

**Division 4: Public Sector Commission, \$29 003 000 —**

Mr A.P. O’Gorman, Chairman.

Mr C.J. Barnett, Premier.

Mr M.C. Wauchope, Public Sector Commissioner.

Ms F. Roche, Deputy Commissioner, Accountability, Policy and Performance.

Mr D. Volaric, Deputy Commissioner, Agency Support.

Dr K. Schofield, Deputy Commissioner, Capability and Development.

Mr M. Davey, Chief Finance Officer.

Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup, Adviser, Office of the Premier.

[Witnesses introduced.]

**The CHAIRMAN:** I give the call to the member for Cannington.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Premier, I refer to the third dot point on page 90 of budget paper No 2, and I specifically refer to the inquiry into the office of Minister Collier. Did this inquiry arise through contact from the Director General of the Department of Training and Workforce Development with the Public Sector Commissioner? Why was the word “bullying” removed from the draft terms of reference? How many departmental officers were interviewed in the process of the investigation? How many of these officers referred to “bullying” in their statements? Finally, what was the reason for the recommendation that staff in the office of the Minister for Energy; Training and Workforce Development receive retraining?

[3.40 pm]

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** This issue was well over a year ago but it still seems to attract the attention of the opposition. I am not dodging the issue, I have had no discussions with the minister over this matter, but clearly there were some difficulties—if the member likes, some tensions—between the minister and the head of a newly created department, so we had a first-time minister and a newly established Department of Training and Workforce Development. The head of the department quite properly took her concerns to the Public Sector Commissioner—the Public Sector Commissioner is the employer of heads of department—and simply raised with him the matter of some tensions between, primarily, the office of the minister, as I understand it, and the Department of Training and Workforce Development. Wanting to establish a better working relationship, the Public Sector Commissioner, of his own volition, took that matter on and did not involve me in any way, and nor should he have; he worked to help resolve the issue. I do not know whether he wants to make any further comment, but I ask the Public Sector Commissioner to comment on that; it was work that he undertook with the department.

**Mr M.C. Wauchope:** In 2010 I became aware of some working relationship issues between the Department of Training and Workforce Development and the Minister for Training and Workforce Development’s office. Towards the end of 2010, I suggested a number of courses of action to assist in improving that relationship. That advice included reviewing the section 74 communication agreement; reviewing the systems and procedures in the minister’s office to determine how communication may have been improved; repeating the accountable and ethical decision-making training program for ministerial officers; considering the function, structure and operations of the department to determine whether any finetuning was required—that may well be the report the member referred to; and, subject to ministerial and director general approval, looking at placing two departmental officers in the minister’s office for a limited time to assist with matters relating to the department. I am advised by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, which has responsibility for ministerial officers, that the communication systems and processes were examined, including amendment to the section 74 agreement; that the AEDM training was conducted in March 2011 and has been conducted again recently for new staff; and that a departmental officer placement commenced in April 2011, with the liaison officer position extended for the term of government. With respect to the function, structure and operations of the department, an examination was undertaken by a senior officer of the Public Sector Commission, and there is a draft report, which I still have.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** I will just add to that that this situation—I do not know the details, and I do not wish to—proves the case for establishing a separate public sector commissioner so that if there is tension—in this case between a ministerial office and a department—it can be handled at arm’s length from the government or Premier of the day, and I think this is a perfect example of that.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** In respect of my second specific question, why was the word “bullying” removed from the draft terms of reference?

**Mr M.C. Wauchope:** I do not believe there was any reference to bullying in any terms of reference; I am not sure which terms of reference the member is referring to.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** In the process of the inquiry, how many departmental officers were interviewed as part of the investigation?

**Mr D. Volaric:** All the corporate executive members were interviewed, as well as the officer in charge of the State Training Board. In addition to that, other members and key stakeholders were interviewed as part of understanding the workings of the department.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** What were the substantive issues in the breakdown of the relationship between the minister's office and his department?

**Mr M.C. Wauchope:** They were essentially issues of communication and expectations of time frames in which requests for information from the department were to be supplied and in terms of those processes, how that might have been better done. As I said, it was a new department putting together a new program and sometimes the expectations and the delivery were not aligning.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** There was a recommendation for additional training of the minister's staff; were there any recommendations in respect of training for the departmental staff?

