

Chairman; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr John Day; Mr Paul Miles; Mr Sean L'Estrange; Ms Eleni Evangel; Mrs Michelle Roberts

Division 37: Western Australian Planning Commission, \$98 316 000 —

Mr I.M. Britza, Chairman.

Mr J.H.D. Day, Minister for Planning.

Mr N. Thomson, Assistant Director General.

Mr K.H. Wilson, Chief Finance Officer.

Mr T. Hillyard, Manager, Property Services, Department of Planning.

Ms S.J. Burrows, Executive Director, Perth and Peel Planning and Strategy.

[Witnesses introduced.]

[8.30 pm]

The CHAIRMAN: Member for West Swan.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: When is the minister likely to appoint a new chair of the Western Australian Planning Commission?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: First, I will say that I think the situation we have at the moment in which the same person, Eric Lumsden, is both director general of the Department of Planning and chairman of the Western Australian Planning Commission, although probably not ideal in the long term, is working well. It is certainly not leading, as has been suggested, to any delays in planning approvals. If anything, it is probably streamlining the process somewhat. If there are any conflict of interest issues—they would not be personal conflicts of interest of course but in relation to the responsibilities of the respective roles—I have discussed that with Eric and he is ensuring that there is an appropriate process in place so that he is not involved in the assessment or the report provided to the commission on something about which he may make a decision as chairman of the Planning Commission. It is also relevant to note that the heads of a number of other agencies, including housing and environment, are members of the Planning Commission as well, so if there are any suggested conflicts of interest, it could be argued that they exist there as well—but I am sure that if there are, they are dealt with appropriately. In relation to the timing of appointing a chair so that there are two different individuals in the positions, that will certainly happen between now and the end of the year. There will be two separate individuals by the end of the year.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: There will be a new chair by the end of the year?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Members, it would help me if you would refer to a page number when you ask a question.

Mr P.T. MILES: I can do that, Mr Chairman. I am trying to save money, too; I am using an electronic format. I go back to the question I was going to ask before. Whilst I think the Department of Planning has a part of it, the second dot point on page 453 highlights a very important issue with regard to reform of the planning industry, which needs to be done. We heard some information earlier, but can the minister update us on the progress of the reforms that are happening and the priorities, and, I guess, where we are going with it? Also, I note that the Treasurer indicated a special line item for building and planning approvals, under which red tape is to be alleviated, so I ask the minister to touch on that as well.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Further reform of the planning system is being contemplated. We put in place some significant reforms during the last term of government, which have led to significant improvements. That has led to the introduction of development assessment panels, which has been a pretty major change in the planning system for this state. There was a change to the structure plan guidelines, the residential design codes have been reviewed and a new state planning policy on the R-codes is now in place, and there is a new multi-unit housing code in place, as well as other changes. All of that at least partly contributed, I believe, to the assessment in the Property Council of Australia's report card, which was issued last year, that Western Australia has the second-best planning system in the country after the Northern Territory, which has a smaller population and therefore simpler systems perhaps, so that was a significant improvement for Western Australia. In relation to further reform, we want to try to further streamline the approvals process to reduce time lines and also to ensure that there is appropriate accountabilities and governance. We will be seeking to put in place improvements for each stage of the land supply process in region and local scheme amendments, and also possibly further changes to the structure plan and subdivision processes through to the development assessment process. Some examples of what is being considered are, as I said, improving and streamlining the amendment process for both regional and local planning schemes, reducing the complexity of structure plan preparation and removing dual approval requirements—at the moment, in some cases, both the local government and the Planning Commission need to give approval. That can be simplified, hopefully. We will also possibly introduce different systems to fast-track

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the development assessment of standard and low-risk development applications. In a moment I will ask Sue Burrows to add a bit more on what may change there. Changing the scope of development assessment panels is also being considered. I ask Sue to add a bit more information in relation to some of what is being pursued.

