

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE

Consideration of Tabled Papers

Resumed from 14 May on the following motion moved by Hon Stephen Dawson (Minister for Environment) —

That pursuant to standing order 69(1), the Legislative Council take note of tabled papers 2664A–D (budget papers 2019–20) laid upon the table of the house on Thursday, 9 May 2019.

HON DR STEVE THOMAS (South West) [5.51 pm]: I thank members for the brief opportunity this afternoon to try to come to the conclusion of my contribution to the budget debate. It has been suggested that this budget debate has been quite forensic; it has also been described as somewhat long. I assure members that every bit and every thing that I have raised, every piece of information that I have deposited are all things that I passionately care about, and are all things that have budget references applied to them. We will jump to budget paper No 2, volume 2. I only want to cover a few significant issues in a couple of portfolios.

Page 509 of budget paper No 2, volume 2—for those who are following—begins the transport portfolio, and here I want to address a couple of key issues. On the bottom of that page is the heading “New Initiatives”, the first of which is line item “On-demand Transport Reform” with a budget of \$3.1 million. At the bottom of the “Ongoing Initiatives” column is the line item “Westport Planning”, with a budget of \$1 million in the current financial year, \$1.1 million in the next financial year, and then \$5 million each for the first two of the first three forward estimates years. Reference to those are made over the page. On-demand transport reform refers to, amongst other things, the taxi industry. I will make a few brief comments about regional taxi services, particularly with the Minister for Environment representing the Minister for Transport here. I have given notice of a disallowance motion for the regulations for the on-demand taxi services—that is, particularly the metropolitan on-demand services. I do so not in any flippant way, but to try to make sure that everybody present understands that regional taxi services are suffering considerably. Katanning and Denmark’s services have closed down. Albany and Kalgoorlie’s services are on the brink. Busselton, Bunbury and Mandurah’s services are all in trouble. Those regional taxi services are not part of the on-demand bill that applies a buyout based on what we effectively call the Uber levy. The buyback of plates, the contribution to the purchase of plates that occurs in the metropolitan area, does not occur for regional taxis. That makes it a difficult process. What the government suggests, which is absolutely true, is that under the act regional taxi plate owners officially lease their plates; they do not purchase their plates. In a technical sense that is true. But when regional taxi plate owners have exchanged funds to transfer those plates to somebody else, stamp duties have applied. In the same way that we discussed the duties bill not that long ago and we talked about duties that apply to leases as well as duties that apply to the purchase of capital items, in these cases, leases apply. These things were given a value by the state, the transfer of these things were acknowledged by the state, and a share of the price was taken by the state.

If the state thinks that it can walk away from regional taxi services and that people in regional areas do not need a taxi service, it needs to think again. This is particularly important in those areas in the south west, such as Busselton, Bunbury, Margaret River, Albany and Denmark, which have lost their services, because those places look after not only locals, but also a significant tourism industry as well. Tourists who go wine tasting in those lovely places in Denmark and Albany and have one too many need that taxi service to provide a service there. It is important.

My intention is to withdraw my disallowance motion when the government has undergone, an adequate consultation process and come up with a package that looks after and protects, to some degree, regional taxidriver. I accept that regional taxi licence plate holders will not get the same payment as the metropolitan ones, particularly when they do not pay the levy. That is problematic. That deal was struck, and I am not sure that everybody who struck that deal understood the potential ramifications on regional areas. But, if that is not the solution, a greater solution must be found, and I have a few suggestions. Maybe the minister can respond to this at an appropriate time.

