

2012-13 Budget Estimates

Report No. 11

Agriculture, Resources and Environment Committee

October 2012

Agriculture, Resources and Environment Committee

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Deputy Chair	Ms Jackie Trad MP, Member for South Brisbane
Members	Mr Jason Costigan MP, Member for Whitsunday Mr Sam Cox MP, Member for Thuringowa Mr David Gibson MP, Member for Gympie Mr Shane Knuth MP, Member for Dalrymple Mr Jon Krause MP, Member for Beaudesert Mrs Anne Maddern MP, Member for Maryborough
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Chair's Foreword

This report presents a summary of the Committee's examination of the Budget Estimates for the 2012-13 financial year.

Consideration of the Budget Estimates allows for the public examination of both the responsible Minister and Chief Executive Officers of agencies within the Committee's portfolio area. The examination was undertaken through a process of questions on notice and public hearing.

The Committee has made one recommendation as follows:

- that the proposed expenditure, as detailed in the Appropriation Bill 2012 for the Committee's areas of responsibility, be agreed to by the Legislative Assembly without amendment.

On behalf of the Committee, I wish to thank each Minister and their departmental officers for their cooperation in providing information to the Committee throughout this process.

I would also like to thank the Members of the Committee for their hard work and valuable contribution.



Ian Rickuss MP

Chair

October 2012

1. Introduction

1.1 Role of the Committee

The Agriculture, Resources and Environment Committee (the Committee) is a portfolio committee of the Queensland Parliament required under section 88 of the *Parliament of Queensland Act 2001* and established under the Standing Rules and Orders.

The committee's areas of responsibility are:

- Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry;
- Environment and Heritage Protection; and
- Natural Resources and Mines.¹

On 14 September 2012, the Appropriation Bill 2012 and the estimates for the Committee's area of responsibility were referred to the committee for investigation and report.²

On 12 October 2012, the Committee conducted a public hearing and took evidence about the proposed expenditure from the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines and other witnesses. A copy of the transcript of the Committee's hearing can be accessed at: http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/documents/hansard/2012/2012_10_12_Estimates.pdf.

1.2 Aim of this report

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; and
- additional information given in relation to answers.

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

Prior to the public hearing, the Committee provided the Ministers within its portfolio area with questions on notice in relation to the estimates. Responses to all the questions were received.

Answers to the Committee's pre-hearing questions on notice; documents tabled during the hearing; answers and additional information provided by Ministers after the hearing; and minutes of the Committee's meetings are included in a volume of additional information tabled with this report.

1.3 Other Members' participation

The Committee gave leave for other Members to participate in the hearing:

- Ms Anastacia Palaszczuk MP, Leader of the Opposition and Member for Inala;
- Mr Tim Mulherin MP, Deputy Leader of the Opposition and Member for Mackay;
- Mrs Jo-Ann Miller MP, Member for Bundamba; and
- Mr Trevor Watts MP, Member for Toowoomba North.

¹ Standing Rules and Orders, Schedule 6. The schedule provides that departments, statutory authorities, government owned corporations or other administrative units related to the relevant Minister's responsibilities regarding these areas are included.

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.

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 2012 for the Committee's areas of responsibility, be agreed to by the Legislative Assembly without amendment.

3. Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

3.1 Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

The Hon John McVeigh MP is the Minister responsible for the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF or the department). The department has four key service areas as follows:

- Agriculture and Forestry;
- Agri-Science Queensland;
- Biosecurity Queensland; and
- Fisheries Queensland.

The Minister's portfolio also includes two key statutory authorities, the Australian Agricultural College Corporation (AACC) and Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority (QRAA).

The following table taken from the Appropriation Bill 2012 compares the appropriations for the department for 2011-12 and 2012-13.