**Mr M.C. Wauchope:** Not that I made, no.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** So it was not considered that there was any need for additional training? Was it a question of the approach of the departmental staff, or was it a question of the approach of the minister's staff?

**Mr M.C. Wauchope:** One of the reasons we reviewed the department was that it had been in operation for close to 18 months, and we were looking at whether or not there was anything that needed to be tweaked to make it work. It was more around systems and processes than ethical behaviour in relation to the department.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Did the director general tender her resignation at any time during the process of the review?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** To the best of my knowledge, no.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Is that the answer?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** That is the answer, yes.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Not to the Premier's knowledge?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** The director general of the department is still there.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Yes, but I asked whether she offered to resign during the process of the inquiry.

**Mr M.C. Wauchope:** I received no formal offer of resignation.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Formal offer. Okay. Arising from the inquiry, was a report prepared?

**Mr M.C. Wauchope:** As I indicated earlier, there is a draft report that I still have and I am still considering.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** When is the draft report going to be made public?

**Mr M.C. Wauchope:** It will not necessarily be made public.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** When is the final report expected?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** These are internal matters in the public service handled not by government or politically, but at the discretion of the Public Sector Commissioner in his capacity as the employer, and one of his tasks is to solve problems if there are personality clashes or differences between departments and officers, and he deals with them internally.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** What was the nature of the personality problem between the minister and the director general?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** I do not know. I think the member for Cannington needs to grasp that that is precisely why one of the first decisions of this government was to separate the role of the public sector from the political side of government, so that issues internal to the public service could be handled independently and objectively by a public sector commissioner rather than by a Premier or a head of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** In the process of doing the investigation, how many departmental officers referred to issues of bullying by staff of the minister's office?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** I think the commissioner's answer was none.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** No, that was not the answer.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** If the member knows something I do not, please share it with me. The member is just fishing. If he has an accusation and has some documents or evidence, then he should table them and make them public, but at the moment the answer has been that there was no reference to bullying; I do not know —

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** No, that is not what he said. That was a different question; that was a question about the terms of reference. What I am now asking is, in respect of the interviews of departmental officials, how many of them referred to the issue of bullying in the process of that investigation?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** I do not know; I was not doing the investigation. I was not there.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Given that we have the people who did the investigation with us, I wonder whether we could include that information, in the interests of open government, for the rest of the community.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** No. In the interests of people being able to come to their employer, the Public Sector Commissioner, and speak honestly and freely, I do not think they would expect those conversations to be debated in Parliament. However, if the Public Sector Commissioner wishes to add anything, I will give him that opportunity.

**Mr M.C. Wauchop:** I will only make the comment that they were essentially communication and relationship working issues. They have been worked through, and the fact that there is still a good, strong relationship between the minister's office and the department is proof of the pudding, as far as I am concerned.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** I have a different question. Currently the Public Sector Commissioner is working through the "Strategic Directions for the Public Sector Workforce 2009–2014". Page 3 of that document states in part —

In the future, the Western Australian public sector workforce is likely to continue to be affected by factors such as:

- increasing demand for services and State infrastructure
- increasing demand for key occupational groups across the sector
- declining supply of skilled people to perform some roles and services
- changing employee expectations of working arrangements.

The document then sets out a quite detailed explanation as to why demand for services is changing and growing, driven by an ageing population and population growth. In light of the fact that these four key issues underpin the strategic directions of the public sector workforce, it makes no mention—obviously they did not know about it when this was being developed—of an FTE freeze. What impact will an FTE freeze have on the effective implementation of this strategic direction paper?

[3.50 pm]

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** It is actually an FTE cap rather than a freeze. There is growth that occurs where it is driven by demand—for example, in nursing, teaching, police numbers and the like. The cap is applied with some degree of flexibility, but it has certainly been effective in dramatically slowing the growth of FTE numbers and has been important in being able to deliver budget surpluses. It becomes particularly essential given the cutback in the goods and services tax share. It is driving greater efficiencies within the public sector. There are issues of an ageing public sector workforce, and it is nearly a two-thirds female public sector workforce. Also, competition for skilled people in this state means that in a number of agencies, such as transport, state development, and I imagine in computing and technical areas, it is increasingly difficult for the public sector to retain or attract staff. There are some severe pressures, and one of the roles of the Public Sector Commissioner is to take on board all those issues and try to put in place good planning for future staffing and its maintenance in the public sector. It is a complex task in a state like Western Australia. It is different in other states where there are job losses across the whole economy.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** The Premier states it is not a freeze; it is a cap. Bearing in mind the Treasurer's media statement on 17 April states —

- a two-year freeze on the growth in the number of public sector workers to further control public sector salary expenses —

Further —

This measure will require all departments to operate for the next two financial years inside their FTE cap as it was set in 2011–12.

