

## **ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE**

### *Consideration of Tabled Paper*

Resumed from 27 June on the following motion moved by Hon Kate Doust (Parliamentary Secretary) -

That pursuant to standing order 49(1)(c), the Legislative Council take note of tabled paper 2699A-H (2007-08 budget papers), laid upon the table of the house on 10 May 2007.

**HON GIZ WATSON (North Metropolitan)** [11.19 am]: I rise to make some comments on the budget. On behalf of the Greens (WA), I wanted to acknowledge our assessment of the budget for the forthcoming year. We can identify that there are some pluses and minuses, as is always the case with budgets. It should be acknowledged that this budget does provide investment in infrastructure, particularly hospitals, and the government should be congratulated for pursuing the rail network. These long-term projects should be funded, especially when we are experiencing an economic boom that is unprecedented in the state's history. We should also invest in other long-term infrastructure such as water supply, although we have made some comments about the heavy investment in desalination as a response to our drying climate. As much as we can see some of the logic for desalination plants, we are at pains to point out that there are other ways of tackling the water issue in the state through demand reduction and other efficiencies. The government should be applauded for setting aside additional funding for housing, but there is still an enormous amount of unmet need in this area. I will talk about that in a minute.

We do see minuses in this budget, including the lack of attention to social infrastructure and a woeful contribution to environmental issues. I particularly refer to the government's response to greenhouse gas emissions. My colleague has already spoken at some length on this matter so I will not pursue that. If we were to give an overview of where this budget has failed to meet our expectations - not just those of the Greens, but a considerable portion of the community - on the one hand, the Premier has stated clearly that the most serious crisis that we face as a state is a result of the impact of climate change, but, on the other hand, the response in actual real dollars to address greenhouse gas emissions amounts to a mere \$100 million over five years out of a budget that is worth billions of dollars. In our view, that is a totally inadequate response.

It is a complicated business to make some overarching response to a budget for an entire state. How does this budget provide for those who have the least opportunity to have their voice heard in decisions and who are most affected by issues of poverty and disadvantage? I wanted to alert members to the response to the budget provided by the Western Australian Council of Social Service by way of a media statement on 10 May 2007. The media response from the executive director, Lisa Baker, states -

The Treasurer has released the state budget on *Decisions for the Future*, but hasn't resourced the community to give everyone a fair go at enjoying it.

"At the same time that the Government is handing out \$1.2 billion in tax cuts and embarking on a massive infrastructure investment on the back of the boom, people being left behind from the boom are suffering from homelessness, ill health, isolation and a lack of support services," says WACOSS Executive Director Lisa Baker.

The treasurer has made a start at addressing the current crisis issues of housing and child protection, but we need to see the long term plan - which is vital to achieve real improvement.

Community agencies are turning away over a third of clients, unable to meet the demand for help -

That is shocking in a state such as ours where the majority of us are so affluent -

and the budget fails to turn around this crisis, at best only partly plugging the leaking hole in community wellbeing.

The strength of this budget is the large capital investment in economic infrastructure, -

Which I have already acknowledged -

and to a lesser extent health and education infrastructure, but it fails on investment in social infrastructure and human services, particularly service delivery constraints such as workforces in the health, education and community industries.

The investment in education infrastructure will not lead to improved outcomes unless we invest more resources for teaching staff and student services.

The budget allocation for the reformed child protection system does not consider the resources required for promoting children and family welfare to prevent child abuse from occurring in the first place, or the role that the Department for Communities should play. The Department for Communities has an

operating budget for 2007/08 of only \$30mil while the Department for Child Protection has an operating budget of \$230mil for the same period.

I appreciate, having had some involvement over the years in this issue -

**Hon Sue Ellery:** What are you reading from?

**Hon GIZ WATSON:** This is a media statement from the Western Australian Council of Social Service in response to the budget, dated 10 May.

I appreciate the dilemmas and the political difficulties in achieving the balance between dealing with the crisis end of community matters and adequately funding the infrastructure and social capital, and the measures required to prevent the crisis from occurring. That is the dilemma of determining how much is to be budgeted on community services and how much on the crisis end, such as child protection or domestic violence response. I am not suggesting that it is an easy equation to get right, and I guess the government has responded to community and political pressure by allocating a large slice of the budget to child protection. I am just flagging that I hope that the balance has not gone too far the other way. The media statement continues -

The previously released housing budget announcements may arrest the past decade of decline of social housing stock but will not go anywhere near reaching the 6% of total stock target, or house the 15,000 people on waiting lists.