Appropriation	Budget 2011-12 \$'000	Est. Actual 2011-12 \$'000	Vote 2012-13 \$'000
<i>Controlled Items</i>			
departmental services	..	49,875	287,774
equity adjustment	..	(13,768)	(12,325)
<i>Administered Items</i>	..	1,789	9,083
Vote³	..	37,896	284,532

Source: Appropriation Bill 2012, Schedule 2, p. 8.

The Appropriation Bill 2012 also seeks Parliament's authorisation for a supplementary appropriation of \$10.149 million for unforeseen expenditure for 2011-12.⁴

Total capital purchases for the Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry portfolio including statutory bodies are \$23.4 million for 2012-13. Total capital purchases for the statutory authorities in 2012-13 are \$2.2 million for the AACC and \$1.5 million for QRAA.⁵

Total capital purchases for the department are \$19.7 million. This will be applied towards upgrading research facilities to deliver outcomes for agriculture, fisheries and forestry.⁶

³ The Vote total for 2011-12 Adjusted Budget and 2011-12 Estimated actual does not agree to the 2011-12 Appropriation Act due to machinery of Government changes during 2011-12.

⁴ Appropriation Bill 2012, Schedule 4, p. 19.

⁵ State Budget 2012-13, Capital Statement – Budget Paper No. 3, pp. 22-23.

3.1.1 Budget highlights – Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

2012-13 budget highlights for the department include:⁷

- implementing the \$3 million Queensland Government contribution to the North Queensland Irrigated Agriculture Strategy
- finalising agricultural land audits in the Darling Downs and Central Queensland regions
- commencing a \$9 million buyback of commercial Queensland net fishing licences
- \$4.6 million in funding over four years to the Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations for sugar research development.

3.1.2 Issues raised at the public hearing – Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Issues raised by the Committee in relation to DAFF include:

- the barley breeding program agreement
- the development of a 30 year strategic plan for agriculture
- proposed abattoir for Cloncurry
- research in relation to transport and logistics in the beef industry
- north Australia irrigated agriculture strategy
- reductions in red tape and regulation within the Department
- the Fire Ant Eradication Program, staffing cuts, use of baits, the remote sensing program, and national cost-sharing arrangements
- biosecurity pests and diseases and funding of the biosecurity laboratory at James Cook University
- risk assessment of the consolidation of laboratory services at Coopers Plains
- Tropical Weeds Research Centre cutbacks in Charters Towers
- Mareeba Agricultural College
- sustainable development of the timber industry, in particular, the western cypress timber industry
- forestry management
- access for beekeepers to native forests
- \$9 million fishery buyback
- grants for fish stocking groups
- options for new fishery
- results of the latest fishing survey conducted by the Department
- staffing in the Department
- marine environment under the National Environmental Biosecurity Response Agreement
- regional statutory planning process and the competition for land.

⁶ State Budget 2012-13, Capital Statement – Budget Paper No. 3, p. 22.

⁷ State Budget 2012-13, Service Delivery Statements, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, pp. 3-4.

4. Minister for Natural Resources and Mines

4.1 Department of Natural Resources and Mines

The Hon Andrew Cripps MP is the Minister responsible for the Department of Natural Resources and Mines (DNRM or the department). The department has four service areas as follows:

- Mining and Petroleum Services;
- Mine Safety and Health Services;
- Water Services; and
- Land Services.

The following table taken from the Appropriation Bill 2012 compares the appropriations for the department for 2011-12 and 2012-13.

Appropriation	Budget 2011-12 \$'000	Est. Actual 2011-12 \$'000	Vote 2012-13 \$'000
<i>Controlled Items</i>			
departmental services	..	64,909	383,885
equity adjustment	..	(993)	(7,472)
<i>Administered Items</i>	..	5,788	3,448
Vote⁸	..	69,704	394,805

Source: Appropriation Bill 2012, Schedule 2, p. 11.

