

Division 70: Office of the Environmental Protection Authority, \$14 223 000 —

Ms L.L. Baker, Chairman.

Mr W.R. Marmion, Minister for Environment.

Mr K. Taylor, General Manager.

Mr D. Foster, Director, Strategic Policy and Planning Services.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIRMAN: Any questions, members?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I refer to the major spending changes on page 839 of the *Budget Statements*. To speed up the proceedings, the minister can provide the information I am seeking as supplementary information. Can the minister provide a breakdown of how the allocation of \$220 000 in 2010–11 for enhanced project assessment and strategic support was spent and how the proposed \$2.254 million for the project will be spent?

Mr W.R. MARMION: Obviously that requires fairly detailed information. I am happy to provide as supplementary information a detailed breakdown of the \$222 000 that was spent on enhanced project assessment and strategic support and of how the proposed \$2.254 million for the project will be spent.

[*Supplementary Information No A34.*]

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I refer to the first dot point on page 840 under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”. What agency resources are currently dedicated to preparing for the mining of uranium in Western Australia? Have any consultants been employed? Has this included any additional travel by officers of the Office of the Environmental Protection Authority; and, if so, to where and for what purpose?

Mr W.R. MARMION: I am happy for Mr Taylor to answer the question.

Mr K. Taylor: The office has three dedicated positions for the assessment of uranium projects, and other positions within the office also support that. Four projects have been referred to the EPA, three of which have had scoping documents approved by the EPA for environmental studies and the fourth of which has a scoping document open for public review. The funds provided to the OEPA include funds for travel to the sites. The EPA has already made a number of site visits to a number of the proposed mining sites.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Has the travel to the various sites been at the expense of the OEPA, or have the mining companies offered to pay?

Mr W.R. MARMION: I will provide that as supplementary information.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I would like that information for each of the four proposals.

Mr W.R. MARMION: We will provide the details of the travel specifically to review uranium projects and where the funding was sourced from.

[*Supplementary Information No A35.*]

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: What is happening with the water contamination in a couple of the communities at Fitzroy Crossing, the main one being Bayulu? I understand that the groundwater is being contaminated by uranium seepage and that fresh water is being carted in by truck.

Mr W.R. MARMION: Which page in the budget estimates is the member referring to?

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: The first dot point on page 840.

Mr W.R. MARMION: The Office of the Environmental Protection Authority has no knowledge of that. I will ask Mr Taylor to elaborate.

Mr K. Taylor: The role of the Office of the EPA is to support the EPA in the assessment of development proposals, including mining proposals. I am not aware of a mining proposal in the vicinity.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: Exploration has caused the uranium seepage.

Mr K. Taylor: That matter has not been referred to the EPA by any organisation.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: I will make sure that it is. The Water Corporation is aware of it, because it is carting the water.

Mr W.R. MARMION: Perhaps the member might like to ask the question again after nine o'clock when the Water Corporation is here. It might be aware of the issue.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I refer to the second dot point on page 840. When the various appeal points were removed, promises were made about the website and IT improvements to facilitate project tracking. Are all those

improvement in place? How is the effectiveness of the website measured? How many projects are currently in front of the minister? Is this any different from the previous situation?

Mr W.R. MARMION: Can the minister go through them a bit more slowly? It is hard to write down four questions in 10 seconds.

The CHAIRMAN: The member can ask each question separately.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Are all the improvements for the project tracking system in place?

Mr K. Taylor: Not all the systems have been completed but the key ones relating to the amendments to the act last year that related to the appeals provision are in place. The website has been upgraded so that before the EPA makes a decision on the level of assessment for a new proposal it is registered on the website for seven days and the public can comment on those projects before the EPA makes a decision on the level of assessment.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Is the effectiveness of that website being monitored?

Mr K. Taylor: We can provide information on the number of comments that have been received for the various projects. A significant number of public comments have been made and we are doing all we can to make sure that the public is aware of and has access to that provision on the website.

[7.40 pm]

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Having recently looked at the project tracking list, I was able to see quickly the number of projects currently with the Environmental Protection Authority. Can the minister confirm the number of current and ongoing projects and the number of projects the EPA has responsibility for moving to the next stage?

Mr W.R. MARMION: I will defer to Mr Taylor.

Mr K. Taylor: I can only say that about 90 projects have been referred to the EPA and are subject to assessment by the EPA. I cannot provide information on the number of those awaiting EPA action, as distinct from awaiting proponent action.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Could we have that by way of supplementary information?

