



REPORT OF ESTIMATES COMMITTEE E

1. INTRODUCTION

The sessional orders adopted by the Legislative Assembly on 30 May 2001 established seven estimates committees to consider proposed expenditure under the Appropriation Bill 2001 and the Appropriation (Parliament) Bill 2001. Each committee was given the responsibility for scrutinising the estimates for particular ministerial portfolios.

The Legislative Assembly appointed Estimates Committee E to examine and report on the proposed expenditure for the organisational units within the portfolios of the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines and the Minister for Health and Minister Assisting the Premier on Women's Policy.

The committee conducted a public hearing on Tuesday, 17th July 2001 to take evidence from the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines and Minister for Health and their respective officers. The transcript of the public hearing can be accessed at the Queensland Parliament's Hansard web-page at www.parliament.qld.gov.au.

For the purposes of examining the proposed expenditure for the organisational units allocated to it, the committee considered information obtained at the public hearing in conjunction with:

- Budget Papers and Ministerial Portfolio Statements (MPS) tabled by the Treasurer;
- written responses to questions on notice submitted to the Ministers by the committee prior to the public hearing; and
- written responses provided by the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines to questions taken on notice at the public hearing.

Accompanying this report is a volume of "Additional Information" presented by the committee to the Legislative Assembly. The additional information includes the minutes of the committee's meetings and answers to questions on notice asked before and during the public hearing.

2. DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND MINES

2.1 Introduction

The Department of Natural Resources and Mines was created by the merging of parts of the former Department of Mines and Energy and the bulk of the former Department of Natural Resources. Its role is to provide information and policy and a legislative framework to support the planning and management and overall stewardship of the state's land, water and natural vegetation resources and to facilitate the development of the State's mineral resources.

The total appropriation for the Department of Natural Resources and Mines is \$329.9 million.

The MPS provides the following output summary.

Output	Total Cost \$'000
Integrated Natural Resources	\$73,642
Integrated Natural Resources Management and Use –sub outputs:	
• Water Management and Use	\$153,122
• Land Management and Use	\$70,286
• Vegetation Management and Use	\$27,612
Mining Safety and Health	\$23,689
Mineral and Petroleum Exploration and Development	\$35,980
Dispute Resolution	\$3,120

2.2 Key Initiatives

Key initiatives proposed by Department Natural Resources and Mines for the 2001-02 year include:

- \$1.9 million for the National Action Plan on Salinity and Water Quality;
- \$0.7 million for a management strategy for the Government owned East Trinity property
- \$3.5 million to continue the Water Reform Implementation initiative

- \$1.5 million to administer native title aspects of mining tenures processing under State legislation and land use agreements.

2.3 Public Hearing

During the public hearing held on 17 July 2001 the Minister for the Department of Natural Resources and Mines responded to queries from the committee in relation to a wide range of matters, including:

- **SunWater**
 - water pricing policy and in particular the rural water pricing reform and measures to support irrigators during the reform process;
 - funding for maintenance of recreational facilities at the State's dams;
 - membership of the board;
 - strategies SunWater has in place to improve the operational efficiency of its water supply schemes and reduce the operating cost;
 - SunWater's major contracts;
- tradeable water allocations;
- the Rural Water Use Efficiency Initiative;
- commercial arrangements for the installation of micro hydro-electric power generation plants on the irrigation channel at Tinaroo;
- ongoing adequacy of water supplies;
- the water monitoring network;
- the proposed water cap for the Queensland section of the Murray-Darling Basin;
- sustainability issues in the Great Artesian Basin;
- funding for bore rehabilitation in the Great Artesian Basin;
- diversification on leasehold land;
- adverse assessment of water reform;
- water management plans (WAMPS);
- the Foreign Ownership of Land Register'
- regulation of body corporate managers;
- improvement of facilities on the stock route network in particular the Goondiwindi stock route bypass;
- management of wild dogs and the wild dog barrier fence;
- long-term climate forecasting;

- the vegetation management planning process;
- caps on land clearing;
- assessment of tree-clearing permits;
- the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality;
- the Strategic Weed Eradication and Education Program;
- management of weeds and pest animals in Queensland;
- water services for indigenous communities;
- the fishway program;
- the coal royalty regime;
- change to the royalty regime;
- the statewide indigenous land use agreement;
- the future of the coal export industry in Queensland;
- employment in Queensland's mining industry;
- funding of mining exploration permits and processing new permit applications;
- the new Land and Resources Tribunal;
- the future of the coal seam gas industry;
- investment in exploration;
- cross-border trade in illegal fireworks;
- new exploration applications;
- applications for low-impact exploration;
- mining safety and the Mines Rescue Service;
- public safety associated with the use of gas and explosives;
- review of the proposed explosives regulation;
- mining health and safety;
- extended hours of work in the mining industry.

3. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

3.1 Introduction

Queensland Health provides for health services by way of 188 public hospitals and outpatient centres, more than 277 primary and community health care facilities and 21 residential aged care facilities across the State. The appropriation for the Department of Health is \$2.403 billion.

The MPS provides the following output summary:

Output	Total Cost \$'000
Treatment and Management –Acute Inpatient Services	\$2,022,597
Treatment and Management –Non-Inpatient Services	\$960,942
Integrated Mental Health Services	\$385,036
Health Maintenance Services	\$484,409
Public Health Services	\$206,433

3.2 Key Initiatives

Key initiatives for the 2001-02 financial year include:

- an additional \$10 million to rebuild and redevelop State Government nursing homes to ensure compliance with Commonwealth Accreditation Standards for the aged care sector;
- an additional \$10 million to reduce elective surgery waiting lists;
- an increase of \$13 million over three years in equity funding and \$8.5 million in output funding for advanced hospital medical equipment
- an additional \$2.6 million in 2001-02 in equity funding matched by \$2 million from internal funding toward the upgrade of staff accommodation in regional and rural Queensland;
- a further \$5 million in State funding to reduce waiting lists for public oral health services in areas of high demand across the state;
- an additional \$1 million for Medical Aids Subsidy Scheme;
- an extra \$1.5 million to increase the number of Expanded Child Health Centres to assist families with young children;

3.3 Public Hearing

During the public hearing held on 17 July 2001 the Minister for Health responded to queries from the committee in relation to a wide range of matters. The matters raised at the hearing include:

- alcohol and drug treatment services;

- youth beds available for drug rehabilitation;
- the needle availability program;
- hepatitis C;
- tertiary level services;
- waiting times for cochlear implants;
- the Statewide Paediatric Rehabilitation Service at the Royal Children's Hospital;
- magnetic resonance imaging units at the Prince Charles Hospital;
- funding for child health centres;
- services to be provided from the redeveloped Logan Community Health Centre;
- reported needle-stick injuries;
- health services in indigenous communities;
- the indigenous women's cervical screening strategy;
- staff travel costs;
- staffing levels;
- funding for a fully-equipped aircraft for the Royal Flying Doctor Service;
- the cinema advertising campaign to stop young people from taking up smoking;
- positive parenting programs;
- the new Mater Children's Hospital;
- spending in advanced medical equipment;
- acute in-patient episodes of care and same-day episodes of care;
- redevelopment of the Nambour Hospital;
- nurse retention rates;
- Commonwealth funding;
- Funding for commissioning of critical care services at the Caboolture Hospital;
- the 100% In Control Rock and Croc Eisteddfods;
- the budget allocation for the Fraser Coast district health service;
- strategy for prevention of injuries to young children;
- service delivery in palliative care;
- residential care projects;
- funding to address extensive waiting lists for dental services;

- specialist services in Maryborough and Hervey Bay;
- the Mental Health Strategy;
- survey of oral health service clients;
- oral health services for school students;
- extra funding for Caloundra hospital;
- cancer research;
- Eat Well Queensland – the Queensland public health food and nutrition strategy;
- youth suicide prevention strategies;
- a central elective surgery booking bureau;
- specialist outpatient clinic waiting lists;
- delivery of services at Gold Coast hospitals;
- shifting of the flying surgeon from Longreach to Mount Isa;
- implementation of Queensland Health’s fourth enterprise bargaining agreement;
- funding for elective surgery;
- redevelopment of the Gold Coast, Innisfail, and Royal Brisbane Hospitals;
- independent review of the emergency department at the Nambour Hospital;
- the Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy;
- accident and emergency services at the Robina Hospital;
- ophthalmology service at the Gold Coast Hospital;
- dental services in Maroochydore;
- the Goodna community health facility;
- medical Aids Subsidy Scheme;
- new tobacco laws;
- under-age smoking and passive smoking.

