

Chairman; Mr David Templeman; Mr Tony Simpson; Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr John Castrilli; Ms Janine Freeman

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**Metropolitan Cemeteries Board —**

Mr N. Morton, Chairman.

Mr A.J. Simpson, Minister for Local Government.

Mr P. Deague, Chief Executive Officer.

Mr G. Bayne, Chief Finance Officer.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Minister, I know that you did make mention of the new advisers, but for the purposes of identification could you please introduce them.

[Witnesses introduced.]

**The CHAIRMAN:** Member for Mandurah.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I have a series of questions and I really hope to get through them all. I refer to the cemetery renewal program at Karrakatta under “Works in Progress” in the table on page 789 of budget paper No 2. Can the minister indicate what the ongoing maintenance cost is for a section at Karrakatta Cemetery that has not been renewed? Is the minister able to provide that information?

[12.30 pm]

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** I thank the member for the question. I may have to pass over to my CEO for some detailed information on that issue.

**Mr P. Deague:** A lot of the old burial sections at Karrakatta are out of grant, which basically means that they are not used frequently. Therefore, the maintenance costs decrease substantially. We do a general tidy up of those areas and ensure weeds are controlled. If there is a requirement for a burial in those sections, we clean the pathways to enable access to those areas. There is quite a substantial cost in renewing a burial section, including maintenance of those areas, with increased landscaping and improved road access.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Obviously, it would cost less for an area that has not been renewed, but for a renewed area there would be an increased cost. Does the minister have any idea of the maintenance cost?

**Mr P. Deague:** Through the minister, I estimate that the cost in a burial section of about 500 graves would be about \$2 000 a year.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** There has obviously been work around the mausoleum. How many exhumations have been carried out at Karrakatta Cemetery in the areas where the mausoleum has been built? Where have the remains been reburied, who bore the costs, including the replacement of coffins and headstones, and were families notified that exhumations were taking place? I know that is a loaded question.

**Mr P. Deague:** It is part of the cemetery renewal process. Under the Cemeteries Act, before a section is renewed, the Monument Assessment and Advisory Committee assesses the area first. That is a subcommittee of the board. Once a section has been identified for renewal, particularly in a mausoleum site where there is no further access to any burials due to the construction of the mausoleum, that process is referred to the board and then there is a 12-month public comment period. At the end of that period, we get the information supplied from the community. That is presented back to the board and a submission is made to the Minister for Local Government for his or her approval at the time. During that process, there is consultation with the families about their requirements. That has resulted in some exhumations in the mausoleum, which the cemeteries board has borne the cost of, or other sections where they can carry out further areas or we have offered mausoleum crypts in some circumstances. We have also liaised with the commonwealth and the Office of Australian War Graves on disinterring soldiers to the Perth War Cemetery. That has been under the guidance of the commonwealth and also the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in England. We follow their guidelines in that process.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Can the minister provide the names of the deceased Australian Defence Force members that the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board has advised the Office of Australian War Graves as possibly deserving commemoration as a commonwealth war grave? I am asking for names. I do not expect the minister to rattle them off now, unless there are only a couple. I would be happy to receive that as supplementary information.

**Mr P. Deague:** One name is Pinchetti. Identification of the war dead is provided by the commonwealth, so we abide by that information. The commonwealth updates that information regularly. In assessing an area to be renewed, particularly in a mausoleum site, we are guided by the commonwealth and its information in determining an official war grave or war dead, and that is the process that we are following.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Can the officer give me names or numbers?

**Mr P. Deague:** I can, but I do not have them with me.

Chairman; Mr David Templeman; Mr Tony Simpson; Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr John Castrilli; Ms Janine Freeman

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**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** Can I ask that the question be put on notice so I can provide the member with some more detail at a later date? We will provide the information of the names of the official war dead.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The minister is agreeing to provide that supplementary information.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I just wish to clarify that. What was the term the officer used?

**Mr P. Deague:** It was official war dead. There are definitions in the sense that people died during the war and people died during the war period, which is generally two years after the First World War and the Second World War. That is people who died from war injuries, not people who fought in the war, who are veterans. They could have passed away any time.

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** The supplementary information that I am going to give the member is the names of the official war dead in the mausoleum.

*[Supplementary Information No A50.]*

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** How many Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstones have been replaced or removed at Karrakatta?