Total capital purchases for the DNRM for 2012-13 are \$19.8 million.⁹

4.1.1 Budget highlights – Department of Natural Resources and Mines

2012-13 budget highlights for the department include, amongst other things:¹⁰

- Implementing an approved Land Access Framework
- Funding 14 regional Natural Resource Management bodies to improve weed and pest control
- Conducting a pilot study to assess the potential for coordinated surveys in a greenfield development
- Delivering a framework for appropriate management of mining leases on North Stradbroke Island.

4.1.2 Issues raised at the public hearing – Department of Natural Resources and Mines

Issues raised by the Committee in relation to DNRM included:

- repealing the *Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (Land Holding) Act 1985*
- improved public access to research databases
- release of water in the Flinders and Gilbert River catchments in north-west Queensland
- interim flood plain map for the Queensland Reconstruction Authority

⁸ The Vote total for 2011-12 Adjusted Budget and 2011-12 Estimated actual does not agree to the 2011-12 Appropriation Act due to machinery of Government changes during 2011-12.

⁹ State Budget 2012-13, Capital Statement – Budget Paper No. 3, p. 86.

¹⁰ State Budget 2012-13, Service Delivery Statements, Department of Natural Resources and Mines, pp. 3-4.

- unallocated state land fire and pest management program
- management of water in mine sites
- vegetation management and enforcement of the *Vegetation Management Act 1999*
- volume of water released in the Flinders River catchment
- programs to support the sustainability of the Great Artesian Basin
- pilot study to address coordinated surveys in greenfield development sites
- Murray-Darling Basin Plan
- address management system for residents of Mutchilba
- natural resource management funding programs and Commonwealth funding
- investigations for tree-clearing breaches and figures in relation to prosecutions and fines for illegally cleared vegetation
- staffing redundancies in the department's vegetation management area
- front-line staffing redundancies and MOHRI data definitions
- Paddock to the Reef Program and regulatory burden
- staffing redundancies and implications on service performance
- management of abandoned mines
- cash-bidding system for petroleum and gas tenements
- Queensland Renewable Energy Fund
- load-out facility to service mining projects in Cloncurry
- mining safety and health performance regime; and staff losses
- CFMEU Mining and Energy Division
- Local Area Mine Permit program
- North Stradbroke Island sandmining leases
- small scale mining sector and regulatory burden
- Collingwood Park mine subsidence.

5. Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection

5.1 Department of Environment and Heritage Protection

The Hon Andrew Powell MP is the Minister responsible for the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection, formerly the Department of Environment and Resource Management (DEHP or the department).

The following table taken from the Appropriation Bill 2012 compares the appropriations for the department for 2011-12 and 2012-13.

Appropriation	Budget 2011-12 \$'000	Est. Actual 2011-12 \$'000	Vote 2012-13 \$'000
<i>Controlled Items</i>			
departmental services	883,896	708,166	186,676
equity adjustment	(19,152)	(23,610)	(2,888)
<i>Administered Items</i>	6,719	4,763	..
Vote¹¹	871,463	689,319	183,788

Source: Appropriation Bill 2012, Schedule 2, p. 10.

Total capital purchases for the DEHP for 2012-13 are \$23.5 million. The majority of the capital purchases relate to land acquisition activities (\$22 million).¹²

5.1.1 Budget highlights – Department of Environment and Heritage Protection

2012-13 budget highlights for the department include, amongst other things:¹³

- \$8.5 million (\$26.5 million over four years) to protect Queensland's koala population
- \$9 million (\$17.2 million over three years) for protected area estate acquisitions
- \$1 million (\$7.4 million over three years) for the continuation of nature refuges
- \$2 million to continue the Healthy Waterways program
- \$2.8 million (\$16.8 million over four years) to employ 40 additional Indigenous rangers.

