The variance is primarily due to a decrease in the number of incentives paid as the scheme winds down. The cessation of the scheme was a decision of the Australian Government.
3. The increase is due to higher visitation being expected due to reopening of venues and increased patronage.
4. The increase is primarily due to an increase in bond loans paid in 2022–23.
5. The increase is primarily due to reopening of venues and increased leasing space following revitalisation works.
6. The variance is due to concessional entry fees which varies depending on the number and nature of ticketed exhibitions in the year.
7. This item is part of the government response to COVID-19.
8. The value of this concession arrangement cannot be easily quantified.

Source: Queensland Budget 2022-23, *Budget Strategy and Outlook*, Budget Paper No. 2, p 195.

3.3 Library Board of Queensland

The Library Board of Queensland is the governing body of the State Library of Queensland, established under the *Libraries Act 1988*. The State Library is responsible for collecting and preserving Queensland's cultural and documentary heritage, providing free access to information and the advancement of public libraries across the state.¹³

The budget comparison for the Library Board of Queensland for 2021-22 and 2022-23 is shown below.

Library Board of Queensland	2021-22 Budget \$'000	2021-22 Est. Actual \$'000	2022-23 Budget \$'000
Total income	80,610	83,314	84,651
Total expenses	80,610	83,314	84,651
Operating surplus/(deficit)

Source: Queensland Budget 2022-23, *Service Delivery Statements*, DCHDE, p 46.

The key deliverables for 2022-2023 note that the State Library of Queensland will:

- continue to share First Nations peoples' perspectives through language revitalisation, knowledge creation and truth-telling in culturally informed and respectful ways
- continue to deliver online and onsite experiences that empower, stimulate, and enrich
- partner with local government to enhance the role of public libraries in building community capacity, cohesion, and resilience
- continue to deliver the First 5 Forever program in partnership with local government to provide strong early literacy foundations for all Queensland children aged zero to 5 years
- celebrate the 20th anniversary of Indigenous Knowledge Centres in discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities that deliver programs to keep culture strong.¹⁴

3.4 Queensland Art Gallery

The Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art (the Gallery) are both administered under the *Queensland Art Gallery Act 1987*. The Gallery is governed by the Queensland Art Gallery Board of

¹³ Queensland Budget 2022-23, *Service Delivery Statements*, DCHDE, p 42.

¹⁴ Queensland Budget 2022-23, *Service Delivery Statements*, DCHDE, p 42.

Trustees.¹⁵ The objective of the Gallery is to strengthen Queensland’s visual arts sector and contribute to the cultural, social, and intellectual development of all Queenslanders.¹⁶

The budget comparison for the Queensland Art Gallery for 2021-22 and 2022-23 is shown below.

Queensland Art Gallery	2021-22 Budget \$’000	2021-22 Est. Actual \$’000	2022-23 Budget \$’000
Total income	62,690	71,430	65,106
Total expenses	62,690	64,647	62,188
Operating surplus/(deficit)	..	6,783	2,918

Source: Queensland Budget 2022-23, Service Delivery Statements, DCHDE, p 53.

The key deliverables state that in 2022-23, the Gallery will:

- deliver the blockbuster exhibition *Air* and major solo artist exhibitions by Chiharu Shiota (Japan), eX de Medici (NSW) and Michael Zavros (Qld), enabled by \$6 million in funding from 2022–23 to 2024–25
- present the work of contemporary Queensland artists through the major group exhibition *Embodied Knowledge: Queensland Contemporary Art* and a survey exhibition of the work of Joe Furlonger
- expand the reach of the Gallery’s flagship exhibition series, *The Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*, to regional Queensland audiences through the QAGOMA Touring exhibitions *Asia Pacific Contemporary: Three Decades of APT* and *Asia Pacific Video*
- continue the implementation of the Gallery’s inaugural *Reconciliation Action Plan 2022–24*, with the assistance and oversight of the Gallery’s Indigenous Advisory Panel
- continue to progress the All Ages Learning Centre envisioned for the Queensland Art Gallery, including progressing a schematic design and detailed business case
- establish base-year carbon emissions and implement an emissions accounting system to progress the aims of the Gallery’s sustainability policy.¹⁷

3.5 Queensland Museum

The Queensland Museum was established under the *Queensland Museum Act 1970* and is governed by the Board of the Queensland Museum.¹⁸ Its purpose is to celebrate the cultural, social, and natural heritage of Queensland.¹⁹

¹⁵ *Queensland Art Gallery Act 1987*, s 19.

¹⁶ Queensland Budget 2022-23, Service Delivery Statements, DCHDE, p 50.

¹⁷ Queensland Budget 2022-23, Service Delivery Statements, DCHDE, p 49.

¹⁸ *Queensland Museum Act 1970*, s 12.

¹⁹ Queensland Budget 2022-23, Service Delivery Statements, DCHDE, p 56.

The budget comparison for the Queensland Museum for 2021-22 and 2022-23 is shown below.

Queensland Museum	2021-22 Budget \$'000	2021-22 Est. Actual \$'000	2022-23 Budget \$'000
Total income	52,414	61,850	57,547
Total expenses	58,707	66,416	64,574
Operating surplus/(deficit)	(6,293)	(4,566)	(7,027)

Source: Queensland Budget 2022-23, Service Delivery Statements, DCHDE, p 60.

