

Division 45: Western Australian Land Information Authority, \$51 753 000 —

Mr D.A.E. Scaife, Chair.

Mr J.N. Carey, Minister for Lands.

Mr G. Gammie, Chief Executive.

Mr G. Dewar, Chief Finance Officer.

Ms C. Comrie, Chief of Staff, Minister for Lands.

Ms J. Lim, Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: The estimates committees will be reported by Hansard and the daily proof will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point. Consideration is restricted to items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must relate to a page number, item or amount related to the current division, and members should preface their questions with those details. Some divisions are the responsibility of more than one minister. Ministers shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 2 June 2023. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

I give the call to the member for Vasse.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 743 and the line item “Land Information and Services” in the service summary table. The budget for 2023–24 is around \$10 million above the estimated actual, and then the forecast falls in the out years. Can the minister explain these forecasts?

Mr J.N. CAREY: I ask the chief executive to respond.

Mr G. Gammie: Thank you. The difference in the budget for the year 2022–23 relates to government’s approval of Landgate’s proposal to develop a spatial digital twin for Western Australia. That is the first year of funding that will enable to us complete a project definition plan that will set out the technology road map, technology solution, risk management plan, benefits realisation plan and all the bits and pieces that go into deciding to progress to the next steps with that particular program. That program will deliver a piece of state digital infrastructure that will enable government agencies to share and collaborate on location information in a three-dimensional to four-dimension spatial model of Western Australia. A virtual copy of Western Australia will allow them to do all sorts of interesting things, including improve asset management, planning and so on.

[9.40 pm]

Ms L. METTAM: Can I clarify the name of the program?

Mr G. Gammie: The program is called Spatial WA.

Ms L. METTAM: Is it anticipated that there will be an increase in funds for the set-up cost of Spatial WA? Then will there be recurrent costs going forward and is that reflected in the funding?

Mr J.N. CAREY: It is not at that stage yet. It is effectively only at the early development stage.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: A paragraph here relates to Spatial WA, saying the increase in the number of employees from the 2021–22 actual to the 2022–23 estimated actual is the result of the realignment of resource requirements. Is there any further explanation for that or what it actually means?

Mr J.N. CAREY: I will get the chief executive to answer that question.

Mr G. Gammie: The change in FTE numbers is simply a reallocation amongst the services within Landgate. There is no increase or decrease in numbers. It is simply a reallocation to different services.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to outcomes and key effectiveness indicators on page 744; the key effectiveness indicator reads —

The land titles register is updated and maintained in a timely and accurate manner ...

Can the minister advise, for each month of 2023 to date, the average time taken to register a change of title? Has it been improving?

Mr J.N. CAREY: I think this is important to put on the record because there was some incorrect reporting in the media. I saw all these other claims were made. We have a booming economy. I think the member knows that and

I know that. We have an incredible housing market. Landgate has experienced near-record numbers of documents being lodged in recent years. To give members a sense, between 2014 and 2021, lodgements averaged 298 000 a year. Last year, more than 400 000 land registry documents were lodged, with 2023 trending towards a similar number of lodgements. In 2023, more than 32 500 transfer documents were lodged and 80 per cent of them were lodged electronically with 94 per cent being automatically registered within minutes of lodgement. However, of course, there are more complex cases, so time frames can be longer. Landgate generally works with settlement agencies in order to address any lodgement areas or get more information. That gives the member the broader trends. I might leave it to the chief executive to add further information.

Mr G. Gammie: The KPI on page 744 refers to simple and correct documents. That is a transfer, a mortgage, a discharge of mortgage, a caveat or a discharge of caveat. They are our top five documents. That takes up about 80 per cent of total lodgements. As the minister mentioned, about 80 per cent of those are lodged electronically and most of those are registered within minutes. Our actual performance of just under 90 per cent reflects the level of electronic lodgements. The balance are paper documents that need to be examined by a person and they are passed before registration.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is the minister comfortable that these new arrangements are really improving the efficiency? Obviously, I think those numbers probably explain that, but is the electronic system proving to be much more effective than the former paper system in the world document transfers?

Mr J.N. CAREY: Overall, I can say I am very satisfied with the performance of Landgate, particularly given, as I indicated, the near-record number of registrations coming through because of the booming market. I ask the chief executive to make further comment.

Mr G. Gammie: The electronic system that we currently use today is a system that was originally developed by Landgate. It continues to operate at similar levels since its partial commercialisation a few years ago. Not much has changed there. We are seeing a growing number of more complex dealings being lodged. Leases and those sorts of things are coming into play as part of a busier market. Those are the things that we continue to need to examine on a manual basis, but the digital processes are working very well and to the same standard as they were before.

Ms L. METTAM: I am sorry if I missed this but is the minister able to explain the average time taken to register a change of title?

Mr J.N. CAREY: I did say it, but I will leave it to the chief executive.

Mr G. Gammie: If a dealing is lodged electronically through Property Exchange Australia and the documents are what we call true and correct, they will be registered immediately—within seconds of lodgement. As they are handled digitally, there is no human intervention. That covers around 80 per cent of total lodgements, which are what we call simple and correct documents. They are the typical residential transfers with a mortgage attached—those sorts of issues. Lodgements made in paper take a bit longer because they need to be manually examined. Under the act, we are required to examine them in the order in which they are lodged, so they take a little bit longer to get through depending on what is in the examination pipeline. At the moment, our turnaround times on manually lodged transfers is about 30 days. Of course, the transfer itself is effective from the date it is lodged so everyone's interests are protected—the exiting owner, the incoming owner, the exiting bank and the incoming bank are all protected within that environment. It is basically going through the examination process to make sure that everything in those paper documents is correct and in a form that the registrar is happy to register.

[9.50 pm]

Ms L. METTAM: There was a report earlier this year about wait times for the registering of a change of title blowing out by as much as six months. Has this been addressed? Is the minister aware of that? There was a report in March by Kim Macdonald.

Mr G. Gammie: I am sorry. We are not aware of any particular blowouts in registering transfers. They are either done digitally in real time or within about 30 days being the average time for paper-lodged documents. I am not aware of any significant delays. New titles and those sorts of things are typically issued once clearances are obtained through the Western Australian Planning Commission and that happens within a matter of days. We are certainly meeting industry's requirements for quick turnaround times and things like subdivisions and new titles. There are no blowouts in transfers being registered.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I recall a case in which someone in, I think, South Africa or somewhere managed to work the system to get a transfer into someone's home that was not the right thing and the transfer ended up in the wrong person's name. Are there any systems in place or has that scenario been improved?

The CHAIR: This is not how I wanted to end the evening, member for Roe!

Mr J.N. CAREY: I thank the member for referring to page 745 on South African scams, and I will take that! South African scams are growing! I will take the answer. I ask the CEO to answer.

Extract from *Hansard*

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B — Thursday, 25 May 2023]

p493b-495a

Chair; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr John Carey; Mr Peter Rundle

Mr G. Gammie: Yes, that is a well-known case. I think Nigeria might have been the origin of that one. There has been no subsequent fraud of that nature since that occasion. As a consequence of that experience, Landgate introduced the verification-of-identity process, which is required to be undertaken by a lawyer or a licensed settlement agent if they are representing parties. If the party is self-represented, they need to have their identity verified by the local post office, so there is a very high benchmark. That creates a process to make sure the people lodging documentation are the right people. Since that process was implemented some years ago, there have been no subsequent cases of title fraud.

The appropriation was recommended.