Is the Premier telling me now that that is not correct; it is now like the ceiling, and it will continue to rise.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** The member just used the word "cap", which reinforces that it is a cap. The cap is set. There is some flexibility in the way it is administered, and from time to time that cap is increased.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** What is that flexibility?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** The flexibility might be if there is a particular need or shortage in some area, or some issue arises—whatever it might be. It is applied in a strong way, and it had slowed the growth in public sector numbers and it has helped the financial position in the state. But it is not an absolute public sector freeze; it is a cap.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** Previously, Mr Conran told me that the 2011–12 FTE for DPC was 730. The Premier is telling me now that in 2012–13 that can continue to rise subject to circumstances.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** That one is unlikely to because the major component of employment is staff in electorate offices, which is fixed and is unlikely to change. The cap has been applied, and there has been some growth in the cap over time. It started off at 103 000 or 104 000; it is not that now—it is above that. However, the cap has moved up only slowly and there is some flexibility if differences in demand or need arise in particular agencies.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** The freeze referred to by the Treasurer is actually the continuation of the ceiling or cap that has been in place? There is no change.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** That is how I interpret it, yes. It is the choice of words.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** Taking the Treasurer's words, what is the FTE cap as it was set in 2011–12?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** I do not know whether I have that number. I will ask the commissioner to answer.

**Mr M.C. Wauchope:** The figure I have for the 2011–12 ceiling was 108 363

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** Does that include everyone?

**Mr M.C. Wauchope:** That figure is for the general government sector only; it does not include the GTEs.

**Dr M.D. NAHAN:** I refer to the second dot point on page 90 of the *Budget Statements*. Could the Premier indicate how well the Aboriginal employment strategy is going? What type of areas is it going into, and how successful is the government at retaining Aboriginal people in the public sector after they have finished their traineeship?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** This was introduced in last year's budget, and Aboriginal people are under-represented in the public sector. One would hope that Aboriginal people would be over-represented in the public sector. That was an initiative of the commissioner, and I ask him to comment on its progress.

**Mr M.C. Wauchope:** One of the drivers for this was the national partnership agreement, the COAG agreement, to have 3.2 per cent of our public sector workforce composed of Aboriginal people by 2015. The strategy was launched in October 2011 by the minister. It is a five-year strategy funded for \$11 million over that period. It has five themes partly around online cultural awareness and creating a culturally inclusive workplace. The key about this is obviously attracting Aboriginal people and having strategies to get people into the service, and then building their capability and careers. The theme that I am particularly interested in is fostering Aboriginal leaders to take on higher positions in the public sector, and, at the end of the day, being accountable; that is, the program being successful, and, as the member indicated, being able to retain the people we recruit and develop over a period of time. We have been successful in the past in developing some successful leaders who have, in part, been sought out by the resources sector and they have left the public sector. I do not see that that was a failure. It is actually quite a good outcome when one thinks about it. They have obviously been seen as attractive employees. However, there is important underpinning of the sector by having ongoing leadership of Aboriginals in the sector.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** The "State of the Sector Report 2011" on the commissioner's website states that the current separation rate for indigenous Australians is 21.1 per cent in the Western Australian public service. In light of the answer just given, is there a target that the Public Sector Commission is aiming for in the reduction of this figure?

**Dr K. Schofield:** There is no target for the retention rate. We have a target for increasing the Indigenous population within the public sector. The target over the period of this strategy is to increase the current rate from 2.6 per cent to 3.2 per cent in the workplace.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** Clearly, with a 21 per cent turnover or separation rate, that would have to be a key focus for the Public Sector Commission. Is there a particular focus on reducing that separation rate?

