



# 2020-21 Budget Estimates

**Report No. 2, 57<sup>th</sup> Parliament**  
**Legal Affairs and Safety Committee**  
**February 2021**

## **Legal Affairs and Safety Committee**

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### **Acknowledgements**

The committee thanks:

- the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, Minister for Women and Minister for Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence
- the Minister for Police and Corrective Services and Minister for Fire and Emergency Services.

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 2020-21 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 (2020-2021) Bill 2020 for the committee's areas of responsibility, be agreed to by the Legislative Assembly without amendment.

On behalf of the committee, I thank the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, Minister for Women and Minister for Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, and the Minister for Police and Corrective Services and Minister for Fire and Emergency Services, and their departmental officers for their co-operation 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 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.



Peter Russo MP

Chair

February 2021

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Role of the committee

The Legal Affairs and Safety 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.<sup>1</sup>

The committee's primary areas of responsibility include:

- Justice and Attorney-General
- Women and the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence
- Police and Corrective Services
- Fire and Emergency Services.

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 responsibilities in relation to the Electoral Commissioner, Information Commissioner, Queensland Ombudsman and the Queensland Family and Child Commission.

On 4 December 2020, the Appropriation (2020-2021) Bill 2020 and the estimates for the committee's areas of responsibility were referred to the committee for investigation and report.<sup>2</sup>

On 14 December 2020, the committee conducted a public hearing and took evidence about the proposed expenditure from the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, Minister for Women and Minister for Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, the Minister for Police and Corrective Services and Minister for Fire and Emergency Services, 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
- additional information given in relation to answers.

Prior to the public hearing, the committee provided the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, Minister for Women and Minister for Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence and the Minister for

<sup>1</sup> *Parliament of Queensland Act 2001*, s 88 and Standing Order 194.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

Police and Corrective Services and Minister for Fire and Emergency Services 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; and further answers and additional information provided by Ministers after 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:

- Ms Ros Bates MP, Member for Mudgeeraba
- Mr Michael Berkman MP, Member for Maiwar
- Ms Amanda Camm MP, Member for Whitsunday
- Mr Dale Last MP, Member for Burdekin
- Dr Amy MacMahon MP, Member for South Brisbane
- Mr Tim Nicholls MP, Member for Clayfield
- Ms Fiona Simpson MP, Member for Maroochydore

## 2 Recommendation

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

**Recommendation**

The Legal Affairs and Safety Committee recommends that the proposed expenditure, as detailed in the Appropriation (2020-2021) Bill 2020 for the committee's areas of responsibility, be agreed to by the Legislative Assembly without amendment.

### 3 Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, Minister for Women and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence

This section discusses issues raised during the committee’s examination of the Bill.

#### 3.1 Department of Justice and Attorney-General

The Honourable Shannon Fentiman MP, Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, Minister for Women and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, is the Minister responsible for the Department of Justice and Attorney-General (the department). The department has four service areas:

- Justice Services
- Legal and Prosecution Services
- Liquor, Gaming and Fair Trading
- Women and Violence Prevention.

In addition, the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice is responsible for the:

- Queensland Human Rights Commission (QHRC)
- Crime and Corruption Commission (CCC)
- Legal Aid Queensland (LAQ)
- Office of the Information Commissioner (OIC)
- Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC)
- Prostitution Licensing Authority
- Electoral Commission of Queensland (ECQ)
- Office of the Queensland Ombudsman (OQO)
- Public Trustee of Queensland (Public Trustee).<sup>3</sup>

The following table taken from the Appropriation (2020-2021) Bill 2020 compares the appropriations for the department for 2019-20 and 2020-21.

Appropriations	2019-20 \$'000	2020-21 \$'000
<i>Controlled Items</i>		
departmental services	554,440	624,979
equity adjustment	(30,008)	(45,458)
<i>Administered Items</i>	435,068	460,636
<b>Vote</b>	<b>959,500</b>	<b>1,040,157</b>

Source: Appropriation (2020-2021) Bill 2020, Schedule 2, p 11.

Budgeted capital expenditure for DJAG for 2020-2021 is \$31,052 million.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> 2020-2021 Queensland State Budget – Service Delivery Statements, Volume 2, pp 2-56-57.

<sup>4</sup> 2020-2021 Queensland State Budget – Service Delivery Statements, Volume 2, pp 2-69.



### 3.1.1 Budget highlights – Justice Services

The 2020-21 budget highlights in the *2020-21 Queensland Budget - Service Delivery Statements (SDS)* for Justice Services include:

- responding to justice issues arising from recommendations of the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*
- continuing to implement priority recommendations made by the Queensland Family and Child Commission regarding the blue card system, and providing ongoing support for the new online blue card application (commenced 31 August 2020)
- commencing the implementation of the Queensland Family and Child Commission's recommendations to develop a strategy and action plan to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access to blue cards, with a focus on increasing cultural capability within Blue Card Services and improving the support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander blue card applications
- implementing and monitoring the cross-agency strategy and action plan developed to address the under-registration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander births
- solidifying changes and recommendations implemented over the last three years in the coronial system, including developing a cross-agency service delivery framework, which will formalise agreements with partner agencies to outline how each agency will support and deliver coronial services to coroners and families into the future
- continuing to embed appropriate diversion and intervention programs to support defendants in the criminal justice system to address the underlying causes of offending including the continuation of the Murri Courts in 15 locations and the Queensland Drug and Alcohol Court in Brisbane
- continuing to embed Court Link in eight locations state wide – Brisbane, Cairns, Southport, Ipswich, Mount Isa, Maroochydore, Redcliffe and Caboolture
- implementing the Framework for Stronger Community Justice Groups (CJGs) alongside CJGs, communities and key government agencies
- embedding domestic and family violence related policy and legislative reforms relevant to the justice portfolio, such as the specialist domestic and family violence courts.<sup>5</sup>

### 3.1.2 Budget highlights – Legal and Prosecution Services

According to the SDS, budget highlights for the Legal and Prosecution Services in 2020-21 include:

- providing legal services to the Queensland Government in areas of law affecting the public sector
- efficiently and effectively considering matters referred for prosecution or confiscation proceedings ensuring fair, timely and transparent outcomes
- providing legal services related to the Attorney-General's role as First Law Officer as well as their statutory functions in matters arising under the *Dangerous Prisoner (Sexual Offenders) Act 2003*, *Mental Health Act 2016* and interventions under the *Human Rights Act 2019*
- continuing to support the community by addressing claims for serious child physical abuse and psychological abuse and upholding the fundamental principles of justice and Charter of Victim's Rights in relation to victims of crime and their families

<sup>5</sup> 2020-21 Queensland Budget – Service Delivery Statements, Volume 2, p 2-59.