Ms S.J. Burrows: The model scheme text provisions have just been through a major review. That is currently being drafted. We are trying to look at all the administrative provisions, including structure plan provisions, within that document to provide the planning framework for local government and, therefore, quicker assessment of schemes. There is also a requirement that some provisions will become mandatory, so the minister will have the power to so direct that schemes be changed so they will not have to go through the amendment processes. That will be a major reform.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: I add that a discussion paper on further reform will be put out within the next few weeks. There has been some initial consultation with representatives of both the private sector planning profession and local governments about the content of that discussion paper. That will be out for general comment fairly soon. In relation to the member's question about the information in the budget papers about a review of the planning and building approvals process, that is being overseen by the regulatory gatekeeping unit of the Department of Finance. What is being done in planning will very much contribute —

Mr P.T. MILES: Sorry—from the Minister for Finance?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Yes. It is in the regulatory gatekeeping unit, which is in the Department of Finance.

Mr P.T. MILES: Did the minister mention that he is going to streamline the planning land use codes as well? Is the minister going to look at amending those or reducing that list down from the huge number that it has? I mean, a garage has to have four or five different uses if they want to do a whole car, for instance, for repair work.

Ms S.J. Burrows: Yes, that is part of the review process.

Mr P.T. MILES: I did not hear that, that is all.

Ms S.J. Burrows: No; it was not mentioned.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Further to that question, the minister mentioned the model scheme text as part of the planning reform agenda. Can the minister explain how this will achieve greater consistency across the state with respect to the administration of local government town planning scheme requirements for development applications and structure plans?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: The model scheme text is fairly important in the planning system. As the name implies, it is what is provided for local governments to include within their planning schemes. They can vary from it, but if they vary from it significantly, it can involve a much more lengthy process of assessment in relation to being approved in the first place or for any future amendments. The aim is to have a model scheme text that is contemporary and, hopefully, will be used by most, if not all, local governments. A process of review has been underway for a year or so at least. Some of the key improvements that are being considered include regulations that provide a set of standard provisions that will apply automatically to all local government schemes. That could be included. These provisions will standardise assessment and approval processes for development applications as well as providing consistent processes for other applications and planning documents, such as structure plans and development contribution plans. Secondly, it will involve reviewing what proposals may be exempt from requiring planning approval, such as removing the need for compliant single houses to obtain planning approval. Third, it will involve improving the administrative provisions and the definitions, language and general user-friendliness of schemes. Fourth, it will involve considering regulations which clearly set out the steps required in the preparation of the scheme amendment process, including steps and time frames to be undertaken by the Department of Planning and the Western Australian Planning Commission. The new model scheme text is currently going through the Parliamentary Counsel drafting process, and I hope and expect that it will be ready for public release either near the end of this year or early next year.

[8.40 pm]

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: My question relates to the metropolitan region improvement tax that is shown on page 452. The first part of my question is: has it always been the case that such a small or limited proportion of revenue is used for land acquisitions while the rest is being used for items such as salaries for the Department of Planning? Has that always been the case, or is that a relatively new development?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: A proportion is used for paying salaries; I am not aware that that has changed much, but most of the tax is used for land acquisition. Some is used for funding land management, of course; in fact, quite a bit is, including Whiteman Park, which is still owned by the Planning Commission.

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Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I know the government keeps trying to get rid of it.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: It would be appropriate at some stage to hand it over to the environment portfolio. The current operation at Whiteman Park is funded at about \$6 million or \$7 million a year.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I have an answer that the minister provided in Parliament. For 2012–13, I have metropolitan land acquisitions at \$42.2 million as part of the total MRIT revenue listed, which is \$85.1 million. By way of supplementary information, can I get a 10-year analysis of land acquisition as a proportion of total MRIT revenue?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: We can seek to provide that.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I thank the minister. So, by way of supplementary information, a 10-year analysis of land acquisition as part of MRIT revenue is to be provided.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Is the member talking retrospectively?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Of course.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: I just want to clarify what the member is seeking. A 10-year analysis —

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Of metropolitan land acquisitions. So, for example, in an answer provided by the minister, the amount was \$42.2 million in 2012–13 for land acquisitions, compared with total MRIT of \$85.1 million in 2012–13.

