

Division 7: Office of the Public Sector Standards Commissioner, \$3 243 000 -

Ms Hodson-Thomas, Chairman.

Dr Gallop, Premier.

Mr N.R. Hunter, Executive Director.

Ms M. White, Acting Director of Equal Opportunity in Public Employment.

Dr GALLOP: I apologise for the commissioner not being here today.

Mrs EDWARDES: I refer the Premier to output 1 on page 129, compliance monitoring and assistance. The budget has been reduced. The Public Sector Standards Commissioner will this year have an increased workload for whistleblowing, including a review of the code of ethics, and will see an increase of four staff. I do not know whether those four staff will be in that area or in some of the other output areas. This indicates a significant reduction for the carrying out of this work in the forthcoming year.

[12.20 pm]

Dr GALLOP: The allocation of funds to the office was agreed between the Government and the commissioner. The Government is satisfied that the office has the allocation that it needs to do the job given to it by the Parliament.

Mrs EDWARDES: The Premier probably cannot answer that question in any other way. I simply put it on notice, particularly with regard to whistleblowing. The culture of the Public Service must be addressed and that will involve the office in an enormous task. It will need extra resources if it is to do it properly. If those resources are not made available, there will be a reduction in services elsewhere.

Dr GALLOP: That legislation has not been passed as yet.

Mr McGOWAN: I refer to page 128 and the Equal Opportunity Act and the government equity and diversity plan. Has any work been done on the proportion of people from non-English speaking backgrounds working in the public sector and their spread across the public sector to determine their level of representation in the higher and lower echelons?

Dr GALLOP: The member may be aware that in January this year I launched an equity and diversity plan for the public sector work force for 2001-05. That outlines the Government's commitment to equity and diversity in public employment for women, indigenous Australians, people with a disability, people from culturally diverse backgrounds and youth. It sets performance objectives for the public sector as a whole for 2003-05 and requires agencies to contribute by identifying objectives for their organisation. Agencies have been asked to provide those objectives to the Director of Equal Opportunity in Public Employment by 30 May. An extension to 30 September will be necessary for some agencies because their employee numbers are still unclear due to amalgamations of agencies as a result of machinery of government changes. When agency objectives have been received, the director will collate them and report to me on the impact of the government sector objectives.

Yearly achievement monitoring reports are produced. In recent years, the director has also provided yearly feedback reports to individual agencies with more than 100 employees, benchmarking their equity and diversity measures against the public sector generally. The director also produces matrices for women and each of the diversity groups that benchmark agencies by showing their position on a graph illustrating the representation and distribution of the group in each agency. Distribution is measured by the equity index and compares the distribution of the group across all levels with the distribution of the total work force. An ideal equity index is 100. An index of less than 100 indicates compression at the lower levels. These matrices have proved very effective in allowing agencies to compare their performance with that of similar agencies. If members are interested, we can provide copies of the matrices.

Recent trends have been assessed based on 2001 data. Representation of women has increased to 60 per cent of people and 55 per cent of full-time equivalents. The equity index for women increased to 53 in 2001 from 50 in 2000. The percentage of women in the senior executive service increased to 20.3 per cent in 2001 from 19.1 per cent in 2000 and 16.9 per cent in 1999. Western Australia still has the second lowest representation of women in the SES of all Australian States and Territories, but the gap has now narrowed. There have been increases in tier two management similar to SES data, but there have not been similar improvements in tier three. That is a concern because those positions provide the feeder pool for SES and tier two. There has been an increase in representation of indigenous Australians, but they are primarily employed at the lower levels. There has also been an increase in representation of people with disabilities across all levels of the public sector. There has been no recent change in representation of people from culturally diverse backgrounds, but employment is across all levels. We have work to do in this area. That analysis is based on June 2001 figures.

Ms WHITE: The new figures will be available in June.

Mr McGOWAN: What did the index reveal about the representation of people from non-English speaking backgrounds in the upper echelons?

Ms WHITE: The representation of people from culturally diverse backgrounds is 4.3 per cent - the same figure as the previous year. However, they are well represented across all levels of the public sector. The ideal equity index is 100, and an index of less than 100 indicates under-representation at higher levels. The equity index for people from culturally diverse backgrounds was 120 in 2001. Although they are under-represented, they are employed across all levels of the public sector.

Mrs EDWARDES: I refer to page 132 and the improvement of the position of women in the public sector over five years. The target for 2002-03 has been reduced because the percentage increase is levelling off. How does one equate that with a desire to continue working towards a better gender balance across government?