**Mr P. Deague:** That is a commonwealth responsibility. The Metropolitan Cemeteries Board is the only cemetery manager in Australia. I only met with the director of the Office of Australian War Graves, Brigadier Chris Appleton, yesterday. He is very happy with what the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board is doing; that is, honouring the war dead. It is the responsibility of the Office of Australian War Graves to maintain war graves. I would have to ask it for that information.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** I wish to follow up on some of this stuff, including the process of removing headstones. Does the board send a list of names to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in that case, and it ticks off? How does it work? Does the board get a list from the commission?

**Mr P. Deague:** We get the information from the commonwealth, and that is updated regularly. Through our cemeteries record system, we identify those graves to be retained. As I mentioned earlier, with the memorandum of understanding we have with the commonwealth, we have stated, as endorsed by the ministers for local government, that we retain those graves as government graves, which means for perpetuity and at no cost to the families or the commonwealth, in recognition of their war service record. Succinctly, through the information they provide to us, we then update our records.

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** I have been on a tour of Karrakatta. There are people who did not die during the war but served in armed conflicts. There is increasing concern, especially coming up to the anniversary of Anzac, among people who want to revisit and see where their relatives are buried. I have certainly had complaints that those graves are nowhere to be found. Is the minister confident that the board has adequate records to follow up people or have these gravestones been removed in some cases without any record being kept?

**Mr P. Deague:** It is an interesting question. There are a couple of components to it. Our assessment of a burial section—it might mean a headstone being removed—would be done on the basis that we do not have any information on the deceased buried in those graves. Similarly, a lot of families did not want their loved ones recognised for their war record because they did not believe in the war. They did not want any recognition. That is a significant component as well. A number of historians have recently said that we should recognise those but the families never did, so there is no information of their war history on the headstones or in our records. In consultation with the commonwealth, if they have requested an official war grave, we have gone back on our renewed sections and allowed for the monument to be placed. In some situations there was never a monument but we have allowed that to occur. It occurred in a few instances last year. We have an excellent relationship with the commonwealth in this process. We review it consistently as we are reviewing Indigenous war graves. We had a recent memorial put up just before Anzac Day for Indigenous soldiers from the Boer War. The Boer War is not covered by the Office of Australian War Graves, so we have started liaising with the Australian War Memorial in Canberra to get those records so we can improve our database.

[12.40 pm]

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** Another source of information is through the Returned and Services League of Australia. On the tour I went on throughout Karrakatta, not just the war graves area, they were able to identify people who had served and had a lot of detailed information about them. It seems as if the information has been obtained from the commonwealth. Is there any capacity to expand the inquiry so that it includes, for example, intelligence that the RSL or other historians have?

**Mr P. Deague:** Yes; that is certainly no problem at all. We welcome information from genealogists, historians or any association. We have close liaison with the Heritage Council of Western Australia and the National Trust of

Chairman; Mr David Templeman; Mr Tony Simpson; Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr John Castrilli; Ms Janine Freeman

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Australia. We met with the president of the RSL some years ago and he is aware of our program. If the RSL has any additional information, I would certainly welcome that to improve our cemetery renewal process.

**Mr G.M. CASTRILLI:** I refer to the expenditure on new works at Whiteman Park, mentioned on page 789 of budget paper No 2, where there is an allocation of \$40 000 for this year and \$30 000, \$50 000 and \$2 million in the forward estimates. I am interested to know what those works are and how they will enhance that space. Can the minister tell me what is happening with those new works?

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** Whiteman Park is identified as a new cemetery site due to the future growth of Perth. In our fast-growing metropolitan area we have identified the need for more cemeteries. The amount of \$2.1 million has been allocated. As our city becomes more multicultural, it is important to provide appropriate burial areas for people of all faiths, including those with no religious belief. As the member for Bunbury pointed out, \$50 000 and \$2 million are allocated to finish it off. That will cater to the fast growth in the northern metropolitan area of Perth and will work hand in hand with the Pinnaroo cemetery. A couple of other areas have been identified for the future, one of which is Whitby Falls near the old Whitby Falls Hostel in the south east corridor. As the population of Perth grows, we will allocate areas for more cemeteries and crematoriums where people of all religious faiths can farewell their deceased loved ones. Whiteman Park is a large area of land near the Brabham housing estate. It is also a well-known recreation area and is considered suitable given the size of the area and its proximity to all the major highways.