[Supplementary Information No A19.]

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I have a further question in relation to this revenue. As I understand it, this is used by WAPC to purchase properties and in some cases those properties are used for public transport, roads and other such infrastructure. I refer to page 457, where an amount of \$39.8 million is highlighted for land acquisition in 2013–14. Is any of that land being acquired for the Metro Area Express light rail project or for the airport rail project?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Not at this stage, but we expect that to occur at some stage in the future. That has not occurred to this point.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: In relation to this project, when will WAPC be informed that land needs to be acquired, and over what time frame will that occur?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: I am advised that it is a decision for the government as to whether the Department of Transport acquires the land necessary for those projects or whether the Planning Commission has a role—so it could be either, as I am informed. Given that there is a time frame for those projects starting, land acquisition would presumably need to occur within the next two to three years.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: So WAPC has not been notified of how many properties would need to be acquired?

Mr N. Thomson: The MAX light rail team is based in the Department of Transport, and it is currently looking at the detailed design of that project and assessing the requirements for acquisition as we go forward. We will obviously be notified through government processes and decisions.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: In relation to MRIT, I notice that the Bush Forever program is no longer budgeted for in the forward estimates. Does that mean that there will be no further Bush Forever program?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: There was a specific amount of \$100 million allocated back in 2000, I think it was, when the previous coalition government was in office. That was to operate over 10 years, and it seems to have extended out slightly to 30 June this year. I am advised that there are only 21 whole or part properties within 12 Bush Forever sites, with a total area of about 388 hectares remaining to be purchased as a result of the Bush Forever scheme amendment. The amendment reserved 20 700 hectares of land—some of it private; a lot of it was publicly owned land. So far, the Planning Commission has purchased more than 120 properties at a cost of \$101 million, to acquire a total of 1 100 hectares of private land. For the 21 remaining properties, when they are required to be purchased or some compensation provided, the same processes still apply, and that will be from the continuing funds available to the Planning Commission out of the MRIT. Although there was a specific amount of \$100 million allocated back in 2000, that has been expended, and further acquisitions will be able to be made through the continued operation of the fund.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: With regard to 2013–14, the government is expecting \$87.2 million in MRIT, and of that, only \$39.8 million will be spent on land acquisition in the metropolitan area; is that right?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: I am advised that those figures are correct.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Will Bush Forever now be absorbed into the general metropolitan land acquisition?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Yes. It will not all be happening this year—some will be needed for some years, presumably.

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Mr T. Hillyard: Within the budget this year, there will be some properties that will continue to be Bush Forever-identified properties; they are in the program already, but they are taken as part of the general acquisition program.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: In relation to purchasing properties, I asked a series of questions about the valuations of properties purchased. There are some instances in which the acquisition value has been higher than the two valuations received by government. Can the minister explain why that would occur?

[8.50 pm]

Mr J.H.D. DAY: That would be because the person whose land has been reserved would have a valuation that is higher than the two Planning Commission-appointed valuations, and there is a negotiated agreement. I do see the request for approval. There has to be ministerial approval for a purchase for anything more than \$1 million. All the actual amounts being paid, from my recollection, are pretty close to the valuations that have been provided by the Western Australian Planning Commission. If two different amounts are being provided, generally it is in between the two. I will just ask Tim Hillyard to add to that, and hopefully confirm what I have said is correct.

Mr T. Hillyard: While there are two valuations obtained by the commission for all its property dealings, a number of these matters are also dealt with within the State Administrative Tribunal et cetera and the Supreme Court and arbitration. There is a degree of mediation involved. As a result, some settlements occur—this has to account for the risk of the matter going through to a hearing and there being a judgement higher than the valuations et cetera. It is a negotiated outcome, using the valuations as a guide. But it is ultimately a matter for negotiations. As the minister pointed out, it is not until we get into the negotiations that the other landowners involved provide valuation advice, and there can be some discussion between the valuers engaged by the commission et cetera and some adjustment up is required.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: In respect to that third valuation or the other valuation by the landowner, is that authorised by Planning? For example, must they be well-known, established valuers?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: They are licensed.