The key deliverables state that in 2022-23, the Queensland Museum will:

- continue to future-proof the \$550.0 million state collection by investing in best-practice collection care, management, and digitisation initiatives
- continue a 4-year \$9.1 million maintenance and infrastructure renewal program
- reinforce its position as a leader in the preservation of Queensland's cultural and natural heritage through high-quality research, knowledge dissemination and advocacy in priority areas of climate change, essential ecosystems, and the Great Barrier Reef
- remain responsive to the needs of communities in regional and outer metropolitan areas via a state-wide network of public museums, education loans service, and online engagement
- continue to support community museums via the Museum Development Officer program
- strengthen partnerships with First Nations communities through implementation of an Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan and an ongoing commitment to repatriate Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Ancestral Remains.²⁰

3.6 Queensland Performing Arts Trust

The Queensland Performing Arts Trust is constituted under the *Queensland Performing Arts Trust Act 1977* and operates the Queensland Performing Arts Centre (QPAC). Its purpose is to contribute to the cultural, social and intellectual development of all Queenslanders.²¹

The budget comparison for the Queensland Performing Arts Trust for 2021-22 and 2022-23 is shown below.

Queensland Performing Arts Trust	2021-22 Budget \$'000	2021-22 Est. Actual \$'000	2022-23 Budget \$'000
Total income	63,565	66,609	73,948
Total expenses	63,565	62,609	70,948
Operating surplus/(deficit)	..	4,000	3,000

Source: Queensland Budget 2022-23, Service Delivery Statements, DCHDE, p 67.

The key deliverables note that in 2022-23, the Queensland Performing Arts Trust will:

²⁰ Queensland Budget 2022-23, Service Delivery Statements, DCHDE, p 56.

²¹ Queensland Budget 2022-23, Service Delivery Statements, DCHDE, p 63.

- attract and support 5 major musical theatre touring productions, including Cinderella, with the remainder to be announced
- present, in collaboration with Queensland Theatre, The Sunshine Club, the revival of a classic Brisbane production
- extend the reach of programming by engaging online audiences through QPAC's Digital Stage
- deliver QPAC's First Nations Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan
- support the delivery of the Brisbane Metro project and surrounding public realm improvements at QPAC
- provide professional and technical input into finalising the construction of the new theatre venue at QPAC.²²

3.7 Residential Tenancies Authority

The Residential Tenancies Authority (RTA) is a statutory body established under the *Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act 2008* (RTRA Act) to administer the RTRA Act which regulates the Queensland residential rental sector.²³ The RTA's purpose is to provide fair, valued and impactful rental regulation, education and support services.²⁴

The budget comparison for the Residential Tenancies Authority for 2021-22 and 2022-23 is shown below.

Residential Tenancies Authority	2021-22 Budget \$'000	2021-22 Est. Actual \$'000	2022-23 Budget \$'000
Total income	41,472	5,174	41,324
Total expenses	37,760	39,191	48,160
Operating surplus/(deficit)	3,712	(34,017)	(6,836)

Source: Queensland Budget 2022-23, Service Delivery Statements, DCHDE, p 74.

The key deliverables state that in 2022-23, the Residential Tenancies Authority will:

- continue working with the Queensland Government to implement the *Housing Legislation Amendment Act 2021* to better support tenants, property owners and managers, and improve housing stability for people in the residential rental sector
- deliver and embed the RTA Strategic Plan 2022–26, which reflects the evolving sector context, strategic risks and opportunities that will shape the RTA's direction and guide decision making and priorities for the next 4 years
- research and develop a customer engagement plan that deepens the RTA's understanding of its diverse range of customers and stakeholders, define the ideal customer experience, and apply these insights to improve its services

²² Queensland Budget 2022-23, Service Delivery Statements, DCHDE, p 63.

²³ *Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act 2008*, s 468.

²⁴ Queensland Budget 2022-23, Service Delivery Statements, DCHDE, p 70.

- continue to regulate, educate, and support everyone in the Queensland residential rental sector to understand their rights and obligations under the RTRA Act.²⁵

3.8 Key Issues raised at the public hearing

Issues raised by the committee in relation to DCHDE included:

- the number of social houses that could have been constructed for the cost of the Wellcamp quarantine facility; the repurposing of the Wellcamp quarantine facility for use as crisis accommodation; the use of the Wellcamp quarantine facility to house people in Toowoomba who are on the public housing waiting list
- the number of people listed on the social housing register; the audit of the social housing register
- social housing eligibility criteria; the timing of the inclusion of wellbeing criteria into the core social housing eligibility criteria
- demand for social housing; planning for future demand for social housing
- investment in social housing; capital investment in social housing in the Wide Bay region
- progress against key milestones in the Housing and Homelessness Action Plan 2021-25
- housing supply under the Queensland Housing Investment Growth Initiative and QuickStarts Qld
- housing solutions in response to unprecedented pressure on the housing market
- investment in housing and support for older women experiencing or at risk of homelessness in Queensland
- return on investment from the Housing Investment Fund
- number of houses built under the Queensland Housing Strategy
- the Logan Renewal Initiative
- findings from the Queensland Audit Office Report 1: 2022-23 *Delivering social housing services*
- investment in housing in First Nations communities across Queensland
- funding for Queensland neighbourhood and community centres; capital investment in a neighbourhood centre in Agnes Water
- funding for sector peak body organisations
- number of referrals for corruption or misconduct to DCHDE's Integrity Services Unit and the outcomes of those referrals
- the 2017 draft report by the then State Archivist into allegations of unauthorised disposal of public records, in relation to ministerial use of private email for government business
- spending in 2021-22 on the new performing arts venue at QPAC; budget for and completion date of the new performing arts venue at QPAC
- expected timing for the reopening of the Dinosaur Garden at the Queensland Museum
- contents of the interim report issued by Professor Peter Coaldrake

²⁵ Queensland Budget 2022-23, Service Delivery Statements, DCHDE, p 70.

