

Mr John Castrilli; Mr Fran Logan; Chairman; Mr John Hyde; Mr Max Trenorden; Mr Gary Snook; Mrs Carol Martin; Mr Troy Buswell; Mr Bob Kucera

Division 19: Local Government and Regional Development — Service 2, Improved Access to Services and Capacity for Development in Regional Communities, \$29 158 000 —

Ms K. Hodson-Thomas, Chairman.

Mr F.M. Logan, Minister for Energy representing the Minister for Regional Development.

Ms J. Mathews, Director General.

Mr G. Comben, Acting Director, Strategies and Legislation.

Mr M. D'Ovidio, Principal Accounting Officer.

The CHAIRMAN: The member for Bunbury has the call.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: Thank you, Madam Chair. The third dot point under “Major Initiatives For 2008-2009” on page 330 of the *Budget Statements* reads —

Compile and release a range of publications focusing on regional demographic and economic changes for all non-metropolitan areas . . .

What is the difference between the data presented by the Department of Local Government and Regional Development and that presented by the regional development commissions? I thought that the RDCs gather or should gather this data as part of their duties. What different information or data does the department provide, given what the regional development commissions provide, and why is the department doing it?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I am advised about a couple of points. One is that the Department of Local Government and Regional Development gathers data of relevance to regional policy for the publication of documents and reports such as the regional economic perspectives documents that the department releases for the regional development commissions. Also, that work focuses on close liaison with the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the nine regional development commissions, or RDCs, and the various other organisations at a state and federal level in order to obtain information that contributes to the planning process in regional Western Australia. It is not a question of double-dipping or duplicating the work of regional development commissions; the department works in conjunction with RDCs and assists them in gathering information not only for their own use, but also to feed back into the state planning for regional Western Australia.

[8.40 pm]

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: Is the department just taking the data that is provided by the regional development commissions and putting it into a report?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: No. As I indicated, the department gleans information from a number of sources, including the Australian Bureau of Statistics and various others such as the RDCs. That information is put together for the state government and its various departments, including for its own use and also for the RDCs themselves.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: Do the regional development commissions not do precisely that in their regions? I understand that they are supposed to look at all the economic indicators, drivers and demographic projections. I presume they are doing all that work now anyway.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: As I said, this is not a matter of duplication; it is work done in conjunction with the RDCs.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: It is not a duplication; it is just pooling together the information from all the development commissions!

Mr F.M. LOGAN: No, it is combining the work that the RDCs do and other work that they do not do. It is a collaborative effort. It is not a competition. The work is done collaboratively by the department for the production of reports such as the economic perspectives for RDCs. The RDCs are the beneficiaries of the information.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: I am aware of that. However, from what I understand, the sphere of influence of regional development commissions includes putting out their own reports that include demographics and economic indicators and they then promote their own regions for investment opportunities. I assume that unless they are not doing their job properly, they have that information as part of their own promotional documents and for their own information for their own reasons, surely.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I do not understand where the member's line of questioning is going. What point is he making? It is a collaborative effort between the department and RDCs, of which the beneficiaries of that type of information are the RDCs.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: I am happy to explain it to the minister if he wants me to.

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Mr F.M. LOGAN: Maybe the member should. If there is an issue, bring it to my attention.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: Let me put it this way: the regional development commissions are in control of their own regions —

The CHAIRMAN: I have to call the member for Bunbury to order.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: The minister just asked me a question, Madam Chair.

Mr J.N. HYDE: Do not challenge the Chair.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: The member should mind his own business.

The CHAIRMAN: Order, members! I am able to handle this situation without the help of the member for Perth, who is not helping. The member for Bunbury must ask questions that are specific to the budget papers. I understand that the member is dissatisfied with the minister's response but the minister is able to respond in any way he wishes.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: I am happy to stop this line of questioning. The minister said that he did not know where I was coming from and he agreed that I should explain it to him. I was responding to the minister. I am happy to stop asking questions on this because I think I have made the point.

The CHAIRMAN: We are having a great deal of difficulty allowing other members to ask questions because the questions being asked are too long and the answers are too long also. I give the call to the member for Avon.

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: I refer the minister to the table of key efficiency indicators on page 329 of the *Budget Statements*. The average value of a grant approved for local and regional communities is expected to reduce from approximately \$54 000 in 2007-08 to approximately \$45 000 in 2008-09. The budget states that the reduction in 2008-09 is due to an increased number of successful applications. That does not compute. Are there any issues other than the increase in the successful number of applications that have caused a significant reduction in the average value rate of approval?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I am advised that it is influenced by the quantity that is being paid. I am aware that it is the average value of the grants that is listed. Even the average value is influenced by the total amount of money that has been paid. If there is an increase in that amount, the number of grants will reduce commensurably.

