

Metropolitan Cemeteries Board —

Ms J.M. Freeman, Chairman.

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

Mr P. Deague, Chief Executive Officer.

Mr G. Bayne, Chief Finance Officer.

The CHAIRMAN: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard staff. The daily proof *Hansard* will be published at 9.00 am tomorrow.

Members may raise questions about matters relating to the operations and budget of the off-budget authority. Off-budget authority officers are recognised as ministerial advisers. It is the intention of the Chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the committee clerk by Friday, 30 May 2014. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice with the Clerk's office.

I now ask the minister to introduce his advisers to the committee.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIRMAN: Member for Mandurah.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Madam Chairman, are we dealing with the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board first?

The CHAIRMAN: I think that is the agreement.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I propose that we spend only 20 minutes on it.

The CHAIRMAN: It is all in the one division, however the committee proceeds.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Minister, I refer to page 658 and the cemetery renewal program, which has a total cost of \$10 million in the forward estimates. Part of the progress of the renewal program is the renewal of new grave areas and, under the act, there are certain requirements for what happens to those graves. There has been criticism in the past that some of those graves have not been restored in accordance with the terms of the act. Could the Minister for Local Government briefly outline the progress of the renewal program in that context?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I thank the member for Mandurah for the question. The program of renewal has been around for a number of years. Like the member for Mandurah, last year in the estimates committees I learned a little more about the cemetery process. It is quite an amazing industry as is the process that cemeteries go through. The renewal programs are very interesting and, as the member for Mandurah would know, there are concerns about headstones and so forth during that renewal process. Peter Deague may be able to add some information about the \$10 million in the forward estimates, the program and how that is unfolding.

Mr P. Deague: In the progress of cemetery renewal at Karrakatta, each section is reviewed based on certain criteria—historic value and whether it is a war grave or an official war grave. That process defines what graves will be retained. Obviously, graves in grant are retained in burial sections as well. The program works with the community on the basis that the act defines clearly that there has to be a 12-month advertising period to allow the community to respond to the renewal program. After that 12-month period, the renewal program is reassessed. The matter goes back to the board of the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board and is then referred to the minister for his decision. All up, the process of approval probably takes about 18 months. In that process, if during the construction phase the MCB gets information from the community about concerns about monumental work and retention, most often, if not all times, those graves are retained.

Over the years, the MCB has had a lot of interest in official war graves, including those from the time of the Boer War, the First World War and Second World War and even a few graves of Vietnam veterans as well. The board is going through a process with the community and also Honouring Indigenous War Graves Inc in conjunction with the Office of Australian War Graves in Canberra. The MCB has a memorandum of agreement with the commonwealth on the retention of official war graves at no cost to the community, which recognises the service that they have provided to Australians.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: As part of the renewal program there was a commitment to, I understand, similar to what is done in the commonwealth war graves area, a book of remembrance. Is it true that the board has

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committed to providing a book of remembrance available to loved ones, visitors et cetera, that identifies those graves that have been removed as part of the renewal program? If so, where is that book on display at Karrakatta or at any other relevant cemetery?

Mr P. Deague: A book of remembrance originally was a book, and it was retained in the office. If there were any questions from the community, they could visit the office. Over the last few years we have revised that and mirrored what the Commonwealth War Graves Commission does, which is to have a pillar box with the details of the burial section, or in the case of a war cemetery, the battle, and also the people buried in the burial section itself. The MCB has mirrored that and is rolling out that program over the next few years on all the renewal sections going back to 1998.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I understand that Karrakatta and Fremantle Cemeteries are on the state heritage list. What is the impact of that on the renewal program? What obligation is there for consultation with the Heritage Council of Western Australia?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I will get Mr Deague to add to my answer, but I will clarify a couple of points. The member for Girrawheen is right that a lot of gravesites are of national or historical significance to the state, in terms of pioneers and people who have achieved a lot in the state, and they become part of our national treasures and part of the heritage process, especially given that some parts of Fremantle Cemetery were built at the turn of the century and there are icons in it. I will pass over to Peter to clarify the heritage within Karrakatta and Fremantle Cemeteries.

[7.10 pm]

Mr P. Deague: We work with the Heritage Council of Western Australia and the National Trust of Australia. We have a memorandum of understanding with the Heritage Council of Western Australia concerning the renewal program. The actual monuments are not owned by the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board but by the families, so we liaise closely with the families about what is of historical value. That is important with a renewal program, because some families feel that they can modify a historic monument based on a further burial in a grave, so we work closely with families to help them understand the historical value. At Karrakatta Cemetery we have a historic section, on which there are quite a lot of constraints on re-use, and that works well for the community. Recently, through the Minister for Local Government, we set up heritage trails that have been very successful with the community.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Can the minister explain to me the pecking order for a gravesite that is considered a war grave and worthy of national listing and how that interacts with any state heritage considerations?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Just to clarify, is that in terms of the renewal process or just the sites themselves? The renewal process is advertised before going to that process. Every opportunity is taken to try to contact the owners of the sites before going through with the renewal program. I do not know whether Mr Deague can add any more to that.