- use of the Boggo Road Jail for arts and creative uses
- mainstreaming of physical accessibility and sensory accessibility of arts venues
- support for the arts and cultural sector through the *Creative together: a 10-year roadmap for arts, culture and creativity in Queensland* program
- elevation of First Nations arts
- support for touring arts and cultural events across the state
- support for regional communities, artists and arts organisations
- support for artists through rental reform.²⁶

²⁶ Public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 4 August 2022.

4 Minister for Seniors and Disability Services and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships

The Honourable Craig Crawford MP, Minister for Seniors and Disability Services and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, is responsible for the Department of Seniors, Disability Services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships (DSDSATSIP).

4.1 Department of Seniors, Disability Services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships

DSDSATSIP provides its services through 2 service areas:

- Seniors and Disability Services – to deliver and fund high quality services and safeguards and promote the inclusion, rights and social and economic participation of seniors and people with disability
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships Services – to increase the social and economic opportunities for Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples.²⁷

The following table taken from the Appropriation Bill 2022 compares the appropriations for DSDSATSIP for 2021-22 and 2022-23.

Appropriations	Budget 2021-22 \$'000	Est. Actual 2021-22 \$'000	Vote 2022-23 \$'000
<i>Controlled Items</i>			
departmental services	295,216	274,541	308,504
equity adjustment	6,670	2,061	4,200
<i>Administered Items</i>	2,434,745	2,415,626	2,819,639
Vote	2,736,631	2,692,228	3,132,343

Source: Appropriation Bill 2022, Schedule 2, p 12.

4.1.1 Budget highlights

The total estimated expenditure (Controlled and Administered budget expenses) is approximately \$3.154 billion.²⁸

DSDSATSIP derives its income from appropriation revenue, user charges and fees, grants and other contributions and other revenue. In 2022-23, DSDSATSIP's income is expected to be approximately \$3.32 billion.²⁹

The total budgeted capital outlays for DSDSATSIP total \$7.7 million in 2022-23.³⁰ This includes capital purchases of \$5.1 million, with \$4.2 million allocated for robust and secure accommodation for disability services clients with challenging behaviours, and \$0.9 million allocated for general property

²⁷ Queensland Budget 2022-23, Service Delivery Statements, Department of Seniors, Disability Services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships (DSDSATSIP), p 1.

²⁸ Queensland Budget 2022-23, Service Delivery Statements, DSDSATSIP, pp 10 and 13.

²⁹ Queensland Budget 2022-23, Service Delivery Statements, DSDSATSIP, p 10.

³⁰ Queensland Budget 2022-23, Service Delivery Statements, DSDSATSIP, p 8.

upgrades and departmental minor works.³¹ The capital grants budget for DSDSATSIP for 2022–23 is \$2.6 million, which is for the construction of a splash park on Thursday Island.³²

In the 2022-23 budget, a total of \$725.0 million has been allocated for energy, rates and water concessions and rebates administered by DSDSATSIP.³³

DSDATSIP has been allocated increased funding of \$12.2 million over the next 4 years and \$2.8 million ongoing to support Seniors in Queensland, including to expand elder abuse services provided under the Seniors Legal and Support Services program to ensure Queenslanders will have equitable access to these services.³⁴

Other 2022-23 budget highlights for DSDSATSIP include:

- \$3.0 million over 2 years to support First Nations families to make applications for legal recognition of Torres Strait Islander traditional child rearing practices by continuing to operationalise the *Meriba Omasker Kaziw Kazipa (Torres Strait Islander Child Rearing Practice) Act 2020*
- \$1.5 million in 2022–23 to support local communities with their Alcohol Management Plans focussed on addressing sly grog and homebrew and implementing local programs and services
- \$5.0 million over the next 4 years to implement initiatives agreed under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and improve life outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders, including supporting 19 remote and discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to develop local employment and economic development plans
- \$2.4 million over 4 years to 2024–25 for the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Coalition to undertake research and consultation and provide expert and strategic advice to ensure co-design of strategies and actions, to implement the Closing the Gap National Agreement's key priorities and targets
- \$16.7 million across the forward estimates and \$4.4 million ongoing for addressing Land Administration requirements and strategic land and infrastructure program planning initiatives in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, including enabling homeownership opportunities
- increased funding of \$385.0 million in 2022–23 to provide Queensland households with a Cost of Living Rebate of \$175.³⁵

4.2 Concession Schemes

Concession scheme	2021-22 Est. Actual \$ million	2022-23 Est. Actual \$ million
Electricity Asset Ownership Dividend and Cost of Living Rebate ¹	100.0	385.0
Electricity Rebate Scheme ²	225.0	243.0
Pensioner Rate Subsidy Scheme	57.4	58.6
South East Queensland Pensioner Water Subsidy Scheme	19.7	20.1
Home Energy Emergency Assistance Scheme	10.0	10.0
Medical Cooling and Heating Electricity Concession Scheme ²	2.4	2.9
Reticulated Natural Gas Rebate Scheme	2.6	2.7

³¹ Queensland Budget 2022-23, Service Delivery Statements, DSDSATSIP, p 8.