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: What has occurred to allow those extra applications to be made? In 2006-07 and 2008 there has been a constant decline. Has the process been opened? Has the criteria been expanded? Has something like that happened?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I will pass that question to Mr Comben, who will explain the details of those grants.

Mr G. Comben: Every second year we run the community facilities grants program, which provides a maximum grant of \$25 000, and we fund probably 50 or 60 projects through that grants program. Therefore, every second year the average grant will fall considerably.

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: Okay. That is a logical answer. That is very good; thank you.

Mr G. SNOOK: I refer to the reason for significant variation in the key efficiency indicators on page 329 of the *Budget Statements*. The minister will note that the 2007-08 estimate includes funding carryover. Will the minister identify for the committee where that carryover is identified within service 2?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I am not too sure whether that is pointed out in the division itself, but I can inform the member that the expenditure variance in the 2007-08 budget to estimated actual relates to the carryover of \$2.535 million from the 2006-07 budget of the funding of the telecentre support. The expenditure reduction in 2008-09 is mainly due to not having a funding carryover from the telecentre support and the completion of the Future Skilling Outback WA project in 2007-08 of \$1.8 million.

Mr G. SNOOK: Is the money indicated in service 2 inclusive of regional investment funding, regional development grant schemes, the outer metropolitan community program and financial support to local government? Is that within the service 2 outline?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: It is certainly inclusive of regional investment funding because it is the total cost of service but it does not include the outer metropolitan funding because that is a separate amount that is handled by a local government service.

Mr G. SNOOK: Does the minister agree that the positioning of the details of the controlled grants and subsidies on page 338, which we are not allowed to refer to because we are dealing only with service 2, creates some difficulty for members of the committee to cross-reference regional development funding and the capacity for development in regional communities under service 2? I am trying to be concise and to stay within the Chair's

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guidelines regarding asking questions only about service 2. Does the minister agree that it is incompatible to have it located where it is, for that reason?

[8.50 pm]

Mr F.M. LOGAN: A number of dots points within service 2 give members the opportunity to find a way to ask the question the member is seeking to ask. I am not responsible for the printing of the budget layout, and neither is the department. It is handled by the Department of Treasury and Finance.

Mr G. SNOOK: I make the point for the observation of the advisers and for others to take note that the budget layout should make it easier for members to follow the accounting provisions. I am not having a shot at the minister. It is a commonsense thing. Madam Chair, I seek your indulgence to finish on the comment that it would be far more compatible to lock the regional development and regional community service section into one, or cross-reference it so that we are not pulled up by vigilant Chairs and told that we are out of order.

The CHAIRMAN: Members have an opportunity in the third reading of the Appropriation (Consolidated Account) Bill (No. 1) 2008 to point out the problems they have envisaged with the operation of the committee. The member for Moore has made a valid point that he could take up at that time.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: I refer to the sixth dot point under “Major Initiatives For 2008-09” at page 330. My question relates to the Department of Local Government and Regional Development, which is responsible for implementing the government’s policy to close Wittenoom. Has the department received funding to acquire privately owned property in Wittenoom?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Yes. It received \$1.8 million in the 2007-08 financial year and it has been allocated \$400 000 in the 2008-09 financial year. An amount of \$850 000 has been allocated to the purchase of property in Wittenoom and to provide removal assistance to residents. An allocation of \$1.35 million has been made to implement the shared equity scheme to assist Wittenoom residents to purchase a property elsewhere in the state. To date none of the residents has taken up the offer. A request will be put to cabinet to extend the time of that offer. As the member would be aware, it has been a long, drawn-out and sorry saga for Wittenoom, particularly for those people who have suffered the consequences of living and working in that town. The government is trying to bring a closure to that story and town, which requires asking and encouraging people to move on and giving them assistance to do that. Although only a handful of residents are left, a number of freehold titles in the town of Wittenoom are still to be dealt with. About a dozen residents occupy properties in Wittenoom. It is up to the department to encourage those people to move on and to provide them with some incentive to purchase property elsewhere. The purchasing of property, rather than lifestyle, may be the issue. Funding was allocated in last year’s budget and has been allocated in this financial year’s budget for residents of Wittenoom to move on.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: I have driven up and down the inland road a number of times. I was informed a couple of years ago that there was no signage to Wittenoom. That is not the case; there is signage to Wittenoom. If the minister can answer my question, I would be happy; if not, I will seek the information by way of supplementary information. The signs are encouraging the public to go to Wittenoom. By doing so, members of the public would subject themselves to exposure to asbestos, which would endanger their lives. Is the government doing anything through the department to ensure that people are not encouraged to go to Wittenoom?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: It is. I will give an example of what the department has done. The department has launched a website about Wittenoom, which includes health information, government policy and alternate destinations and links to those destinations. The department has created and distributed brochures informing potential travellers of the risks associated with travelling to Wittenoom. It has written to more than 100 companies requesting that the reference to Wittenoom in their publications or promotional material be removed or be accompanied by government warnings and reference to the department’s website on Wittenoom. It has submitted drafting instructions in the form of a cabinet submission requesting drafting of legislation for compulsory acquisition. Members have seen that the status of Wittenoom as a town site has been abolished from maps. The department has employed an independent auditor to evaluate the GHD and Parsons Brinckerhoff report. It has also put a recommendation to the Department of Environment and Conservation that Wittenoom be classified as a contaminated site. Wittenoom has now been classified as contaminated and caveats have been placed on all Wittenoom titles. I am advised that many of the signs to Wittenoom have been removed, but I will inform the department that if there are still signs to Wittenoom on the highway, it must take action to remove them.