5.1.2 Issues raised at the public hearing – Department of Environment and Heritage Protection

Issues raised by the Committee in relation to DEHP included:

- the protection of Queensland's environment
- staff redundancies and budget savings
- investments and activities in relation to the protection of koala habitat
- permit system to remove flying foxes
- funding for the protection of the Great Barrier Reef
- wild river declarations in Queensland
- Cape York Peninsula Bioregion Management Plan
- cessation of some climate change plans

¹¹ The Vote total for 2011-12 Adjusted Budget and 2011-12 Estimated actual does not agree to the 2011-12 Appropriation Act due to machinery of Government changes during 2011-12.

¹² State Budget 2012-13, Capital Statement – Budget Paper No. 3, p. 59.

¹³ State Budget 2012-13, Service Delivery Statements, Department of Environment and Heritage Protection, pp. 4-5.

- membership of the Heritage Council
- Industry Driven Waste Strategy
- the Gladstone Healthy Harbour Partnership
- Flinders Karawatha Corridor
- coastal planning and protection policy
- funding for coal seam gas regulation
- number of compliance officers within the former Department of Environment and Resource Management
- mine water releases
- reduction in number of performance measures for the department
- Healthy Waterways initiatives
- crocodile management strategy
- regulatory approach to managing the Queensland Nickel refinery
- Biodiversity Offset Policy
- Everyone's Environment grants program.

Statements of Reservation

Shane Knuth MP

The premise of the 2012 Budget was to immediately reduce the size of the public service and cut a raft of programs that the State Government has decided are redundant.

Prior to the 2012 election the LNP had stated it would reduce the public service through natural attrition and made commitments to retain services in rural and regional Queensland.

During the AREC Budget Estimates hearing I questioned the rationale of cutting funding for the Farm Financial Assistance program, moving the Townsville Biosecurity Lab to Coopers Plains and removing five positions from the Charters Towers Tropical Weed Research Centre among other things. I believe the responses to those questions, while fitting the Government's agenda of cutting costs, indicated that there has been very little consideration of the broader economic and social costs of these decisions to rural communities.

I also questioned the amount of water released for the Flinders River Agricultural Precinct. While this is a welcome initiative, the Minister's response indicated that the move was a token gesture with no thought for the quantity required to support significant agricultural development in the region. This lack of forward planning is an inherent feature of the 2012 Budget which is further demonstrated by the recent announcement that the ban on uranium mining will be lifted. If the revenue for uranium had been factored into budgetary estimates, thousands of Queenslanders may have kept their jobs.

I disagree fundamentally with the Government's approach to the budget. Decisions have been hastily made and irrational staff cuts have created a culture of fear in Departments responsible for the administration of Government. This is significantly impeding Government operations which will inevitably impact the broader Queensland economy. The pre-election strategy should have been retained and the public service reduced through natural attrition while ensuring services in regional Queensland were not diminished.

Sincerely,



Shane Knuth

Member for Dalrymple

Jackie Trad MP

The Member for South Brisbane submits this statement of reservation. The Members for Mackay and Bundamba agree with the statement.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the Estimates hearings

The Opposition registers its severe concern regarding the conduct of the 2012 Estimates Agriculture, Resources and Environment hearing (the hearing). When the wholesale and bipartisan changes to the committee system were introduced last year there was widespread optimism that they would improve government accountability and increase proper scrutiny. This year's estimates put paid to that optimism and showed that the Newman Government is intent on using its massive majority to ride roughshod over due process.

The entirety of the hearing was overly weighted towards Government questions when compared to equivalent estimates hearings during the term of the previous Government. This was a continuing theme over the course of the day. The table below shows the ratio of Government to Non-Government questions asked to each Minister during this year's hearing and the comparable figures for 2011.

Portfolio Area	Ratio of Non-Government Questions to Government Questions	
	2011	2012
Natural Resources and Mines	5.33 to 1	1.14 to 1
Agriculture	6.3 to 1	1.82 to 1
Environment	5.2 to 1	1.82 to 1

These changes represent a marked departure from estimates practices under the former government which diminishes the entire process and in turn, reduces accountability and transparency. Queensland's Parliamentary unicameral system necessitates a strong Parliamentary committee system that enables proper scrutiny; the ongoing abuse of this system by the Newman Government reveals the genuine absence of their support for accountability and transparency to the people of Queensland. The reduction in non-government questions is only one example of the Newman Government making a mockery of the estimates process and reveals its intention to dishonour the 2011 bipartisan changes made to the committee system.