- efficiently and effectively dealing with child protection matters referred by the Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs to ensure fair, timely and consistent outcomes for the protection of children, only taking action that is warranted in the circumstances.<sup>6</sup>

### **3.1.3 Budget highlights – Liquor, Gaming and Fair Trading**

For 2020-21 the following budget highlights were identified in the SDS for the service area of Liquor, Gaming and Fair Trading:

- continuing to deliver key initiatives of the government’s Tackling Alcohol-Fuelled Violence policy
- continuing to work with other Australian regulators to enhance consumer protection on marketplace issues and on COVID-19 related matters such as travel, holidays and accommodation where consumers have been impacted by refunds and cancellations
- continuing to modernise and implement changes to the regulatory framework for incorporated associations in Queensland, as well as for the formation, registration and management of co-operatives under the Co-operatives National Law
- progressing the government’s commitment to implement mandatory continuing professional development requirements for property agents, subject to consultation and the results of a regulatory impact statement
- continuing to provide regulatory oversight, compliance assessment and approvals to ensure the integrity of gaming for the Queen’s Wharf Brisbane development
- continuing the rollout of additional digital services to make it easier for people to access and use services and reduce processing times
- continuing to assist licensed venue operators to maintain place-based management solutions to minimise alcohol related harm
- continuing to progress outcomes of the review of the *Body Corporate and Community Management Act 1997* and establish a new community titles legislation working group to examine matters arising out of the Property Law Review
- continuing to work with the Responsible Gambling Advisory Committee and its working groups on projects to reduce gambling harm
- considering options for regulatory reform, through consultation with the hotel, club and casino sectors, which support recovery without compromising community safety.<sup>7</sup>

### **3.1.4 Budget highlights – Women and Violence Prevention**

As part of the Machinery-of-Government changes effective 12 November 2020, the portfolio areas of women and domestic and family violence prevention were transferred to the Department of Justice and Attorney-General from the former Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women.<sup>8</sup> Budget highlights for the Women and Violence Prevention service area identified in the SDS for 2020-21 include:

- continuing to provide Domestic and Family Violence services and lead efforts to prevent and respond to domestic and family violence, including engaging community and corporate stakeholders, and provide additional funding of \$6 million over four years and \$1.5 million ongoing to support vulnerable populations to prevent domestic and family violence

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<sup>6</sup> 2020-21 Queensland Budget – Service Delivery Statements, Volume 2, p 2-63.

<sup>7</sup> 2020-21 Queensland Budget – Service Delivery Statements, Volume 2, p 2-65.

<sup>8</sup> 2020-21 Queensland Budget – Service Delivery Statements, Volume 2, p 2-58.

- continuing to support domestic and family violence victims and help manage an increase in demand for domestic, family and sexual violence services arising from the COVID-19 pandemic
- continuing to support new and expanded services to prevent and respond to youth sexual violence, including community education activities and place-based trials to respond to young people who have experienced sexual violence or are engaging in early sexual offending behaviour
- continuing to support intervention services to hold perpetrators to account, help break the cycle of abusive behaviour and reduce domestic and family violence
- continuing to provide sexual assault and women's health and wellbeing services, including implementing 'Prevent, Support, Believe – Queensland's Framework to Address Sexual Violence' and addressing violence against women in all its forms
- continuing to provide re-entry services for vulnerable female prisoners at Southern Queensland Correctional Centre, and continuing programs and services that target the needs of women prisoners and offenders, including a parenting program for mothers on remand, and victim counselling and accommodation support to assist women transitioning from remand to bail
- continuing to lead the Queensland Women's Strategy to encourage government, the private sector and the wider Queensland community to take significant action to achieve gender equality in Queensland, and continuing to facilitate the Women on Boards initiative to increase the number of women on boards in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors.<sup>9</sup>

### 3.2 Queensland Human Rights Commission

On 1 July 2019, the Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland became the Queensland Human Rights Commission with functions under both the *Human Rights Act 2019* and the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991*. The QHRC is an independent statutory body created by the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991* (ADA). QHRC's purpose is to protect and promote freedom, respect, equality and dignity.<sup>10</sup>

The SDS states that in 2020-21 the QHRC will include the following areas of focus:

- supporting justice and self-determination of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples by providing a culturally appropriate Commission experience, and working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to strengthen understanding of rights and remedies
- maintaining an effective complaints process to manage the assessment and resolution of complaints under both the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991* and *Human Rights Act 2019* and reducing the current backlog of complaints
- continuing to support the implementation of the *Human Rights Act 2019* by delivering training to public entities, developing resources for vulnerable Queenslanders including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and people with disability, and intervening where appropriate in proceedings involving human rights issues to provide expert assistance to courts and tribunals
- gathering qualitative and quantitative data about the impact of the *Human Rights Act 2019* for publication in the annual report
- increasing institutional transparency by supporting pathways for people in closed facilities to understand their rights and access to QHRC services, including providing training and resources to community visitors, official visitors, independent patient rights advocates, and developing resources for prisoners, young people in detention and children in residential care

<sup>9</sup> 2020-21 Queensland Budget – Service Delivery Statements, Volume 2, p 2-67.

<sup>10</sup> 2020-21 Queensland Budget – Service Delivery Statements, Volume 2, p 2-74.

- supporting vilification law reform in Queensland.<sup>11</sup>

### 3.3 Crime and Corruption Commission

The Crime and Corruption Commission (CCC) is an independent agency established under the *Crime and Corruption Act 2001* to combat major crime and reduce corruption for the benefit of the Queensland community. The CCC's vision is for safe communities supported by fair and ethical public institutions, with an agency focus on those matters of highest threat to the Queensland community.

