

KEEP AUSTRALIA BEAUTIFUL COUNCIL

470. Mr J.P.D. EDWARDS to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage:

I refer the minister to the Keep Australia Beautiful Council, which aims to reduce litter volumes in Australia, provides educational material to schools and organises mass media litter abatement campaigns.

- (1) Is the minister aware that according to the council's latest annual report, state government funding to the council has been slashed by over \$250 000, or 35 per cent?
- (2) Is the minister also aware that as a result of the council's reduction in funding, six of nine programs run by the council have been cancelled or suspended?
- (3) Can the minister confirm that as a result of the Government's Machinery of Government Taskforce recommendations, the Keep Australia Beautiful Council will be dissolved into the body comprising the merged Water and Rivers Commission and Department of Environmental Protection?

Dr J.M. EDWARDS replied:

- (1)-(3) I thank the member for the question. I confirm that the future of the Keep Australia Beautiful Council (WA) was discussed in the machinery of government report, which was made widely available. In about October 2001, as part of the changes made following the machinery of government report, the Government brought the Keep Australia Beautiful Council into the Department of Environmental Protection and the Water and Rivers Commission. Before that time the council had not been treated particularly well. I am not too clear about what had happened, but it had lost a large amount of sponsorship that it had been receiving.

Mr P.D. Omodei: Under the Lawrence Government it was \$50 000 a year.

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: Actually, it was the previous Government that reduced the council's funding. The council was having some financial difficulties by the time I became Minister for the Environment and Heritage. Although the council remains an entity in itself, its officers and its functions were merged into the Department of Environmental Protection. The Government has reviewed the council's programs. We have made the council's major programs a priority but cut back some of its other programs because it could not afford them.

The Government is considering changes to the litter laws. The Keep Australia Beautiful Council was established under the authority of the Litter Act; however, the Litter Act is gravely out of date. The Government has considered incorporating parts of the Act into the proposed waste management Bill, which the former Government had proposed, or, alternatively, recent suggestions emanating from people from the waste management industry include implementing changes to the council under the Environmental Protection Act. The Government has continued funding the Keep Australia Beautiful Council and it has encouraged the council to continue its programs, particularly the tidy towns competition, which is an outstanding program. That program allows communities to build social capacity in their own areas. In many ways, the role of the council has moved on. Certainly stronger penalties are needed. We are considering into which more appropriate, modern and responsive legislation it would be appropriate to incorporate parts of the current Litter Act.