

Mr Paul Omodei; Dr Judy Edwards; Mr Jeremy Edwards; Mr Bernie Masters; Mr John D'Orazio; Mr Norm Marlborough; Mr John Quigley

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**Division 38: Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority, \$14 245 000 -**

Ms J.A. Radisich, Chairman.

Dr J.M. Edwards, Minister for the Environment.

Dr S. Hopper, Chief Executive Officer.

Ms M. Broderick, Director, Business and Corporate Services.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: I refer to significant issues and trends on page 619 of the *Budget Statements*. I commend Dr Hopper for the tremendous work done at Kings Park; it is a credit to him and his department. I notice that a cut of about four per cent has occurred in the capital contribution in the budget this year. I also note that it is projected that Kings Park will have an increase of more than 460 000 visitors in 2004-05, which is fantastic. Is that a justification for the cut, or is there another reason?

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: Essentially, the peak of the capital works program has been reached with the Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority. A lot of capital works have been undertaken with the authority, as no doubt the member is aware. The recent capital works have included the Kings Park Lotterywest Federation Walkway, which I am delighted to announce has had 900 000 visitors since it opened in August 2003. As the member rightly pointed out, there is a lot of people pressure on the park. As I said, a lot of money has been invested in capital works. A retail outlet is currently under construction to be completed in the current financial year. Similarly, we have a plant conservation centre and an ecology centre and work is taking place in Bold Park. A huge amount of capital works has taken place, and that is now tapering off.

Mr J.P.D. EDWARDS: The member for Warren-Blackwood asked my question.

Mr B.K. MASTERS: I refer the minister to page 620 of the *Budget Statements*. Remembering the comments just made about the reduction in capital expenditure, I presume that the reduction of almost 25 per cent from \$16.8 million in the current year to \$12.4 million next year in the total cost of outputs is in operating expenditure. Putting aside the reduction in capital expenditure, how can the minister justify a huge cut in operating expenditure next year even though there will be an additional 450 000 visitors to Kings Park next year?

[10.20 am]

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: The base funding will remain fairly constant. However, we have had expenditure for capital works through those outputs. For example, capital works projects in 2003-04 amounted to \$2.6 million. They included \$500 000 for the Lotterywest Federation Walkway, minor capital works from 2002-03 but expended in 2003-04 of \$600 000, minor capital works in 2003-04 of \$600 000, the retail outlet valued at \$200 000, \$300 000 for the plant conservation centre, \$200 000 for the ecology centre and \$200 000 for Reabold Hill. That is the reason the member is seeing those types of changes.

Mr B.K. MASTERS: Why would those capital items be incorporated into the line item at page 620, which I would have thought would be operating costs rather than capital costs?

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: Agreement has been reached with Treasury that projects expended in this way appear in these outputs. For example, the gross output for conservation and scientific research increased between 2002-03 and 2003-04. It was primarily due to expenditure on capital works, which could be regarded as recurrent. It includes bushland management for Kings Park of \$200 000, bushland management for Bold Park of \$900 000, continuing work on the Mt Eliza scarp of \$600 000, the Bold Park ecology centre and the Reabold Hill works, which I mentioned previously.

Mr B.K. MASTERS: Is the Araluen Botanic Park under the umbrella of the Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority? I thought there were some moves to do that some years ago.

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: A recommendation was made in the Machinery of Government Taskforce report that looked at government departments and facilities and where they reported to. One recommendation was that Araluen Botanic Park come under the umbrella of the Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority. Since then, it has continued with the Department for Planning and Infrastructure because the park comes under the control of the Western Australian Planning Commission. The park is assisted by the Araluen Botanic Park Foundation, a group of community volunteers who are very committed to the park. Discussions have been held about how to manage the funding arrangements in such a transfer. Most of the funding comes from the metropolitan regional improvement fund, which is quite a financially healthy fund. It comes courtesy of the connection with the Western Australian Planning Commission. Speaking parochially, as an agency we are very clear that there will be a need for transfer funding to ensure the tasks currently undertaken and to be undertaken in the future can be

Mr Paul Omodei; Dr Judy Edwards; Mr Jeremy Edwards; Mr Bernie Masters; Mr John D'Orazio; Mr Norm Marlborough; Mr John Quigley

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done. Quite sensitive negotiations have continued with the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure and me with the foundation and the board of the Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority, the chief executive officer and others from the Department for Planning and Infrastructure and the WAPC. I believe that the negotiations may be drawing to an end. We want the best outcome for both entities. I will certainly not be signing off on that until I am confident we have the best outcome.