In terms of crime fighting and anti-corruption services, key priorities for the CCC as identified in the SDS in 2020-21 include:

- illicit markets of high value or high public impact
- crimes involving risk, actual loss of life or serious injury to a person
- crimes against children and vulnerable victims
- corruption involving elected officials, misuse of confidential information, and exploitation of public sector resources
- stakeholder engagement
- critical organisational capabilities including digital, analytics and workforce planning.<sup>12</sup>

### 3.4 Legal Aid Queensland

Legal Aid Queensland is an independent statutory authority that operates under the *Legal Aid Queensland Act 1997*. According to the SDS, Legal Aid Queensland will continue in 2020-21 to provide quality legal services to financially disadvantaged Queenslanders.<sup>13</sup>

As stated in the SDS for 2020-21, Legal Aid Queensland will focus on:

- providing community legal education and information - through its website, publications, community legal education activities, state-wide contact centre and customer service counters
- continuing to deliver legal advice and task assistance - over the phone, by video-link, or face-to-face
- providing lawyer assisted dispute resolution - for families facing separation, and for consumers and farmers
- delivering duty lawyer services - in criminal, family, domestic violence, child protection, anti-discrimination, employment and administrative law
- providing representation in courts and tribunals - including criminal law, family law, child protection, domestic violence, specialist courts, mental health and some civil law matters.<sup>14</sup>

### 3.5 Office of the Information Commissioner

The Office of the Information Commissioner (OIC) has a statutory role under the *Right to Information Act 2009* and the *Information Privacy Act 2009* to assist the achievement of more open, accountable and transparent government through independently upholding and promoting information access and privacy rights.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> 2020-21 Queensland Budget – Service Delivery Statements, Volume 2, p 2-74.

<sup>12</sup> 2020-21 Queensland Budget – Service Delivery Statements, Volume 2, p 2-77.

<sup>13</sup> 2020-21 Queensland Budget – Service Delivery Statements, Volume 2, p 2-80.

<sup>14</sup> 2020-21 Queensland Budget – Service Delivery Statements, Volume 2, p 2-80.

<sup>15</sup> 2020-21 Queensland Budget – Service Delivery Statements, Volume 2, p 2-83.

According to the SDS for 2020-21, the OIC will undertake the following:

- promoting awareness and engaging with stakeholders about the important role of the right to information (RTI) and information privacy (IP)
- implementing relevant recommendations of the CCC report *Operation Impala: Report on misuse of confidential information in the Queensland public sector*, including supporting agency privacy champions
- engagement with agency leaders to facilitate key changes to culture and practices for openness, transparency, privacy and information security safeguards, including privacy by design and proactive release, and enabling agencies to self-assess and improve performance monitoring of key aspects of RTI and IP
- work with agency experts to ensure information management practices keep pace with a rapidly evolving technology environment including electronic service delivery and artificial intelligence
- reporting to Parliament on audits about administrative release, compliance and current privacy topics of interest
- independent, timely and fair processes for finalising external review applications and privacy complaints.<sup>16</sup>

### 3.6 Queensland Family and Child Commission

The Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) was established as a statutory body on 1 July 2014 under the *Family and Child Commission Act 2014*.

The 2020-21 SDS identifies a number of key focus areas for the QFCC:

- presenting evidence about the performance of the child protection system through systems evaluations, examining trends in data and by reviewing areas of interest within the child protection and family support system
- monitoring the implementation of previous recommendations from systems reviews of the child protection system
- using evidence to inform and influence improvements for young Queenslanders and their families through policy and advocacy
- developing strong partnerships between government, non-government service providers and academic experts aimed to improve the delivery of child protection services in Queensland
- hosting the independent Child Death Review Board.<sup>17</sup>

### 3.7 Prostitution Licensing Authority

The Prostitution Licensing Authority (PLA) is a licensing and regulatory agency established by the *Prostitution Act 1999*.

The SDS states that in 2020-21 key priorities for the PLA include:

- providing support to the licensed sector of the sex industry in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, including by its fee relief initiative and by assessing and enforcing the compliance of brothels with the *COVID Safe Industry Plan: Queensland Sex Industry*
- maintaining a high standard of industry regulation by rigorously vetting applicants for brothel licences and approved managers' certificates to ensure that only suitable persons may influence

<sup>16</sup> 2020-21 Queensland Budget – Service Delivery Statements, Volume 2, p 2-83.

<sup>17</sup> 2020-21 Queensland Budget – Service Delivery Statements, Volume 2, p 2-86.

the operations of brothels, including brothel licence applications from individuals to open new brothels, so that brothel numbers may increase during the year

- conducting audits and inspections of brothels and reinforcing with licensees and approved managers the importance of regulatory compliance.<sup>18</sup>

### 3.8 Electoral Commission of Queensland

The Electoral Commission Queensland (ECQ), an independent statutory authority established under the *Electoral Act 1992*, delivers state and local government elections and ensures compliance with electoral funding and disclosure requirements. The ECQ also undertakes periodic redistributions of Queensland's electoral districts through the Queensland Redistribution Commission, and assesses proposals referred by the Minister for State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning for changes to local government boundaries through the Local Government Change Commission.<sup>19</sup>

The following table from the Appropriation (2020-2021) Bill 2020 compares the appropriations for the ECQ for 2019-20 and 2020-21.

Appropriations	2019-20 \$'000	2020-21 \$'000
<i>Controlled Items</i>		
departmental services	70,231	92,812
equity adjustment	1,809	(37)
<i>Administered Items</i>		
<b>Vote</b>	<b>72,040</b>	<b>92,775</b>

Source: Appropriation (2020-2021) Bill 2020, Schedule 2, p 15.

The SDS for 2020-21 identifies a number of key focus areas including:

- efficiently and effectively delivering the 2020 state general election
- completing public reports on the ECQ's delivery of the 2020 local government elections and the 2020 state general election, including evaluations of the ECQ's delivery of the elections
- deploying the new Election Management System to support delivery of the 2020 state general election and transition of the system into the ECQ's core business functions
- implementing legislative amendments passed by the Queensland Parliament in the *Electoral and Other Legislation (Accountability, Integrity and Other Matters) Amendment Act 2020*.<sup>20</sup>

### 3.9 Office of the Ombudsman

The purpose of the Office of the Queensland Ombudsman (OQO) is to independently investigate complaints, review systemic problems and work with agencies to improve their administrative practices and decisions.<sup>21</sup>

The following table from the Appropriation (2020-2021) Bill 2020 compares the appropriations for the OQO for 2019-20 and 2020-21.

