

ECONOMICS AND INDUSTRY STANDING COMMITTEE

Seventh Report - "Annual Report 2006-2007"

MR R.C. KUCERA (Yokine) [11.32 am]: I present for tabling the seventh report of the Economics and Industry Standing Committee, titled "Annual Report 2006-2007".

[See paper 3068.]

Mr R.C. KUCERA: This seventh report, which is the third annual report of the Economics and Industry Standing Committee of the thirty-seventh Parliament of Western Australia, provides a brief overview of the committee's activities for the period 1 July 2006 to 30 June 2007. This is also my first report as chair of the committee, having been appointed to the committee by the Legislative Assembly on 21 June 2007 and subsequently elected as chair, a position I am proud to hold. I particularly acknowledge my fellow members on that committee: Dr Judy Edwards, the member for Maylands; Mr Grant Woodhams, the member for Greenough; Mr Mick Murray, the member for Collie-Wellington; and Mr Tony Simpson, the member for Serpentine-Jarrahdale. I will make comment later on Dr Loraine Abernethie, the principal research officer, and Mr Peter Frantom, the research officer, for this committee. I would like to acknowledge also the very significant role played by Ms Jaye Radisich during her membership of the committee. Ms Radisich held the position of Chair from the committee's establishment by the thirty-seventh Parliament until her resignation from the committee in June 2007. The committee thanks Ms Radisich for her energy, enthusiasm and commitment to the committee's work.

Ms J.A. Radisich: Don't forget to mention her dictatorial style!

Mr R.C. KUCERA: I thank the member for Swan Hills. The member made that comment, not me!

On 14 June 2007, the committee tabled its major report on the state government's role in developing and promoting the information communications technology - ICT - industry in Western Australia. The complete print run of that report has already finished, and the report has gone out into the community. There is tremendous interest in that report. That report represented the culmination of an inquiry that the committee commenced in June 2006. As part of its investigations, the committee held eight hearings, and gathered evidence from 21 witnesses. The committee also held 25 formal deliberative and adoption meetings during the reporting period. The ICT inquiry report reached 67 findings and made 34 recommendations to government. The committee has requested that the Minister for Industry and Enterprise report to the Assembly any action proposed by the government in respect of the report's recommendations. The government is required to formally respond within 90 days. The committee has also invited the Premier, in his capacity as Minister for Innovation; Science, to respond to the ICT report and its recommendations.

At the time of writing, the committee is considering a number of potential areas for inquiry from issues that have been presented to us. These range from adventure tourism to the safety of mine site accommodation in the wake of the recent cyclones that have occurred in the north west, and the adoption of clean coal technology. I will say more about that matter in a moment. A very important issue that is emerging, and that the committee has been approached on, is waste oil recovery and recycling. We have already had a number of briefings on that issue. Another important issue is suburban waste recovery. Other important issues are anti-trust and competition policy issues, which are currently the subject of national concern, particularly in the retail industry.

Discussions regarding the committee's next inquiry have raised another important issue; namely, the extensive range of portfolio responsibilities that has been allocated to this committee. There is no complaint about that. However, it raises the important issue of resourcing. Pursuant to standing order 287(3), the Economics and Industry Standing Committee has been allocated 16 portfolio responsibilities, covering such diverse areas as heritage, science, regional development, racing and gaming, planning and infrastructure, and consumer and employment protection, to list but a few. With regard to these portfolio responsibilities, the committee is charged with reviewing and reporting to the Assembly on the outcomes and administration of relevant departments, departmental annual reports that are tabled in the Assembly, and the adequacy of portfolio-relevant legislation and regulations. The committee is also required to investigate and report on any matters referred to it by the Assembly. It should be noted that the committee comprises five members. There is certainly no issue with that. They are five very enthusiastic members, I might add. It is supported by a secretariat of two. However, given the range of portfolios that the committee covers, the committee believes it is not possible for the committee to adequately fulfil its allocated review and report functions without a significant increase in resources.

The issue of standing committee portfolio workloads and staffing levels has been raised previously by the committee in its March 2006 submission to the Legislative Assembly's Procedure and Privileges Committee's "Review of the Legislative Assembly's Committee System and Other Matters". It is disappointing - the

committee would like this disappointment noted - that to date the Procedure and Privileges Committee has yet to report its findings. However, we will battle on.

The committee's 2005-2006 annual report noted that at the time of its writing the government response to the "Inquiry into the Production and Marketing of Foodstuffs" report had not been forthcoming. The response to this inquiry has now been received, and I am pleased to report that all 11 recommendations have received government support. This is a clear indication of the thoroughness of the report of the committee. As a result of this inquiry, the Minister for Agriculture and Food, Hon Kim Chance, MLC, announced in September 2006 funding for a voluntary Buy WA Food First certification and marketing scheme and for annual pesticide testing of fruit and vegetables, which is a matter that I think is on everybody's mind these days. Since then the committee has met with the minister to discuss the agency time lines and the programs that are required to give effect to the government response to the committee's inquiry.

In relation to the clean coal technology issue that I raised earlier, I am pleased to advise that the Economics and Industry Standing Committee will host a university student as a parliamentary intern who will undertake a research project related to that issue during the second semester of 2007. Although the parliamentary internship program has been running for some time, this is the first intern to be attached to the Legislative Assembly committee office. Having met the young man, I look forward to our involvement with his initial placement. I am sure that he will be a very successful addition to the committee process.

I also take this opportunity to formally thank the members of the committee for their dedication and commitment to the work of the committee. The depth of the information communications technology report, which was the main focus of the committee's activities over the past year, indicates that this commitment has been signalled in the committee's achievements. As somebody who still has to get his four-year-old granddaughter to tune the video machine, the report was remarkably simple to follow and easy to understand, and that is a tribute to the research officers and members of the committee. Thanks for that report also must go to the committee's former principal research officer, Ms Jessica Shaw, and particularly to the former research officer, Jovita Hogan, who held the fort as the acting principal research officer for a period during the formation of this report. Ms Hogan's efforts on behalf of the committee are sincerely appreciated. Finally, I thank the committee's current secretariat, Dr Loraine Abernethie, the principal research officer, and Mr Peter Frantom, the research officer, for their assistance afforded to the committee.

By way of final comment, as I have only just recently joined the committee system, I applaud the standing committee process within this Parliament. Having been a minister for almost five years, and having used and been privy to the committee system as both a minister and a member of this house, I must say that it is a good system. I urge the Procedure and Privileges Committee to conclude its review of the committee system and other matters and consider the kind of support and resources that, I suspect, all committees require in order to function properly. I commend the report to the house.