“Meanwhile the Treasurer has tried to have his cake and eat it too on inflation rates. His Government policy on indexation for the non-government sector has used a CPI rate of 2.5% in determining the rate it will pay for government contracted service providers. This is a huge drop on the 4.8% CPI rate it has used as a reference point for capping the increase on household fees and charges. The community will be calling the Treasurer to honour his commitment for adjustment payments so that they are not short-changed,” concludes Ms Baker.

I will add briefly to the comments in the media statement about housing. I have said in this place on numerous occasions that if we cannot provide even the most simple affordable housing to everybody in Western Australia who needs it, we are significantly failing the community. I realise that any government, regardless of which party was in power, would struggle with the speed of the economic boom, which is having a huge impact on housing availability, including not just reasonably priced rental accommodation, but also any rental accommodation at all in Perth. If we cannot ensure that people have safe, secure and affordable roofs over their heads, all the other factors of disadvantage are multiplied, such as children being unable to attend school, ill health and mental illness. If people do not have secure places to live, the consequences are enormous throughout the community. Although the budget contained some welcome improvements in the area of housing, those improvements are nowhere near good enough and will serve only to play catch-up with the situation that has developed in housing.

I return to the Greens' disappointment about the amount of money allocated in the budget to environmental issues. In a debate that we had in this place this week about Whiteman Park, I was reminded that the policy settings of governments of both Labor and Liberal shades require environmental management and conservation to be virtually self-funded. The state - and, by implication, taxpayers - subsidises industry to a very large extent by providing infrastructure. We allow an enormous multinational company - Alcoa - to continue to clear-fell our jarrah forests in a totally unsustainable fashion despite the fact it is required to rehabilitate the land it strip mines. The success rate of rehabilitating those areas back to anything approximating the biodiversity of the pre-existing jarrah forest is only 50 per cent. Alcoa wins prizes for its environmental achievements, which indicates how difficult it is to rehabilitate any ecosystem after strip mining. The state congratulates itself for a booming economy and for producing bauxite at record levels. However, those things come at a cost to the environment and at an ongoing cost to our jarrah forests, which are already under pressure from land management clearing practices and climate change. We continue to wear the systematic degradation of that forest so that bauxite can be mined. I have not mentioned the ongoing health impacts on members of the Yarloop and Wagerup communities, which have also been debated in this place many times.

**Hon Barry House:** Would you rather that those former timber reserves be overrun by weeds and feral animals, because that is what is happening?

**Hon GIZ WATSON:** No, Hon Barry House, I would rather see them properly rehabilitated. Strip mining, clear-felling and knocking everything down and replanting is not good for any forest.

**Hon Barry House:** It produces a lot of wealth and jobs.

**Hon GIZ WATSON:** That is excellent. We can do that. That is the choice, but it comes at a cost to the environment.

**Hon Barry House:** What about looking after what we already have, because we do not do that?

**Hon GIZ WATSON:** I will move onto that. That is because they are required to be self-funded. When we debated the Whiteman Park disallowance motion - I again thank the Liberal Party for its support - the government proposed that a portion of the park that is reserved for the public as parks and recreation land be sold for housing. The government said that some of the money gained from selling off part of the park would be used to continue to manage Whiteman Park. We do not expect to flog off parts of other assets. The Sunset Hospital site is another example that comes to mind. The government has stated that that little gem, which comprises nine hectares in the middle of the city, has great heritage and conservation value. However, it has suggested that if we want to maintain that area, and if we want its heritage and conservation value to be useful to the community, we need to sell some of it off. Why do we not do that in other areas? It seems to me that heritage and conservation are the two areas in which the asset is expected to pay for itself. When looking at the budget papers for the portfolio of environment and conservation, I was particularly disturbed by the trends of management. For example, the conservation reserve and national parks are subject to increasing visitor pressure, increasing pressure for more infrastructure and increasing threats from invasive species. The policy setting is that the conservation reserve is expected to pay for itself by being a natural attraction that tourists will enjoy. The tourism involvement somehow pays into the management of the parks and reserves. We will always have real tension there. As the pressure goes on to those areas to have more roads and more access for visitors, the asset that is attracting people will be degraded. It is a very fine balance. It creates the same conflict we experienced when the former Department of Conservation and Land Management was responsible for producing timber from forested areas and responsible for maintaining the biological values of those areas. It is the same issue in our national parks.