Mr T. Hillyard: Yes, they are licensed valuers.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am looking at page 454 of the *Budget Statements* under “Statutory Planning” and the line item “Net Cost of Service”, which has just short of doubled since 2011-12. Note 1 under “Explanation of Significant Movements” makes reference to the increase in the number of applications. Does that account for all the increase in the net cost of the service, and is it possible to provide a cost of the service per application? It has just been pointed out to me that the last line, “Average Cost per Application Determined”, shows that it has increased from \$2 720 to \$4 423 since 2011-12 and 2013-14. Why has there been such an increase per application?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Note 3 on page 455 of the *Budget Statements* is relevant, but I am advised that the 2013-14 budget target compared with the 2012-13 estimated actual outcome reflects the increase in fees to full cost recovery and expected fall in applications during 2013-14. The figure is derived by dividing the cost per service into the number of applications. I trust the member understands that!

Mr K.H. Wilson: Yes, that is it.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Do you want to add anything to that, in plain English?

Mr K.H. Wilson: No, that is full cost recovery.

Ms S.F. McGURK: But there has been an increase because there is full cost recovery, but that does not account for the cost per application, does it? That is income.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: I presume that given there has been a more detailed assessment of the actual costs of undertaking the assessments, and it has been realised that the actual cost involved and time involved is higher than was thought to be the case previously, that is why it has gone up. Does that sound right?

Mr K.H. Wilson: Correct.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: There has been a reassessment of the actual time involved and the actual staff costs involved.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: And the department has upped its fees commensurately as well, has it not?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: As we discussed earlier, yes.

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Tuesday, 20 August 2013]

p93b-100a

Chairman; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr John Day; Mr Paul Miles; Mr Sean L'Estrange; Ms Eleni Evangel; Mrs Michelle Roberts

Ms E. EVANGEL: I refer to page 457 of the *Budget Statements* that relates to the Bush Forever program. I notice that 2012-13 was the final year of the funding for that plan. Can the minister please provide an update as to what program has actually achieved to date?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Yes. The Bush Forever program was something very significant that was put in place back in 2000, and it has ensured that about 10 per cent of each type of vegetation on the Swan coastal plain has been able to be preserved. That has come at a cost to taxpayers, but it is something that has been considered to be very important given that the impetus to undertake this program goes back to the 1995, when it was realised that with quite substantial urban development occurring on the Swan coastal plain, more action needed to be taken to ensure that, as I said, there was a minimum of 10 per cent of each type of vegetation complex preserved in the Swan coastal plain. The Bush Forever program was put in place, and as I mentioned earlier, 20 700 hectares of land was reserved under the program, and the Western Australian Planning Commission has purchased 120 properties so far at a cost of \$101 million to acquire about 1 100 hectares of private land. So it has been very significant as an environmental measure undertaken through the planning system. It is all about trying to get a good balance between environmental protection and allowing urban and other development in appropriate areas.

Mr P.T. MILES: I think I ask this every year. Minister, as to the Bush Forever program, I have people up in my electorate who still have not been paid out for their land, and I know there are others in Southern River and other parts. So if that program has been closed, have all those people been paid out?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: As I mentioned earlier, if land has been reserved—my understanding is that it is subject to compensation if the whole site is undevelopable or reserved—they are still able to have their land acquired or receive compensation under the normal processes that apply. Where only part of a lot is subject to Bush Forever designation and where development is still able to be undertaken, they are not subject to compensation normally. They are in no different position from any other landowner who has constraints on their land for a range of other reasons, whether it be proximity to a major highway where they need to set back the buildings more than would otherwise be the case, for example, or in a range of other constraints. But the planners can comment on the other constraints that may restrict people undertaking development.

