

**APPROPRIATION (RECURRENT 2023–24) BILL 2023**  
**APPROPRIATION (CAPITAL 2023–24) BILL 2023**

*Estimates Committees A and B Reports and Minutes — Presentation*

**MR S.J. PRICE (Forrestfield — Deputy Speaker)** [1.27 pm]: I present to the house the reports and minutes of Estimates Committees A and B.

[See papers 2015 and 2016.]

*Estimates Committee A Report — Adoption*

**THE ACTING SPEAKER (Ms A.E. Kent)** [1.28 pm]: The question is —

That the report of Estimates Committee A be adopted.

**MR S.J. PRICE (Forrestfield — Deputy Speaker)** [1.28 pm]: Members, estimates is over for another year. I start by thanking everyone involved—all the clerks who assisted throughout the three days we were here, the chamber and parliamentary staff who looked after us while we here and the ministers and their advisers and the departmental staff who were also part of estimates. I thank them very much for the time and effort they put in. To all the acting chairs, thank you for your contributions over the days to make sure that everything ran very smoothly. To opposition members, thank you for your hard work. Thank you to all the government members who took part during the estimates committees. Thank you, of course, to the government Whip and her assistant for the work they did in making sure that all our committees were attended and we maintained a quorum throughout the three days.

I will give members some statistics on what happens over those days, with the chairs sitting there. We are not just sitting there listening to questions intently. Responses and everything that goes on are recorded, so we can provide feedback on what has actually taken place. In committee A, 915 questions were asked in total. The opposition asked 295 questions and a further 577 questions. The government asked 39 questions and a further four questions. That means that percentage-wise, the opposition asked 95 per cent of questions, while the government asked five per cent.

The most questions were asked in division 35, Department of Communities, services 1 to 6, early childhood education; child protection; prevention of family and domestic violence; and community services, with 98 questions. The following divisions and off-budget authorities were not examined: division 12, Office of the Auditor General; division 19, Economic Regulation Authority; division 9, Office of the Information Commissioner; Legal Aid Commission of Western Australia; Chemistry Centre (WA); and WorkCover WA.

Committee A sat for three days, from 9.00 am until 10.00 pm on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. The examination took 31 hours and 21 minutes over those three days. There were six supplementary information requests approved, and all supplementary information answers for committee A were received by the due date. On that note, I commend the report of committee A to the house.

**MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe — Deputy Leader of the Opposition)** [1.30 pm]: I thank the Deputy Speaker for his report; it is much appreciated, especially the comprehensive information he provided. I will cover both committees in my brief contribution. I would also like to reiterate what the Deputy Speaker said in thanking the clerks and the chamber and parliamentary staff for looking after everyone. Thanks to the ministers and their advisers and, of course, thanks also to our two new parliamentary secretaries, the member for Riverton and the member for Victoria Park, who came into the mix as well. Thanks to them on their debut efforts.

I would also like to thank the high-quality team of six from the opposition, who were split into two lots of three, covering both chambers every day, every hour. Thanks to our Liberal Party colleagues and my Nationals WA colleagues for the work they did over three long days.

I would like to point out some information to the chamber, if I can; the Leader of the House might actually be interested in this information. Going back to the last four years of the previous government, the total number of supplementary information answers provided in 2013 was 107; in 2014, it was 139; in 2015, it was 170; and in 2016, it was 189. In the last year of the previous government, 189 pieces of supplementary information were provided.

Looking now at the last four years of this government, in 2020, there were 45 supplementary information answers provided; in 2021, 27; in 2022, 34; and this year, there was a grand total of 20 pieces of supplementary information provided—six in committee A and 14 in committee B. That is an indictment of this government and an absolute disgrace. We got to a point at one stage when we were wondering whether we would actually get any supplementary information. We have gone from 189 pieces of supplementary information in the last year of the previous government, in 2016, to a total of 20 under this government in 2023.

**Mr P. Papalia** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Thank you, minister.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I ask the new Premier and Deputy Premier whether they will commit to a new level of transparency. At one stage we were wondering whether we would get any supplementary information, so on behalf of the opposition, I just want to record our disappointment at receiving only 20 pieces of supplementary information.

**Mr P. Papalia** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Minister!

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Despite many questions and many opportunities for both ministers and parliamentary secretaries to provide that information, it was not provided; it was, “No, no, no: question on notice.” The government should have a look at the record of the previous government and then have a look at its own record and its level of transparency. I look forward to our new Premier and Deputy Premier providing a new level of transparency in relation to supplementary information and the government’s wider work.

Once again, I thank everyone for their efforts during the estimates hearings. Thanks to all the staff and the chairs and everyone else who was involved. A new level of transparency and cooperation would be appreciated, and I look forward to that.

**MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Leader of the House)** [1.35 pm]: I am very happy to make a contribution to the consideration of the report that has been tabled by the Deputy Speaker and the lament that we just heard from the member for Roe. As the member for Roe would have read in that report, 95 per cent of the questions he referred to were asked by his party. One of the things that this government made sure of was to limit the number of questions from our own side because we wanted to accommodate, as is appropriate, questions from the opposition.

