

**Division 68: Swan River Trust, \$7 892 000 —**

Mr P.B. Watson, Chairman.

Mr D.A. Templeman, Minister for the Environment.

Mr R. Hughes, General Manager.

Ms R. Spencer, Acting Environmental Programs Manager.

Mr J. Wong, Chief Finance Officer.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Member for Capel.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** I have a general question for the minister. I refer to page 1095 and to the heading “Total Cost of Services”. The budget estimate for 2008-09 obviously is in decline, and I am interested to hear the minister’s explanation of how changes to the funding coming in from the Burswood Park Board etc are going to impact on the overall budget. What will be the net effect of that process on the activities that have previously been carried out by the Swan River Trust and the environmental activities in the Swan Canning Riverpark?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I thank the member for the question. I am pleased to highlight to the committee that last week the Burswood Park Board approved the allocation of \$6 million to allow the implementation of the critical river protection initiatives for 2008-09. This means that the total funding available to the Swan River Trust’s programs lifts to \$13.89 million in 2008-09, which is actually an increase of \$1.16 million over the previous year. The passing of the legislation relating to Burswood Park has ensured that for 2008-09 we will have an allocation of \$6 million, which will increase the total appropriation available to the Swan River Trust by \$1.16 million.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** Pay rises all round!

**Mrs J. HUGHES:** The last dot point on page 1094 refers to the vandalism of foreshore trees along the river. It is very disappointing that there has been an escalation in vandalism in this area. What can be done to stop this happening? Is anything being done?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I thank the member for the question. Unfortunately, we have seen the deliberate vandalism of trees along parts of the foreshore areas of the Swan and Canning river system. That vandalism includes the physical removal of trees and the poisoning of trees. Obviously, local governments and local communities are concerned about the ongoing natural values of the river, including the foreshore vegetation. It is important that we send a very strong message to anybody who may attempt to damage foreshore vegetation, be they mature trees or smaller understorey-type vegetation along the foreshore reserve. That vegetation obviously plays an important part in the river’s ecosystem. It also provides stability; we know that erosion issues continue to be a concern for any river system. We have seen damage along the riverfront in areas such as Attadale, Minim Cove and Maylands and also at the Shelley Rossmoyne Foreshore Park. The Swan River Trust board, in collaboration with local government, has erected a series of signs that I believe are having a big and important impact. We must send a very clear message to people that we do not want this to happen.

**Mrs J. HUGHES:** Does the minister mean that a sign is put in the place of the tree? I know that something similar is done in Melbourne.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** The sign goes up in the place where damage has clearly been done.

**Mrs J. HUGHES:** People get to look at a great big, dirty, yucky sign instead of a tree.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Everyone in the area will know that an act of vandalism has been committed. It is an important initiative that sends a very clear message that it is abhorrent behaviour and will not be accepted. It also encourages members of the local community, particularly those living in and near those areas, to become even more vigilant and report to the trust or to their local government any suspicious activity.

**Mr M.P. WHITELY:** The first dot point at the top of page 1095 refers to the restoration of foreshore vegetation and river walling. The erosion of the riverbank is a real issue in my stretch of the river up around Ashfield and Bassendean. It is coming under increasing pressure with the demands of recreational boating along that section of the river. Can the minister provide some advice on the measures that are in place to ensure the integrity of the river foreshore?

[9.50 pm]

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I thank the member for Bassendean for his acknowledgement of the importance of the river, particularly in his electorate. As the member will be aware, the Swan and Canning Rivers Management Act 2006 established joint management arrangements for shorelines between the state and local governments. This allows us to establish effective joint management processes. Immediately required maintenance work is

estimated to cost more than \$5 million. Since 2002 the government has committed more than \$4.25 million to more than 100 foreshore protection and rehabilitation projects through the *Riverbank* competitive grant program. This program allows local communities and volunteer groups to work with the Swan River Trust and local government to address the issues that the member has highlighted. It is an ongoing issue that the trust will need to progress. We cannot underestimate the importance of the legislation that was introduced by this government. It allows us to establish and foster very important joint management arrangements.

**Mr M.P. WHITELEY:** On the issue of joint management arrangements, the Town of Bassendean puts a lot of effort into a stretch of river in the municipality and does a good job on water management. However, the City of Bayswater, which is in my electorate, is responsible for a short stretch of the river north of Tonkin Highway through to the border of Ashfield and Bayswater. The stretch of river in question is probably just one kilometre long and is less well kept. What can be done when a local government places less emphasis on foreshore management? How can we overcome that problem?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I will ask the general manager to comment on that matter specifically. I assure the member that the trust and I recognise the need to have the support of local government, and in particular the river councils that have, as part of their jurisdiction, areas of both river systems. I have attended a number of meetings of mayors and presidents of local governments that share the Swan and Canning Rivers in their municipalities. We have a very robust relationship. I have attended three mayoral forums. We must continue to work on the relationship between the trust, the state government and local government. We have a good working relationship and, as the minister, I will continue to foster that relationship. That will help address the issue the member has highlighted whereby some local councils might not necessarily place the same degree of importance on river foreshore management that the member would like to see or on their ability to collaborate with the trust. I ask the general manager to make further comments.