**Mr G.M. CASTRILLI:** Is it in the City of Swan?

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** Yes. The city has been very supportive of the proposed Whiteman Park cemetery.

**The CHAIRMAN:** There is about 15 minutes left for this division.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I refer to the renewal program on the same page. According to the Cemeteries Act 1986, section 39, “Memorials in redevelopment area”, reads —

Where a Board redevelops a portion of the land within a cemetery the Board shall erect a memorial showing the names and such other details as the Board considers appropriate of deceased persons buried in the redevelopment area.

Does the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board comply with that section of the act, and can the CEO give me some examples?

**Mr P. Deague:** We have photographs and a register of those who have passed away. We have constructed an enclosure where the headstones that have been removed from the graves are placed. As a further extension, we are creating a pillar box very similar to that for the commonwealth war graves. As people enter the commonwealth war cemetery there is a small pillar box, like a postbox, inside of which is a register of all those interred. We have followed with a similar process. We started with books as memorials and then moved to the retention of headstones to now a book similar to what the commonwealth has, which is well recognised in over 150-odd countries throughout the world as the process to follow, plus it is online. If people request photographs or inscriptions from the headstones, we have that also.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Have all the headstones in Karrakatta been photographed?

**Mr P. Deague:** Yes, of all the renewed sections.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Will that be a normal process?

**Mr P. Deague:** Yes.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** I am not sure whether the minister is aware but a petition was given to the board saying, “We the undersigned residents wish to petition the inadequate allocation of burial grounds for Muslims who reside in the northern corridor”. Has any work been done on that; and is there a capacity to deliver an adequate burial site in the northern suburbs?

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** We have identified that need in a couple of areas. Whiteman Park is one of the new sites and Rockingham and Guildford accommodate them now.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** They do, but that is the problem; there is nothing in the northern suburbs that accommodates them.

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** Correct, that is why we have identified Whiteman Park, and funds are allocated in the budget to develop a cemetery there.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** It is a long way away.

Chairman; Mr David Templeman; Mr Tony Simpson; Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr John Castrilli; Ms Janine Freeman

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**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** There is a finite amount of land. We have identified Whiteman Park as a place to cater to all faiths in our community whether it be through burial, cremation or whatever. One hundred and thirty hectares at Whiteman Park have been set aside to provide for the many religious faiths of our changing multicultural society. I take on board the member's comments about the northern suburbs and that Whiteman Park is further to the east than she would like, but the capacity of Pinnaroo is stretched, and that reflects the growing pains we are feeling. We have identified in future budgets the development of a cemetery as far south as Whitby Falls to cater to the south east corridor. There is suitable room for expansion at Rockingham, but we do acknowledge that we need to do more and we are trying to address the issue.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I would like to ask the minister a question about a matter referred to on the same page about the renewal program. Can the minister provide me with an answer to the following question: how many headstones in Karrakatta Cemetery have been destroyed since the commencement of the renewal program; how many have been retained in the cemetery's confines; and how many have been taken by families?

[12:50 pm]

**Mr P. Deague:** This certainly has been an involving process. I have been involved in the process for the last 15 years with the board. At the beginning—I am talking about 1995 to 1998—any headstones that could not be retained on site, for example, because the marble would break up, were crushed. That process has changed and any headstones that can be retained will be put on a memorial wall in the cemetery or in the burial section. This has been well received by the community and people have looked at memorial plaques close to their relatives' headstones.

I do not have the figure with me of the number of headstones that have been destroyed, but it is minimal when compared with the number destroyed at the beginning of the program. Headstones are now retained within the sections. The renewed sections of headstones can be seen in the garden area and in the memorial wall.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Are the figures obtainable? If the figures are obtainable, I would like that to be provided as supplementary information.

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** The information to be provided to the member for Mandurah is the number of cemetery headstones that have been destroyed since the commencement of the renewal program and how many have been retained.

[*Supplementary Information No A51.*]

**Ms M.M. QUIRK:** Can the minister also provide by way of supplementary information the number of graves that, on advice from the Office of Australian War Graves, have been transferred to the commonwealth war graves cemetery?