I have been involved in debating how we fund, manage and maintain our conservation reserves without degrading them. They are our jewels in maintaining biodiversity in Western Australia. I have looked at the experience in the United States, and the model there is very much the same; visitor access, infrastructure and recreational facilities are provided within the conservation estate. There is also tension because the operators of the tourism ventures and the tourists want more and more access. Because the money received is used to fund the management of the parks, it is very hard not to degrade the original asset. Yellowstone National Park is a case in point if members are interested in looking at where we might go and where we are heading in this state in requiring national parks and nature reserves to produce their own funds from visitation. One of the things that the government needs to consider is that, although we have some revenue from our own tax base that funds the management of parks and reserves, tourists, particularly tourists from overseas, are not directly providing funds for management of the assets that they are using. I argue that in nature-based tourism there should be some sort of a levy on people who are not Western Australians - that is, who are from the eastern states or overseas - that goes into the particular region to fund, for example, the management of Ningaloo or Cape Range National Park or parks in the Kimberley. The levy will specifically be for that purpose because that is why people are there. We make a big push to market Western Australia as a tourism destination because we have such magnificent natural assets. In looking at this in any real, economic way, we do not take enough money from tourists. They put money into local industry, but that money does not necessarily support the assets they have come to look at. There is a very strong case for doing so because other countries do it. Other countries have small percentage levies that go into managing parks and reserves, for example. People visit the Kimberley to look at the assets. That is shown from the visitor surveys; it is what is attracting people there. The management of the environment is quite often done by itself but, at the same time, the income flow is not sufficient to keep up with the management of the visitors who are producing the money and causing the impact. Therefore, it becomes a vicious circle.

I got slightly distracted. I was not going to talk about that issue; I was going to talk about another key issue in the budget. The test of any strategy of the state, and the test of any budget, reflects on how that budget will assist those who are most disadvantaged. It is very topical at this point to talk about how well this budget is providing for Aboriginal people in Western Australia. Particularly topical is the fact that in May, at about the time the budget was brought down, we acknowledged that it had been 40 years since the 1967 referendum that gave Aboriginal Australians equality before the law, which until then they had not had.

**Hon Kate Doust** interjected.

**Hon GIZ WATSON:** It was 27 May. Of course, on 26 May it was Sorry Day and it was also acknowledged that it had been 10 years since the "Bringing them home" report was tabled in the federal arena. I had the opportunity of reading a couple of speeches that were given in Canberra in the Great Hall of Parliament House in acknowledgement of that anniversary. I will quote from one of those speeches; that is, the speech given by Professor Lowitja O'Donoghue on the tenth anniversary of the "Bringing them home" report. These sorts of reflections are critical, especially in light of the recent actions taken by the federal government allegedly to deal with the situation in Aboriginal communities in remote regions. In her speech Professor O'Donoghue said -

When I reflected about coming to this gathering today, and the ten years that have passed since the Bringing Them Home Report was tabled, I experienced a range of conflicting feelings.

The first was the feeling of weariness at how many times in my life I have stood up to speak about rights and justice for Aboriginal people. I decided that, at my age, it's probably not a good idea to even try to begin counting!

And of course, what accompanies this feeling is a profound sadness about how little has actually been achieved in terms of the wellbeing of Aboriginal people in this country.

On the other hand, I am constantly inspired by the hard work and commitment of those who work for change - and there are many of them.

They are peoples from all walks of life who never give up in their struggle for justice. This must be celebrated and honoured if we want to sustain and grow our healing.

Another positive is that I also feel is that the general population of this land is responsive to justice (as they overwhelmingly were in the 1967 Referendum) - if these issues are adequately represented in the public domain.

But this is a very big 'if'.

In spite of the much touted prosperity at Australia many Aboriginal people still live in the worst of third world conditions.

On any social indicator of wellbeing: health education, housing, employment, civic participation, numbers in custody - you name it - Aboriginal people are always over-represented at the wrong end of the scale.