Ms WHITE: The percentage referred to in the papers is a percentage of women throughout the public sector. Although there has been an increase in the percentage, it is not increasing as quickly as it has been. An ongoing increase is anticipated, but it will not be as rapid. If the member is talking about women in senior positions and management tiers, that is not mentioned in the budget papers.

Mrs EDWARDES: The indicator shows that it is levelling off. The reduction does not suggest a desire to improve the figure.

Dr GALLOP: The equity and diversity document deals only with women at the senior level, not women overall in the public sector.

Mr McRAE: How is the Office of the Public Sector Standards Commissioner doing with its diversity index?

Dr GALLOP: As I said, it discusses these matters with each agency.

Mr McRAE: I am referring to the agency itself.

Ms WHITE: I cannot provide the exact figures, but the office has high diversity - it is substantially higher than the average.

Dr GALLOP: Maxine Murray replaced Don Saunders as the commissioner. That might have changed the balance. I am happy to provide supplementary information on the make-up of the staff of the Office of the Public Sector Standards Commissioner.

[Supplementary Information No A61]

Mrs EDWARDES: I refer to page 132 and major initiatives for 2002-03. Reference is made to providing further encouragement and assistance to those government boards and committees that are yet to develop codes of conduct. How many boards and committees have developed codes of conduct and how many are still to do so?

Mr HUNTER: There is no requirement under the Public Sector Management Act for boards and committees to have a code of conduct. However, the previous commissioner and the current commissioner are of the view that it makes good business sense. Much of their work involves government money and providing services to the community. At this stage, 292 of a total of just under 400 boards and committees have developed codes of conduct.

[12.30 pm]

Dr GALLOP: I was informed recently that the office has a template code for all boards and committees. The member will be aware that some boards have a very limited range of functions compared to others, like Western Power, which is very commercial and broad-based. Therefore, the types of codes and their needs will vary.

Mrs EDWARDES: On page 134 a key effectiveness indicator is the percentage of the commissioner's nominations accepted by the Minister for Public Sector Management. In 2000-01 it was 96 per cent and last year it dropped to 87.5 per cent. Is there a reason for that? Is the Government to put in place any changes in procedures or processes to increase the percentage?

Dr GALLOP: I can get details on that. The issue was the chief executive position of the Department of Conservation and Land Management. Given that the reform process legislation had not gone through the Parliament and some ongoing issues needed to be worked through, it was felt that it was better to keep the current incumbent in an acting position until all that settled down before the appointment of the new director general.

Mrs EDWARDES: That has meant a waste of resources. The Premier, minister and Commissioner for Public Sector Standards signed off the advertisements and the interviews took place. Therefore, a considerable amount of work went to waste when the filling of the position was waiting for legislation.

Dr GALLOP: The minister came to the view, and said to the Government, that she would be much happier if the incumbent stayed in the position, given the uncertainties that were around. The Government accepted that.

Mrs EDWARDES: On page 135, output 3 deals with chief executive officer selection and reappointment advice. Bearing in mind the Premier's earlier comment on not necessarily advertising for but being able to reappoint chief executive officers, the cost efficiency for chief executive officers' selections has gone up considerably. The average cost per chief executive officer selection in the 2001-02 budget was \$39 000 and the estimated actual was \$46 000, which represents an increase on 2000-01. The cost for the current year has not been reduced and is still at a very high level.

Dr GALLOP: The number of CEOs has reduced, but they still have the same fixed costs; therefore, the amount goes up. This illustrates some of the problems that we have with some of these measures.

Mrs EDWARDES: On page 137 the statement of financial performance shows that full-time equivalents have increased to 29. I link this question to the amount of money that has been allocated to this division, which means that the Government must do more with more people but with less money. What do the extra four FTEs relate to; is it a new function?

Mr HUNTER: The four additional staff will relate to the whistleblowing legislation. When that is passed, the Commissioner for Public Sector Standards will be required to monitor the Act to develop guidelines for authorities to follow, to develop a code of conduct to go with it and to assist agencies to comply with the new legislation.

Mrs EDWARDES: The expenses for ordinary activities give a reduced figure for salaries and allowances, which is not increased markedly in the outgoing years, yet the division has an extra four FTEs. Has the office been restructured so that classification levels have reduced?

Dr GALLOP: I am not aware of that.

Mr HUNTER: There has been no major restructuring in the office. Some has occurred in one of the divisions which has resulted in one or two fewer FTEs being required for the original function for which it was determined. With a new commissioner on board, there is a possibility that there may be some further changes in the office over the next three or six months.

Mrs EDWARDES: What classifications will the extra four FTEs be?

Dr GALLOP: I will provide the classifications of the extra four staff by way of supplementary information.

[Supplementary Information No A62]

The appropriation was recommended.