**Mr R. Hughes:** At the last mayoral forum, the minister released a document that the trust had prepared as a result of a program that was conducted in partnership with the Swan Catchment Council. We assessed the condition of the entire stretch of the Swan and Canning Rivers foreshores. That information allowed us to get a clear picture of a system of priorities. In the past, the competitive grants process was very much driven by the priorities of the councils. We now have a priority-based system that we generated from our perspective. It will require a collaborative effort but, as the minister said, the act establishes joint responsibility for foreshore management. We now have a very firm basis for setting those priorities. We will drive the works in the areas that need more attention than others.

**Mr M.P. WHITELEY:** I would not like to see a system that rewards bad behaviour. The Town of Bassendean has put a lot of effort into its area of responsibility. If it is a needs-based assessment, a high level of need could be demonstrated by the City of Bayswater because of its neglect of the river. I would not like a council to be rewarded for its bad behaviour by being given extra funding.

**Mr R. Hughes:** The system is not set up to do that. We are involved in at least three fairly substantial projects with the City of Bayswater through the *Riverbank* program. The member will see some areas dealt with as a priority. As each year passes, we can address the areas that have not received attention in the past. It will not happen in any given year; this process will take a decade or more.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** On page 1097, service 1 is “Statutory Assessment of Development Proposals”. The cost of those assessments is indicated over the page, but the timing of them is not mentioned in the budget papers. Does the department assess the time taken to assess development proposals and is it measured against a statutory or non-statutory recommended time frame; and, if so, what is the outcome of that assessment?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I am happy for the managing director to respond.

**Mr R. Hughes:** We do not measure that as a key performance indicator although, of course, we keep track of each project that comes in. All the assessments that come before the trust have the time lines noted. Things will come forward as priorities, I suppose, and we are sensitive to developers wanting their projects dealt with as priorities across the board. We are not aware of our processes being the cause of any significant delays.

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** On page 1099, under service 2, “Waterways Management”, reference is made to water quality and logistic support. Are the water quality and monitoring results in the public domain for the community to view? Just to pick one component, what are the general trends for salinity in the Swan River from those results? Presumably, there are various sites of testing, but I ask in a general way.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** The answer to the first question is yes, that information is available on the website of the trust. An example of the scope of testing might be—I know the member for Capel likes graphs —

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** I love graphs.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** This graph is an example of a physical chemical profile, showing at a site the salinity, the dissolved oxygen, the temperature etc. The general manager might be able to give an even better overall picture.

**Mr R. Hughes:** Yes, we have a data set of monitoring of the Swan and Canning river system, which is envied by our counterparts around the world in managing waterways. As the minister said, we manage from the physical parameters—salinity, dissolved oxygen and temperature—and we manage the phytoplankton assemblages in the river on a weekly basis, and all this data is available on the website. We report phytoplankton through the general media each week through what is called the algae alert, so that people can be alerted if there are toxic blooms in the waterway, especially in areas where they might want to get in contact with the waterway itself. As for trends, it is a complex question I suppose —

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** One which is not fair at this time of night.

**Mr R. Hughes:** With declining rainfall, we might see a reduction in the amount of nutrient being delivered to the waterway through the tributaries, but what we are seeing, which is perhaps of more concern than this graph shows, is oxygen levels in a long stretch of the river at really critically low levels. That is driving one of our key programs at the moment to look at the feasibility of large-scale oxygenation in the Swan River. It has been working well in the Canning River. We are looking at the kinds of technology that might allow us to deliver at least some relief to the system in the upper Swan River.

**Mrs J. HUGHES:** I think the managing director has just answered my question, which related to page 1101 and the major initiatives for 2008-09 regarding the planning and design of a large-scale oxygenation plant on the Swan River. Mr Hughes has pretty much answered the question, but is there anything the minister could add to that answer?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I will speak very briefly, because I know that we need to vote on this division. The Swan River Trust's oxygenation of the Swan and Canning Rivers obviously aims to reduce the release of nutrients and sediments. Two oxygenation plants on the Canning River have successfully maintained oxygen levels. They have also reduced nutrient levels and improved aquatic habitats, which ultimately reduces the risk of large-scale or even smaller scale fish kills. An oxygenation plant on the Swan River at Guildford—which, from memory, I have visited—is being upgraded.

**The appropriation was recommended.**