Aboriginal people, the first people of this land, are dying of despair while those in power look the other way. Their eyes and their priorities are clearly focused in other directions.

It is for this reason that I have no expectation of an apology from our current Prime Minister.

Yet acknowledgement of the wrongs of the past is a fundamental plank in rebuilding relationships. Every State Government has taken this important step - and said Sorry.

The Tasmanian Government has even passed legislation to compensate Tasmanian members of the Stolen Generations.

But at the Federal level, rebuilding relationships is not the name of the game.

The rules of the game that prevail in this town under this leadership are to respond to (and only to) what will win votes.

And this is not good news for Aboriginal people - or for that matter any groups of people who do not have a powerful voice.

Of the 54 recommendations made in the Bringing Them Home report, 35 have been ignored - that is two thirds.

Where there has been a response - for example, Link-Up services - the funding is drastically inadequate to meet the need.

The wonderful dedicated workers of these services as with so many workers in Aboriginal services, buckle under the load.

The Prime Minister either doesn't 'get it' or he doesn't care, and I am not sure which is worse.

What I do know is that:

There has been a failure of moral authority and ethical leadership in Australia over the last ten years.

This country is in a position to be a world leader in human rights and social justice. Instead it is, as Aboriginal people would say, 'a shame job'.

When initiatives are taken, they are too small and mean spirited to bring about significant and long-term change.

And, most importantly, the colonial attitudes of two hundred years ago are still alive and well in the corridors of power today.

I want to look at some of these attitudes because they underpin the sorry state of Aboriginal affairs in this country.

There is a general attitude of entitlement that pervades the mentality of the privileged. It is a view that assumes a right to have advantage.

And it is a view that does not question the price that others have had to pay for that advantage.

This stance of entitlement incorporates a pride in many achievements - sporting, military and economic. But it ignores the parts of the story that are shameful.

These are not incorporated into any sense of self or identity. (I was not there. It is not my fault becomes the catch-cry.)

It is a stance that does not respect differences or other ways of doing things.

Take, for example, the recent budget allocations to Aboriginal health and housing. .

That refers, of course, to the federal government's budget. The report continues -

While there was a much-publicised scheme for a small number of people to buy their own homes in a small remote Top End community, there was almost nothing done to ease housing affordability for the majority of Aboriginal Australians who live in urban communities.

The Costello budget with its focus on remote and regional areas actually takes money away from Aboriginal housing in urban areas.

A recent World Health Organisation report into Indigenous health worldwide concluded that the health of Aboriginal people lags almost 100 years behind other Australians and that they are the sickest Indigenous people of all the wealthy nations.

The authors wrote that progress would not be made until the Government publicly acknowledged the role of Aboriginal people's "stress, alienation, discrimination and lack of control."

Health experts agree that \$500 million per year is needed to lift the Aboriginal health standard to that of non-Aboriginal Australians and reduce the 17-year gap in life expectancy.

Tom Calma, the Social Justice Commissioner, believes that with an input like this we could close this gap within a generation.

But rather than \$500 million the 2007 budget allocates only about \$30 million per annum to this nationally and internationally scandalous situation.

On the same note, I will add another perspective. I refer to the response in the past week or so to the most recent crisis in Aboriginal communities; that is, child protection. I will quote from an article that was printed on 25 June - just a few days ago - in the *Australian Policy Online*. The article, entitled "Remote Communities", has been written by Judy Atkinson, the director of the Gnibi College of Indigenous Australian Peoples at the Southern Cross University. To me it is a useful insight into what has been a sudden development. A lot of people are struggling to make sense of what I would describe as John Howard's shock and awe campaign on Indigenous communities. The way in which Ms Atkinson has written this article is the way that I view this cynical move.

The article states -

**JUDY ATKINSON has been writing about violence in remote communities for two decades. Here she responds to measures announced by the prime minister last week.**

I woke up this morning with a sense of doom. What was wrong? Yes. I remember! The prime minister has announced that he is "sending in the troops." He has declared, in effect, a National Emergency.