The government could reapply, or apply, geographical restrictions to metropolitan taxidriver so that we do not get metropolitan licence holders going to regional areas to take Thursday night, Friday, Saturday and Sunday traffic and then disappear back to Perth, which metropolitan taxidriver in some circumstances can do at this point. That would provide some protection for those regional areas. If they had a different system, and a leasehold system, that potentially is one option the government might look at. The Department of Transport and regional taxidriver also need to discuss an economic proposition; that is, no taxi service should be required to provide a service for which it loses money. If the government is requiring a taxi company to provide a service for which it loses money, the government will have to increase its component of the payment of that. There is a system that subsidises some of those regional areas now. I have to say that it is slow and unwieldy, and the Department of Transport could improve the way in which it does that. Something needs to happen to allow regional taxidriver to continue to exist, because on the original proposal, they certainly would not now. I am pleased that the government has made some moves in this direction and that the implementation of on-demand transport includes assistance for regional taxi operators at

\$3.1 million. That is a step in the right direction and we thank the government for that. We just think the government needs to go to a little further, and the ideal outcome here, as we have proved occasionally at other times, is that negotiations that provide a better outcome allow for the withdrawal of the disallowance at the appropriate time. The alternative, if a disallowance was ever to get up, would be to create chaos in the metropolitan taxi system. That is certainly not my intention. My intention is to make sure that regional taxi companies are not forgotten in the process. If members want to call that a bit of blackmail, I guess I will probably accept that as a reasonable definition. I am sure the government, with its windfall budget, will be capable of providing some additional assistance in a form yet to be determined I suspect for regional taxi providers, and I expect to see that in place.

On the same page, Westport planning has been allocated a significant amount of money, about \$13 million. I will make this comment on Westport planning. For those who do not know, the Westport planning process is about where the government will potentially combine the ports of Fremantle, Kwinana and Bunbury. It will work out where the best method for the management of the shipping trade is in Western Australia. I went to a Westport briefing in Bunbury a couple of months ago and I was intrigued to see a slide of all the various options that were being considered. Every time a chart that said, “Possible expansion of Bunbury port” it had a nice little line that said, “Not an economic reality”, or words to that effect. My question about the Westport proposal is: has the port of Bunbury been excluded from the start, and is the government going through a consultation process despite having already decided that the new port will be either Kwinana or Fremantle in some form or another and Bunbury is to be excluded? The words on the chart were “not economically viable”. Every time we called for an investment in the port of Bunbury, the chief of the Westport group said in his presentation that the port of Bunbury is not economically viable. I do not know whether that is the case. Perhaps that represents the policy of the government more than it does the independent review of the Westport process. I would like the government to respond to that. I would be interested to know whether it is realistically looking at expanding Bunbury in some form or another. If it does not expand Bunbury and it decides to enhance Fremantle, because it can hold that for the next 20 years, it needs to look at Roe 8. At the Westport briefing, it was suggested that it was not so much looking at ports, but the infrastructure in the lead-up to ports, particularly transport infrastructure. Logistics was its focus. If the government’s focus is Fremantle, it had better look at the logistics of Roe 8. The construction in Kwinana is the alternative, and that might be where we get to, but there are some logistical issues down there. It appears to me that the Westport process has largely excluded Bunbury, and I would love to know whether that is the case.

Another announcement was made this week, and I could not find it in a press release or in the budget, but it was printed on the morning of the budget, so it was obviously released the day before. The government will put in \$4 million to kickstart some of the Bussell Highway dualling, which is very welcome. It is not enough to complete the whole something like \$80 million project. Some commitment to it is a good idea. Can the minister indicate where that money can be found in the budget as there does not appear to be a line item anywhere? That is just to ensure that it is guaranteed and put in place. I would be interested to know. It is basically going forward. An article in the *South Western Times* contained a comment from the Minister for Transport, which states —

“The McGowan Government has consistently called for Commonwealth funding towards this important project ... we are getting on with the job and will be optimistically working with the next Federal Government to allow the project to be rolled into the wider Bunbury Outer Ring Road project.”

That was from the *South Western Times* of 9 May. The next day we saw a similar comment from the minister. On 10 May, in the *Augusta Margaret River Times*, an article states —

“We are getting on with the job and will be optimistically working with the next Federal Government to allow the project to be rolled into the wider Bunbury Outer Ring Road project.”