³² Queensland Budget 2022-23, Service Delivery Statements, DSDSATSIP, p 8.

³³ Queensland Budget 2022-23, *Budget Strategy and Outlook*, Budget Paper No. 2, p 210.

³⁴ Queensland Budget 2022-23, Service Delivery Statements, DSDSATSIP, p 3.

³⁵ Queensland Budget 2022-23, Service Delivery Statements, DSDSATSIP, p 3.

Electricity Life Support Concession Scheme ²	2.5	2.7
Electricity Rebate – COVID-19 – Residential Household Utility Assistance Package & Small / Medium Business Power Bill Relief Package ³	0.6	..
Total	420.2	725.0
Notes:		
1. The increase is due to a \$175 Cost of Living Rebate being provided in 2022-23, compared with the \$50 Electricity Asset Ownership Dividend rebate administered in 2021-22.		
2. Electricity rebates are adjusted annually according to the Queensland Competition Authority's (QCA) price determination for general household electricity tariff (Tariff 11). For 2022–23, the QCA determined Tariff 11 will increase by 9.2%.		
3. This item is part of the government response to COVID-19.		

Source: Queensland Budget 2022-23, *Budget Strategy and Outlook*, Budget Paper No. 2, p 210.

4.3 Key issues raised at the public hearing

Issues raised by the committee in relation to DSDSATSIP and the Family Responsibilities Commission (FRC) included:

- the number of referrals to DSDSATSIP's Fraud and Corruption Control Committee in 2021- 22 for corruption and misconduct
- complaints about accommodation support and respite services raised in the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability
- the rollout of the DSDSATSIP's internal COVID-19 vaccination program; vaccinations for accommodation support and respite services clients
- feedback on the title of the portfolio of the Premier and Minister for the Olympics
- funding for accommodation support and respite services
- support for seniors at risk of abuse; support for seniors provided through the Seniors Legal and Support Service
- the status of the Queensland Carers Advisory Council
- activities planned for Seniors Month 2022
- the percentage of employees with disability employed across DSDSATSIP in particular and the public sector in general
- selection processes in DSDSATSIP in response to the Crime and Corruption Commission's report titled *An investigation into allegations relating to the appointment of a school principal*
- the operation of the Taxi Subsidy Scheme; transport services for people with disabilities and seniors
- support for Queensland's seniors to offset cost-of-living increases
- events for seniors
- investment to help increase National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participation between 2020 and 2022; provisions to support Queenslanders who have a psychosocial disability but who do not qualify for NDIS funding; utilisation of support by Queenslanders with NDIS plans
- support to reduce the number of students with disability receiving school disciplinary absences
- transitioning of Olympic and Paralympic Games athlete accommodation to permanent disability public housing
- the number of people with a disability on the social housing register

- management of the Forensic Disability Service
- status of the *All Abilities Queensland: opportunities for all* report
- funding for disability advocacy beyond June 2023
- consequences on the FRC of the removal of the cashless debit card; the number of FRC clients who have chosen voluntary income management
- provision of Childrens Court notices to the FRC
- Queensland government funding grants to the FRC
- the number of First Nations people employed in DSDSATSIP
- the 2021-22 Remote Indigenous Land Infrastructure Program Office allocation for cultural heritage
- representations made to DSDSATSIP regarding disproportionately high disciplinary absences amongst First Nations students
- the progress of the Cultural Heritage Act Review
- the role of Community Enterprise Queensland in Queensland's remote and very remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- initiatives to preserve and strengthen First Nations languages
- the Queensland Government's response to Voice to Government
- the progress of the Path to Treaty in Queensland
- budget allocation for First Nations policy
- data collection and approval processes for social reinvestment grants
- processes used in the Social and Emotional Wellbeing program
- service delivery reforms in Mapoon and Yarrabah
- Local Thriving Communities Grants and measures to reduce the incidence of suicide
- processes to strengthen and promote local decision making in remote and discrete communities to improve service delivery
- implementation and impact of the *Meriba Omasker Kaziw Kazipa (Torres Strait Islander Traditional Child Rearing Practice) Act 2020*.³⁶

³⁶ Public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 4 August 2022.

5 Minister for Children and Youth Justice and Minister for Multicultural Affairs

The Honourable Leanne Linard MP, Minister for Children and Youth Justice and Minister for Multicultural Affairs, is the Minister responsible for the Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs (DCYJMA).

