

ESTIMATES COMMITTEES

Standing Orders Suspension

MR J.C. KOBELKE (Nollamara - Leader of the House) [4.57 pm]: I move -

That until 30 June 2003, Standing Orders Nos 222, 223 and 230 are suspended and the following sessional orders are substituted –

Bills referred to estimates committees

222. (1) After the second reading of the Appropriation bill or bills which provide for the main recurrent and capital appropriations, the consideration in detail stage will be replaced by Estimates Committees A and B.

(2) The estimates committees will examine the bills and proposed expenditure contained in the Estimates and report on proposed expenditure by the Parliament and government departments and agencies funded from the Consolidated Fund.

(3) The estimates committees may also examine a maximum of five off-budget public corporations, as determined by the management committee, and ask questions regarding their budgets and operations.

Management committee

223. (1) There will be a management committee which will comprise the Leader of the House, one member nominated in writing to the Speaker by the Premier, and two members similarly nominated by the Leader of the Opposition.

(2) Before the estimates committees first meet, the Leader of the House will present to the Assembly the report of the management committee, which report will prescribe -

- (a) which parts of the Estimates are to be considered by each committee;
- (b) the time allotted for consideration of each part or any division or program of the Estimates and the budgets of those agencies referred to in Standing Order No 222 (2) and (3); and
- (c) following consultation with Assembly members, which five off-budget public corporations will attend estimates committee's hearings for a minimum of 30 minutes per corporation.

Ministerial advisers

230. (1) Advisers who are present at an estimates committee to assist ministers will not directly answer questions or otherwise address the committee except with the approval of and in the presence of a minister or parliamentary secretary.

(2) Representatives of off-budget public corporations are treated as ministerial advisers for the purposes of this Standing Order.

This motion establishes the sessional order as recommended by the Procedure and Privileges Committee in its report on the operations of Estimates Committees presented to the House in March this year. The sessional order suspends Standing Orders Nos 222, 223 and 230 and replaces them with this sessional order. The reason for that is to provide for the inclusion and examination during the estimates hearings of five off-budget public corporations. There will be no change to the current conduct of Estimates Committees in accordance with the standing orders, but it is done in this way so that we can consider within Estimates Committees matters that would normally not be allowed because they are off-budget.

Members will be aware that on 10 April this year I undertook a survey of all members of the House, other than ministers, to determine those off-budget agencies that would be incorporated into the estimates schedule. As a result of the feedback from 29 members who responded, the following agencies are being included in the estimates schedule this year: Western Power, the State Housing Commission, Western Australian Government Railways, the Water Corporation and the Rottnest Island Authority. These five off-budget agencies have been allocated half an hour each in the estimates schedule, which has been circulated to members. The Assembly will consider determination of that schedule next week. I take this opportunity to thank those members who took part in the survey. The sessional order also provides that representatives of off-budget public corporations be treated the same as ministerial advisers during the estimates hearings - meaning that only with approval of the minister are they able to respond directly to members' questions. If the operation of estimates with the incorporation of

off-budget public corporations is successful, the House, at some point in the future, can move to incorporate the provisions of the sessional order permanently into standing orders. I commend the motion to the House.

MR J.L. BRADSHAW (Murray-Wellington) [4.59 pm]: I commend the Government for including in the Estimates Committees government enterprises that do not have a budget allocation, because even though they are supposed to be corporatised and stand in their own right, they still have government connotations and government imprimatur. They should be subject to scrutiny by the Parliament. It is a step in the right direction, but the problem is that half an hour is totally inadequate for these agencies, and it is hardly worth putting on the agenda. At least it is a step in the right direction, and the Opposition accepts this, but it would like those government enterprises to be subject to longer scrutiny than half an hour.

MRS C.L. EDWARDES (Kingsley) [5.00 pm]: I also endorse the comments that have been made, and commend the Government for the process it has entered into in establishing the Estimates Committees. It is probably the first time that I have heard little complaint, prior to the Estimates Committees being held, about their structure and organisation. That has resulted from the consultation that has taken place early in the process. I also endorse the remarks about the half-hour limit. If 30 minutes is all the time allocated, scrutiny will be very difficult if a government member also wants to ask questions in that time. Every member in this House has a right to ask questions on behalf of his or her constituents. I ask the Government, in preparing government backbenchers, to limit the number of questions, so that there is real value in that half hour. I also commend Treasury for paginating the budget, which I asked for a couple of years ago. I am not quite sure yet whether I can add my own comments to the pages so that they will be useful during the Estimates Committee, but we are now going some way to limiting the amount of paperwork needed at estimates time. I wish everyone well.

MRS D.J. GUISE (Wanneroo) [5.02 pm]: I inform the House that a chairman's guide has been prepared in relation to the Estimates Committees and the Speaker has given his approval to it. There will be a meeting of the Acting Speakers next week, and we will endeavour once again to ensure that members opposite get a good opportunity to scrutinise the budget, including the off-budget authorities.

Question put and passed.