

**Division 57: Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority, \$14 641 000 —**

Ms L.L. Baker, Chairman.

Mr A.P. Jacob, Minister for Environment.

Mr M. Webb, Chief Executive Officer.

Mr I. Biddle, Business and Finance Manager.

**The CHAIRMAN:** This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day.

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 estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item program or amount in the current division. It will greatly assist Hansard if members can give these details in preface to their question.

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 principal clerk by Friday, 19 June 2015. 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 Gosnells.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** I refer to page 665 and the heading "Significant Issues Impacting the Agency", and also to page 669 and the heading "Asset Investment Program". I am aware that the Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority is about to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary. I am surprised that there is no mention of this in the significant issues impacting the agency, especially noting that part of that anniversary celebration is a project to construct a botanic staircase worth about \$1.86 million. I am curious to know why that has not been included in either the significant issues impacting the agency or the asset investment program.

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** The member for Gosnells is correct. The Western Australian botanic gardens will turn 50 on 4 October this year. It was back in 1965 that our 17-hectare botanic gardens were opened for the first time. My understanding is that the Western Australian botanic gardens have the most diverse and comprehensive display of our state's plants. The member is also correct in that there is a new botanic staircase and community pavilion project. That project is currently under construction in Kings Park. This project has been generously funded by the Friends of Kings Park volunteer group and also through Lotterywest.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** Sorry, but I do not think the minister heard my question. Why is there not any mention of the botanic staircase in either the significant issues impacting the agency or the asset investment program, especially given the fiftieth anniversary? Why is it not there?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** As I said, it is because this project has been principally funded through a very generous donation from Friends of Kings Park and also through Lotterywest.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** It may have been Friends of Kings Park that sought the money, but the fact is that the work is being done by Plan E Landscape Architects. Is that correct?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** Yes.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** Plan E is a contractor to the agency, I would imagine.

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** Plan E is a contractor to a range of people. I know it is a contractor to the Department of Parks and Wildlife, and also to the City of Joondalup, which has used Plan E a number of times. Mr Webb may wish to add to that.

**Mr M. Webb:** That is correct. Plan E does some work for BGPA also.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** It does some work?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** Plan E is a private landscape architecture firm.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** Is Plan E a contractor of choice? Is it a frequently used contractor by the Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I will defer to the CEO on that.

**Mr M. Webb:** We have a number of contractors that are appointed through a public tender process. Plan E—I cannot remember the last time; I think it might have been three years ago—has been appointed through a public tender process.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** I have before me a document that says that there was a request for approval to waive the requirement to seek a competitive quotation—bearing in mind that this is a contract for over \$1 million—and to issue the contract for the botanic staircase to Plan E. Is that correct?

**Mr M. Webb:** That is correct. There was a waiver under this project. Plan E is paid through the money that comes via Friends of King Park and through Lotterywest.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** Can the minister explain why we would issue a contract worth \$1.86 million for the botanic staircase and community pavilion project without going out to competitive tender?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I will again hand over to Mr Webb to respond to that.

**Mr M. Webb:** The total value of the construction contract or the landscape contract that the member is referring to is not \$1.86 million. I would need to provide under supplementary the exact amount. But the waiver was done under the State Supply Commission Act and in accordance with that act.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** Mr Webb referred to the State Supply Commission Act. There is a line in that act that says that all public authorities shall comply with supply policies, and this applies notwithstanding any exemptions. I note that there was a request for an exemption. However, it seems to be an exceptionally large sum of money to have gone through without a competitive tender. Do you not agree, minister?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I think we have explored the issue. The member is seeking an opinion.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** I am asking, minister, for an explanation. You are the minister. You are responsible for an agency that does not go out to competitive tender when it is dealing with a contract worth over \$1 million. You are responsible.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Member, what is the question?

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** What is the minister going to do about this, when he has an agency that does not go out to competitive tender for a contract worth over \$1 million?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** This is a specific instance that we are talking about first and foremost, which is the new botanic terraces and community pavilion. It is a fantastic project to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the botanic gardens in Kings Park. It has been generously funded by the Friends of Kings Park volunteer group and also through Lotterywest, hence it does not appear, I assume, as a capital item in the BGPA budget papers, and the CEO has just outlined that the awarding of this tender complied with the relevant legislation.