5.1 Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs

The DCYJMA has 3 service areas as follows:

- Child and Family Services – to enable families to safely care for their children and young people, and provide services to support the safety, belonging and wellbeing of children and young people not able to be cared for by their families
- Youth Justice Services – to keep the community safe by working together to prevent offending and reduce reoffending by children and young people, and by enabling young people to reconnect to community
- Multicultural Affairs – to promote Queensland as a unified, harmonious and inclusive community.³⁷

The following table taken from the Appropriation Bill 2022 compares the appropriations for DCYJMA for 2021-22 and 2022-23.

Appropriations	Budget 2021-22 \$'000	Est. Actual 2021-22 \$'000	Vote 2022-23 \$'000
<i>Controlled Items</i>			
departmental services	1,838,805	2,049,555	2,282,057
equity adjustment	(12,367)	(13,020)	17,055
<i>Administered Items</i>	90,191	55,885	72,460
Vote	1,916,629	2,092,420	2,371,572

Source: Appropriation Bill 2022, Schedule 2, p 8.

5.1.1 Budget highlights

The total estimated expenditure (Controlled and Administered budget expenses) is approximately \$2.304 billion.³⁸

DCYJMA derives its income from appropriation revenue, user charges and fees, grants and other contributions, and other revenue. In 2022-23, DCYJMA income is expected to be approximately \$2.304 billion.³⁹

³⁷ Queensland Budget 2022-23, Service Delivery Statements, Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs (DCYJMA), p 1.

³⁸ Queensland Budget 2022-23, Service Delivery Statements, DCYJMA, pp 11 and 14.

³⁹ Queensland Budget 2022-23, Service Delivery Statements, DCYJMA, pp 11 and 14.

The capital works program for the DCYJMA in 2022-23 is \$51.7 million.⁴⁰ These funds provide infrastructure and systems to support children, young people and families to be safe and help prevent and respond to crime, violence, abuse and neglect.⁴¹

In the 2022-23 budget, DCYJMA is being allocated \$420.2 million over 4 years (including \$414.3 million of additional funding and \$6 million funded internally) and \$92.2 million per annum ongoing to the DCYJMA to continue the Supporting Families Changing Futures reforms.⁴²

Other 2022-23 budget highlights for DCYJMA include:

- \$2.2 billion over 5 years and \$500.0 million per annum ongoing for out-of-home care services in response to significant, ongoing pressures arising from an increase in demand in the child protection system
- introducing reforms that will extend support to young people leaving care up to 21 years, with \$400,000 over 4 years from 2022–23 for implementation and evaluation activities. From 2023–24, carers will continue to receive allowances for 19 to 21-year olds remaining with their foster/kinship carers, while young people aged 18 to 21 years leaving non-family-based care will be mentored and supported financially by non-government organisations to live independently. Funding for allowances and support from 2023–24 is held centrally
- as part of \$78.8 million in whole-of-government funding, increased funding of \$75.3 million over 4 years (including \$1.6 million funded internally) to DCYJMA for Youth Justice Strategy reforms through:
 - \$20.9 million in funding over 4 years for Indigenous Youth and Family Workers and for Family Led Decision Making which empowers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in decision making and identifying solutions to address the young person’s offending behaviour
 - funding for the Mount Isa Transitional Hub with \$7.4 million over 4 years (including \$1.6 million funded internally) which diverts young people from the youth justice system by responding to young people on the streets at night who are at risk of reoffending
 - expanding the number of locations from 8 to 14 for the state-wide Multi-agency Collaborative Panels
 - recurrent funding of \$7.4 million per annum from 2022–23 to address the pressures in the youth justice detention centres to allow for a more sustainable permanent staffing model
- \$3.0 million for a Community Partnership Innovation Grant scheme to partner with local communities on crime prevention projects focussed on young people who are, or could become, repeat offenders
- \$1.1 million over 4 years and \$170,000 per annum ongoing to support and engage with the Australian South Sea Islander community.⁴³

⁴⁰ Queensland Budget 2022-23, Service Delivery Statements, DCYJMA, p 9.

⁴¹ Queensland Budget 2022-23, Service Delivery Statements, DCYJMA, p 9.

⁴² Queensland Budget 2022-23, Service Delivery Statements, DCYJMA, p 3.

⁴³ Queensland Budget 2022-23, Service Delivery Statements, DCYJMA, p 3.

5.1.2 Key issues raised at the public hearing

Issues raised by the committee in relation to DCYJMA included:

- the number of outstanding investigations and assessments in the south-east region awaiting finalisation, and the number of those that have been outstanding for more than 100 days; time taken to respond to and complete urgent risk assessments
- the number of times independent expert advice has been sought by DCYJMA from Crown Law regarding disciplinary processes as recommended by the Coroner of the Mason Jett Lee case
- annual targets for reunifications attempted by DCYJMA; safeguards for reunified children
- funding allocations for diversionary programs for young people who come into contact with the youth justice system; programs delivered in youth detention centres to address offending behaviour and break the cycle of youth crime
- the timing of the release of the report of the Atkinson review of youth justice reforms
- new investment in the child safety system in the 2022-23 State Budget
- progress of the Community Partnership Innovation Grants scheme
- support for foster and kinship carers; support for young people exiting out-of-home care
- action taken following a report of signs of injury to a child following a contact visit; processes for reporting alleged sexual abuse to the Queensland Police Service and Child Safety; medical attention for children in cases of alleged abuse, injury or medical conditions
- the total cost and design of the Caloundra short-term remand centre proposal
- incidence of centre-wide lockdowns in youth detention centres generally, and Cleveland Youth Detention Centre in particular
- support for and involvement of victims of crime in youth justice processes
- DCYJMA's contribution to the Youth Justice Taskforce
- the role of secondary family support services in diverting families from the child protection system
- services offered in Far North Queensland, including the Cook electorate, to tackle youth crime
- the number of repeat offenders in the youth justice system who were known to the child safety system
- the number of youths fitted with GPS monitoring devices
- behaviour management processes in youth detention centres
- contents of the interim report issued by Professor Peter Coaldrake
- progress of the co-responder program
- support for children and young people with disabilities in out-of-home care
- the number of referrals of corruption or misconduct to DCYJMA's Fraud and Corruption Control committee
- the Japan-Queensland relationship
- the impact of escalating tensions between China and Taiwan on Queensland's Chinese diaspora
- funding for Multicultural Queensland Month; quantum of sponsorships by sponsors of Multicultural Queensland Month

- prosecution of race-related crimes
- progress and importance of the Holocaust museum
- membership of the grant assessment panel for Celebrating Multicultural Queensland grants
- support and advocacy for Queensland's Afghan community after the fall of Kabul in August 2021
- support for people arriving in Queensland from Ukraine
- funding for projects that engage and support culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities; engagement of CALD communities with the electoral process
- operations of the Multicultural Queensland Advisory Council
- initiatives to improve social cohesion in communities across Queensland
- breakdown of staff positions and roles in Multicultural Affairs.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 4 August 2022.

6 Statements of Reservation

Community Support and Services Committee- Statement of Reservation

Introduction

Opposition members of the Committee agree with the passing of the 2022/23 Budget.

However, the Budget is characterised by numerous shortcomings which have failed to meet the expectations of Queenslanders. Many of these shortcomings became increasingly evident during the Estimates process.

The Budget was an opportunity for the government to show Queenslanders they have listened to them. It was a chance to open the books and show Queenslanders they have been heard. It was a chance to reveal the true state of affairs and what will be done to make their lives just a little easier.

The Estimates process failed to provide reassurance that the great challenges facing Queenslanders were being addressed – the health crisis, the housing crisis, the youth crime crisis, the cost of living crisis and the integrity crisis.

Estimates revealed a host of band aid solutions that will do little to improve conditions throughout Queensland. Coupled with a litany of cost overruns and government financial waste – no better demonstrated than by the loss of over \$220 million of taxpayers' funds on the Wellcamp vanity project – no long term solutions were presented by the government.

Despite its inherent imperfections, the Estimates process drew attention to government neglect and waste and a cavalier disregard for the highest standards of probity and integrity in government.

Communities, Housing and Digital Economy

The Wellcamp facility at Toowoomba was discussed with regards to its use for temporary social housing. It was argued that it was a purpose-built health facility. The question was raised as to why a 1,000 bed facility that cost over \$220 million is currently sitting empty while tens of thousands of Queenslanders are on the social housing waiting list. The Wellcamp facility was made for crisis accommodation, yet Queensland's most vulnerable are not being given temporary housing and no commitment to use this facility for temporary social housing was given.

It was revealed that the number of households on the social housing register has increased. The Director General explained that 21% of social housing applicants were removed from the reported figure of 30,922 due to no longer needing social housing or no longer being eligible. As of the 30 June 2022 there were 27,437 households on the list, an increase of around 10%.

Of the \$2.9 billion investment in social housing, \$1 billion is the Housing Investment Fund. There was no commitment from the government as to how many years it would take for the return on investment from the Housing Investment Fund to reach \$1 billion.

In 2017 the government made a promise to build 200 homes each year for the first five years as part of the Queensland Housing Strategy. This commitment was not met and the net increase in social housing properties is less than a thousand five years later. A broken promise and thousands of Queenslanders waiting for housing.

There were a number of negative outcomes in the Auditor-Generals report and eight recommendations made. The Minister noted that the department have accepted all recommendations, however when it was asked if the Minister took responsibility for the negative outcomes, no clear answer was forthcoming.

Affordable social housing must be a priority for the State Labor Government.

The Director General was asked about corruption and misconduct referrals for the department. It was revealed that there were 27 matters received by the Integrity Services Unit and 8 of those were corrupt conduct matters. It was disappointing to learn that 85% of those 8 were allegations relating to inappropriate workplace behaviours.

It was noted for the record that a committee member requested Agnes Waters be considered for a neighbourhood centre project in the future.

Unfortunately, there was no time for further questions in the Communities portfolio.

Arts

The practical completion date for the new performing arts venue at QPAC has been further delayed. It was revealed that due to the adverse weather and other delays, only \$32 million of the budgeted \$84.2 million was spent in the last financial year.

The outdoor Dinosaur Garden at the Queensland Museum remains closed. Four months after the 2022 flood event, work is only now beginning on the Outdoor Dinosaur Garden, with a projected completion date of approximately mid-September; 6 months from the flood event.

Seniors and Disability Services

The Director General was asked about corruption and misconduct referrals for the department. The DG advised that in 2021-2022 there were 31 suspected corrupt conduct referrals, 13 of which have been finalised. There were 82 suspected misconduct referrals, of which 68 have been finalised. No further details were forthcoming.