**Dr K. Schofield:** The whole strategy is aimed at retaining people as well. We have five themes in there. One of the key strategies around retention is creating a culturally inclusive workplace, for example. All the themes within the strategy are aimed at retention as well as attraction.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** Do you have the statistics for Aboriginal public servants in regional WA compared with metropolitan WA?

**Dr K. Schofield:** We do have those statistics but I do not have them with me at the moment.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** Can I ask for that by way of supplementary information?

**The CHAIRMAN:** Premier, are you happy to provide that by way of supplementary information?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** I do not know whether that is possible to provide.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** He said he could provide that.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** I am prepared to provide that if it is possible.

*[Supplementary Information No A8.]*

[4.00 pm]

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Premier, I return to the question about the investigation by the Public Sector Commissioner. I have two questions. First, how many directors general of other departments have made requests for investigations of their ministers' offices across the other agencies? Secondly, how many senior level executives from the Department of Training and Workforce Development have sought to transfer out of the department or resign subsequent to the commencement of the investigation?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** I do not think it is fair to suggest that the director general of the department sought an investigation into the ministerial office. What she did was come to the Public Sector Commission and say there are problems of communication and relationships between the ministerial office and the department. So the member's choice of words is a careless choice of words. I am not aware of any other similar case, but, again, I will ask the director general to comment.

**Mr M.C. Wauchope:** From time to time we do get relationship issues between ministers and their chief executive officers; it is not peculiar to any particular government or any particular minister. In relation to what is happening in turnover of staff in the Department of Training and Workforce Development, that is a question that the Leader of the Opposition would need to put to the director general. We do not have those statistics.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** So what is the answer to the question about how many other —

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** The answer to the question is that the Public Sector Commissioner does not have that information and it should be directed to the department concerned.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** The first part of my question was not answered. I understood what the director general said, but how many other cases have there been?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** None.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I refer back to page 89, the efficiency dividend. I asked the Premier in respect of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet: which programs are being reduced, cut or removed, and where is the Premier getting rid of staff and so forth? Therefore, I ask the same question here: in order to manage the efficiency dividend, exactly what programs, projects and staff are being cut, and are any revenue measures being put in place to manage that?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** There are no revenue measures, to my knowledge. As I said previously, it is up to the heads of the various agencies to work out how they will meet the efficiency dividend. They have at least a full month to work out how they will do it, and once they arrive at that, I am sure they will tell their respective ministers and will implement it. But we are not at that stage yet.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** With all due respect, the Premier has been doing that in relation to some agencies. For instance, the Premier's Physical Activity Taskforce was abandoned —

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** That was done in the lead-up to the budget.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** In the case of the Department of Training and Workforce Development, the First Click and Second Click programs for older people to learn how to operate computers were abandoned.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** That was part of the budget process also.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** This is part of the budget process.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** It applies from 1 July, so the Leader of the Opposition is too early. Once the Public Sector Commissioner works out where he will make those savings, he will no doubt tell me, and I will no doubt agree and it will be in place. But we are not at that point yet.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** So the Premier has no idea where he is going to make those savings?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** I will leave it up to the professional public servants to implement that policy. I do not preach to them or dictate to them how they will do that.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I would have thought it is a matter of some public interest how those savings are made.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** It may well be; but ask the question in July and we will probably be able to answer it.

[Ms A.R. Mitchell took the chair.]

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** I refer again to the investigation by the Public Sector Commission into Minister Collier's office. I draw the Premier's attention to a freedom of information request —

**The CHAIRMAN:** Member for Cannington, forgive me, but I have just arrived, so can the member tell me which page and what line item he is on?

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Certainly. I am very happy to do that, Madam Chair. I refer to the third dot point on page 90 of budget paper No 2, and I specifically refer to the inquiry into the office of Minister Collier. In answer to a freedom of information request from Hon Mark McGowan, the Public Sector Commissioner sought an exemption for documents related to this investigation on the basis that clause 5(1)(a) of schedule 1 of the Freedom of Information Act exempts a matter if—I will quote in part—its disclosure could impair the effectiveness of any procedure for preventing, detecting, investigating or dealing with any contravention or possible contravention of the law. I am just wondering what contravention or possible contravention of the law was demonstrated by the investigation?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** None to my knowledge, but if the member has a complaint about the FOI process —