Ms S.J. Burrows: Just purely environmental constraints, minister—I think that covers it.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: They do not have to be Bush Forever to have other environmental constraints apply in some cases—I refer to water management issues et cetera. Convinced?

Mr P.T. MILES: No, I am not; I can tell the minister that I am definitely not.

[9.00 pm]

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: I am just looking at the top of page 455 of the *Budget Statements* at that note about the increase in statutory planning applications in 2013 estimated actual compared with the 2012-13 budget due to increased efficiencies in the approvals system of lodging applications and a reduction in the backlog. I would like to know, if possible, what the backlog was in each month of 2012-13 and what the backlog is currently. If the latter is not available, perhaps the minister can tell me what it was at the end of July this year. There is a further comment that the backlog is expected to increase slightly in 2013-14 due to an expected increase in the number of applications in the last quarter of 2012-13. I assume that is April, May and June this year. I am interesting to know what the total backlog is now. The minister may be aware that I have written to him and asked questions about Hazelmere in particular. People complain about the time taken, so I am interested in the backlog and how many people are waiting.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: In relation to Hazelmere, my recollection is that the City of Swan is lodging a request for the metropolitan region scheme amendment to be initiated.

Ms S.J. Burrows: The MRS amendment requests for Hazelmere have been lodged with us. They are currently referred out to other government agencies for comment. A report to initiate those amendments is due to go to the commission, I believe, in September.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: How long is it likely to take then before the landowners are advised of the scheme amendments having been approved? What time frame are they looking at?

Ms S.J. Burrows: The initiation of the scheme amendment will mean it will go out for public comment. That process will depend on what comment is raised during that period. We expect it to then go back to the commission. That process can take six months if there are hearings on those amendments. We have divided the Hazelmere amendments into certain sections. We have not put it in as one amendment so that if issues arise, we can withdraw sections of the amendment and deal with those and allow parts of the amendment that are not contentious to continue.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: I make the point that I have certainly had constituents say that they have had to put their lives on hold and they are unable to borrow money against property. As these things drag on, it dramatically affects their lives and being able to get on with their lives and do other things. Sometimes people are ill or other factors come into it and these processes seem to take an extraordinarily long time. I fully appreciate that public comment periods and so forth are involved, but I am interested in hearing the answer to my earlier question about the backlog, or having that by way of supplementary information, and within that, what kind of applications are sitting in the backlog?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: We are certainly conscious of the need to keep things moving in relation to Hazelmere. We are aware of the concerns and seeking to move it forward as expeditiously as reasonably possible. It has been a matter of, as I understand it, waiting for the proposal to come from the City of Swan. That has now happened, so things can move. The question is what the member is specifically talking about when she refers to backlogs. Is she talking about scheme amendments?

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: I am asking about the backlog that the budget paper refers to on page 455. I want to know what the backlog is; what kind of applications are in the backlog category by category; and how many applications are in the backlog for each month in 2012–13. Also, what is the current backlog according to whatever definition the department has used when it has used the word on page 455?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Primarily, as I understand it, it refers to the scheme amendments. I can advise that as at 14 August this year, 115 scheme amendments were outstanding and 20 of those had been with the Planning Commission for more than 12 months. Two months earlier, as at 12 June, 123 scheme amendments were outstanding, 20 of which were with the commission for more than 12 months. Therefore, 95 have been with the Planning Commission for less than 12 months. Most of them are dealt with in a fairly timely manner. As I said much earlier this evening, some matters are much more complex, or further information is needed, or the Planning Commission is waiting for advice from the Environmental Protection Authority and so on. Complex issues are involved and that is why some things take longer. They are the figures I have at the moment. To provide a detailed breakdown of the backlog would be a huge amount of work and would not prove much.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: I am just reading plain English; to me “backlog” seems to imply something that has taken too long, whereas the answer the minister has given seems to be about things that are in the normal process. I would not consider something within the normal process to necessarily form part of a backlog. I want some clarification of whether the 115 or 123 that the minister referred to as being outstanding are past some due-by date or statutory time period or whether that is just how many happen to be in the queue. Of the ones that are outstanding—the 23 or whatever—how long has the longest one been outstanding?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Generally, the target is nine to 12 months for scheme amendments. I gave the figure of 20 that have been outstanding for more than 12 months, and therefore more than that notional target time.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Can I just clarify the backlog question? Is something that has been there only two or three months in the backlog?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: No. What I consider to be in the backlog, if we want to be precise about it, is something more than about 12 months for scheme amendments.