Is it a National Emergency? Yes, to some degree it is. It has been, for twenty years. More importantly, it is a National Shame. Why was this emergency allowed to develop to the stage that ordinary Australians are outraged. And whose shame is it? The blame game, which I do not subscribe to, but which I will move into for this specific article, rests with government. How come the average Australian did not know when government have known for many years? How do I know they have known. Because, apart from the reports I have been involved with, I have had ministers say to me: *Well, we know the problems. You tell us the solutions.*

I therefore must assume they knew the problems.

I have been looking for solutions since 1992.

This morning I asked myself: If I were prime minister, with all his powers, what would I have done? Firstly I would understand and respond accordingly to the fact that this is not an issue isolated to "Aboriginal Lands" in the Northern Territory.

...

In the short term, I would focus on a child centred approach to building child centred, child safe communities.

**A child centred approach:** My first question would be to ask what child safe places are already within communities. How can I support them? Often the safe house in the community is inhabited by a grannie on welfare, who opens her door to any child in need. She is someone who, somehow, like the miracle worker with loaves and fishes, can feed many children from her welfare cheque. I would support those people who are already doing hard jobs with little or no resources.

Secondly, I would ask for Aboriginal peoples living in remote Aboriginal communities, rural towns and urban centres to put up their hands if they wanted to be involved in a long term approach to building their futures, from within a child centred-child safe infrastructure. I would then, in the short term, begin to work with select communities from each region across Australia, to help build their capacity. I would do this with an understanding that each community I worked with, supported and resourced, would be obliged to work, in turn, with others near them.

In the short to medium term I would provide educational opportunities to increase skill development which could be piggybacked from one community to another.

Third, following from my child centred approach I would immediately start to build networks of workers, already out there, on the ground, and I would build from their knowledge and expertise, resourcing them to do their jobs without the stress levels they live with, on a day-to-day basis.

I would provide educational opportunities to workers so they feel capable of working with the child, who as described on page 67 of the Northern Territory report, saw his mother shot in the head and had to clean her brains up of the floor. I would ensure that workers have clear child trauma counselling skills by providing short courses for culturally safe crisis intervention.

These are both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal workers who have, as their fundamental work ethic, the rights of the child to live and learn in child safe, child friendly environments.

These workers would include police who are legislated to protect children from harm. Hence restricting access to alcohol and other drugs is an important part of their work responsibility. Social workers, and child protection officers who see the damage pornography does to the developing child would be encouraged to work with police to help restrict access to such material. I would charge mine workers, and mining companies for the behaviours of their employees, and others such as mechanics, school teachers, builders, who are found with such materials, on Aboriginal lands, in Aboriginal communities.

I would expect school teachers to embed in their class curriculum, modalities and activities which heal trauma.

...

In the medium term, if I were the prime minister I would build into all that I do, a **community strengths based approach**, grounded in advancing education at all levels. The strengths based approach would provide educational opportunities for Indigenous Australians to acquire skills so they can work with their own people, and others, for healthy early childhood development; education for life long learning, and education for healing.

Such educational packages would be both community based and tertiary delivered. They would have formal accreditation so that graduates could work in any field that helps build a society where children will always feel and be safe. This approach is an Indigenous employment strategy, and I would build that into my government's employment and enterprise strategies.

...

In the longer term, if I were the prime minister, I would embed in all that I do, research on the ground. Those researchers undertaking professional doctorates, with scholarships for Indigenous Australians, would work with those working on the ground, and would document the activities and processes, so that in five or ten years time, I could show the Australian nation what works, why it works, and how it would work in the towns and regions of Everywhere.

I would expect then that we would be able to work together, all of us, to build a future for all people in this country. I would then be able to say to my senior bureaucrats: you now have the practice based evidence. Support these approaches, on behalf of all Australians.

But I am not the prime minister.

And I am sorry that I am not, for if I were this prime minister, I would ask of myself: am I now willing to say *sorry* for my government's inability to respond to this *long term* "emergency," an emergency that has existed over the ten years that I have been prime minister of this country? Am I willing to say sorry on behalf of my ministers, who have known of this crisis for many years, for their lack of will to do their jobs? Their inaction has profoundly deepened this so-called emergency.

If I were the prime minister I would sit in deep soul searching about my lack of leadership in response to these critical needs, and I would acknowledge that in my mandate on behalf of all Australians, I have failed Aboriginal children today. And I would say... **Sorry.**

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Hon Ken Baston.**