<sup>18</sup> 2020-21 Queensland Budget – Service Delivery Statements, Volume 2, p 2-89.

<sup>19</sup> 2020-21 Queensland Budget – Service Delivery Statements, Volume 2, p 2-93.

<sup>20</sup> 2020-21 Queensland Budget – Service Delivery Statements, Volume 2, p 2-94.

<sup>21</sup> 2020-21 Queensland Budget – Service Delivery Statements, Volume 2, p 2-102.

<b>Appropriations</b>	<b>2019-20 \$'000</b>	<b>2020-21 \$'000</b>
<i>Controlled Items</i>		
departmental services	8,935	8,574
equity adjustment		
<i>Administered Items</i>		
<b>Vote</b>	<b>8,935</b>	<b>8,574</b>

Source: Appropriation (2020-2021) Bill 2020, Schedule 2, p 16.

Key priorities for the OQO, as identified by the SDS for 2020-21, include:

- continuing to provide timely, effective assessment and investigation of complaints, making recommendations to agencies to improve administrative practices and to rectify unjust decisions and to improve the knowledge and skills of public sector agency officers in decision-making, and recommending improvements to practice
- enhancing engagement with agencies and the wider community to increase awareness about the OQO's investigative role and ensure equitable access to its services
- monitoring, reviewing, and reporting on agencies' management of complaints and Public Interest Disclosures
- continuing to implement responses to the COVID-19 situation that ensure continuity of services in a way that is safe for the community and employees
- continuing to ensure the requirements of the *Human Rights Act 2019* are incorporated into all aspects of the OQO's operations.<sup>22</sup>

### 3.10 The Public Trustee

The Public Trustee provides responsible, transparent, and ethical financial, estate and trust administration and other essential fiduciary services, enduring power of attorney and will making services to Queenslanders.<sup>23</sup>

The SDS for 2020-21 identifies key focus areas for the Public Trustee including:

- trialling a new video-conference will service initiative in certain regional government offices to enhance access to will-making services by regional Queenslanders
- introducing an online booking engine for will appointments to enable customers to book will appointments via the PT website at a specific PT office at a date and time of their choosing
- implementing the structured decision-making framework in line with the commencement of the *Guardianship and Administration and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2019*
- delivering the Financial Independence Program (FIP) to assist financial administration customers to grow their financial independence
- re-designing financial statements and budget templates for greater accessibility
- developing online videos as an alternative channel for information delivery.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> 2020-21 Queensland Budget – Service Delivery Statements, Volume 2, p 2-103.

<sup>23</sup> 2020-21 Queensland Budget – Service Delivery Statements, Volume 2, p 2-110.

<sup>24</sup> 2020-21 Queensland Budget – Service Delivery Statements, Volume 2, p 2-110.

### 3.11 Key issues raised at the public hearing

Issues raised by the committee in relation to DJAG, QHRC, CCC, LAQ, OIC, QFCC, ECQ, OQO and the Public Trustee included:

- ministerial and senior executive use of private email for government business
- lobbyists with access to ministerial or departmental office facilities
- current investigations of the CCC
- government expenditure in relation to the former Public Trustee
- budget allocations to the ECQ to ensure adherence to electoral law, including the content of election materials and advertising
- funding for community legal centres
- initiatives of the OIC to protect the personal information of domestic and family violence victims
- legal services provided by LAQ to financially disadvantaged people and to First Nation Queenslanders
- the work of the QHRC to protect and promote human rights
- costs associated with the delivery of the Konnech electoral management system
- budget allocations and resources available to QCAT
- budget allocation for the provision of engagement and education facilities for the QFCC and the Queensland Ombudsman
- budget allocations to the CCC
- DJAG's consultation with domestic violence advocates in relation to the issue of non-lethal strangulation
- resources required of the Queensland Law Reform Commission to complete their report into voluntary assisted dying
- statistics relating to liquor licence application processing times
- DJAG communication and consultation strategies concerning the issue of coercive control in the context of domestic and family violence
- measures to provide specialist domestic violence training and trauma informed training within the Queensland court system
- budget allocations to support housing and emergency accommodation and children and young people in the context of domestic and family violence
- implementation of the 'no card no start' measures to support the blue card system
- DJAG's measures to minimise the impact of COVID-19 in Queensland courts and tribunals
- recording and transcription services in courts and tribunals, and expenditure on court information systems
- assistance to craft brewers and artisan distillers, and to Queensland liquor licensees, to mitigate the economic effects of COVID-19
- the number of deaths reported for investigation by the coroner and measures to address a backlog in cases
- DJAG's law reform agenda, including modernisation of the *Property Law Act 1974*, and reform to building management statements



- DJAG's delivery of perpetrator intervention services across Queensland
- provision of specialist domestic violence and family violence courts, and domestic violence services for women
- investigation into the feasibility of using personal emergency devices or tracking devices for high risk offenders in the context of domestic and family violence
- disputes relating to COVID-19 rental protections for residential tenancies referred to QCAT
- government measures to improve and promote gender equity
- achievements of, and future directions for, the Queensland Womens Strategy
- capital budget allocations to upgrade courthouses across Queensland
- addressing the under-registration of First Nations Australians at birth
- safety standards of Christmas toys.

## 4 Minister for Police and Corrective Services

This section discusses issues raised during the committee’s examination of the Bill.

### 4.1 Queensland Police Service

The Honourable Mark Ryan MP, Minister for Police and Minister for Corrective Services, is the Minister responsible for the Queensland Police Service and the Public Safety Business Agency.

The following table taken from the Appropriation (2020-2021) Bill 2020 compares the appropriations for the Queensland Police Service for 2019-20 and 2020-21.

<b>Appropriations</b>	<b>2019-20 \$'000</b>	<b>2020-21 \$'000</b>
<i>Controlled Items</i>		
departmental services	2,094,143	2,191,123
equity adjustment	8,541	34,188
<i>Administered Items</i>	739	725
<b>Vote</b>	<b>2,103,423</b>	<b>2,226,036</b>

Source: Appropriation (2020-2021) Bill 2020, Schedule 2, p 18.