Ms S.J. Burrows: Because processes are connected in a scheme amendment, it may require a structure plan and then a subdivision application. We can have instances when a subdivision application comes in while the structure plan or some of the amendment issues are still being resolved. Therefore, they get held in pending until the issues are resolved and the applications can be processed.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Basically, the answers that the department has given to me are all about process: things take time because they have to be referred off to other places and whatever. I fully understand that. From what the minister has said, there is no issue with staffing or the processes of the Planning Commission. No delays are caused by the Planning Commission; they are caused by processes in which other agencies have to get back to the commission. Are there delays of the department’s own making or that could be expedited by having more staff on the job at the Planning Commission?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: That is probably the case to some extent, but there are no unreasonable delays as a result of staffing levels within the Department of Planning. As with other agencies, if it had more staff, within reason it could probably deal with some things more quickly, but, generally, most applications for scheme amendments and subdivision applications are dealt with in a timely way. As I mentioned earlier tonight, about 95 per cent of subdivision applications are dealt with in the statutory 90-day period. That is a fixed statutory period because after that time if approval is not given, an appeal can be lodged with the State Administrative Tribunal.

[9.10 pm]

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Ms R. SAFFIOTI: My question relates to population projections. There has been a lot of debate about the impact of population increases on budget forecasts across agencies.

The CHAIRMAN: Is the member for West Swan referring to a line item or a section?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: It is probably under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”.

The CHAIRMAN: I am sorry; I did not get that. What is the page number?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: It is on page 453.

The CHAIRMAN: Which line item?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I am talking about significant issues impacting the agencies in the department’s role in land use planning and land development matters. What role do the Western Australian Planning Commission and the Department of Planning have in setting population forecasts for the rest of government? Are they updating their population projections compared with the “Directions 2031” document that was released about a year and a half ago?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: The short answer is yes—there are demographers in the department and they produce what are known as *Western Australia Tomorrow* forecasts. I do not remember how often they are published. I will ask Sue to add a bit more information and say whether the projected figures are updated in relation to Directions 2031.

Ms S.J. Burrows: *Western Australia Tomorrow* is updated regularly and, yes, it does have regard to Directions 2031, but also other factors such as activity happening in the market or where population is coming from and going to.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: When was it last updated and communicated to agencies?

Ms S.J. Burrows: I will have to take that on notice.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: By way of supplementary information, can I have information on the last time the population forecasts were updated and communicated to government agencies?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Which ones in particular does the member have in mind?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Which ones does the minister think? Which government agencies?

The CHAIRMAN: We need a clear understanding of the supplementary question. What is the minister’s understanding of it?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: My understanding is that the member seeks the date when the *Western Australia Tomorrow* population projections were last updated and published and what the projections are for the state’s population.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: And when they were communicated to the Department of Education, the Department of Health, the Department of Transport and Western Australia Police.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: That would happen on a continuing basis. Once they are published, they are not kept secret within the Department of Planning, are they? They have been made generally available.

[*Supplementary Information No A20.*]

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am sorry to do this to everyone, but I want to go back to point 2 at the top of page 455 and also to the explanation at point 3 at the bottom of the page. I am getting a little confused because to me point 2 at the top of page 455 is saying that because there have been increased efficiencies, the commission has been able to process an increased number of applications. However, the explanation at point 3 at the bottom of page 455 then says that a reduction in the number of planning decisions have come out of the commission.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: It is because the committee does not meet.