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** It is not a complaint.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** If the member has an issue about FOI, he needs to take that to the FOI commissioner.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** I am not seeking to do that, Premier. The exemption in respect of the three specific documents—documents 6(b), 6(i) and 6(l) of the application—was on the basis that their disclosure could impair the procedure for preventing, detecting, investigating or dealing with any contravention or possible contravention of the law—that is, that is what the Public Sector Commissioner decided that the documents would expose. So what I am asking is: what was the contravention or possible contravention?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** I do not believe there was one.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** But we know that there was because the Public Sector Commissioner —

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** I do not know that that is the case at all.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** If the Premier wants, I can show him the documentation from the Public Sector Commissioner. It has his signature on it.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** The member can read the paragraph either way.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** So what was the contravention?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** That is not something I am involved in. That is a matter for the FOI commissioner and his department.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** But the Public Sector Commissioner signed the letter—the decision-maker in the Public Sector Commission. So it is the Public Sector Commission.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** It is to do with that agency.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** It is that agency that made the decision. It is not the FOI commissioner who made the decision. All I am seeking is not what the documents were, but what was the contravention that they were investigating?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** I do not believe that there was one, and I certainly have no knowledge of any one.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** But, Premier, why would they seek an exemption based on the law enforcement, public safety and property security exemption under the FOI act? It specifically mentions that exemption.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** I do not know. I do not involve myself in that. I made it very clear that I have had no involvement in the issue.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Can we seek that as supplementary information?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** I do not know that we are at liberty to respond on FOI matters. I do not know whether the commissioner wishes to make a comment, but that is not something I would go near as a Premier.

**Mr M.C. Wauchope:** If I can make a point, Madam Chair, I was not the decision-maker. I am never the decision-maker on FOI.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** I think the member for Cannington is chasing a cat up a tree.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Member for Cannington, I think you have been advised how you can deal with that.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** The member for Cannington is fishing for something that does not exist.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** The question I am asking, Madam Chair, is this: why is the exemption being claimed by the Public Sector Commission if there was no such issue involved? Surely that is pretty reasonable. I am not after the document; I am just after what it was that led the Public Sector Commission to claim that exemption.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** I think the commissioner has made it clear that the FOI commissioner ruled on that. The member for Cannington may dispute it, but it is certainly not part of the budget of the Public Sector Commission. If the member has an issue, take it up with the FOI commissioner.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** But it is not related to the FOI commissioner. There is no decision of the FOI commissioner.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Member for Cannington, I am going to say that I am still struggling to find where that is relevant to the budget papers.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** It is, and I have referred to it, Madam Chair. It is the third dot point on page 90, “maintaining a high standard of accountability, governance and integrity”. What could be more fundamental to that than being honest with the people of Western Australia?

**The CHAIRMAN:** I think the member for Cannington has had answers from the Premier. If the member wishes to take it further, he has been advised how he can do that. There are other members who would like to ask questions, and I would like to give them that opportunity and proceed with the afternoon. Do any other members have any other questions on division 4?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** It should be on the list.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I have a list, and I am asking whether there are any other members; otherwise, I will put the question that the appropriation be recommended. Would the Leader of the Opposition like to go on the list again?

[4.10 pm]

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Yes, please, Madam Chair. My question is to the Premier, and it is in relation to boards and committees. I draw the Premier’s attention to total appropriations under division 4 at page 89. As the Premier will recall, a few years ago he answered a question in this place that provided information on the number of government boards and committees. It turned out there were many hundreds of them and that they had grown enormously in the last few years. The Premier indicated that he would cut the number of boards and committees and that one of the mechanisms he would use to do that was to redefine the definition of “boards or committees” to no longer include those boards and committees that did not involve people being paid. Therefore, those types of boards and committees would not be included in the list of boards and committees. Last year, I think, at some point the Premier was shown that there had been a significant growth in the number of boards and committees in the last three years. I asked question on notice 7361 to the Premier, dated 28 February 2012, and was told that the Public Sector Commission’s publicly available database of boards and committees, which was found to be inaccurate, was removed from its website. The Premier’s answer indicates that the Public Sector Commission was reviewing the number of boards and committees. The information is not available on the website because the old information was taken down when it was shown to be inaccurate and there are six officers across the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and the Public Sector Commission working on the issue of how many boards and committees there are. How many boards and committees are there and when will the Premier make the information available?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** I intend to make a further statement to Parliament, probably at the beginning of the spring session. As I made clear in the Premier’s Statement earlier this year, we will have what might come to be known as “repeal day” when obsolete and redundant legislation and regulations will be dealt with. Part of that process will involve a reduction in the number of boards and committees. What staggered me is that when this government came in and I asked what I thought was a fairly straightforward question—how many boards and committees do we have?—no-one could answer it. That is not a criticism of the public sector —