The following table outlines a comparison of the budgets for 2019-20 and 2020-21 for the Public Safety Business Agency.

<b>Appropriations</b>	<b>2019-20 \$'000</b>	<b>2020-21 \$'000</b>
<i>Controlled Items</i>		
departmental services	281,231	200,371
equity adjustment	33,951	(7,073)
<i>Administered Items</i>		
<b>Vote</b>	<b>315,182</b>	<b>193,298</b>

Source: Appropriation (2020-2021) Bill 2020, Schedule 2, p 16.

#### 4.1.1 Budget highlights – Queensland Police Service

The role of the Queensland Police Service (QPS) is to work with the community and stakeholders to prevent, disrupt, respond and investigate crime. The QPS will deliver police services in 2020-21, ‘to keep Queensland safe by working with the community and our partners to prevent, disrupt, respond and investigate crime and eliminate road trauma’.<sup>25</sup>

According to the SDS, the 2020-21 QPS capital program of \$146.8 million supports quality frontline services throughout Queensland, including police facilities, motor vehicles, vessels and information and communication technology.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> 2020-21 Queensland Budget – Service Delivery Statements, Volume 1, p 1-171.

<sup>26</sup> 2020-21 Queensland Budget – Service Delivery Statements, Volume 1, p 1-175.

The SDS states that 2020-21 budget highlights for the QPS include:

- supporting the public health response to the declared disaster situation and public health emergency for COVID-19, to protect the community from the spread of COVID-19 and ensure the safety of all Queenslanders
- developing pioneering research and innovative prevention strategies to divert people from serious and organised crime, including outlaw motorcycle gangs, to reduce crime and victims of crime
- delivering effective enforcement of safe speeds and driver behaviour to reduce road trauma, including increased enforcement of 'point to point average speed' on sections across major Queensland road networks and greater use of combined red-light speed camera technology at at-risk intersections
- continuing the Service Alignment Program to implement the QPS Strategic Review recommendations and to realise the Commissioner's vision by transforming service delivery to meet the challenges and leverage the opportunities presented by the current environment
- continuing to implement the recommendations from the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* and the Queensland Family and Child Commission, including establishing an online sexual assault reporting form, developing and implementing the QPS child death review processes, and implementation of new offences relating to prevention and reporting of child sexual offences
- continuing the highly successful Project Booyah program, a QPS led collaborative and transformative early intervention program for disconnected and/or at-risk young people, and Youth Co-Responder Teams
- continuing to support the implementation of the *Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy 2016-2026* and the Government response to the report from the Special Taskforce on domestic and family violence in Queensland.

#### 4.1.2 Budget highlights – Public Safety Business Agency

As outlined in the SDS, the Public Safety Business Agency (PSBA) provides corporate and support services for frontline partner agencies and 'is committed to its vision to be a leader in corporate services, innovation and delivery'.<sup>27</sup> In September 2020, the Queensland Government announced the disestablishment of the PSBA, which will see the transition of existing functions and staff into core public safety agencies. It is expected that this process will be completed by 30 June 2021.<sup>28</sup>

The SDS identified key priorities for the PSBA in 2020-21 including to:

- identify ways to more efficiently deliver services to public safety agencies
- deliver the capital program to provide essential equipment to enable frontline public safety services, including new, replacement or upgraded facilities, vehicles and vessels
- improve resource investment outcomes for public safety agencies through enhanced strategic asset management
- continue the transformation of ICT service delivery models to implement contemporary approaches for multi-agency service provision

<sup>27</sup> 2020-21 Queensland Budget – Service Delivery Statements, Volume 1, p 1-181.

<sup>28</sup> 2020-21 Queensland Budget – Service Delivery Statements, Volume 1, p 1-181.

- implement a long-term public safety strategic communications strategy to provide a connected and integrated statewide communications solution to deliver enhanced operational capabilities for Queensland's public safety agencies
- strengthen public safety agency cyber-security and resilience through the secure development, support and maintenance of the agency and its partners' ICT services, applications and infrastructure.<sup>29</sup>

## 4.2 Queensland Corrective Services

The Honourable Mark Ryan MP has ministerial responsibility for Queensland Corrective Services (QCS).

QCS provides modern, sustainable and evidence-based corrective services to maximise rehabilitation and reduce recidivism.<sup>30</sup>

The following table taken from the Appropriation (2020-2021) Bill 2020 compares the appropriations for the service for 2019-20 and 2020-21.

<b>Appropriations</b>	<b>2019-20 \$'000</b>	<b>2020-21 \$'000</b>
<i>Controlled Items</i>		
departmental services	973,036	1,025,723
equity adjustment	(9,507)	57,472
<i>Administered Items</i>	0	0
<b>Vote</b>	<b>963,529</b>	<b>1,083,195</b>

Source: Appropriation (2020-2021) Bill 2020, Schedule 2, p 17.

QCS has budgeted \$195 million for 2020-21 for capital purchases.<sup>31</sup>

Key priorities for QCS as identified in the SDS for 2020-21, are to:

- continue to safely manage the demands of a growing prison population and work collaboratively with other criminal justice agencies to implement innovative responses to manage the increasing demand on the criminal justice system
- continue to successfully engage staff and stakeholders to deliver quality services aimed at reducing recidivism
- enhance QCS' organisational structure and anti-corruption framework as informed by the implementation of recommendations from the CCC's Taskforce Flaxton
- continue to implement the recommendations of the Queensland Parole System Review<sup>32</sup>
- continue the transition of Queensland's remaining privately-run prison, Southern Queensland Correctional Centre, to public operation to improve safety and enable a consistent approach across Queensland
- continue to harness new technology to drive efficiency in systems and operations
- continue the capital program including work on the development of Stage 2 of the Southern Queensland Correctional Precinct, finalisation of the expansion of Capricornia Correctional

<sup>29</sup> 2020-21 Queensland Budget – Service Delivery Statements, Volume 1, p 1-182.

<sup>30</sup> 2020-21 Queensland Budget – Service Delivery Statements, Volume 1, p 1-147.

