

Division 42: Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions — Service 2, Tourism, \$59 013 000 —

Ms M.M. Quirk, Chair.

Mr R.H. Cook, Minister for Tourism.

Mr P. Dans, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Rottnest Island Authority.

Mr J. Banks, Executive Director, Rottnest Island Authority.

Ms L. Cassetta, Chief Financial Officer, Rottnest Island Authority.

Mr N. Fergus, Chief of Staff, Minister for Tourism.

[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 have a question from the member for North West Central, and then the Leader of the Opposition.

Ms M. BEARD: I refer to page 694 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, significant issues impacting the agency, specifically paragraph 8.4 that refers to the Rottnest Island Authority's \$34.1 million upgrade to the drinking water supply network. Is there currently a water shortage on the island?

Mr R.H. COOK: I thank the member for the question. The power and water infrastructure on the island are significant pieces of work. The McGowan government has invested around \$60 million for maintenance upgrades to the power and water utilities on the island. There is not so much a question of water shortage—water comes from a small desalination plant—but it is true to say that a lot of the pipes and the network associated with that are somewhat aged. A key piece of work that Mr Banks is involved in at the moment is transitioning the water and power utilities away from the Rottnest Island Authority—for some historical reason, it has continued to be its own utility provider—to Horizon Power and the Water Corporation. In relation to those challenges associated with water, I might invite Mr Dans and/or his officer —

[12.50 pm]

The CHAIR: That might be sufficient information for the member. I am mindful of the time.

Ms M. BEARD: Is there a need for bottled or potable water to be transported to Rottnest Island, or is it sustainable at the moment with the drinking water that is there?

Mr R.H. COOK: No; it is all done through desalination and the collection of a small amount of water through the local catchments.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to the second explanation of significant movements on page 697. It talks about the estimated actual income being higher than the 2022–23 budget due to the recognition of the \$4.5 million grant for the national tourism icons program from the commonwealth, which was not budgeted for. Can the minister explain what that grant was for and what it was spent on?

Mr R.H. COOK: I will ask Mr Banks to provide information on that.

Mr J. Banks: We were fortunate to receive total funding of \$17.2 million from the commonwealth back in 2019. We have been rolling out a series of programs with that funding. That has involved the upgrade of our mall central area and we are undertaking works at the far west end of the island. We have also undertaken a significant welcome statement with that funding, as well as a significant upgrade to the basin area.

Ms J.J. SHAW: I draw the minister's attention to the service summary on page 695 and the second service, "Visitor Services and Public Programs Provided at Rottnest Island". Can the minister provide an update on the implementation of the new booking system, please?

Mr R.H. COOK: Thank you very much, member. As the member knows, booking a holiday at Rottnest Island has always been one of the great Western Australian challenges. Many people have perfected that art and the rest of us continue to be bewildered by it. One of the important developments that has taken place is the new updated

online queuing and booking system. That has been rolled out over the course of this year and has been a particularly successful aspect of the upgrades that the Rottnest Island Authority has taken on. The importance of the booking system is that it has to be able to guard against bot purchasing. A lot of work has been done to build in an appropriate level of cybersecurity and bot protection to ensure that people do not continue to game the booking system under the new system. Protections are in place, and the effectiveness of that can be seen over the last two days as more bots are targeting the system. If the source is a known bot data centre, it is immediately blocked. If the source appears suspicious to the user, the user is asked to complete a CAPTCHA response to ensure that they are human, which is usually the matrix to identify traffic signals. I am sure that one day someone will invent a technology that can identify traffic signals, but that protection is proving to be particularly important as we move more to an online arrangement for booking accommodation.

What is really pleasing is that the new consumer website and online system, rotnnestisland.com, was awarded winner of the 2023 Australian Web Awards in the category of government websites for government, government agencies or wholly government-funded programs. This is all about continuing to upgrade and update the infrastructure and the online experience of Rottnest, and to continue to make sure that Western Australians enjoy the premium tourism service that they would expect if they were booking accommodation or something else at a premium tourism destination.

Ms J.J. SHAW: I have a further question.

The CHAIR: There is no further question. I give the call to the member for North West Central.

Ms M. BEARD: I refer to the line item “Karijini National Park Upgrades” under the asset investment program on page 702 of budget paper No 2, volume 2. Can the minister give a brief update of the national park upgrades—sorry, I am looking at the wrong one.

Mr R.H. COOK: There are not too many gorges at Rottnest!

Ms M. BEARD: I refer to the average level of visitor satisfaction for Rottnest Island on page 696. There has been a decrease in visitor satisfaction to 75 per cent. Is there an explanation for that?

The CHAIR: It would be the booking system, I suspect!

Mr R.H. COOK: I will ask Mr Banks to provide further commentary. The member can see that in 2022–23 we sought a budgeted satisfaction level of around 75 per cent and the actual estimated is 84 per cent.

Ms M. BEARD: I am wondering why the government thought it might have been lower.

Mr R.H. COOK: I will ask Mr Banks to comment.

Mr J. Banks: As the minister has clarified, the target for the previous period was 75 per cent and we have exceeded that target. In recognition of that, we have set a higher target of 85 per cent in the future. It is generally trending up.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to the completed works on page 703 and the line item “Holiday and Tourism Facilities”. Obviously that program has come to an end or is estimated to end at the end of the financial year. Has that project been completed and are there any plans to further enhance the holiday and tourism facilities in the future?

Mr R.H. COOK: Thank you very much, member. This program was anticipated for 2022–23. The works that were targeted for that financial year have been completed. We are obviously looking at opportunities to undertake further upgrades. I will ask Mr Banks to comment on that shortly. The projects completed in 2022–23 are essentially across three key areas: the refurbishment of visitor accommodation and ablutions, which cost \$7.3 million; the North Thomson wastewater sewerage pump station and flow-balance tank replacement, which cost \$2.2 million; and the generator replacements, which cost \$274 000. Mr Banks can provide an overview of what we are anticipating in 2023–24.

Mr J. Banks: The budget line item for the top program—the national tourism icons program—relates to that commonwealth funding. That project is coming to an end and will be fully expended this financial year. We are in the final stage of the last project, which is the west end project. The other line item is our recurrent budget approval. That flows on to page 704 where the program picks up again and the member will see the recurrence of our recurrent capital program and any specific purpose funding streams that we have in those future years.

The appropriation was recommended.