The DG was unable to provide any feedback from the royal commission into violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation of people with disability directly relating to accommodation support (AS) and respite services (RS).

It was revealed that there have been no discussions about financial differences between what AS and RS clients now receive and what they may receive under changes due to the NDIS. The Minister confirmed that nothing has been finalised.

The Queensland Government had a Public Sector target for employing people with a disability of 8% by 2022. It was disappointing to learn that the current percentage across the Queensland government is only 3.25%, well below the target.

There are significant issues for people with disability around public transport. Taxi subsidies were raised; however, the Minister was unable to give specific answers, referring to TMR and the Minister for Transport along with the NDIS. On page 20 of the Interim Disability Service Plan, tabled during the hearing, Disability and Seniors Connect are listed as the responsible parties for TSS.

The question was raised about people not qualifying for the NDIS and what provisions the department is making for Queenslanders who do not qualify. Again, the Minister referred to another department stating Health would be responsible.

ATSI Partnerships

The Family Responsibilities Commissioner was asked about the Cashless Debit Card and the consequences of the removal. The FRC stated that further feedback was being sought to establish implications the proposed changes will have. The FRC gave figures on how many clients were on voluntary income management (VIM), these figures have increased from 18 clients in 2020-2021 to 126 clients in 2021-2022. As of the 1st of August, 2022, 70 voluntary income managements were in place and valid.

It was revealed that across the department a total of 6.33% of employees identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

There was a zero allocation for cultural heritage in 2021-2022 when in previous years there have been allocations. The DG admitted that cultural heritage related costs were not as significant as initially anticipated.

Social reinvestment grants in respect to Kowanyama were raised, and questions asked regarding data collection and details of approval process. It was disappointing that the details were not forthcoming.

Budget details and proof of success regarding trials that were undertaken in Mapoon and Yarrabah under Local Thriving Communities were not specific. The measures of success were unclear, and no specific examples were able to be given.

When asked about the differences in processes for the Social Emotional Wellbeing program compared to the social reinvestment grants, it was explained they would be similar. The five community led initiatives will be identified through an expression of interest process and input from communities as to how dollars should be spent. Again, no specifics given.

Children and Youth Justice

It was established that investigations and assessments for Child Safety are out of control in the South East Region, with the Government confirming that at 31 March there were 1,660 investigations not yet finalised. These are legislatively required investigations after an initial assessment is done where credence has been given to the initial concern report. The Director-General admitted that it is one of their practice standards to complete all investigations in 100 days, yet 522 of the 1,660 investigations have been open for more than 100 days.

To hear that over 500 children in the South East region alone have not been seen within the recommended time and could potentially be remaining in unsafe situations while waiting for these investigations to happen is highly concerning.

The Government confirmed the practice of seeking several opinions from doctors, or 'doctor shopping' as it has been reported by numerous foster carers and doctors in the regions. Rather than deny this practice was happening the defence was given that there sometimes wasn't clarity around the motivation behind this occurring.

It was also revealed the Department spent almost \$1 million on the abandoned Caloundra Youth Jail, with the Member for Caloundra requesting to see floorplans to 'tweak' them and therefore make the jail more palatable to the community.

Just six young people have been fitted with GPS trackers since the Government brought in their youth reforms in April 2021, further providing evidence this Government has lost control of youth crime.

The farcical nature of the Government's dixer was on show in this hearing, with a Government Member asking the same question twice (in a row). It is a demonstration of how little this Government cares about the process and truly opening themselves to scrutiny. Questions were answered with lengthy discussions of topics irrelevant to the questions asked, taking up time from non-government members and not allowing a full enquiry into this Department's budget and practice to be held.

Multicultural Affairs

It was disappointing to learn that the Minister had not met with Ambassador Yamagami of Japan with regard to his government's concerns with the Japan-Queensland relationship following the budget. The Minister stated those issues had not been raised with her.

Similarly, the Minister has not sought briefings from the trade minister and / or the Chinese Consul General regarding the impact of Queensland's Chinese diaspora with respect to escalating tensions between China and Taiwan. The Minister again stating these issues had not been raised with her by the community.

It was revealed that the Holocaust Museum project has not yet been able to announce a location for the Museum.

In last year's estimates the engagement in the electoral process of culturally and linguistically diverse communities was discussed. This was raised again, and it is disappointing there was little interest or progress in this area.

Conclusion

Having interrogated ministers and officials throughout the Estimates process the Opposition does not believe the Budget presented a sustainable solution to the significant problems facing the Queensland economy and Queenslanders.

Just as ambulance ramping and hospital waiting times were at critical levels last year, housing shortages continue to exist throughout the entire state, crime rates continue to increase and critical infrastructure remained underfunded.

The 2022/23 Budget was a lost opportunity that will make the lives of Queenslanders even more difficult in the coming years.