4. RECOMMENDATION

The committee recommends that the proposed expenditures, as stated in the *Appropriation Bill 2001* for the organisational units within the portfolios referred to Estimates Committee E for examination, be agreed to by the Legislative Assembly without amendment.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The committee thanks ministers and their staff for their cooperation and assistance during the estimates process.

Jim Pearce MP
Chairman

31 July 2001

MEMBERSHIP

Mr Jim Pearce MP (Chair)

Miss Fiona Simpson MP (Deputy Chair)

Ms Bonny Barry MP

Dr John Kingston MP

Mrs Dianne Reilly MP

Mr Jeff Seeney MP

Mrs Christine Smith MP

SECRETARIAT

Ms Anita Sweet (Research Director)

Ms Narelle Robinson (Executive Assistant)

STATEMENTS OF RESERVATION - OPPOSITION MEMBERS

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND MINES

Acknowledging it is the Government's responsibility to apportion expenditure to programs within each portfolio, the National Party Opposition nevertheless holds a great number of reservations with aspects of the 2001/2002 budget for the Department of Natural Resources and Mines.

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

SunWater

Under the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreement, water users are to pay for the cost of operating, maintaining and refurbishing their irrigation schemes. The agreement makes provision for the payment of a Community Service Obligation (CSO) payment, where it is deemed necessary, on a transparent basis.

The Estimates Committee heard that the Beattie Labor Government will reduce the rural water subsidy portion of its Community Service Obligation (CSO) payments to SunWater from \$13.25 million in 2000/2001 to \$9.1 million in 2001/2002 and eventually to a paltry \$1.5 million per annum. Given the hardships that irrigators and general water users have already endured, it is unacceptable that the community should be required to pay additional costs for their water allocations, as a result of the Government's decision to provide five to seven year price paths. In addition to this, the cost being charged by the State Government for water use is above the lower bound cost recommended by the Council of Australian Government's (COAG) Agreement. This has caused great dissatisfaction amongst irrigators in areas such

as the Burdekin, the Mareeba Dimbulah Irrigation area and Emerald who are now refusing to pay a part of their water bills. Although this is a commercial entity, it is providing a community service and the Minister should expose the Government's policy with regards to SunWater and how much extra water users throughout the state will pay 'according to the true cost of providing that scarce natural resource' as the Minister stated. Instead the Minister hid behind the excuse of commercial in confidence arrangements that SunWater has with Treasury.

The Opposition also registers its strong objection to the failure of the Minister and his Department to ensure there is a representative of the irrigation industry on the SunWater Board. Consideration of this appointment would offer a means of improving communication and the organisations' responsiveness to the industry, which uses an estimated 80% of the total water used in Queensland.

Micro-hydroelectric power (Tinaroo Falls and Barron River)

A lack of understanding on the Minister's behalf of the broader issues in natural resources was emphasised in his inability to acknowledge that the installation of micro hydro-electric power generation plants on the irrigation channel at Tinaroo and the Barron River had recently run into some difficulties. This joint Stanwell Corporation and SunWater project will provide a source of green power and the Opposition acknowledges the benefits of this commercial arrangement. However, the Minister was yet again unable to clarify the Opposition's reservations with the price water paths and whether the income received by SunWater from the Hydro-power scheme would cross-subsidise irrigation prices.

NCP Payments and Water Reform Targets

The Opposition holds strong reservations whether the \$86.4 million received in National Competition Policy payments by the Queensland Government in 2000/2001 has been forwarded to the Department to assist with the implementation of the water reform process, including to fund socio-economic studies and provide compensation for irrigators. The Minister and his Department have a moral obligation to spend this money towards the water reform process. Given the Minister struggled to provide sufficient examples of how this money is spent, the Opposition can not provide its support over the allocation of this funding.

Integrated Natural Resources Planning Budget

The Output Statement for the Integrated Natural Resource Planning output reveals that spending has been cut in actual terms this year by more than \$12.4 million or on last year's budget by nearly \$1.4 million. The note to the output statement put this down to the Federal Government's reduced Natural Heritage Trust Funding for this financial year. However, spending by the Beattie Government will be decreased by \$41.4 million this budget and given the backlog which has developed in completing water resource plans across Queensland, this is an unacceptable level of funding to match the work that is still required to be completed. Further, the Minister had the gall to suggest that the process will take time as a result of consulting local communities. Given, an irrigator is not present on the SunWater Board this certainly does not match the Minister's statement in the Estimates hearings.