[3.50 pm]

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** Let us get this right. The Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority acquires the money, perhaps with some assistance from the agency as well, and from Lotterywest—so, money from government—to go through the shell of the name of a volunteer organisation, a very good one at that, and then this public money goes straight to Plan E Landscape Architects, a company the minister has indicated he knows of from Joondalup days, without a competitive tender. How can that be good process?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I do not know whether the chief executive officer wants to add any further comments, but I think he has outlined the process in this instance. This one was awarded to Plan E and it complied with the relevant requirements of the legislation.

**Ms S.F. McGURK:** Like the member for Gosnells, I am a little surprised about what the minister is telling us about a contract of this size. He has a look on his face now that indicates he is surprised that we are asking about a contract worth more than \$1 million not being put out to competitive tender, notwithstanding that some contributions were made by outside groups for that contract. Can the requirements of the legislation be explained to me? I am sorry; I did not hear the exact State Supply Commission legislation requirements. Would the minister mind briefly explaining them to me so that we can understand how the act was complied with, given there was no public tender process for this work?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I might take that as supplementary information to ensure that I provide the exact clauses within the legislation. The CEO has assured me that we have complied. If the member wants the exact clauses that we complied with, it would be better to take it as supplementary information.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Can we have the supplementary question defined, please. What is the minister prepared to hand over?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I will hand over the relevant clauses under which the contract was awarded for the new botanic terraces and community pavilion.

*[Supplementary Information No B41.]*

**Mr M.H. TAYLOR:** I refer to the second dot point on page 665 under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”, noting that fire risk management is a key consideration of the authority. Can the minister indicate how the authority manages this risk?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I thank the member for Bateman for the question. In the past financial year to date we have recorded four small bushfires within Kings Park, however none was larger than half a hectare. The number and the extent of bushfires in both Kings Park and Bold Park has been declining due to established procedures and practices and the excellent support that the Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority receives from the Department of Fire and Emergency Services. In addition, Kings Park and Bold Park have more than 40 bushfire-trained staff with firefighting equipment, which includes two light tankers, two medium tanker appliances and a rapid-response unit. There are more than 100 fire hydrants throughout Kings Park and staff are rostered on call 24/7 throughout the fire season. We also have a process for closing and patrolling all or part of the park depending on the daily fire danger rating, which is provided by the Bureau of Meteorology, and for advising whether a total fire ban is declared by the Department of Fire and Emergency Services. An evacuation plan has been developed for Kings Park, bearing in mind this is our most popular tourist destination within Western Australia. It receives more than five million visits a year, so an evacuation plan has been developed with Fire and Emergency Services and WA Police for all areas of the park to assist in emergency management during a fire event. This year we have undertaken something a bit different. We had two experimental fire burns which had been planned. One of those was executed in the current autumn burn—that was a six-hectare fire in Kings Park. I believe that is the first prescribed burn undertaken in Kings Park since 1984. It feeds into a broader scientific study being undertaken through the BGPA on the impacts of prescribed burning on coastal heathland, specifically on the Swan coastal plain. So although there is a prescribed burning benefit for Kings Park bushland, it also links into a far larger study. A six-hectare burn is planned for Bold Park. The weather window did not go our way for that one, but we hope we may be able to pick it up in the spring burn if the weather permits.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** I refer to services and key efficiency indicators 1 and 2 on page 668. I would like some clarification of the full-time equivalent numbers. The annual report gave a figure of 125 but this document has 135 FTE. Can we break that down? How many of those FTEs are what I understand to be known as heavy blue-collar workers?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I do not have the exact number, and I am not familiar with the term “heavy blue-collar worker” either, but the full-time equivalents as they are reported in the budget are the figures.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** Minister, I think it would be helpful for us all to know how many people are out there doing the heavy work and how many are administration people. If the information is unavailable to the minister now, I am happy to take it as supplementary information. To break the numbers down further, I am keen to know how many might be privatised jobs or contractors funded by Rio Tinto, noting the very good Rio Tinto Naturescape Kings Park and other projects like that. I wonder whether the 135 figure includes other employment arrangements.

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** We will endeavour to provide a breakdown. There is a range of services. There are not only frontline ground keeper services, which will be provided in a range of disciplines throughout the park, but there are also administrative duties, and extensive, world-leading science and research is undertaken through the BGPA. If the member wants a specific breakdown of staffing, I am just wondering what the correct terminology for science staff, admin staff and others is. I refer to Mr Webb.

**Mr M. Webb:** If I understand the question, we can provide information in relation to administrative staff, outdoor staff and other staff.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** That sounds good.

*[Supplementary Information No B42.]*

**The appropriation was recommended.**