Mr G. SNOOK: My final question on this division relates to the fifth dot point under “Major Initiatives For 2008-09” at page 330. It refers to the government’s continued support for Telecentre Network Western Australia. Is the amount allocated in 2008-09 the same as previously and what is the amount for each telecentre?

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Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: I want to request more formal information on the same question. It might also answer the member for Moore's question. My question is: what was the amount of money allocated to each telecentre in the 2007-08 budget and the 2008-09 budget?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: The member for Avon wants that dot point to go to that length and it does not. I will ask Ms Mathews to give an overview of the current funding to telecentres and their future.

[Mr A.P. O'Gorman took the chair.]

Ms J. Mathews: I can confirm that since the telecentres began operating in 1991, they have been funded to the tune of about \$2 million a year. Basically, that funding is used to ensure that there is adequate funding for base salary. Many people operate the centres. Most of the centres are staffed by volunteers. Over the years they have become a very valuable source of information and a way of connecting rural, remote and Indigenous communities to the internet and the outside world. Over time they have become an important community hub and they are increasingly engaged in community activities. Telecentre operations work closely with local government authorities in the organisation of community events and festivals. Their mandate and operation is, in some ways, expanding. At the moment the Telecentre Advisory Council is in the process of putting forward a strategic marketing plan for the future. That plan will look at ways of developing and using this infrastructure more innovatively. With the advent of broadband, there is certainly scope for expanding the way the Telecentres are used. Increasingly, they are used to provide education and training and promote information on and advice about government services. There is scope for the role of these telecentres. Currently, 102 telecentres are operating and a further three will be set up in Indigenous communities.

[9.00 pm]

Mr F.M. LOGAN: The rollout of very fast satellite-delivered broadband and fibre-optic to significant areas of Western Australia, if not all the state, will have an impact on telecentres, particularly if the federal government's \$4.5 billion fibre-optic national broadband network program goes ahead in the way that we expect it to. I spoke about that in Parliament recently and I raised the issue with the department during a briefing. Certainly Western Australia will play a major role in that rollout. As I reported in Parliament recently, the Kimberley—particularly the Indigenous communities and government agencies—is now being serviced by Newsat Pty Ltd with satellite telecommunications that involve very fast satellite-delivered broadband. In fact, when that is repeated through a wireless repeater, people up to 30 kilometres from Indigenous communities on the Dampier Peninsula will have access to wireless broadband at a speed of 2.5 megabytes, which is as fast as what we can get anywhere in the metropolitan region. In the western desert lands, many of the larger centres are connected to Alice Springs by a fibre-optic network as a result of the program we have put in place in conjunction with the commonwealth government. That is very fast broadband. What does that mean for telecentres in those areas?

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: They will be closed.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: The member for Avon must remember that the speed of the broadband is pervasive. It has gone through all aspects of the community and has an impact on health, education, households etc. What is the future of telecentres if there are complete wireless networks in the regions?

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: The minister does not understand telecentres.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I understand telecentres. The member does not understand the technology, which is pervasive. What will happen when people will be able to use laptops to access the internet anywhere? That is primarily the issue for telecentres.

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: The government will shut them down. That is what telecentre staff are telling me.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: The member for Avon must think more carefully about advances in technology. We must adapt to new technology. I know that it is difficult for the member for Avon to get his head around technological changes.

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: That is because I am talking to an idiot.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: The member's problem is that he does not understand what he is talking about. He has no idea about technological changes.

The CHAIRMAN: Members are not permitted to have a free-flowing conversation across the chamber. Members who have a question must seek the call. When I give them the call, they are permitted to ask a question. I will not allow this banter to continue across the chamber. I ask the minister to finish his answer.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: As I pointed out to the department, the rollout of a national fibre-optic network will dramatically change the role of telecentres. The technology that comes from that speed of broadband is pervasive and will change the nature of telecentres. The member for Avon does not grasp that point.