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** And still cannot.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** It is interesting. I simply asked that there be a count and the number given was 1 276, which I thought was a little excessive. There has been an ongoing process of abolishing boards and committees and winding them up. At least one committee went to its minister and said, “We actually don’t know what we are meant to do, so please wind us up”, and we did.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** Which committee was that?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** I cannot remember its name, but there were many examples like that.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** Anecdotally.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** I was asked the question. Part of the work being done was to define what a board or committee would be because some of the entities were essentially internal working groups, as should happen within the public sector. A definition was adopted that a board or committee for this purpose would be one that has at least one external member and one external paid member, effectively—so, external and paid. The initial number of 1 276 boards and committees was reduced to 628.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** By redefining it?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** Not entirely. The Public Sector Commission, in conjunction with the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, has done extensive work on this and I am about to receive a detailed report and briefing on it. I am yet to have that, but it will probably happen shortly. We will then identify further committees to be abolished. I hope the Opposition will cooperate, because to abolish a number of them requires legislative change as they are set up by statute. A large number of them—probably up to 300—will be abolished administratively. That is the figure I have been given. I am yet to go through the list myself, but I intend to do that to verify that figure. There will be moves to abolish a significant number of committees. The opposition is just a little ahead of us, but when Parliament comes back following the winter recess I hope to give a full report to Parliament about those that have been abolished. Yes, some have been created. There is nothing wrong with creating new boards and committee—it is not an absolute crime—so long as they are relevant. The point is to get rid of those that are no longer required or are of little value. That work has been done and I will provide a report when Parliament returns. The process will continue and legislative changes will be required in many cases. As I remarked at the time, almost every fish and vegetable had a committee. I do not think that is necessary. That is the situation we were in when we came to government.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Why did the Premier remove from that website the list of boards and committees that the Premier's department put on the website, and why has it been missing for some considerable time—up to a year now?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** It is because the definition of what is a board or committee was applied and there was not full confidence that the list was accurate in that respect. We are talking about hundreds of committees and over 100 different government agencies. It was therefore withdrawn. Through the Public Sector Commission, a total review report was prepared and that was completed on 14 May. As I said, I am about to have a briefing from the Public Sector Commission on that so that I will be fully informed. My intention, all going well, is to bring a full report to Parliament.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Will the Premier provide by way of supplementary information the current number of boards and committees?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** When I bring the report to Parliament I intend to table the information on the boards and committees.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Will the Premier not provide that information now?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** No; I have not even seen the report yet and I want to be confident that it is accurate. It sounds strange; it is a bit like an episode of *Yes Minister*. I thought that it would have been relatively easy to sort out, but I can assure members that it is not at all.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** How many of the 477 boards and committees that were listed on tabled paper 2104 that were defined as no longer being a board or a committee still exist? Where are we at regarding the 26 boards and committees listed under the Department of Health that require legislative change to eliminate but which the Department of Health does not agree to eliminate?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** I think the member needs to address that question to the Minister for Health. Let me make it clear: I am not saying that boards and committees, including those with external members, are not an important part of government; they are. They provide advice to ministers and in many cases they take responsibility for the operation of an organisation. The government trading enterprises are an obvious example of that, and they do a good job. It is up to the minister, on advice from the director general in the case of Health, to decide whether some or all of those committees are required or whether they require an external member. It may be that some of the functions can simply be performed internally by fully paid public servants. I think that in many cases the role that has been taken on by some of these boards and committee can be done internally as part of the ongoing administration of government. In Health a new group will be set up to manage the hospitals as part of the National Healthcare Agreement. That group will have a relevant role in managing hospitals at the local level, so the Minister for Health and I agree with that. However, some other committees relating to particular diseases or whatever else may not be necessary in that form.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Do the 477 committees that were included in tabled paper 2104 under the column “definition” still exist?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** I do not know that every single one of them does but, as I said, when Parliament returns after the winter break, I hope to give a full and detailed listing of the original 1 276, which the former government did not seem to pay any attention to; they were just there carrying on in oblivion and no-one knew what they were doing, what they were or how many there were. We have at least focussed on this to reduce their number and make sure that every single board and committee, particularly when it has an external paid member, is needed and relevant. That seems to me to be a proper task for the Commissioner for Public Sector Management to take on.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** Using the definition of “board or committee” that allows the Premier to say there were 1 200 boards or committees, how many are there now?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** I will answer that when we come back. I am yet to go through the report, which has only just been completed. I can tell the member that it is a thick report because it is complicated. I think that the definition is reasonable, which is that there be external paid members of the board.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** By “external” does the Premier mean external from the public service?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** Yes. Of the 1 276 listed, some were essentially internal. The investigation threw up all sorts of boards and committees that no-one knew existed, let alone ministers. I have forced ministers—encouraged them—to look at all the boards and committees and see whether they are relevant. Some have already been abolished. The Hairdressers Registration Board of Western Australia is the most high-profile example. In other cases, including my agencies, two or three boards have been combined into one. We are also reducing the number of members on boards and trying to increase female representation on boards. This is an ongoing process that will not be solved overnight. If we bring in an omnibus bill to abolish a whole lot of boards and committees, I hope members opposite will support it.