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** I will provide the member for Girrawheen with the number of official war graves transferred from Karrakatta Cemetery to the Perth War Cemetery.

[*Supplementary Information No A52.*]

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I seek a clarification. My first question asked for the total number of exhumations and I do not know whether the minister agreed to provide the answer in writing. I asked for the total number of exhumations carried out at Karrakatta in the area where the mausoleum had been built, and where those remains have been reburied. The minister answered the question about the cost, saying most of those costs were borne by the cemetery board, but could he provide supplementary information on the total number of exhumations?

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** I am happy to provide the total number of exhumations carried out in the areas where the mausoleum has been built at Karrakatta Cemetery as part of the renewal program.

[*Supplementary Information No A53.*]

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I assume that the estimated cost of \$11 million in the budget allocation for the renewal program is the total estimated cost. The allocation in the out years is \$1.125 million for this financial year, through to \$1.4 million for 2016–17. Can the minister confirm whether that is the total cost or if there will be further costs in the out years to complete the program?

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** The costs will be ongoing.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** So \$11 million is for the projected forward estimates.

Are annual checks carried out to ascertain whether burial licence holders' contact details are current?

**Mr P. Deague:** We are reliant on families to update their information and this can be a difficult process because people take out a grant, a right of burial or a memorial that might be 25 to 50 years old but do not update their records until there is a further interment in the family grave. When a family wants to purchase a burial plot, we ask whether they have family members buried at different cemeteries. We then go through our records system to

Chairman; Mr David Templeman; Mr Tony Simpson; Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr John Castrilli; Ms Janine Freeman

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see whether there is a family grave that they can use. This encourages a more efficient use of the land we have instead of continual expansion.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** On page 789 there is a reference to the replacement and rehabilitation of ageing cremators. Does the minister know whether the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board is working with local governments on plans for any new crematoriums in the Perth metropolitan area? I do not think the board covers regional areas. I preface that question because I am often asked why there is no crematorium in Mandurah; the nearest is at Karrakatta, Fremantle or Bunbury.

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** The government has identified Whitby as a future site for a crematorium, and this would be a bit closer for people in Mandurah. The member has raised a good point. In the past 10 to 12 years the growth in demand in Mandurah has been quite strong. Considering the average age of the population through the Mandurah area, having to track back up to Fremantle for crematorium services is something we need to address. It is forecast in the budget that the government is working towards Whitby, which will be a bit closer than having to go to Fremantle.

**Mr P. Deague:** The Metropolitan Cemeteries Board works closely with the Department of Planning. The Department of Planning projects a future Perth population in excess of 3.5 million and identifies an expanded Perth metropolitan area that includes the Mandurah region. I am looking at the potential for land, maybe 150 or 200 hectares, in that region. With the expansion of Rockingham Regional Memorial Park, we are looking at establishing chapel facilities and the need for a crematorium, which is about 30 minutes from the CBD of Mandurah. We aim to be able to provide access to our cemetery facilities between 30 to 45 minutes within the metropolitan area and we do achieve that at the moment.

The other pressing problem we have is that people are getting quite large and we have had to upgrade our cremators to take cremations up to 350 kilograms. This means that our cremators are not operating at capacity at the moment. We have installed one of the larger cremators at Pinnaroo. With the new crematoriums, we will have to provide an upgraded cremator to take cremations up to 350 kilograms. That is why there is quite a substantial cost in regards to our cremators.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Is that because of lifestyle factors; of people getting heavier?

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** Last Friday night I was at the TS Canning cadets and a new ambulance that was like a small truck was brought in and showed to us. I asked: “Why is it so special?” I was told: “Those little ones I normally roll out can only carry 230 kilograms. We have a need now for ambulances that can carry people larger than 230 kilograms”. This one has a tailgate lift on it to lift patients into the back of the ambulance and to move them around. The crematoriums are also trying to deal with larger cremations. It is a lifestyle thing and an issue we have to deal with when moving patients. We have two of the truck-like ambulances.

Before we close off, I want to clarify a point for the member for Girrawheen about the security rebate. I commented that it was about \$3.7 million in 2012–13. That is incorrect. It should have been \$2.2 million in 2012–13 and \$3.7 million was for 2011–12. I apologise for that.

*Meeting suspended from 1.00 to 2.00 pm*