I think that is a very good idea. Does the minister know why I think that is a good idea? It is because I suggested it a year ago. If members are looking for evidence of rolling that in, if they go to the POWAnet and look at the media clips of 11 May 2018, there is a thing there called the state budget. If they listen to that, they will hear Hon Dr Steve Thomas say that, in his view, the government should roll the Bussell Highway dualling into the Bunbury Outer Ring Road project. I said that a couple of days after last year’s budget was brought down. It has taken the government only a year to catch up, which is good, but I am glad that it got there in the end. My view has always been that we should build the southern end of the Bunbury Outer Ring Road, dual the Bussell Highway and then come back and build the northern end. By that stage, we might have worked out precisely where the path is going to go. It is nice to see that the government has caught up. Hopefully, that will continue.

I want to spend a bit of time—not much—finishing on the environment. We do this quite poignantly because it is an issue that the minister and I are quite passionate about. I wish to make a couple of comments before I close my contribution on this budget. There are a couple of key issues. For the most part, the environment budget has done fairly well. I want to make a couple of suggestions to the minister. I like the Indigenous ranger program. The minister and I have discussed that previously. I think we are both supporters of that project. The one contribution I would make is that it needs to have a stronger educational component to it. I would like the Indigenous ranger program to have further and higher education as a component of the program itself so that it becomes an

information sharing issue between Indigenous rangers and lecturers, for example, in environmental management, but also provides additional skills and qualifications. It is a good project. I know that the minister supports it. Perhaps at some stage the minister could look at putting in higher education as a higher priority. I know it comes with a cost but I am sure I will support the minister on that.

Hon Stephen Dawson: I will respond to that in my reply because most of those rangers are getting certificate 3s or indeed certificate 4s and there are opportunities for further education.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I am talking about tertiary education. I would like to see it progress to tertiary education.

Hon Stephen Dawson: As an option.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Yes, as an option, not a requirement, and encouragement to do so with an environmental degree.

I turn to page 578 of the budget papers, and service 8, “Environmental Management Services to the Environmental Protection Authority”. I reiterate what I have said publicly; that is, in my opinion, we have a problem with the EPA setting forward its guidance proposals on emissions. I urge the minister to look at the solution that I have proposed, which is that the EPA be encouraged to put its proposals forward as an environmental protection policy under section 3 of the Environmental Protection Act 1986. I do so with great respect for the work of Dr Tom Hatton, the chair of the EPA. His work has been fantastic. However, I think there is a problem in presenting what he presented in the way of guidance. The issue is this: the EPA went through guidance, and every time a major project was proposed, because of its guidance, it would recommend 100 per cent offsets. Generally speaking, the minister would probably have to oppose or not support the EPA in most of those cases. Whether we are in the Labor Party or the Liberal Party, at some point we need some development, and 100 per cent offsets would have been immensely problematic. The problem is that the head of the EPA and the EPA would be at war with the Minister for Environment, who would have to be incredibly brave every time. I know that might suit the agenda of the Greens, which hamstring industry and nothing ever happens, but it is not a good outcome for people in Western Australia; it is not going to work.

The problem we have now is that Dr Hatton goes away and reconsiders what he has done. If the only option and the direction in which he goes is guidance, we have exactly the same problem. If he comes back with it going in the guidance form, it becomes untenable. His other option at that point is to toss the whole thing out. I think that undermines the credibility of a very intelligent, articulate and passionate environmental advocate. I do not want to see that position undermined. If it comes back as an environmental protection policy, it is possible at that point for the chair to maintain all the dignity that he has earned over the last few years as an excellent protector of the environment in this state and for the government and the opposition and all the minor parties to then debate whether this is the appropriate and best way forward. That would happen in public and in the house. I think that would be the best outcome for everybody. I urge the government again to have a good look at that process because we are here to provide solutions, not problems. As far as I can see, that is the only solution that provides a way forward with dignity for all those people involved. I urge the minister to consider that again.