WAMP Science

On 4th July the Land Court directed that the Department of Natural Resources issue amalgamated water-harvesting licences to the

Anchorage Farming Company. The Department had previously refused to on the basis that the decision involved the consideration of the draft Condamine Balonne Water Allocation Management Plan (WAMP) and on the basis that technical studies by the Department has found that the available water resources were over-committed. As a result considerable flaws have been exposed in the technical studies which were undertaken. This has considerable implications for the commencement of the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin water diversion cap as well as other plans throughout the state. The Opposition has strong reservations with regard to the accuracy of the scientific studies, which have been proved questionable, following this recent example. As part of his responsibilities, the Minister should make the community aware of what these implications mean and if the Government is serious about managing the state's river systems in a responsible way, it should contribute a greater allocation of funding.

DEPARTMENT OF MINES

Review of Coal Royalty Regime

When questioned on the Treasurer's proposal to review the Coal Royalty Regime this year, without increasing the actual royalty rate, the Minister refused to answer, not wanting to prejudice any future discussions with the Mining Industry. Given that the Beattie Government has promised not to increase taxes in this year's budget, it seems the Coal sector, which contributes to 40% of Queensland's export's will be singled out for rises and further that the community has been deceived. Although the royalty rate of 7% will remain unaltered, the reported change due to apply from October 1 this year will see the Government 'fine tune' the regime by moving the point at which it is levied from the mine gate price to the gross value-aboard-ships in port. This proposed refinement could take another \$80 million from the bottom line of the mining sector. This is on top of the \$531 million in coal royalties that the

Queensland Mining Council (QMC) estimates the Government will receive this financial year as a result of expected price rises, the low Australian dollar and increased export volumes. The Opposition is disappointed with the Government's deception of the mining community and this will place pressure on the Industry's ability to compete with the flood of low-priced coal coming on to the market.

State Indigenous Land Use Agreement

The Government's plan to produce a State-wide Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA) has failed to date and as a result there has been no movement on a backlog of 1700 mining tenures held up through the native title process. The ILUA is required under a protocol between the Queensland Indigenous Working Group (QIWG) and the State Government before any tenure application received prior to September 2000 can be processed. This protocol has prevented any real progress and continues to place a freeze on the granting of exploration permits, administrative red tape that the Premier has so far failed to respond to in an appropriate manner. Negotiations for smaller regional Land Use agreements such as one currently with the Kalkadoon people is a more viable option that the Beattie Government should take into consideration if it is to succeed in granting additional exploration permits to the benefit of the future of the mining industry.

Mining Investment

On June 30, the Premier was reported to have called on mining companies to 'get off their backsides and seek business opportunities in Latin America' while announcing a \$650,000 Latin American Mining Strategy with Mexican Mining Executives. Given the depressed state of Queensland's mineral exploration industry which has seen the recent closure of Normandy Mining's Townsville operations, surely the

Beattie Government could use the funding for programs beneficial to the Queensland Mining Industry, such as to the Black Coal Cooperative Research Centre (CRC). Further, this could also be better spent to alleviate the state's native title backlog, which is also affecting jobs within areas of the sector. This is another example of the Beattie Government's failure to provide sufficient funding to an industry which is crucial to Queensland's exports and retaining the skilled people in these jobs.

Conclusion

The Budget Papers for 2001/2002 for the Department of Natural Resources and Mines reflect a lack of sufficient funding that is not being provided by the Beattie Labor Government. A decreasing Community Service Obligation Payment by SunWater, doubt as to whether the Government has forwarded on National Competition Policy payments and the deceptive process by which the Government will increase the Coal Royalty rate serve as pertinent examples. Accordingly, the Opposition can not support a budget that does not provide the required expenditure for two portfolio areas, which are critical to a large number of Queensland's communities. Further the department responded in the Estimates hearings with an unwillingness to provide accurate and up to date information.

Jeff Seeney MLA Shadow Minister for Natural Resources and Mines

Member for Callide
27 July 2001

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Introduction

Either the Health Minister does not know what is happening in her department or she chooses to hide the information from the public who have a right to an open and accountable system.

Under the rules of parliament, a Minister cannot be forced to answer questions and this has been abused by Health Minister Edmond in the Estimates process. It should be noted that as the published Health Department budget documents lack a range of appropriate performance indicators and there is a scarcity of financial reports for individual units which in their own right deliver significant services (ie Alcohol and Drugs, Oral Health, individual Health Districts), it becomes more important for the Minister to provide answers to questions during the Hearings and if she does not know, to seek departmental advice.

