



GLEN ELMES
Member for Noosa

Hansard, 5 August 2009

2009 ESTIMATES HEARING – REPLY

Mr ELMES (Noosa--LNP) (9.04 pm): Going through the estimates process for the first time was certainly an enlightening experience. The preparation and then the experience itself--of being in the red chamber and questioning a minister who was surrounded by 20 or so minders--was an education, and one that I enjoyed. I was extremely fortunate to have the assistance of James Martin and Sam Scanlon from both my office and the opposition office.

The understanding and helpfulness of the chair of Estimates Committee E, the member for Bundamba, was also deeply appreciated, as was the friendly way in which I think the entire committee went about the proceedings.

I would also like to record my thanks to the parliamentary staff who assisted the committee. They are a further example of the outstanding assistance that every member of this place receives from every single parliamentary staff member all the time.

The estimates process in theory is good. It is good for our democracy and it keeps both ministers and shadow ministers on their game.

However, it is certainly a process that could be improved upon enormously. The opportunity to ask more than 10 questions on notice and so gather additional data would improve estimates.

To have the requested information delivered two or three days prior to the hearings is essential, and it makes a joke of the process when that information is not provided in a timely manner.

The answers to my questions on notice came in five minutes before the deadline, which was certainly better than the experience of some other shadow ministers. I would also like to suggest that ministers should be required to be a bit more forthright when using their three minutes in which to answer questions.

The continual stream of briefing notes pushed under the nose of a minister who is clearly in difficulty might be a safety valve for the minister, but it is hardly conducive to an open and accountable process.

During the time allotted to me I raised a number of issues, a couple of which I would like to revisit as either the answers were inadequate or use was made of the process that made it possible to avoid giving an answer at all.

One of my concerns is the administration of the ClimateSmart Home Service. Even with my simple understanding of maths, I know that the cost to fit the target number of 26,000 households will be many millions of dollars more than what was budgeted for when the program was planned.

Examples include the cost to train electricians in the first place and the huge drop-out rate of those trained and the change in the basic structure of the home visit just three weeks after the beginning of the operation, where the amount paid to an electrician per visit changed from \$38 plus GST for half an hour to almost \$51 plus GST over 40 minutes to do the same work-- a higher cost with fewer homes visited every day.

The last time I looked at the ClimateSmart website, some 73,000 home visits had been undertaken. The cost overrun on just that part of the program will be in the order of \$2.4 million. The ClimateSmart program is a worthy one, but unfortunately there is no place in the schedule for contact to be made with participating householders to judge whether any real and lasting reduction in carbon emissions by the home will be made.

It is a further example to me that, when it comes to running any project within budget, Labor should not even be trusted with the petty cash tin.

The management of Fraser Island water quality, the treatment of dingoes and World Heritage listing will be ongoing issues, as will the decline in koala numbers both throughout the Koala Coast and the rest of South-East Queensland, including my own seat of Noosa. If the government were serious about ensuring the survival of koalas it would need to put its hands in its pocket and purchase land from private landholders so that it can be set aside to be used as part of the vital habitat that is required.

During the estimates committee hearing the headline grabber for the minister was the announcement of the Cooloola recreation area. My community and I are grateful for the extended time allowed to fully discuss the implications of this announcement. Last week I convened a meeting which was attended by councillors and staff from the regional council, environment and resident groups, businesspeople and other interested people.

I am pleased and proud of the progress made, as it shows the maturity of the Noosa community. A further meeting will be held next week, after which a considered view will be put to the minister.

If there is one thing Labor is good at, it is spin. The use of deception has been developed by this government into an art form. What the budget and estimates have clearly shown is that over the last three years capital expenditure for this department has continued to decline.

I for my part will continue to highlight this government's short-sightedness and neglect of the environment.

Debate, on motion of Mr Elmes, adjourned.