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Mr G. SNOOK: The minister's adviser did not answer my question about next year's funding, which has been \$2 million in previous years. Is the amount the same for this year?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: It will continue on next year.

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: With no inflation components?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: No, it will be \$2 million.

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: Will the minister advise the funding for each of the 102 telecentres in 2006-07 and 2007-08?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Ms Mathews will provide that information now.

Ms J. Mathews: I am happy to clarify that that \$2 million is essentially allocated across the 102 telecentres with each receiving \$20 000. That money contributes to the funding of a manager for the telecentres. The rest of the staff are community volunteers.

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: Despite the minister wanting to get personal during this debate, telecentre staff in my electorate have approached me and said that funding has been reduced dramatically this year.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Which telecentre is the member for Avon talking about?

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: I am referring to the telecentres in Pingelly, Brookton —

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I ask the member for Avon to advise me which telecentre approached him and said that its funding had been cut. The member made a statement that he was approached by a telecentre

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: I have been approached by every telecentre in my electorate.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: The member said he had been approached by a telecentre.

Mr T. BUSWELL: Hang on! Who is asking the question?

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: With all due respect, Mr Chairman —

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I am trying to find out for the member's benefit —

Mr T. BUSWELL: The minister should pull himself together!

The CHAIRMAN: As I have said, when members get into a free-flowing conversation across the chamber, the debate deteriorates and questions are not answered. Members on my left should ask the questions and the minister should answer them with the help of his advisers. That is relatively simple. We can manage that.

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: My question is quite simple. I ask the minister to advise the funding for the 102 telecentres last year and this year.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: The member for Avon received an answer from Ms Mathews.

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: The answer is that the government is going to shut them. I will tell them just that.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: The member for Avon can go on all he likes. He has received the answer, but I will give it to him again. The funding allocation is \$2 million across the 102 telecentres. Each telecentre will receive \$20 000.

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: The answer is that the minister is not prepared to answer the question. I am prepared to accept that.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: If the member for Avon continues to interrupt, I will take him on.

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: I am terrified! I am shaking in my boots!

Mr F.M. LOGAN: The member is an idiot. It is about time he got out of this place.

The CHAIRMAN: Despite the fact that this is not a normal parliamentary debate, the estimates committee is a function of Parliament. Members are not permitted to use unparliamentary language. I ask the minister to withdraw his comment.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I withdraw that statement. However, I repeat what I said about the information I provided the member for Avon.

The CHAIRMAN: The minister need only withdraw his comment. I give the call to the member for Yokine.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: I refer to the heading service 2, "Improved Access to Services and Capacity for Development in Regional Communities". The line under the heading reads —

To enhance the social and economic development of communities through the provision of assistance, funding and leadership.

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Recent changes to the state's prostitution laws will place greater emphasis on local governments. I cannot find it in the budget papers, but the minister may be able to advise me of the amount of funding that has been put aside to assist local government to progress that piece of legislation, given that the onus will now be on local government to administer the changes under that legislation.

[9.10 pm]

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Can the member direct us to the point that he referred to?

The CHAIRMAN: I believe it was service 2 on page 329.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: It is page 329. Under the heading "Improved Access to Services and Capacity for Development in Regional Communities" the following is stated —

To enhance the social . . . development of communities through the provision of assistance, funding and leadership.

The changes under the legislation will obviously impact on regional communities, just as they will impact on those in the metropolitan area. Can the minister advise whether any funding has been set aside to assist local government following the introduction of the new legislation? That will be particularly important in remote and Indigenous communities.

The CHAIRMAN: I will have to rule that question out of order, because I cannot trace that question directly to a budget item. I do not think the minister can answer the question.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: I am sorry; I cannot hear you, Chair.

The CHAIRMAN: I am going to rule that question out of order. There is a fairly tenuous link to the budget under that line item. I think the question is probably more appropriately asked of the Minister for Health, the Minister for Police and Emergency Services or the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: I am happy to take it on notice. You are going to rule it out of order, Chair?

The CHAIRMAN: Yes.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: I would have been happy to take it on notice.

The CHAIRMAN: The member can put a question on notice through the normal channels. That is quite acceptable.

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: I refer to the first dot point on page 330. Will the minister please provide by way of supplementary information details of moneys from the regional investment fund that have gone to Indigenous-related projects in 2005-06, 2006-07 and 2007-08? I suspect that he will have to provide that information by way of supplementary information.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: We will provide information on the moneys that have been allocated —

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: Through the RIF.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Yes, through the RIF to Indigenous communities for 2005-06, 2006-07 and 2007-08 by way of supplementary information.

[*Supplementary Information No A16.*]

The appropriation was recommended.