Furthermore, after a brief adjournment of the hearing, the committee allowed Minister McVeigh to make a second 'opening statement' which further chewed up valuable time that should have been devoted to proper scrutiny of the budget. This is a further indication of a Government that is determined to quash scrutiny.

It is also of great concern to the Opposition that Government members were allowed to submit Questions on Notice to both the Minister for Environment and the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines a day late. The Opposition and the Member for Dalrymple were required to submit Questions on Notice by the due date of 27 September 2012. However, Government members submitted their questions the next day, Friday 28 September 2012. When questioned during the hearing about the different deadlines, the AREC Committee Chair confirmed that Government members had submitted their questions a day late. In a subsequent conversation, I asked the AREC Committee Chair why the Government questions had been submitted late, to which he responded "*they were just a little late.*" I then further asked "*So there was no legitimate reason for why they were late?*" to which the Committee Chair replied "*no*".

It is totally unacceptable that deadlines for Parliamentary Committee proceedings differ according to members' political persuasion and it diminishes the Committee process and Parliament as a whole.

Furthermore, throughout the entire hearing, Ministers continually dodged and obfuscated questions, claimed ignorance and directed committee members to other Ministers. This was particularly egregious when the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines claimed to have no responsibility for legacy water contained in mines. It is abundantly clear to the Opposition that the machinery of government changes are being used as a cloak by Ministers to avoid answering questions.

These are just a few examples of the Newman Government's disregard for the estimates process and reveal a clear intent to dishonour the bipartisan changes to the committee process made in 2011.

Natural Resources and Mines

Untreated Water in Mines

The Minister was asked on six occasions in the first session and three occasions in the second session as to what discussions had taken place around the release of untreated water from mines that built up during the floods last year.

Specifically, the Opposition was trying to seek assurance that no deal had been done with the mining industry around royalty increases and the release of untreated water into river systems which had been flagged in the media.

The Minister refused to confirm whether any discussions had taken place and continually argued that such questioning is out of scope and was a matter only for the Environment Minister.

The Director-General in contrast by the second session was willing to answer questions and confirm that mining companies had discussed the issue.

This was despite the Minister meeting with the Rockhampton Regional Council in August this year to discuss the issue of untreated water in mines. The Mayor of Rockhampton Council is advocating for legislation to require mining companies to treat water before discharges into Fitzroy River system.¹

These are serious questions that were treated with contempt and patronising arrogance in the Estimates hearing by the Minister.

The Minister failed to answer questions about the pumping of untreated water from mines into river systems, preferring instead to claim that as Mines Minister he had no responsibility for the management and release of untreated water in mines.

The role of the Environment Minister in issuing permits for the disposal of untreated water does not preclude the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines from being involved in the decision making process.

As the Minister confirmed at the hearing, he is a member of the Resources Cabinet sub-committee that is overseeing policy and regulatory changes to the resources industry, including the issue of untreated mine water.

The fact that the Minister refused to answer questions in relation to this issue shows that either the Minister is trying to hide something or is not across his portfolio responsibilities.

It is worth noting here that the Environment Minister later provided some data that was over three months old. Based on the quality and currency of the information provided by the

¹ (Source <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-08-16/minister-to-hear-fitzroy-river-water-quality/4202434>).

Newman Government there is no way of knowing if untreated water is being pumped into river systems.²

Vegetation Management

The Minister was unconvincing in his testimony to the Committee that he did not direct the Director-General to suspend the enforcement of the *Vegetation Management Act* which prevents wide scale tree-clearing.