The CHAIRMAN: Yes, certainly. The member would like that question answered by way of supplementary information.

Mr W.R. MARMION: Could the member tell me what he is specifically requiring?

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I want a printout of the tracking database, a clear indication of the number of projects currently in the system and an indication of the number of projects that need the EPA to take the next action before they can be advanced to a further stage. It is actually quite easy to do.

Mr W.R. MARMION: I did not quite get the question. The member is talking about a tracking system providing the data.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Yes.

Mr W.R. MARMION: And then he said something about the EPA assessment project. Is the member talking about projects to go on the tracking system?

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: No, I want to know the number of projects in the tracking system, the number of projects where the ball is in the EPA's court and the number where the ball is in the proponent's court. We hear many claims about the system not delivering for proponents, when it could well be that proponents are the ones slowing up the system.

Mr W.R. MARMION: It is a mixed question. The member wants to know which projects are waiting for EPA action.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Yes.

Mr W.R. MARMION: We can provide that information.

The CHAIRMAN: What supplementary information has the minister agreed to provide?

Mr W.R. MARMION: We have agreed to provide the number of projects awaiting EPA action.

[*Supplementary Information No A36.*]

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I refer to page 841, subheading "Outcomes and Key Effectiveness Indicators", line item "Percentage of audited projects where all environmental conditions have been met". How many projects were audited in each of the budget years? There is a rather striking figure of 100 per cent all the way along there.

Mr W.R. MARMION: We will have to provide as supplementary information the specific number of projects that were audited for that 100 per cent figure. Madam Chair, do you want me to repeat the supplementary information that we will provide?

The CHAIRMAN: I got it but perhaps it will be worthwhile doing it one more time for *Hansard*.

Mr W.R. MARMION: We will provide the number of projects that were audited for the first outcome, the efficiency and effectiveness indicator, which is the percentage of approved projects with actual impacts not exceeding those predicted during the assessment, and the number of projects that were audited for the 100 per cent reading there.

[*Supplementary Information No A37.*]

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I refer to page 843, financial statements, line item “Grants and subsidies” under “Income Statement (Controlled)”. I note in 2010 that line item was budgeted at \$700 000; however, the estimated actual is now \$1.09 million and will remain in the out years to 2012–13. What is the reason for that increase, and what are the various grants and subsidies that make up this amount?

Mr W.R. MARMION: Mr Taylor might be able to elaborate on this, but my understanding is that it reflects contributions to the fertiliser action program, and also \$390 000 from the royalties for regions funding for work in the Pilbara. If Mr Taylor would like to clarify that, I would be happy for him to do so.

Mr K. Taylor: This is part of the government’s Pilbara Cities project. The Office of the Environmental Protection Authority has been provided with additional funds so that we can carry out assessments of any new developments associated with Pilbara Cities that might have an environmental impact so that they can be progressed.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Further to that, is that an extra amount?

Mr K. Taylor: Yes.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: How much of that money is going to the fertiliser initiative, which the minister referred to?

Mr W.R. MARMION: Madam Chair, I defer to Mr Taylor.

Mr K. Taylor: My understanding—I stand corrected—is that the original \$700 000 in the 2010–11 budget was for the fertiliser action plan and the additional \$390 000 was the Pilbara Cities funding from royalties for regions.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Further to that, through the minister to Mr Taylor, has that \$700 000 been spent? What is actually happening with that fertiliser plan? Is it ongoing?

Mr W.R. MARMION: Mr Foster will be able to answer this question.

Mr D. Foster: Much of that money was held by the EPA for other agencies, and it has been disbursed. We would need to give a more detailed breakdown if the member would like that.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Could I ask for that by way of supplementary information?

Mr W.R. MARMION: We are happy to provide by way of supplementary information the detail of the \$700 000 that I understand comes from the fertiliser action program.

[*Supplementary Information No A38.*]

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I refer to page 841, subheading “Environmental Impact Assessment and Policies”. I note that the income was budgeted at \$700 000 for 2010–11.

Mr W.R. MARMION: Which line item?

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: This is “Environmental Impact Assessment and Policies”, total cost less income.

Mr W.R. MARMION: Yes.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: It was at \$700 000 for 2010–11 but it is now estimated to come in at \$1.24 million. What is the reason for the increase, please?

Mr W.R. MARMION: Madam Chair, I defer to Mr Taylor.

Mr K. Taylor: Again, part of that would be related to the \$390 000 for Pilbara Cities, but we would have to provide supplementary information as to what the funds were beyond the Pilbara Cities funding.

The appropriation was recommended.