<sup>31</sup> 2020-21 Queensland Budget – Service Delivery Statements, Volume 1, p 1-152.

<sup>32</sup> See Queensland Parole System Review - Final Report November 2016, Walter Sofronoff QC.

Centre and upgrading and maintaining infrastructure across correctional centres and community corrections offices.<sup>33</sup>

### 4.3 Key issues raised at the public hearing

Issues raised by the committee in relation to the QPS, the PSBA and QCS included:

- training capacities for police recruits at Queensland’s two police academies
- resources required as part of the response to COVID-19, including roadblock services at state borders, airports and quarantine facilities
- provision of cleaning services at quarantine facilities in accordance with Queensland Health advice
- strategies to balance the time police officers spend undertaking proactive duties with reactive duties
- forecast planning for police stations, police beats, and deployment of mobile police beats
- statistics in relation to resources required to respond to domestic violence incidents
- measures to address mental health issues experienced by police officers
- recruitment and attrition rates of police officers
- operational deployment of unmanned aerial vehicles, or drones, in the Sunshine Coast region
- resources to enhance monitoring and surveillance by police to identify child sex offenders
- police responses at public protests where people have employed dangerous attachment devices
- the number of surveillance device warrants issued as part of organised crime prevention strategies
- statistics concerning serious assaults on correctional officers by prisoners and prisoner-to-prisoner assaults, and strategies to enhance officer and prisoner safety
- increasing prisoner populations in existing Queensland prisons and measures to address capacity constraints
- absconds from low-security facilities
- costs of remedial works at Arthur Gorrie Correctional Centre
- expenses to maintain television and entertainment units in prison facilities
- implementation of recommendations from the CCC’s Taskforce Flaxton report
- implementation of recommendations from the Sofronoff Queensland Parole System Review
- progress on the construction of Stage 2 of the Southern Queensland Correctional Precinct
- strategies to address and manage the risk of COVID-19 in Queensland correctional facilities
- the transition of prisons from privately operated to public operation
- emerging technologies to assist in the delivery of corrective services
- support for the Project Booyah youth justice system.

<sup>33</sup> 2020-21 Queensland Budget – Service Delivery Statements, Volume 1, p 1-148.

## 5 Minister for Fire and Emergency Services

The Honourable Mark Ryan MP is the Minister for Fire and Emergency Services. The Minister's portfolio comprises Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) and the Office of the Inspector-General Emergency Management (IGEM).

### 5.1 Queensland Fire and Emergency Services

QFES is the primary provider of fire and rescue and emergency management programs and services throughout Queensland. QFES encompasses the Fire and Rescue Service, disaster management services, the Rural Fire Service (RFS) and the State Emergency Service (SES). Through service agreements, QFES also supports other volunteer groups that provide emergency responses.<sup>34</sup>

The following table taken from the Appropriation (2020-2021) Bill 2020 compares the appropriations for QFES for 2019-20 and 2020-21.

<b>Appropriations</b>	<b>2019-20 \$'000</b>	<b>2020-21 \$'000</b>
<i>Controlled Items</i>		
departmental services	106,546	124,070
equity adjustment	(10,441)	(6,515)
<i>Administered Items</i>		
<b>Vote</b>	<b>96,105</b>	<b>117,555</b>

Source: Appropriation (2020-2021) Bill 2020, Schedule 2, p 18.

The QFES has a capital program for 2020-21 of over \$72 million.<sup>35</sup>

Key priorities for the service, as identified in the SDS for 2020-21 include:

- reducing bushfire risk and improving community safety awareness and knowledge in relation to bushfire safety and prevention, and increasing the skills and experience of RFS volunteers
- continuing to focus on natural and socio-natural hazards and risks, improving community understanding of their risks and consequences including risk-based planning requirements and preparation activities
- continuing engagement to support the implementation of the changes to smoke alarm requirements
- continuing to work in collaboration with local governments to operate an effective State Emergency Service
- continuing to enhance volunteer operational capability by ensuring alignment with community needs and the development of sustainable policies and programs
- continuing to promote community safety messaging, including having a fire escape plan; *If It's Flooded, Forget It*; and bushfire safety.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> 2020-21 Queensland Budget – Service Delivery Statements, Volume 1, p 1-157.

<sup>35</sup> 2020-21 Queensland Budget – Service Delivery Statements, Volume 1, p 1-160.

<sup>36</sup> 2020-21 Queensland Budget – Service Delivery Statements, Volume 1, p 1-158.

## 5.2 Office of the Inspector-General Emergency Management

The IGEM provides independent assurance and advice to enhance Queensland's emergency management arrangements.<sup>37</sup>

The following table outlines a comparison of the budgets for 2019-20 and 2020-21 for the IGEM.

<b>Appropriations</b>	<b>2019-20 \$'000</b>	<b>2020-21 \$'000</b>
<i>Controlled Items</i>		
departmental services	4,260	4,126
equity adjustment		
<i>Administered Items</i>		
<b>Vote</b>	<b>4,260</b>	<b>4,126</b>

Source: Appropriation (2020-2021) Bill 2020, Schedule 2, p 16.

As stated in the SDS for 2020-21, the IGEM will focus on:

- reviewing and assessing the effectiveness of emergency management plans and arrangements in Queensland
- partnering with key stakeholders to build future disaster management capability through research
- monitoring and evaluating the progress of IGEM review recommendations
- developing collaborative partnerships to support community safety and continuous improvement in Queensland's disaster management arrangements.

## 5.3 Key issues raised at the public hearing

The issues raised by the committee during the examination of the budget estimates for the QFES, RFS and IGEM included:

- the contract arrangements for the large air tanker (LAT) Bomber 141 and crew located in Queensland during the 2020 bushfire season
- QFES and RFS assistance to Queensland Parks and Wildlife to control the K'gari Fraser Island fire
- budget allocations to marine rescue services and upgrades to the marine rescue fleet
- QFES review of Queensland's volunteer marine search and rescue organisations
- statistics in relation to the QFES firefighter and volunteer firefighter workforce
- mitigation activities to reduce bushfire risks as part of Operation Cool Burn
- QFES response to recent disaster and emergency events
- improvements to disaster management communications
- support for the IGEM disaster management plan assessment process.