I turn to page 585 of the budget papers, which refers to the waste avoidance and resource recovery account. I suspect that the minister and I will have a lot of debates about this over the next couple of years. I say to members that it is quite interesting when the minister and shadow minister both have a passion for doing something about the waste stream. We may disagree on some of the ways we seek to get there, but the reality is that that debate is an incredibly healthy one. It is good to see the minister investing in it. I have some question marks about awarding the container deposit scheme to that particular company, but in the end I may well have done the same thing.

Hon Stephen Dawson: It was an independent process.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Yes. I have no intention of attacking the minister on that, although we will assess that in a couple of years to work out whether a better outcome might have been served elsewhere.

Let me finish by referring to page 590 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions. I again ask the minister to change the name. I am sure I will come up with something particularly good.

Hon Stephen Dawson: You can ask!

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: The Department of Parks and Wildlife—DPAW—is better than DBCA. I thought about DBCA and came up with a suggestion for the minister—“Don’t Bloomin’ Complain Again”, but then he might apply that to me.

Hon Stephen Dawson: I never would!

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: My last point is on ecosystem management in south west forests. At page 90 of the budget papers it states —

A range of threatening processes continue to impact the integrity and functioning of our natural ecosystems ...

I agree with that, but I particularly love the last sentence in paragraph 29 on page 590 of budget paper No 2, volume 2. It states —

Invasive weeds and diseases will continue to be monitored, and management and control will focus on regional priorities and neighbouring land managers.

I am not sure that invasive weeds and diseases, for the most part, are adequately monitored, and I am absolutely certain that they are not managed and I can guarantee members that they are not controlled. We have been dealing with this for a long time now. The Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007 does not function how it was meant to, and government departments are not being held to account for how they manage biosecurity. We have abandoned ship, as it were, on enforcing biosecurity on private land. We do not even examine it on public land. I am astounded. I was in the other place and was one of the significant speakers on that bill when it went through that house. It was assumed in the lower house that a clause in that bill would say that state government departments would be monitored by the lead agency, which is the Department of Agriculture and Food, and that noncompliance would be in the department of agriculture's annual report. That was at least something. At least individual landholders could be fined \$20 000 or \$30 000, although, mind you, no fine has ever been issued. Without a whimper that clause was removed by this Council and now government departments are not accountable for the management of weeds.

When I asked the minister what quality assurance management had occurred within the department's pest management processes, the answer was none. Occasionally, the then Department of Parks and Wildlife and the then Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia would meet up and have a cup of coffee and discuss it, but there is no adequate control. It is not as though the department of agriculture has been effective in controlling weeds on private land. As far as I can tell, it has never prosecuted a single person for not controlling these significant weeds on their land. We have abandoned ship on this. We have let this slip absolutely. Members can be sure that I will be revisiting this issue in the next couple of years. I can also recommend a very worthwhile book for members to read titled *Feral Future: The untold story of Australia's exotic invaders*. It is about how feral species get in and how they become endemic. Cane toads and cottonbush—I will not start because I will not finish. However, without some more activity, we face a feral future. It is not good enough. With those words, I rest.

HON DIANE EVERS (South West) [6.12 pm]: I am the lead speaker for the Greens in the debate on the consideration of the budget papers. The first thing I would like to say is that it is excellent to see fiscal responsibility. With all due respect, I want to refer to the condolence motion today. I listened to a number of people speak in this chamber with such respect and admiration for Hon Max Evans. It was very touching and I want to say that I identify with a lot of the things that were said. We were told that he was very responsible with money—he understood the value of it and the importance of it in making the state strong and resilient for times of need. That seems to be happening in this budget. It is quite a conservative budget, which is understandable given that the year after next is an election year. The way our system works is that the incumbent government gets to splash cash on politically motivated but, hopefully, worthwhile projects. Understanding and acknowledging that makes things easier. Our Parliament has four-year terms, so when a government spends responsibly prior to an election, it can be the outcome of having done the hard yards in the first couple of years.