The Director-General advised that his decision to suspend prosecutions was based on data showing an increase in prosecutions following this same 'perception' from the Minister who has been a long-time critic in the Parliament of vegetation management.

This is despite an answer provided to the Committee in response to Non-Government Question 1 which contained data showing that prosecutions were falling, and that no penalty infringement notices were issued last financial year.

When asked to explain the difference between these figures and the much higher figures released by the Minister in April this year it was explained that the figures provided in the answer to the Question on Notice reflected those prosecutions that had been resolved.

However, the Minister's wording in the release implies that such prosecutions were resolved:

Since July 2009, however, 23 prosecutions have been finalised for offences totalling over 15,000 hectares of illegally cleared vegetation, resulting in approximately \$1,282,000 in fines.

The answer to Non-Government Question on Notice 1 states that over this time period only 14 penalty infringement notices have been issued with total fines of \$22,575.

There has also been no consideration provided to other factors behind the increase in prosecutions such as additional resourcing to enforcement or the possibility of more breaches actually occurring. The review has been engaged and framed towards landholders avoiding prosecution rather than the objectives of the *Vegetation Management Act* to prevent wide scale tree-clearing.

Mine Safety

In the first session the Minister advised that:

The first principle was that I was not willing to entertain any reduction in front-line positions in the mine safety area of my department in the Mines Inspectorate.³

The Minister tabled the 2011-12 Mines Inspectorate Annual Report less than 10 minutes before the start of the estimates hearing. A comparison of the Annual Report with the year showed that staffing fell by 6.5 positions from 91.5 to 85 positions.

When the Minister was confronted with these figures showing a 7% reduction in overall staffing the response was that:

The reconciling of the numbers that you have referred to relate to, as I understand it, administrative and business support positions in the department associated with that division of the department.⁴

Considering the small size of the inspectorate currently any reduction in back office support will have a higher proportionate impact. The Minister completely disregarded this reduction in staffing in his answers.

² (Source <http://www.fitzroyriver.qld.gov.au/meetings/june2012.html>)

³ (Hansard 12 October 2012 page 18)

⁴ (Hansard 12 October 2012 page 28)

Of the reduction in the number of positions three are directly within the Mines Inspectorate comparing the 2010-11 and 2011-12 Mines Inspectorate Annual Reports.

Koala Safety

The Minister also refused to confirm that any future changes to vegetation management legislation will not impact on Koala populations. The Minister's answers showed a complete lack of interest and regard for the issue.

The Minister said the policy for Koala habitat protection was a matter for the Environment Minister, despite the Minister for Natural Resources administering the Act that currently prevents wide scale tree clearing of Koala habitat.

Titles Registry

In answer to Non-Government Question on Notice 4 the Minister confirmed that the LNP is targeting a lower five-day success rate on titles registry while increasing fees by \$24 million and despite an investment in the Automated Titles System of \$5.5 million.

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

It was refreshing to hear the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry talk up a number of projects in his portfolio initiated by the previous Labor Government. In doing so the Minister implicitly acknowledged the previous government's impressive agriculture record and revealed the LNP's lack of real ideas to grow Queensland's agricultural sector.

Newman Government risks Queensland's biosecurity

The Opposition finds it extremely troubling that some 45 full-time equivalent positions have been retrenched from fire ant eradication programs, particularly in light of the new infestation recently discovered in the Lockyer Valley. Moreover it is worrying that the Newman Government is refusing to fund the full \$6 million in additional funding for fire ant eradication agreed through the Standing Council on Primary Industries. This decision jeopardises the entire national cost sharing agreement. The threat fire ants pose to the Queensland agricultural sector is immense. The Government's short-sighted cost cutting measures exacerbate that threat.