Of course, the quality of the questions from the opposition is always under question. It is a little sad for the member for Roe to raise this matter in his contribution because, as he is well aware, the government made every attempt to accommodate the requests and requirements of the opposition during the estimates hearings, given the opposition’s numbers in this house. As he will also be aware, the hours of the last estimates hearings were reduced because the opposition was not confident that it could accommodate the 9.00 am to 10.00 pm arrangements. That was agreed to by the government, and all the way through we have been very, very keen to assist the opposition.

I think the root of the problem here is that we are magnificent in government, but we were also magnificent in opposition.

**Mr P.J. Rundle** interjected.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Member, I am sorry: members opposite cannot attack the government for how they conduct themselves. That is the point. The opposition is trying to attack the government because its performance is poor! That is the point. I have been in this place for 22 years and I have been involved in lots of estimates committees, both on the government side and in opposition, and I have to tell members opposite that when we were in opposition, we plastered the ministers with questions because the previous government was not transparent. Not only that, in the last four years of the previous government’s tenure, the budget was in a diabolical state, so of course it was appropriate for the opposition Labor Party to interrogate the then ministers, as we should have. That included making sure that we were getting information about the diabolical state the budget was in; it was in an appalling state. The former government left us in a parlous state, so it was therefore appropriate during the last four years of the previous government for us to interrogate it with a whole range of questions.

I would be very interested to find out whether 95 per cent of the questions asked during the previous government’s tenure were given to the opposition; I bet that they were not. There would have been an instruction from the then Premier—who, I might add, was twice Treasurer. In fact, during the tenure of the previous government, there were seven Treasurers, so we probably asked that many questions because we were never exactly sure who was going to be the Treasurer the following year! That is probably what was happening; that was the reality. The questions we asked were appropriate during our time in opposition, and I might add that the statistics are great because of the hard work we did. I have to tell the member that I have watched Treasurers from both sides present the budget in this place in the last 22 years, including seven budgets the last time the opposition was in power. Members should remember that two Treasurers came back; one Treasurer went in and out and came back. In fact, the budget was delivered by the then Premier because the then Treasurer had been discarded. I might say that the member for Roe is on very tenuous and shaky ground.

I remember that the interrogation of those budgets was appropriate. As I have said, I have seen lots of budgets handed down. I remember that whenever a budget was handed down when we were in opposition, we were forensic. I remember that because I sat over there next to my very good friend who is now Deputy Premier of Western Australia. I tell members that as soon as the budget was dropped, we were onto it. I remember that there was a team; I was not part of the team because I am not very good with figures, but I was an observer. There they were—they were huddled. I would go into the opposition leader’s den, and Hon Bill Johnston, Hon Rita Saffioti, Hon Ben Wyatt, Hon Mark McGowan and Hon Eric Ripper, when he was Leader of the Opposition, were forensic.

I tell you what: the performances by the then opposition on the terraces of Parliament, immediately after the budget was handed down, were brilliant. It did not look like the current opposition did after the budget was handed down, like a rabbit caught in the searchlights: “Gee! They have delivered a surplus again and they have delivered record employment for Western Australians and record spending on health. What am I going to say?” I can just imagine what was happening. We saw it out there.

*Point of Order*

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Point of order!

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I am giving a good report on the committee. What is wrong with you?

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** The minister has drifted well away from replying to the estimates process and into more general debate.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms A.E. Kent):** Thank you. Please continue.

*Debate Resumed*

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Thank you for your protection.

I am sorry, but the member for Roe is wrong. In this estimates process, 95 per cent of the questions were asked by the opposition. I was there, and a series of questions were asked of me and then a series of subsequent questions were asked to clarify any other points that had been made. I think that not only demonstrates a very clear, transparent and generous offering of answers from the government, of course, but also means that the opposition was given every attempt to seek answers to questions about the budget.

The underlying thing is that the budget is so brilliant and excellent, and delivers such great outcomes for the people of Western Australia that the opposition was frantically trying to find something in it about which it could articulate something. I refute everything that the member for Roe has said. The figures are there: 95 per cent of questions were asked by the opposition. We cannot help the fact that the opposition’s questions were so poorly constructed. We see that every day in question time. It will be interesting to see what the questions will be like in a few minutes’ time. This is the whole point: opposition members have to work harder and more forensically, like we did when we were in opposition. I can remember going in there, and it was like when you throw a paper of chips down on the ground and all the seagulls go arrgh! That is what it was like—forensic! It was amazing, and I have never seen anything like it except, of course, some members going to the buffet on a Wednesday night on family night. I must admit that sometimes that may be another comparison.

Seriously, all the transparency was offered through the estimates process, and all the time was given. The opposition requested the off-budget agencies it wanted to interrogate. That was offered and taken up. I think it is just a bit of sour grapes, quite honestly. We will continue to bring down budgets that are appropriate and deliver quality to the people of Western Australia, and the opposition will have the opportunity through the estimates process, questions in Parliament, matters of public interest and such to interrogate the government, as has always happened under the now Cook government and the previous McGowan government.