Unfortunately, I will not continue my admiration of this budget. As I have said in other years, I am very disappointed that there is next to no acknowledgement in the budget of our changing climate. It should not be hard to get it in there. We are beginning to use those words in our daily conversations. It was said three times in the other house last week and twice in here. A press release went out declaring water deficiency declarations in the great southern, which mentioned climate change. We know it is happening. We feel it around us. This is the most pressing issue for the world, for Australia and Western Australia, but this budget does not take it into account. I fear for us because considerable damage will be done by natural events and there will be considerable litigation when people are unfairly damaged by the effects of climate change. I do not know if anyone has noticed but it seems as though the only ones who get this—there are quite a few other people who do—are our students, our future leaders. They are marching in the streets demanding that we do something, if only to ensure that they have a chance of addressing our unconscionable actions that have been driven by our greed over the past few hundred years and our pigheadedness in the past few decades. Knowing full well that we have been causing havoc with the earth's normal cyclical climate patterns, we have just continued to make it worse. It seems as though Labor has noticed those 200 000 school students in the federal election. But will anything change? Change is needed now. Change is needed soon. As I said, climate change was mentioned last week in this and the other house, but that excludes Hon Tim Clifford's question about whether the government would declare a climate emergency—a suggestion that was swiftly rejected by the minister. The United Kingdom

understands. It has declared a climate emergency. Our Australian government is based on UK rules and most of our population is of its heritage.

Hon Stephen Dawson: This is the same UK that has been trying to deal with Brexit for not months, but years. If they cannot fix Brexit, how are they going to fix climate change?

Hon DIANE EVERS: I guess the first thing is to acknowledge it and make it count in the budget. Let us see if we can get there before them. Let us make it a contest. Who can address climate change first? If we want to be in a competition, let us try to win it. We should be able to; we know what we are doing. Let us move on from there.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order, members! Only one person has the call, and that is Hon Diane Evers.

Hon DIANE EVERS: Australia has a small population yet it continues to emit greater carbon emissions and greater quantities of methane than the UK. We are at the top of the game in this. We know how to pollute the air and planet, and we are doing it big time. In addition, we export fossil fuels. Coal and gas are burned and cause carbon emissions in other countries. To extract and export these fuels, of course, we burn fuel. There are emissions related to mining fossil fuels. It goes on and on and we are digging deeper and deeper holes.

Hon Michael Mischin: Are you walking home tonight or taking a car?

Hon DIANE EVERS: I am walking, thanks.

Hon Robin Scott interjected.

Hon DIANE EVERS: That is not what I am saying!

The PRESIDENT: Order! Member, you have only two minutes to go; do not pick up on the interjections from others, please.

Hon DIANE EVERS: Where is the investment in renewable technology? Where is the payment from profitable mining companies for the damage they are causing now and into the future? Why is there not a carbon capture program—one that works and not the Clayton's method promised by Chevron? We need one that works. Now we are stepping in to assist the hopelessly inefficient dream of carbon capture of fossil fuel-derived emissions. Why is something not being done? To think that we are doing this through technology when we have such easy access to growing trees and improving our soil health. These things can address these issues and they can do it now. Around the world different people are saying that they are going to plant a million trees or a billion trees. Let us just start by stopping the cutting of our trees and maybe it will pick up from there.

An offset program must be restricted to Australia to reward landholders who improve the productive capacity of their land while cleaning the air and producing valuable commodities. We have to look holistically, and not solve a problem while we create another. I hope that the Environmental Protection Authority guidelines will come back soon and that some way will be found to impose carbon offsets on those who pollute in Western Australia. Those carbon offsets must be held in Australia. We should reward those Australians who are doing the right thing. We need to start at home. We need to think globally, but act locally. Our local area is Western Australia, and we should be looking to fix it up first. It was outrageous that the Environmental Protection Authority's guidelines were rejected out of hand. I expect better of this government. I expect it to support farmers and insurance companies, who both know that climate change is human caused. Even mining companies have to acknowledge that climate change is human caused. In 2017, this Parliament unanimously agreed that climate change was human caused. I was most buoyed by that. I thought we were onto something and would be able to talk about climate change, but we have fallen back. We said the words and then we stopped. Why do we not do something? The students are waiting and they want action. They want action today.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.