



Speech by

Andrew Cripps

MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

Hansard Thursday, 28 August 2008

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL

Mr CRIPPS (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (4.12 pm): I rise to make a contribution to debate on the report of Estimates Committee G. I want to discuss a matter within the Natural Resources and Water portfolio. Specifically, I want to canvass the issue of the Indigenous Rangers Program established following the passage of the Cape York Peninsula Heritage Bill in October 2007, which was discussed by the committee during its proceedings.

The Indigenous Rangers Program was designed to provide opportunities for Indigenous people to take an active role in the management of declared wild river areas across Queensland. However, what I have found is that the Indigenous Rangers Program has been implemented in certain areas of Queensland with a wild river declaration and not others. Hinchinbrook Island in my electorate of Hinchinbrook was declared a wild rivers area under the Wild Rivers Act 2005. As such, the Indigenous people in that area near Hinchinbrook Island should be entitled to participate in the Indigenous Rangers Program established to provide opportunities for Indigenous people to take an active role in the management of Queensland's declared wild rivers areas.

The Giringun Aboriginal Corporation in my electorate of Hinchinbrook has expressed concern that the Indigenous people in the Hinchinbrook region have not yet been given an opportunity to participate in the Indigenous Rangers Program while it has been implemented in wild river declared areas in the Gulf of Carpentaria and on Cape York Peninsula, and I have no quarrel with Indigenous Queenslanders in the gulf and on the cape participating in that program, as they have also had wild river areas declared in their country. So they are entitled to be involved in that program.

I made representations to the Minister for Natural Resources and Water in respect of this issue, only to be told that the Hinchinbrook Island wild river declaration will not be considered to participate in this program until at least a review of the program that is apparently going to occur next year. What is the difference between the wild river declared areas in the gulf and on the cape and the declaration under the same act that applies to the Hinchinbrook Island declaration? The Indigenous Rangers Program is an important program, and it is equally important that all wild rivers declared areas in Queensland are included in the rollout of this initiative. I am not satisfied that Indigenous Queenslanders in the Hinchinbrook electorate are being given an equal opportunity to participate in the Indigenous wild rivers program and that the Hinchinbrook Island wild river declared area is being treated differently from other wild river declared areas throughout Queensland.

This attitude from the state government effectively creates two classes of wild river declarations in Queensland without a basis for doing so. The Wild Rivers Act does not provide for different classes of wild river declarations. The state government and the Department of Natural Resources and Water are effectively treating Hinchinbrook Island as a second-class wild river declared area by not delivering the Indigenous Rangers Program at the same time that it is rolled out for other wild rivers areas. Hinchinbrook Island was declared a wild river area by the state government under the same legislation as other declared wild river areas on Cape York and in the Gulf of Carpentaria. It follows that the values the state government seeks to protect are the same on Hinchinbrook Island as those in other wild river systems.

It is totally inconsistent for the state government not to deliver the Indigenous wild rivers rangers program on Hinchinbrook Island at the same time that it is delivered in other wild rivers areas. The Giringun Aboriginal Corporation and Indigenous people in the Hinchinbrook electorate deserve an explanation as to why Hinchinbrook Island is not getting a fair go as far as the Indigenous wild rivers program is concerned. The answers I have received from the minister for natural resources have been dismissive of a legitimate point of concern and have not provided any credible explanation as to why Gulf of Carpentaria and Cape York Peninsula areas are entitled to participate in the program at this time and Hinchinbrook Island must wait for some vague point in time in the future for this program to arrive.