**MS M.M. QUIRK (Landsdale)** [1.44 pm]: Ordinarily, I would not make a comment. In fact, I think the Leader of the House and the Deputy Speaker summed up the situation for this year’s estimates. However, I need to correct the record because the Leader of the Opposition took great offence and alleged that I called him slow. Yes, I did call him slow for requesting a question, getting up and not asking a forensically acceptable question. I want to put that on record. I also want to put on the record that I regarded some of his conduct as verging on bullying. His colleagues put their hands up and got the call. He seemed to be greatly affronted when he did not get the call, but he did not actually seek it a lot of the time.

For a number of years now, I have said that the questions asked by the opposition are less than forensic. I congratulate the opposition members for at least having a go this year, which they have not done in previous years, but asking quadruple-barrelled questions and, in some cases, questions about the wrong division is simply unacceptable. The opposition is given many concessions in the amount of time it has. I think the record was 13 or 14 supplementary questions that I permitted one opposition member to make. Short of rolling over and not turning up to estimates, I do not know what more we can do, other than what is currently being done.

The member for Roe should go back and look at *Hansard* when there was a real competition between the opposition and government to ask questions. In opposition, as I was at the time, a member would be lucky to get five or six questions in a session. The government is handing it to the opposition on a silver platter, but opposition members are still bullying and still whingeing.

Question put and passed.

*Estimates Committee B Report — Adoption*

**THE ACTING SPEAKER (Ms A.E. Kent)** [1.46 pm]: The question is —

That the report of Estimates Committee B be adopted.

**MR S.J. PRICE (Forrestfield — Deputy Speaker)** [1.46 pm]: I will continue with the great flow of statistics, once again recapping the great job that the government did in supplying answers to the opposition's questions during estimates.

Estimates Committee B sat full time for 32 hours and seven minutes over three days. Members will be very pleased to know that 1 140 questions were asked in those three days.

**Ms R. Saffioti**: How many?

**Mr S.J. PRICE**: It was 1 140 questions. Of those, 26 questions, or 2.3 per cent, were asked by government members. That means that 97.7 per cent were asked by the opposition, on the back of 95 per cent in Estimates Committee A.

**Mr R.S. Love** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER**: Thank you, Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr S.J. PRICE**: As was already discussed, a total of 14 requests for supplementary information were accepted, and I believe that all that information has been provided.

Members have to understand that the difference between asking for supplementary information as opposed to putting a question on notice—depending on the level of detail the opposition is asking for—is time. If the opposition asks for supplementary information, the government has a week to respond. If it asks to put something on notice, the government has four weeks to respond. The opposition still gets the answer. To come in here and say that the government did not give the opposition enough supplementary information approvals during the course of estimates is very disingenuous. A lot of extra conversation went on during the requests for supplementary information, and the information was actually provided at the time of the question, so there was no need for it. I fully support the comments from the Leader of the House, who said that it was a result of the government providing the information that was requested; it was not a result of being difficult or not providing the information.

As mentioned previously, in Estimates Committee B, the most amount of questions was asked in division 21, WA Health, with 131 questions asked. Debate did not take place on division 44, Western Australian Planning Commission, or division 23, Health and Disability Services Complaints Office, or on the off-budget Pilbara Ports Authority.

With that, I once again commend the report of Estimates Committee B to the house and thank everyone who took part this year.

**MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe — Deputy Leader of the Opposition)** [1.49 pm]: I will say very briefly on a positive note that supplementary information was provided on six occasions in Estimates Committee A, but in Estimates Committee B, the government provided it on 14 occasions, which was an increase of 140-odd per cent in its response. This compares with 93 and 96 occasions by the previous government in 2016.

I appreciated that at different times the Minister for Transport enabled us to have a sort of question-and-answer conversation without too much formality. That type of attitude was appreciated by the opposition and there were some pretty good responses. There were some rare highlights, but, as I have said, it was a bit of a disappointment. The Leader of the House's tirade was about any number of things that had no relevance to the estimates process and I did not think some of the comments from the member for Landsdale were appropriate, but I will leave it there at this stage.

**DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe)** [1.51 pm]: I commend my colleagues for the outstanding effort that they made during the estimates process this year. For six members to carry the 14-hour days, with 12 hours in the chamber, was an outstanding effort. I want to thank the new Deputy Premier, who was very forthcoming with supplementary information, and, as always, conducted herself in a very professional way, as did most of her ministers. It is an important process for this Parliament, and the opposition appreciates the opportunity to ask questions. The commitment of all members of the opposition—only six of us—to carry the work that would normally be carried by 20 or more members in such a professional way and probe the budget thoroughly was a great reflection of a good opposition team, and it is important for the government to have that. As I say, I thank all my colleagues for the hard work they put in.

Question put and passed.