Mr B.K. MASTERS: Does the minister have a general idea of the cost of managing Araluen? How much might have to be allocated?

Dr HOPPER: It currently operates on a cash grant, which is from gate revenue, and an allocation from the Department for Planning and Infrastructure of approximately \$500 000 to \$900 000. It varies depending on the gate takings. On top of that, there are in-kind services provided by the Department for Planning and Infrastructure to help the foundation administer the park. By our estimate, it is approximately \$1 million to \$1.2 million on current operation. The Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority has additional statutory responsibilities that have to be met in managing Araluen; for example, in the areas of biodiversity conservation, research and cultural heritage such as Aboriginal heritage. The recurrent costs to the BGPA may be higher than the present operating costs.

Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO: I refer to the second dot point at page 619, which is the revised five-year management plan for Kings Park. I thank the board for its wonderful management of the park. It is absolutely fantastic. More importantly, are there any other proposed developments of that nature for Kings Park as part of a formal process? Will there be any more developments of that nature that will attract more people to Kings Park? I have taken a number of tourists to the park. They all think it is an absolutely wonderful place. The standard of maintenance over the past few years has greatly improved to the extent that it is a credit to the board and the Government. Self-promotion is okay!

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: I refer the member to the retail outlet, which is currently under construction. It will be completed in the next financial year. It will be yet another reason for the member to take his visitors to Kings Park and to make sure they buy lots of products! It will be managed by the authority, assisted by Craftwest. I am not sure whether the member has seen any of the Craftwest work; it is doing phenomenal work displaying Western Australian features and craftspeople. They often use Western Australian materials. It will be a very good advertisement for the State, particularly for the member's Italian visitors. He should make sure that he takes them there and that they spend up big as that will help us all! That will be rolled out during the coming financial year. There is also a plant conservation centre, which is very important for the behind-the-scenes work done by the Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority that is not always obvious. That will also occur throughout the next financial year. Potentially, one of the most exciting things is the involvement of the Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority in an application for further scientific funding to see whether it can expand on its work with other scientific entities in looking at plant biodiversity. The authority has made a bid to the Premier's science fund. The bids are now being short-listed and an announcement will be made some time early in the new financial year. If the bid were to be successful, it would be truly fantastic. It would be the icing on the cake. It would celebrate the excellent scientific work that occurs that receives a lot of international acclaim but is not always so well recognised at home.

Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO: I have another question in a similar vein. The walkway in Kings Park was opened last year. It is fantastic and magnificent. Some people have commented to me that it would be nice if it were open until eight or nine o'clock at night so that people can see the lights of Perth.

Mr N.R. MARLBOROUGH: Two o'clock in the morning!

Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO: I do not know about that, but at least until eight or nine o'clock.

Mr N.R. MARLBOROUGH: No-one can see what you are up to at that time.

Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO: Has any thought been given to extending the opening hours from five o'clock in the evening to allow the Perth vista to be seen at night? It would be a very successful tourism attraction. It does not necessarily need to be until midnight.

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: Does the member want to revisit old haunts?

Mr N.R. MARLBOROUGH: The minister and I are thinking along the same lines!

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: Thanks.

Dr HOPPER: The issue raised by the member is something that was raised during the planning stages of the walkway. Our approach has been to get it up and running and to develop an understanding of the teething problems. A balance must be struck between the 95 per cent of people who will really enjoy the experience and the five per cent of people who will take the opportunity to vandalise and get up to nefarious activities. In fact,

Mr Paul Omodei; Dr Judy Edwards; Mr Jeremy Edwards; Mr Bernie Masters; Mr John D'Orazio; Mr Norm Marlborough; Mr John Quigley

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within a week of opening, we had a number of break-ins with our security gates closed. During one of those break-ins, some of the glass panels on the bridge were smashed. There is a balance between what the public would dearly love and what we can afford to deliver in that context. We are reviewing it, and we will review the number of people who go over the bridge monthly. We are coming up for the big annual review. I think that will be the time when we will sit around collectively with the board and ask questions.