Mr P. Deague: We work with other associations, for instance the Lord Forrest monument and a lot of other historic monuments, and we have been involved in refurbishing monuments as well in the past.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I did not make that clear. If something is recognised by the Office of Australian War Graves, what status does it have for what can and cannot be done to that particular grave?

Mr P. Deague: We are the only state that has set up a memorandum of understanding with the commonwealth on retaining war graves. Other states expect the commonwealth to issue grants and, if not, the monuments could effectively be removed. The Metropolitan Cemeteries Board, through the minister, agreed that these official war graves should be retained in perpetuity.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I refer to page 658 of budget paper No 2, and note the line item “Whitby Falls Cemetery Development”, which has an estimated cost of \$4.3 million. There is not a lot of expenditure planned this year—just a little—and then nothing at all for the next year. When is it planned that this cemetery will be operational? I also notice the line item “Whiteman Park Development”. When will that come onstream and can the minister tell us anything about that?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: The Whitby Falls site is in the south-east corridor, where we have a limited amount of cemetery space. We are always looking to try to capture the land before it gets into the urban development process, and before we have to spend a lot of money trying to access it. Pinnaroo Valley Memorial Park off the Mitchell Freeway in the northern suburbs was a piece of land with a water easement through it that was put aside back in the 1970s, and it has worked well as a cemetery. The Whitby Falls site is in my electorate of Darling Range. It is the old Whitby Falls Hospital, which was a mental institution in the 1960s and 70s and has been closed since 2007. The break-up of part of that land was given over to the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board.

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This year's budget allocates some money to do some work. The site has some constraints; it is on a busy south-west highway, which is good for location, there is no scheme water and we are doing some research into that and we are also looking into supplying power. There are other things to do with the land itself and we are doing some seismic testing surveying of the land to work out how we can work this into the site.

There are a number of suitable areas towards Rockingham and we are looking at Baldvis for another one. We are basically trying to put aside some land now so that we can have some allocated land for cemeteries. Whiteman Park is a great site. As the member knows, Whiteman Park is a great facility out there near Ellenbrook. The facility has the train, the park, the motor museum and all that going on. The reserve land next to Whiteman Park works well with a cemetery. We will take over part of it and turn it into a cemetery. There are some natural connections between a system such as that where there is water that can be used to irrigate the gardens, there is access to sewerage and toilets, and other things needed at a cemetery can be put there. One of the frustrations for us is trying to make sure that all the cemeteries have reasonable facilities, so that when funerals are held there is a bathroom and somewhere for people to go to the toilet. It is nice to have somewhere sheltered from the rain where a service can be held, but that is always a struggle for us. The Whitby Falls site is coming along quite nicely. We are identifying and doing some work on that site.

We are very lucky in Western Australia to have a self-funding Metropolitan Cemeteries Board that does not rely on any state government funding. We are also the only state that has not gone through a privatisation process, privatising all of those services. We still have some struggles, of course, including a growing population. The member for Mandurah would know that the only crematorium between Fremantle and Mandurah is in Fremantle. I acknowledge that there are some issues there around Rockingham where we need another crematorium based where the community is. In addition, our community and the population are changing; diverse religions are coming in and there are criteria around that that we have to work with as well. That is an ongoing and changing environment.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I refer again to the renewal program on page 658 of budget paper No 2 and ask about the graves of children that might be impacted by the renewal program. I ask this on behalf of the member for Cannington, who was approached by parents of children who have received a letter that the grave of their child is to be part of the renewal program. Is it true—I am assuming it is true—that children's graves will be subject to the renewal program? Given that it is possible that a child's parent or parents are still alive, what is being done to address this particular issue, given that this would obviously be a very emotional issue for those parents and their families?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I thank the member for the question. That is an interesting situation and it is good to see that the system is working well and we have been able to get hold of the parents to let them know that their child's gravesite is in this area for renewal. I will have to hand over for Mr Deague to explain the process that we go through now once the person has been notified and they do not wish the site to be renewed.

Mr P. Deague: We liaise with the families and sometimes there is an opportunity for the family to renew the grant even though it is in the renewal section. We are compassionate with the families, and in this particular situation we would not push through a renewal of the grave of the child because there are such emotional consequences. Only a few sections at Karrakatta Cemetery are completely dedicated to children and they are not subject to renewal. The grave the member referred to must be in a general burial section that just happens to be the burial site of a child. We have had a number of situations in Western Australian history when a lot of children have died through illness and poor medicinal practices. That is representative, I suppose, of the very nature of the business that the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board works in—dealing with grief and grieving families. We work very compassionately with those families to get outcomes that suit the community.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I have a further question relating to the so-called paupers' graves. I would like to know how many people were buried—sorry, cremated—because I think that is a paupers —

Mr P. Deague: They are burials.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: They are burials. How many were conducted in the cemeteries the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board has jurisdiction over in the last two financial years?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I may have to take that on notice, if the member does not mind.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I would like that on notice. Is it a large number?