<sup>37</sup> 2020-21 Queensland Budget – Service Delivery Statements, Volume 1, p 1-165.

## **6 Statements of Reservation**



## STATEMENT OF RESERVATION

As Queenslanders deal with the impacts of COVID-19, the 2020/21 Budget was the time for the Palaszczuk Government to respond.

Instead, the third-term Labor Government claimed businesses were back on their feet and all jobs lost because of COVID-19 had been regained – claims woefully out of touch with reality.

More than 200,000 Queenslanders who are currently out of work were relying on the Labor Government to get this Budget right. Instead, it is simply pages of broken promises and dreams.

All Labor has delivered Queensland in this budget is \$28 billion in new debt, which might be palatable if the debt created jobs and wealth for the State, but instead the budget has revealed Labor borrowed the \$28 billion simply to keep the lights on. The inadequate infrastructure spend is billions less than southern states and it is projected to be delivered years into the never never.

In its third term, all the Labor Government can manage in terms of an economic plan is a four-page glossy brochure per region and an unemployment rate 13 percent higher than Victoria, and nearly 25 percent higher than New South Wales.

### *Committee operation*

As is prudent, the Opposition agrees with passing the budget. However, there are some reservations that should be noted.

As mentioned above, this budget outlines unemployment figures into the forwards confirming Queensland will have the worst unemployment figures in the country. Despite this, the government has not communicated any plans to fast-track projects to stimulate the economy and create jobs for Queenslanders.

The Government had a responsibility to be completely transparent about debt levels when it decided to hold off the budget until after the election. Labor outlined \$4 billion worth of debt before the election, only to reveal after the election that the actual increase in debt would be seven times that amount (at \$28 billion). While the Opposition understands the need to borrow funds to build the roads, dams and other job creating projects; we are extremely concerned about the revelations in the budget which show the massive increase in debt has yielded only a tiny increase in the State's net worth. This is in stark contrast to results in other states who have used increased borrowings to fund large infrastructure building programs.

Finally, the structure of the whole budget process is fundamentally broken. With a vastly truncated estimates process, the Government had a responsibility to ensure it was completely transparent. Given the circumstances, it was more important than ever that a full and frank examination of each Minister and their portfolios occurred.

The LNP proposes a complete re-imagining of the Estimates process, starting with the appointment of non-Government Chairs during estimates – an initiative that we will implement in Government.

## JUSTICE AND ATTORNEY GENERAL, WOMEN AND PREVENTION OF DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

The hearings of this Committee highlighted significant shortcomings in the government's approach to financial management and a cavalier disregard for sound principles of expenditure.

The Chair of the Crime and Corruption Commission, Alan MacSporran QC, again highlighted the danger in close relationships existing between the government and lobbyists:

"I think it is fair to say that the entire area, as we have said publicly many times, in respect of lobbying and relationships between government and the private sector, constitutes in one form or another a corruption risk."

Mr MacSporran further explained his concerns:

"The difficulty of course is that, irrespective of whether there is anything actually corrupt happening, of greater concern really across the public sector is the perception of the arrangements, and that is why there needs to be some very transparent safeguards put in place that people can be confident are being followed so that there is no opportunity unduly to be availed to engage in corrupt conduct."

In the course of examination, Mr MacSporran replied in the affirmative that it is "unsafe or unwise and a corruption risk to continue to use private email accounts for official business".

A series of decisions were revealed in the hearings which indicate a greater degree of intellectual rigour should be applied to financial decisions by the government to ensure the responsible expenditure of public funds.

In relation to the long-standing difficulties within the Public Trustee the Director General, Mr Mackie, revealed that the Public Trustee, Mr Carne, continued to be paid while suspended from duty for much of 2019-20. The investigatory process only concluded when Mr Carne chose to resign before any determinations had been made.

At the same time, the government was unable to allay concerns that certain bottlenecks within the portfolio would be resolved in the current year.

The Attorney General indicated that changes to the minimum age of criminal responsibility led by the Council of Attorneys General working group was not one of the key priorities for the next 12 months.

Despite a significant workload within the Coroner's Court, no budget is to be provided this year for an additional coroner.

The Property Law Act review, commenced in 2013, remains unresolved. Despite being regarded by the government as a priority, no further commitments to its completion have been made beyond an uncertain commitment to introduce appropriate legislation in the term ending in 2024.

After promising during the election campaign that the issue of voluntary assisted dying would be debated in February 2021, it was announced in December 2020 that a draft bill would be presented in May this year with legislation to be introduced by June.

To meet this deadline, it was revealed that the Law Reform Commission would require additional legal and health advice while the Chair of the Commission, Justice Applegarth would work full-time on the referral. To accommodate these circumstances an acting Supreme Court Judge has been appointed (Government Gazette, 18 December 2020). The total cost of these new arrangements is in the vicinity of half a million dollars.

## POLICE AND CORRECTIVE SERVICES, FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

### *Police*

The LNP members of the committee have concerns about the Palaszczuk Labor Government's ability, based on its track record, to deliver upon its main election commitment to increase the number of police personnel by 2025 over the next five years.

Given this ambitious commitment, the LNP spent considerable time during the hearing trying to get a better understanding of how the Queensland Police Service intends to deliver this commitment. Given the importance of community safety, the LNP will hold the Palaszczuk Labor Government to account on this promise throughout the parliamentary term.

Another area of concern for LNP committee members was around the amount of time and resources that had been re-directed from proactive policing duties to COVID-19 operations. Of particular concern was the reduction in proactive traffic policing, which appears to have led to increases in the road toll from preventable causes such as speeding and drink/drug driving.

The admission by the Police Commissioner that resources had been diverted from the organised crime group, specifically Taskforce Maxima, to staff border posts and other quarantine activities is of great concern. Given the issues around gang related crime on the Gold Coast, and throughout the state generally, this admission should concern all Queenslanders.

Of most concern, however, was the admission by the Police Commissioner that, as a result of the QPS strategic review, there would be closures of certain policing services like police beats. The Commissioner was not able to provide any guarantees on the future of certain specific local policing locations.

The LNP committee members firmly oppose any moves by the Palaszczuk Labor Government to reduce local policing services like police beats.

### *Corrective Services*

The provision of adequate funding for the corrections system has been a vexed question across government for many years.

