

Division 55: Registrar, Western Australian Industrial Relations Commission, \$11 273 000 —

Mr P. Abetz, Chairman.

Mr P.T. Miles, Parliamentary Secretary representing the Minister for Commerce.

Ms S. Bastian, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Department of the Registrar.

Ms L. Mathew, Chief Finance Officer.

Ms Y. Zhou, Manager, Finance and Administration.

Mr P. Groves, Ministerial Liaison Officer.

Mr M. Connolly, Principal Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIRMAN: Member for Girrawheen.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I refer the parliamentary secretary to page 653, under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”, and the comment relating to the draft bill seeking public comment on proposed changes to the industrial relations system. Has the time for comments closed, and when will the actual bill be presented to Parliament?

Mr P.T. MILES: Yes, I was aware of that; that was the bill presented to this house as a green bill for public consultation last year. The public consultation period has closed. Those consultations are being worked on, and obviously the minister’s office and other agencies are working through those consultations before any changes are made to the bill to be brought forward to the house.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: As a result of that public consultation, has the need been seen to markedly change the green bill that went out, or is it in much the same format as that made public earlier?

Mr P.T. MILES: Just before I go on, the actual bill is not actually in this division. The agency responsible for it was the Department of Commerce under the labour relations section. So this is the —

Ms M.M. QUIRK: All right. I have a further question. Did the commission make a formal submission in relation to the bill?

Ms S. Bastian: There was consultation.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: There was consultation, I heard.

Mr P.T. MILES: The commission would not have made a submission to the consultation process.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I gather from the remark in the papers, that the planning cannot be made in relation to the impact of that bill until the final version of the bill is seen; is that correct?

Mr P.T. MILES: Sorry; I did not get the member’s question.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Perhaps the parliamentary secretary can look at page 653 of the *Budget Statements*, under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”.

Mr P.T. MILES: Yes.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Given that the final version of the bill has not yet been seen —

Mr P.T. MILES: Correct.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: — is the commission unable to make any plans relating to its possible impact?

Mr P.T. MILES: I will ask the registrar to make comment on her part of the agency with reference to the bill and whether it will impact the agency or not. But as I say again, it is not something that is part of this agency. I know it has a statement there and there could be an impact on this agency, but we do not know what the bill will end up like, therefore this agency has not seen that bill yet.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I think the parliamentary secretary’s answer is yes, and that is fine. We do not need to spend a lot of time on it, thanks.

Mr P.T. MILES: But if the member wants me to ask the registrar to fill in any blanks, I am happy to do so.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: If she feels a burning need to share her views with us.

Ms S.F. McGURK: My question relates to the number of matters being heard before the commission. Can the parliamentary secretary tell us how many applications were made to the commission in the last financial year, how that compares with past years, and whether they were determined by conciliation or arbitration?

[9.40 pm]

Mr P.T. MILES: Obviously, the agency's workload changed dramatically when the Fair Work Act was put in place; therefore, it has been restructuring and redesigning itself. I will ask the registrar to put on record some of the statistics that the member is asking for.

Ms S. Bastian: In effect, the actual number of applications before the commission in 2011–12 was 694. The budget for the 2012–13 period was for 740. The estimate for the 2012–13 period was 972, but we had an actual target of 1 057 for the 2012–13 period.

Ms S.F. McGURK: What proportion of those applications would be conciliation or arbitration? I am trying to get a sense of the workload.

Mr P.T. MILES: Between the two?

Ms S.F. McGURK: That is right. If they are not resolved by conciliation, they would usually go to arbitration.

Mr P.T. MILES: It is not data that we have with us tonight. Will the member repeat what she is asking for?

Ms S.F. McGURK: It would be good to have an understanding of the trend of the work of the commission. One way of doing that would be to look at the number of applications, which has been provided. Perhaps we could look at the number of applications and what has happened to those applications. Have they been resolved by conciliation, arbitration or dismissal of some sort? If we could have that for 2011–12, 2012–13 and 2013–14, that would be good.

Mr P.T. MILES: I have just been advised that we do not have access to that detail; it is actually in the chief commissioner's annual report. We do not have access to that because it is an independent commission.

Ms S.F. McGURK: If it is in the annual report, that is fine.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I refer generally to the appropriations heading. Has the agency been subject to any efficiency dividend, program rationalisation or review of its current services; and, if so, what are they?

Mr P.T. MILES: There have been some variances between the 2012–13 budget and the 2012–13 estimated actual. The budget for 2012–13 was just over \$11.56 million and the estimated actual was \$11 032 000. That was the result of a funding cut of \$618 000 in six full-time equivalents. This had a reduction and an offset of a \$57 000 salary escalation on the determination of the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal. I will pass over to the chief finance officer, who can probably put a bit more meat on those numbers.

Ms L. Mathew: An amount of \$618 000 was reduced from our funding for corrective measures for 2012–13, but under public sector workforce reform, \$701 000 has been reduced from our budget for 2013–14. It is on page 652. There is \$642 000 for 2014–15, \$417 000 for 2015–16 and \$504 000 for 2016–17. A total of about \$2.3 million has been reduced from the forward estimates.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: That is a fair percentage, given that the overall budget is \$11.5 million. What kind of impact will that have on the agency's area of operations?

Ms L. Mathew: We had corrective measures of \$618 000 for 2012–13. We managed to restructure and multiskill some of our staff and combine some of the areas to find efficiencies, and we have come out with a surplus of \$798 000 for 2012–13 instead of a deficit for the year.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Under these arrangements, that level of saving will have to be made every year. I would have thought that the agency would be close to reaching the point of critical mass.

Mr P.T. MILES: The basis of the question has to be realised. Yes, the member is right. There is a level of reform going on. The Fair Work Act has made a dramatic change to the agency's workload. The registrar has progressively made the necessary reductions. This agency has been doing very well with its budget cash flows. Some of the hearings around town have been run out of this agency, so this agency has been able to charge those hearings for the cost of using the hearing rooms.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: What hearings?

Mr P.T. MILES: The Canning inquiry and the St Andrews inquiry. The agency has been able to charge those hearings for the cost of those rooms. It had available space because of the Fair Work Act, and it had to use it somehow. So it has been very inventive and challenged itself.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Did I understand the parliamentary secretary correctly when he said that there had been a reduction in FTEs as a result of some of the efficiency dividends? The reason I ask is that when I looked on page 654 for the full-time equivalents for support to the commission, I could not see them in 2013–14. The number of FTEs for support drops from 34 but then it picks up again to 34 FTEs. For conciliation and arbitration, it is 19, 17 and 19. Where is the reduction in FTEs?

Mr P.T. MILES: I will refer to the CFO again.

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Chairman; Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr Paul Miles; Ms Simone McGurk

Ms L. Mathew: The 2013–14 budget focuses not so much on the FTE numbers; it focuses more on the sundry levels. Under the public sector workforce reforms, there will be a consumer price index cap of 2.5 per cent. Our level is still at 53, which was the level prior to the reduction of the six FTEs for 2012–13. In effect, for the forward estimates, we will focus more on salary levels.

Mr P.T. MILES: The government made a decision that it is not about the FTEs; it is about the salary cap across government agencies, and we discussed that earlier. Although there is an indication of FTEs, the agency is focusing more on its pool of money for salaries, and obviously it can employ people to that amount of money only.

The appropriation was recommended.

Committee adjourned at 9.49 pm