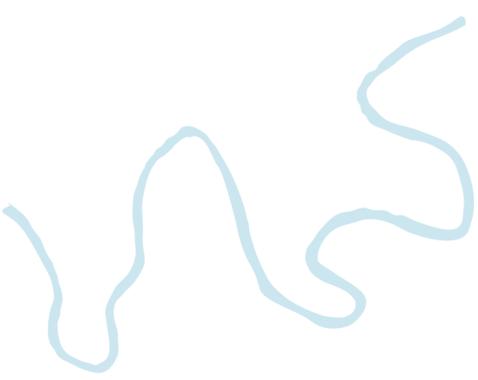
The squandering of millions of dollars demonstrates the government has turned its back on the needs of Queenslanders and has lost control of the levers of public administration.



Stephen Bennett
Member for Burnett



Mark Robinson
Member for Ooderoo



Michael Berkman MP
For Maiwar ▲

12 August 2022

Statement of Reservation - Fixing Budget Estimates

I'm again taking this opportunity to reiterate my long-held concerns about the process of budget estimates, the many ways it falls short as an effective accountability mechanism, and some simple suggestions to improve the process in the short term.

The criticism levelled at this process in previous years are equally relevant to this year's estimates hearings, especially in relation to interruptions from government MPs and committee Chairs, baseless points of order to interrupt uncomfortable questions, time-wasting monologues from Ministers, and Ministers going to great lengths to avoid answering difficult or potentially embarrassing questions.

Since last year's estimates hearings, some significant new voices have joined the chorus of criticism.

Professor Peter Coaldrake AO, in his recent Review of culture and accountability in the Queensland public sector, noted the significance of parliamentary processes in "rising community disaffection" with the Queensland Government, stating:

"there are strong indications that the ambition to modernise the operations of the parliament have run out of their mainly post-Fitzgerald steam... And one of the most vital roles that is played by parliamentary committees is in the interrogation of annual 'budget estimates'. The Queensland parliament's own Committee System Review in 2010 did recommend a freer flowing process for such budget estimates, though both sides in office have subsequently truncated or limited the opportunities for debate."

The Clerk of the Queensland Parliament, Mr Neil Laurie, offered some measured but damning criticism of the Queensland Parliamentary Committee system, particularly regarding its essential function of holding the Government to account, suggesting that the estimates process is in some respects worse than it was before the 2011 review of the Committee system:

"... the equally important part of committees, which is about the accountability of government, ensuring government is accountable. I think that in relation to that we have a long way to go. I think that the parliamentary committees have not necessarily been discharging some of the things that were envisaged in that 2011 review, in particular around things like public works and public accounts and the review of Auditor-General's reports in a proper and adequate way. I think we have a long way to go with regard to that accountability aspect and the work of committees..."

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I think there are a lot of people who would have different ideas about how it could be improved and I do think that what we would have to do is review what has happened since 2011 and what has worked and what has not worked. For example, I do not think, in a general sense, the estimates process that we are having is working as well as what was envisaged it would in 2011 and in some respects the system that was in place prior to 2011 may in fact be better because things may have gotten even worse in terms of the overall estimates process.”

As I've observed at every opportunity since my first experience of budget estimates, the process as it is currently being run provides almost no meaningful opportunity to hold the executive to account. Moreover, by providing a veneer of accountability that doesn't deliver that in any meaningful way, it might almost be considered worse than no process at all.

My view remains that the estimates process is fundamentally broken and needs urgent reform, and this should begin with **an all-party review of budget estimates that could** be undertaken by a committee chaired by a non-government MP with representation from all parties in Parliament.

In the meantime the Parliament should adopt some **interim measures to strengthen estimates** including:

1. Abolish Dorothy Dixers from government MPs who have ample opportunity outside estimates to seek information directly from their government colleagues.
2. Double the amount of time available for questions by having two committees sit simultaneously for the full seven day estimates period. This is standard practice in other jurisdictions and would not involve much extra cost.¹
3. Make sure all hearings are chaired by non-government MPs to prevent Government Chairs using their position to protect the Ministers' and the Government's interests.
4. Expand the Questions on Notice process to give all MPs a chance to ask written questions ahead of the hearings, rather than the very limited opportunity afforded to only the six members of each Committee.
5. Publicise the hearings widely and encourage ordinary people to attend in the hope that this might force everyone to behave a little better.

These interim measures could be implemented immediately by a simple resolution of the Legislative Assembly and easily take effect before next year's Budget Estimates hearings.

There remains a widespread consensus in Queensland, across civil society and the press gallery, that our system of Parliamentary oversight in general and estimates in particular are hopelessly ineffective. This perception is gaining traction in other quarters, as evidenced in the final report of Coaldrake Review and the recent comments of the Clerk of the Parliament, and is feeding directly into the numerous discrete concerns that have fed into a full-blown integrity crisis in the Queensland Government.

¹ During last year's estimates hearings, Mr Laurie gave evidence that "the vast majority of costs [of estimates hearings] are sunk costs", so the cost of extending or expanding estimates hearings would be negligible. He went further this year before the Economics and Governance Committee, stating that doubling the amount of time for estimates by running parallel committees over the 7 days of estimates would incur only "marginally more cost... it would not be a huge sum." There is no defensible reason to not at least take this basic step to increase the amount of time available to non-government Members.

Good governments welcome scrutiny, and budget estimates has the potential to be a key part of a healthy democracy. Now is the time for the Government to do the right thing - open itself up to genuine scrutiny and offer Queenslanders the opportunity to regain faith in our processes of public governance and State institutions.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Berkman', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Michael Berkman MP