However, in the current financial year Commissioner Martin has indicated that:

“There is no government that would say it gets as much resources as it would want, but the reality is that we are a very lean organisation doing really good work with the resources we get and the investments that have been made recently by government.”

At the same time, the Minister indicated that, as at 14 December 2020, four centres out of the twelve have more prisoners than beds. While acknowledging that the Commission may be doing all it can with the resources it has been given, there is clearly a shortfall in the level of accommodation required.

It is also interesting to note that, since 2015, there has been a 29 percent increase in the number of prisoners in custody, putting further pressure on available accommodation.

The issue of overcrowding was raised by the Commissioner in the Estimates hearings conducted into the 2019-20 Budget and was a feature of the Statement of Reservations prepared at that time to the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee Report.

#### *Fire and Emergency Services*

Consideration of the Fraser Island fires constituted a major part of the examination of the Fire and Emergency Services Estimates.

The Commissioner revealed that the large aircraft tanker (LAT) contracted from Canada to help fight the fire on Fraser Island was grounded between 24 November 2020 and 28 November 2020. During this period, while the crew were completing a mandatory CASA five-day break, there were no adequately trained local crew available to fly the LAT nor was it decided to bring additional crew from Canada (who would have to comply with the appropriate quarantining requirements).

The Commissioner indicated that he believed the network of contracted National Aerial Firefighting Centre aircraft could adequately cover this period.

In light of the difficulties that arose in late 2020, a review of this approach should be made to ensure that the most effective form of firefighting equipment is available at all times. Further consideration should be given as to whether lease arrangements, as the government proposes, are the most effective way of meeting this challenge.

The Commissioner confirmed that Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) did not take full operational control of the Fraser Island fire until 27 November 2020 – over six weeks after the fire was first reported. This position was justified on the basis that QFES did not have ownership or management rights over the land in question. Evidence from the Department of Environment and Science had indicated QFES and National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS) working together from the outset to combat the fire.

It is to be hoped that the inquiry established to review this matter proposes new arrangements to ensure adequate provision of firefighting equipment and the

establishment of arrangements to ensure a co-ordinated approach to future fires where other government agencies beyond QFES might be involved.

Again, the issue of the management of bushfire hazards was canvassed. *Operation Cool Burn* accomplished just under 80 percent of the planned activities, leaving about 20 percent unfulfilled. This means that, for whatever reasons, a significant amount of work remained uncompleted.

The risks inherent in this are obvious and there is a clear need for all agencies of government to prepare a realistic vegetation management strategy to ensure proper community safety.

The issue of marine rescue remains unresolved.

There appears to be significant uncertainty surrounding the integration of Volunteer Marine Rescue and Coastguard services.

A clearer message needs to be given to all involved as to how it is intended that the process of reforming marine rescue will develop and what arrangements will exist for bodies that chose not to join any integrated service.

### Conclusion

Queensland needs a new approach to get the economy going and Queenslanders back to work.

The LNP calls for infrastructure spending to be brought forward and rolled out now to help those 200,000 Queenslanders re-enter the workforce.

The LNP will unleash economic growth by:

- Encouraging those with entrepreneurial spirit to invest their own money in job creating ventures.
- Valuing the Public Service by empowering them to make decisions which drop barriers to growth.
- Unshackling the mining industry and tourism industries through leading best practice environmental protections which both preserve our natural environment and utilise it to create jobs.
- Placing significant investment in agriculture research and development with output increased through world's best practice education, training, and support for our producers.
- Building the water infrastructure Queensland needs.

The LNP's approach will return Queensland to the rightful position as the nation's economic powerhouse and create a better Queensland for us, our children, and generations to come.



Laura Gerber MP  
Deputy Chair



Andrew Powell MP

## STATEMENT OF RESERVATION

Whilst supporting Report No. 2, 57th Parliament - 2020-21 Budget Estimates, I would like to again draw attention to the need to review the processes of Estimates Hearings and Committees.

Around the world improvements to committee processes have been sought and implemented. These include further limiting of time for Ministerial statements and Government question time allocation, hosting non-government Chairs, simultaneous hearings, and regular independent reviews of the process. During this Estimates I was advised that a review had occurred in 2010, which given that Planning Schemes are developed every 10 years, vital processes such as those that scrutinize Government including spending, should also be reviewed each decade if not earlier.

As written to the Premier, the CLA, and in last year's Statement of Reservation, there have been several suggestions for improvements from current and previous MPs. This includes cost and time saving changes such as all questions, including from visiting Members granted leave to attend, be taken on notice. Hearings can then be dedicated to follow up questions to these. Resources as a result are targeted, versus Departments preparing for questions never asked, as well lessening the volume of follow up correspondence seeking clarification.

There needs to be a focus on consistent rulings and allocating adequate time for all in attendance for at least two questions per session. Crossbenchers currently must negotiate with the opposition for an allocation which can vary, and should more than one crossbencher attend a hearing as a visitor, this could then be limited to one, or none.

Queenslanders are increasingly disillusioned by processes that are not in line with their expectations, and that no longer are 'fit for purpose'. An independent review of all Committee processes including the Business Committee is beneficial to the process and to the people of Queensland and should be a priority in this term.

That the current system is inadequate is not a reflection of this report, nor Departmental staff, Ministers and all involved in preparing, compiling and attendance at the hearings. The job undertaken given the extraordinary short space of time allocated between Budget and Estimates weeks just before Christmas is testimony to the commitment and dedication of so many, and I thank and congratulate all who worked under this duress. Any reform that better utilises valuable resources, and can deliver better outcomes, I am sure would be welcomed by all.

Queensland has travelled a journey through the COVID pandemic which has been difficult, and expensive. With the costs being worn by all Queenslanders now and into the future, efforts to streamline our systems are needed as part of the recovery. Processes are an instrumental component, and decisions regarding the performance of these should be removed from the political realm, to one that is objective and independent.

In closing, thank you to our Chair, fellow Committee Members, secretariat, and to Committees who gave leave for my attendance. The work you do is difficult, and deeply appreciated. May this year's Budget and Estimates process see the beginnings of improvements sought by Queenslanders and their Members of Parliament.



Sandy Bolton MP  
Member for Noosa

10 February 2021