[4.20 pm]

**The CHAIRMAN:** I draw members’ attention to the time. I am cognisant of a few other divisions to be done. Are there any other questions on division 4 that members wish to ask?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** My question relates to the first dot point on page 90 about strong economic growth increasing demand and so forth. Since September 2008 there has been a rise in the number of senior executive service members from 374 to 465. Can the minister advise what the roughly 100 extra SES members are doing, what their additional salary and entitlements are and why there has been roughly a 25 per cent increase?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** I will ask the Public Sector Commissioner to give a summary, if he is able to. The major reason for an increase in the number of SESs is a rise in salary levels. Some extra agencies have been created, and indeed even in the Leader of the Opposition’s office there is now, on my understanding, a member of the SES, because salary levels have gone up. However, I will ask the commissioner whether he can comment on that.

**Mr M.C. Wauchop:** A number of factors are involved in the increase in the number of SES officers. A number of departments have been created over the past three years and each one of those has a corporate executive, which has contributed to an increase in numbers. SES vacancies are filled from time to time and, as the minister indicated, we have a competitive labour market. And, quite frankly, to compete in some areas we have to reclassify the positions to actually attract the people.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** I just add again that it has been particularly prevalent in areas that may be in competition with the resources industry. For example, in one of my agencies, the Department of State Development, when we sit down with highly intelligent, highly educated corporate executives and lawyers and make the state’s case, we have to pay maybe not a comparable salary but a fairly high salary. Similarly, this is the case in areas such as the Department of the Attorney General and offices of the Crown such as the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions and so on. It goes right through particularly to planning, as we find that planners are in short supply. People in planning, who are able and experienced enough to deal with major planning issues for Perth and regional Western Australia, command a higher salary than previously. One impact on the public sector of the resources growth in this state is the quite significant pushing up of wage and salary costs, which has made recruitment and retention more difficult. That is a reality of Western Australia.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Further to that —

**The CHAIRMAN:** Is it a further question or a new question?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Yes, a further question on that issue. Competition with the private sector obviously has been an issue in the past 10 to 12 years, considering the strength of the economy over that time. Is the minister by way of supplementary information able to table a list of what these positions and the salary levels are?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** I will ask the commissioner to respond.

**Mr M.C. Wauchope:** I might get Mr Volaric to answer that.

**Mr D. Volaric:** We cannot provide the specific table representing the 100 FTEs that the member mentioned today because the nature of filling SES positions can vary through resignations, retirements and filling new positions. We might not be able to capture which positions are being abolished. We can provide details on numbers and a breakdown of those numbers, but not specific details to the extent the member is after.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Whatever information can be provided by way of supplementary information through the minister would be fantastic.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** I will undertake to supply some further details on the composition of the SES group.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** As detailed by Mr Volaric.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** No, it is for me to offer and for the Leader of the Opposition to accept, not for him to demand it.

*[Supplementary Information No A9.]*

**The appropriation was recommended.**