[7.20 pm]

Mr P. Deague: No, it is not a large number.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Perhaps, by way of supplementary information, could I have what I asked for, and the cost, which is ultimately billed back to the government? I assume that is what happens. Could I have the number

of government burials conducted by the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board in its jurisdictions for the years 2011–12 and 2012–13? We have not finished this financial year, but I am happy to have figures up to the present day. Could I also have the cost that is billed back to government and the number of those burials involving Indigenous people?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: We are happy to provide that information.

[Supplementary Information No A28.]

Mrs G.J. GODFREY: I refer to the development of Rockingham Regional Memorial Park on page 658. What funds have been set aside for the development of this park? Could the minister please advise what this is intended to deliver and how it will enhance the recently completed works?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I thank the member for those questions. Rockingham is one of those areas in the south west corridor of Perth that is experiencing a huge amount of growth. The Rockingham cemetery is quite large and is capable of quite substantial growth. There is a rotunda in the park, which can be used for small services, and we have put in some blinds to keep the rain out. We are still working through some issues with the toilet facilities. They are not quite up to standard, mainly because there is no sewerage nearby. Not having sewerage nearby means it is a struggle to put in toilet facilities. Some money has been allocated to do some work around the cemetery, including a car park and entry statement and basically tidying it up to make it a little more presentable. We are also planning to build a permanent chapel on that site because we have identified that it is a growth area and it will be there for a number of years. The money that was allocated in this year's budget is for the planning work around the Rockingham cemetery. As I said, I think that involves the entry statement, grounds work, car parks and also planning for a chapel so we can have better access to burial places in the south metropolitan region.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I refer to the fourth paragraph on page 658, which relates to investment in on-site infrastructure. The minister would be acutely aware of our ageing population. I have yet to go to a funeral at a crematorium in the past five years in which there has not been standing room only. Given the ageing population, it is becoming increasingly difficult for mourners to stand for any lengthy period. There seems to be inadequate seating at all the crematoria that I have been to.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: That is a very good question. I will pass over to Peter to talk about a couple of the works we are undertaking. We have a very large void in the amount of seating available and the seating is also at an age at which it is getting close to being replaced. The member has identified one of the things we have a problem with; that is, there is nowhere near enough seating for a general cemetery. Funerals for a popular person can attract large numbers of people. In those cases, people start to flow into the car park; they are not in the chapel for the service. We are identifying ways to design chapels a bit better. Peter can give some detail about the work that we are doing. That is one of the biggest areas that needs to be addressed. We need more seating and the areas need to be bigger. That is a challenge.

Mr P. Deague: It is certainly a concern. We designed our recently built second chapel at Pinnaroo so that the doors open wider onto a courtyard, and there are TVs and sound systems on the outside. We instruct the funeral directors to ensure that the elderly have preferential seating. It seats 400, so it is quite extensive. We can sometimes get up to 1 000 people at funerals. It is very hard to plan for that. It is a design issue that we have to consider, similarly with universal access.

Mr P. ABETZ: I refer to the cemetery renewal program at Karrakatta on page 658. When I was in Germany recently, I visited a cemetery. Because of the issues that arise from so-called cemetery renewal and the shifting of gravestones, in Stuttgart in Germany, there are family gravesites that are somewhat larger. I found my great uncle, grandparents and so on. It is being used continually. The extra name is simply added to the gravestone so all the relatives know where the grave is. I think some fee is payable every 25 years, which maintains the family history and prevents the need to redevelop in that sense. Has thought been given to that, perhaps not for Karrakatta because that is an existing cemetery, but for new cemeteries such as the one at Whitby Falls? Could thought be given to that so that issue does not arise as it has arisen with Karrakatta?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I thank the member for the question. I will pass over to Peter to talk about making the plots into family grave plots and adding names to it. He can provide some detail about that. I will add a couple of points. I was asked a question on notice last year relating to tours, which are carried out in Karrakatta Cemetery and Fremantle by using a smart phone. When people walk in, they are given a map and, using a phone, scan across the map. With headphones on, people can hear about the history of a person, and perhaps find out about C.Y. O'Connor or Bon Scott. If people have guests in town and they are looking for something to do and want to learn about the history of WA, they can go on this great walking tour on a trail through the cemetery using a map

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and a smart phone. It is very interesting. People get to learn a fair bit about Western Australia's history. I will pass over to Peter, who can talk about the family plot process.

Mr P. Deague: We do that now at Karrakatta. We do it only for families who request it. It is a process called lift and deepen. The Greek and Macedonian communities, in particular, like that as an option. Without going into too much detail, effectively, we dig down, put any remains in an ossuary box and then reuse that grave. We certainly do that now. We leave it up to the families to record the history. They often do that. As the minister said, with new technology, some families are creating web pages. They put the person's history on a web page like Facebook. That is becoming quite popular. At this point the legislation allows us to do that for unrelated people but we only do it for families at this point.