Ms S.F. McGURK: It is because the committee does not meet. How are those two statements reconciled? Does the commission represent a black hole in which some applications go in never to be seen again? No, that is a joke; I am just trying to understand those two points.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: The reference to a reduction in the number of committee meetings would refer to the regional planning committees of the Western Australian Planning Commission. There has been a reduced frequency in the meetings to manage costs adequately. That is the reason for the reference there to that.

Mr N. Thomson: There is no causality, if that is what the member is trying to infer from the number of committee meetings and the number of decisions.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: That is what it says.

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Ms S.F. McGURK: That is what point 3 says.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I am sorry to take the minister's budget papers at face value again!

The CHAIRMAN: Order, members!

Mr N. Thomson: The explanation is that there has been a reduction in the number of committee meetings because there simply has not been the need for so many committee meetings. It has been part of the process of making sure the commission operates efficiently. For the purpose of taxpayers' funding and to make sure we use those funds appropriately, there has been a reduction in the number of meetings, particularly regional planning committee meetings, in the last 12 or so months.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: This might not seem in accordance with what is in here, but there has been no reduction in the number of decisions made.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am sorry, but the statement in the second line of point 3 says —

The CHAIRMAN: Does the member for Fremantle have a further question?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: There is no great black hole or anything like that into which applications fall and do not reappear. There are still plenty of decisions being made, whether they be decisions on subdivision applications, scheme amendments or structure plans. Who wrote all this?

Ms S.F. McGURK: It is confusing; I am sorry.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: I agree.

Ms S.F. McGURK: It states, "Budget Target is due to a reduction in the number of planning decisions which is a result of a reduction in the number of committee meetings."

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: At least they are not as bad as the education budget papers!

The CHAIRMAN: Order! One question at a time. Has the member for Fremantle finished her line of questioning, because we have other divisions to deal with?

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: I think the final question is: will there be a clarification by the minister when Parliament next sits to correct the budget papers, since the answer is not what it says in here?

Ms S.F. McGURK: It is confusing, Madam Chair, because those two points still seem a bit contradictory.

Mr P.T. MILES: On page 457 of the *Budget Statements* under "Asset Investment Program" there are some new works for "Fire Suppression systems Workshops". Can the minister explain what that is about and how that will work, obviously in the event of a fire?

[9.20 pm]

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Yes, it refers to \$2.1 million allocated to provide increased fire protection at Whiteman Park. It is a very active location that has approximately one million visitors a year. It covers 4 000 hectares of bushland and the additional fire suppression works to be undertaken cover two important areas of the park. Firstly, the workshop area that is located adjacent to Mussel Pool is where a number of volunteer organisations are located, including Bennett Brook Railway, the Perth Electric Tramway Society and the Bus Preservation Society of WA. Those organisations have within their collection a range of vintage trains, trams and buses that are very historically and culturally important, as well as presumably having a significant monetary value. Increased fire protection therefore will be provided within those workshops. Secondly, Whiteman Village, which is where a lot of activity occurs, currently has a fire suppression system in place but it needs to be upgraded in view of the ongoing development of building structures including the new visitor information centre. The two new systems will ensure that if there is a fire, the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and other firefighting units will have access to a guaranteed water supply, which will continue to operate for extended periods including during times of electricity outages, and all backed up by automatic diesel pumps that are operated on the site.

That is one important aspect. Another change that is occurring is the final restructure of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services. Whiteman Park is now coming within the metropolitan structure of DFES and so all fires in Whiteman Park will be responded to by the metropolitan fire brigades—that is, career firefighters rather than volunteer bush fire brigades. Volunteer brigades will be called upon to assist in the event of a major fire incident. Memorandums of understanding have been put in place with three local brigades based at Ellenbrook, Bassendean and Malaga to ensure that there are protocols and relationships in place. All of that adds up to better fire protection arrangements in Whiteman Park.

The appropriation was recommended.