The Government's decision not to proceed with the construction of a new, state-of-the-art biosecurity laboratory at James Cook University is reckless and irresponsible. It is interesting that under questioning the Minister walked back from his previous statements that the project was entirely unfunded, recognising that a budget allocation of approximately \$17 million had been made by the previous government. In response to a Question on Notice from the Member for Dalrymple the Minister indicated that the transfer of biosecurity functions from the existing Oonoonba facility to Coopers Plains would cost less than \$2.2 million. This is in direct contradiction to a ministerial briefing note released under right to information which indicated the cost of upgrades to the Coopers Plains facility was at least \$10 million. Under questioning the Minister claimed that the figure of \$10 million was an initial estimate which subsequent work by his department managed to reduce. The idea that the cost of upgrading the Coopers Plains facility could fall by a factor of five in just a matter of months defies credibility.

The Opposition believes the Minister should give a full parliamentary update on this project and detail the scope of works planned for the Coopers Plains facility. Given the Minister's claim that the cost of those works has fallen by some \$8 million, it is most likely that the Government has significantly altered the scope of the works recommended by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. The decision to axe the JCU Biosecurity Lab significantly reduces North Queensland's biosecurity capacity and the Minister has ignored departmental advice on the required work at Coopers Plains his decision will drastically reduce the biosecurity capacity of the entire state.

Fewer recreational fishing programs

The Opposition is concerned with the reallocation of funding from the recreational use fee and do not believe it accords with the intent of the fee. It does not provide sufficient focus on recreational fishing activities and it is important to note that a number of programs have been defunded including the recreational fishing enhancement and Fishcare volunteers programs.

Forestry – agrarian socialism for the 21st century?

It was telling that the Minister refused to answer, or even properly consider, a question on the competition between the forestry and agriculture industries for the use of scarce land. This is a legitimate area of concern and government planning decisions to privilege one industry over another has the potential to greatly distort the Queensland economy away from the most efficient market allocation. In refusing to answer this question the Minister refused to rule out a return to the agrarian socialist tradition which has always been a feature of the Queensland conservative parties.

Frontline services no longer frontline

In an answer to a question taken on notice during the hearing the Minister was forced to reveal that the Newman Government's massive job cuts will directly affect frontline service delivery in the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Under the current definition of a frontline employee some 55 frontline staff have been fired. Even this doesn't show the full extent of these job cuts as the Newman Government in their zeal to fire as many public servants as possible has fiddled with the definition of frontline, according to the definition used by the previous government some 180 frontline positions will disappear.

Environment and Heritage Protection

The Estimates hearing concerning the portfolio areas for the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection revealed the Queensland environment does not have a strong advocate in Minister Powell and the Newman Government does not believe that leadership and coordination is necessary to protect Queensland's iconic environmental assets and precious biodiversity.

In essence, the Newman Government has subordinated environmental decision-making to economic policy, which will have devastating long-term effects on Queensland's natural heritage.

Protecting the Great Barrier Reef – no one's responsible

The Minister was unable to state categorically that he was the lead Minister responsible for the protection of Queensland's greatest natural asset – the Great Barrier Reef. It is clear that decision-making on the Great Barrier Reef is fragmented across a number of departments with no one Minister playing a central coordinating role. Various aspects of reef management fall under the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection's portfolio, however key responsibilities also lie under the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines, the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and the Minister for Science, Information Technology, Innovation and the Arts.

The Opposition finds this confused arrangement extremely worrying as a number of economic ministers, with short-term focuses, have responsibility for decisions which will have long-term and potentially damaging consequences for the Great Barrier Reef. This danger is further exacerbated by the fact that there is no central coordinating agency for reef management.

The budget papers indicate that the Minister for Science, Information Technology, Innovation and the Arts has a 'coordinating' role for Great Barrier Reef science. However, when questioned on her role, the Minister was unable to provide detail around the small amount of

funding allocated to her department and had limited knowledge around the scientific challenges facing the Great Barrier Reef. Given the Minister Bate's inability to answer questions, the Opposition has grave concerns about her capacity to coordinate the important scientific research needed to protect the Great Barrier Reef.