[10.30 am]

Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO: Surely the authority could accommodate opening until eight o'clock or nine o'clock at night fairly easily, because a large number of tourists want to see the lights. The facilities are there. It would be only a minor extension. I think the authority should look at it.

Dr HOPPER: Absolutely.

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: That is something we will take on board. It is an issue that has been raised by a number of people. As the chief executive officer said, there will be a review of the operations. In many ways, the numbers of people who are using it are beyond the numbers we anticipated. In fact, we are delighted that this is a free facility; that is, people do not have to pay to visit it. However, we have received about \$120 000 in donations. When the member's visitors come, they need to drop in their gold coins.

Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO: They do.

Mr B.K. MASTERS: My final question relates to output 2, conservation and scientific research, on page 623. The total cost of the output, which is the first line item, will drop by some \$620 000 from the current year to next year. It states that the movement is due to the expensing of capital works projects. As we do not have a breakdown of capital works versus normal operating costs in our budget papers, can the minister advise what is the current year's operating expenditure, other than for capital works, on output 2? How will that compare with next year's operating expenditure? In other words, I would like some assurance that the level of research for last year and next year will be maintained in future years.

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: We have already been through the list of the expensing of capital works projects, so I will not run through that again. I will ask the chief executive officer to pick up on the latter part of the member's question about money spent on the scientific side.

Dr HOPPER: I can assure the member that the allocation for science next year will be the same as, and a slight increase on, the consolidated fund allocation to the current activities of our science group. Science in the park is funded on a two to one ratio; that is, one part government funding and two parts external grants. It is very much a self-motivated group that attracts a lot of external money. What we have been able to do with the capital works program in bushland management is put a front-end research program in Bold Park in particular to try to ascertain the best techniques for bushland restoration. The way that Treasury has agreed for us to do that is by shifting some money into recurrent money, and calling it expensed money. That will pay for some of the research and some of the operations in that capital work. The reduction that the member can see is when those funds cut out. It is in the capital allocation. However, the team remains funded at its core at the same level, if not a bit more, and is attracting external grants at about the same level it has done in the past few years.

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: It is also important to look at previous budgets to see that funding for this output has risen quite a lot, as those capital works were expensed through this output. As that program draws to an end at the end of the decade of capital works, although that amount appears to drop, the fundamental work will continue.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I think Kings Park is a fantastic place for exercise. It is a wonderful facility where people who work in the city can exercise during the day. I try to go there about three times a week. The middle drive is May Drive.

Dr HOPPER: It is Lovekin Drive.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: It struck me that there seems to be a paucity of drinking fountains. Unless people carry their own water in Kings Park, they can become dehydrated. Some of the jogs are up quite long hills. Water must be available in the green area running from the lake down to the DNA Observation Tower, because the grass there gets watered. Is there a possibility of installing some drinking fountains somewhere? There seems to be a paucity in the park, apart from in the Sunset Cinema area. Water is available there, but not in other areas.

Dr HOPPER: Drinking fountains are a bit like car-parking spaces in Kings Park. We have to ensure that we put them where the highest demand is, but we have been progressively increasing the number of drinking fountains at the Western Power Parkland and around the Sunset Cinema area.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I appreciate that. It is the other drive down the middle.

Mr Paul Omodei; Dr Judy Edwards; Mr Jeremy Edwards; Mr Bernie Masters; Mr John D'Orazio; Mr Norm Marlborough; Mr John Quigley

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Dr HOPPER: The member is alluding to Broadwalk Vista.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I do not mean the grassed part.

Dr HOPPER: Up to the DNA tower.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: No; the middle road.

Dr HOPPER: Yes; Lovekin Drive.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Yes; Lovekin Drive. There do not seem to be any drinking fountains there.

Dr HOPPER: There are not. We will have six points scattered throughout the bushland of Kings Park, which will be entry points to the bushland. The first point is just above the Pioneer Women's Memorial fountain. In the past week or two the member may have noticed a rusted steel structure in the form of an Aboriginal mia-mia with interpretation. Each of those nodes will have a drinking fountain. They will be scattered around the bush along the main roads at key points where people can access the bushland and see something of interest. The intention is to have signage, a drinking fountain and a structure like the one near the Pioneer Women's Memorial fountain.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Thank you, doctor. That is good news.

**The appropriation was recommended.**