\$567 Million Debt

The National Party Opposition notes with concern the significant increase in department debt and a shortfall in capital injections previously promised from Treasury in last year's budget. This blowout in debt servicing is being paid out of funds which should instead be available for patient care. Debt in Queensland Health has increased by \$137 million in the last couple of years under this Health Minister to an estimated \$567 million.

Lack of Staff

More staff for Queensland's Hospitals is not a priority of this budget with one of the lowest increases in estimated staff numbers in the last 10 years.

The estimated 0.3 per cent increase – or 120 extra full-time equivalent (FTE) staff across the whole state – amounts to only a net increase of 32 FTE staff across the acute sector in some 188 public hospitals.

The National Party Opposition questions the funding priorities of the Labor Government which is not recognising that many public health services need more staff and that this shortfall will affect patient care.

In regard to retention rates of nursing staff, while the Health Minister claimed an overall improvement, I am disappointed the Health Minister could not provide specifics and there was no information about the retention rates in the various health districts. This has budget implications for districts forced to use more agency staff and it has impacts upon patient care where staffing levels and services are inadequate.

Equity Return

The National-Party Opposition questions the efficient administration of the health budget when more money will be paid back to Treasury in equity return and debt servicing than is going towards addressing the backlog for surgery or dental treatment.

The Health Minister talks about the \$10 million increase in equity return as being "cost neutral". The Minister may even believe her own statement but the net result is that eight per cent or \$188 million of what State Treasury "gives" to Queensland Health goes back to State Treasury in equity return and is not available for patient care.

Thus when the State Government talks about the size of increases in State budgets, the wary analyst will also check the size in increase in Treasury imposed expenses upon departmental

budgets to establish the real net increase in State spending.

Commonwealth versus State Funding

The National-Party Opposition notes with concern that the State’s contribution for Queensland Health increased in real terms by 4.8 per cent which does not match the Commonwealth’s increase of 8.3%.

The State Labor Government once again is falling off the pace needed to keep the public health system operating at quality levels throughout Queensland.

The \$4.06 Billion budget for 2001/2002 consists of \$2.344,817 Billion of state funds and \$1.529,456 Billion from the Commonwealth. The State’s relative contribution is falling compared to the Commonwealth, which has substantially increased its contribution in the last few years.

It should be noted that in real terms, the State’s contribution is less than stated by the Government due to the increase in costs imposed by Treasury through bigger debt servicing and the equity return which is a tax on all sizeable health department assets.

Out of the extra \$127 million State contribution for Health this year, 15 per cent goes back to Treasury and not towards patients care. (The Commonwealth increased health funds to Queensland by \$117 million).

There has been an \$18.97 million increase in costs to the Queensland Health budget imposed by Queensland Treasury through increases in debt and a larger equity return commitment.

Treasury’s double dipping into the Health Department budget is to the detriment of funds available for patient care.

	2000/01 BUDGET	2000/01 ACTUAL	2001/02 ESTIMATE
State Revenue	\$2,217,693,000	\$2,294,471,000	\$2,344,817,000
Expenses – Borrowings	\$34,692,000	\$36,718,000	\$42,679,000
Expenses – Equity Return	\$177,004,000	\$188,637,000	\$187,924,000
Total Expenses (Combined Equity Return & Expenses Borrowing)	\$211,696,000	\$224,637,000	\$230,603,000
Percentage Of State Revenue To Health Returned To Treasury	9.5%	9.7%	9.8%

Intensive Care Units

After having extensively raised concerns at last year’s Estimates Hearings about refused admissions of critically ill patients to intensive care and about the funding of intensive care units, particularly at the tertiary level, the National Party Opposition is pleased to see some extra allocations. Some of the hospitals identified are those which have experienced cutbacks in staffing and funds in the last few years. However, we will continue to monitor this issue as well as Queensland Health’s practice of “vacancy management” and how the funds are actually spent.

Alcohol and drugs

Given the extent of this social problem and the Government's statements about how much it is spending in net terms, the public has a right to see where and how those funds are being spent.

However, the Health Minister has masked this area of government activity (or lack of activity) with secrecy and has failed to answer questions on notice and questions without notice during the Estimates Hearing this year and last year.