Protecting our coastline – devolved to the Deputy Premier

Over the course of the hearing it became clear the Minister for the Environment has only been tangentially involved in the production of the Newman Government's temporary coastal planning policy. The Minister attempted to claim the policy gazetted by the Deputy Premier merely returned to the coastal planning policy in operation until January this year. That is demonstrably untrue as a quick glance over the policies reveals that the previous policy is over five times longer than the policy gazetted by the Deputy Premier. It is not possible to condense 56 pages down to 11 pages without losing significant guidelines for the protection of Queensland's coastline from overdevelopment.

The temporary coastal planning policy is a retrograde step introduced secretly and without any consultation. Throughout the hearing the Minister continually disavowed his role in developing the policy which raises very serious questions as to whether the Minister has any role whatsoever in protecting Queensland's natural environment.

Protecting Cape York's diversity – devolved to the Deputy Premier

In yet more evidence the Environment Minister is continually sidelined by the Deputy Premier, the Cape York Bioregion Management Plan has now been subsumed into a wider statutory regional planning framework being developed in the Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning. Moreover the Minister refused to make public any submissions his department received through consultation on the bioregion management plan. This secrecy is fundamentally inconsistent with the government's much lauded rhetoric around being open and accountable.

Protecting wild rivers – no one's responsible

While the Minister acknowledged he had primary responsibility for wild rivers legislation, this was tempered by the admission that a number of other ministers are also undertaking their own work on the issue. The Minister acknowledged that the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines is taking the lead role in examining the wild rivers declarations in Western Queensland. Minister Powell categorically denied that he had endorsed or provided support for any amendments to wild rivers declarations, however he was forced to clarify this statement later in the hearing. The Minister has in fact provided support to amendments to the Lake Eyre basin declaration suggested by the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines.

Environmental Enforcement – devolved to the Mines Minister

The budget papers reveal the Newman Government has reduced funding to monitor coal seam gas and liquefied natural gas projects. Moreover in answer to a question taken on notice during the hearing it was revealed that there has been a substantial decrease in the capacity of the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection to enforce environmental standards for CSG and LNG projects. The Energy Assessment Unit has seen a loss of five full-time positions and the LNG Enforcement Unit has been almost completely transferred to the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines.

This reduction in capacity is most unwelcome given the significant community concern over CSG and LNG projects. As these are both growing industries it is imperative that strong regulatory frameworks are in place to ensure they develop along sound environmental principles. The reduction of positions in the Department of Environment and Heritage makes it far more difficult to enforce regulations and raises the risk of grave environmental damage resulting from CSG and LNG projects.

Mine Water may flow freely

The Opposition acknowledges many mining operators are currently seeking to discharge legacy water from a number of mines around Queensland. We recognise that water inundation increases operating costs for mining companies. However there are significant concerns that water may be released without the necessary environmental and scientific assessments.

The Government has raised the possibility that it will reduce regulation in order to ease concerns within the mining industry as a result of the massive royalty increases within the budget. This is an incredibly dangerous approach to environmental policy and deserves the utter condemnation of Queenslanders. The Government should not trade environmental regulations away in order to reduce the heat it is experiencing from another poorly thought-through grab for cash.

The Environment Minister reinforced concerns that proper processes are not being followed when he provided out-of-date information on the amount of legacy water contained within Queensland mines. Based on this information there is no way of knowing whether untreated water has been pumped into Queensland waterways.

Conclusion

The hearings showed three ministers who were anxious to avoid sustained questioning on issues of great importance to Queenslanders. The ministers showed contempt for legitimate environmental concerns and exposed the hasty and nonchalant approach to regulation, enforcement and policy development that is already a hallmark of the Newman Government. Indeed, the estimates process has once again exposed the LNP's reluctance to engage in genuine consultation and discussion with Queensland communities about how we best protect our state's precious environment.



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