Furthermore, since the closure of dedicated detoxification facilities in the State's hospitals under this Labor Government with alcohol and drug patients put into general wards, there is a lack of accountability in how funding is allocated. Complaints are continuing about people being unable to access State-run detoxification services.

The Health Minister did not answer how many full-time equivalent staff were employed in Alcohol and Drug work in State Health. She said that most work was done in non-government organisations.

However, when she was asked how much money her department provided those non-government organisations last year, she also failed to provide an answer.

The National Party Opposition views with concern the lack of detail of how and where State funds are being spent and the lack of performance indicators for outcomes in this area.

Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme

In answer to a question on notice about expected funding available for the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme, the Health Minister said this was up to Districts to cover and it would be about the same as last year.

The National Party Opposition is concerned that this item was not flagged for increased funding given the increase in fuel, accommodation and general travel costs in the last year. The principle of equity of access to quality health services and the need to improve health outcomes for rural and regional Queenslanders, given their higher death and injury rate, requires the Health Department to provide greater assistance.

Mental Health

According to the Budget papers, there has been a fall in the number of mental health patients treated in the community (68,000 for 1999/2000 and 67,000 for 2000/2001) while there has been a small increase in the number treated in hospital (22,000 for 1999/2000 and 22,036 for 2000/01).

Given previous concerns about the difficulty for mental health patients in accessing acute care, I am not critical of patients being able to gain admission to acute facilities when they need it. That is a fundamental right.

However, the point is that the amount of community based treatment has fallen by 1000 episodes while acute care has risen and this is contrary to the Mental Health Strategy. This raises concerns that the roll out of community based services still is lacking in meeting the needs of the community to try and lessen acute occasions of care for the mentally ill.

The Opposition further notes that the Mental Health capital works program was significantly delayed with about half of the capital works program for Mental Health services not spent last year

Question over Acute Inpatient Services Activity

Measures	1999/2000 Estimated Actual	2000/01 Target Estimate	2000/2001 Estimated Actual
Acute Inpatient episodes of care	685,000	690,000 - 710,000	670,000
Same day episodes of care	313,000	310,000 – 323,000	302,940
Occupied bed days	2,107,000	2,150,000 – 2,250,000	2,056,904

The Health Minister's explanation was that in just 12 months there had been a shift towards better outpatient and community-based care in the State public health system and school nurses were part of the reason.

However, the Opposition instead questions the veracity of the Health Minister's claim as well as her assertion that there had been no evidence of a benefit to the public health system from Commonwealth subsidies for private health insurance.

Significantly, the estimated actuals for these areas of acute care were not only well below last year's actuals but also below the targets set in last year's budget.

Health of Indigenous Women

The Opposition notes that Queensland Health currently employs two indigenous women health workers in the women's health area and two more will be employed for 2001/2002. While welcoming any improvement in numbers of indigenous workers, the Opposition questions the size of this increase given the need.

Hidden Waiting Lists

The hidden waiting lists to get on to the official surgical waiting lists still continues with patients unable to access specialist outpatient appointments in a timely way.

The Opposition cited one example of a patient waiting nearly two years for an eye appointment at Nambour Hospital, and the fact that this person does not appear on a surgical waiting list until they had had their specialist outpatient appointment (they now have to wait about another year for surgery).

The Health Minister did not answer the question at the Estimates Hearing as to when this problem would be solved. The Health Minister also did not give a commitment when asked as to whether this information about wait-times for specialist's appointments would be published.

Needle Stick Injury and Hepatitis C

As mentioned earlier, the National Party Opposition is critical of the lack of meaningful performance indicators in the output statements for Queensland Health.

Currently there is a measure for the number of new HIV cases but no published measure for Hepatitis C which has a far greater potential impact upon Queenslanders' health and future health costs.

The Opposition believes it is imperative that there is a Queensland register established of Hepatitis C infection rates which also provides background data of how and where the disease is contracted to enable a better targeting of health resources.

Similarly, the Opposition is critical of the Government's lack of recognition that data on needle stick injury and of subsequent infection is neither well collated nor publicly available and deserves Government action. Even needle stick injuries which don't result in infection still have serious health implications given the mental distress they cause and this has not been acknowledged by the government.

The Opposition continues to call on the State Government to introduce retractable needles into the State's hospitals and needle availability programs for the safety and well being of workers and the public.

Fiona Simpson MP

Deputy Chair Estimates E Committee

Member for Maroochydore