

**Division 64: Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority, \$14 429 000 -**

Mrs D.J. Guise, Chairman.

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

Mr M. Webb, Chief Executive Officer.

Mr R.M. Ibbitson, Manager, Finance.

Mr S. Dawson, Chief of Staff, Office of the Minister for the Environment.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The member for Capel.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** I refer to service 2 on page 1127, which deals with biodiversity conservation and scientific research, an area close to my heart. No matter which cost of service I look at, the amount is equally grim. The actual amount for the total cost of service in 2005-06 was just over \$6 million. The budgeted amount for 2006-07 was \$6 170 000. The government managed to spend a bit under \$5 million. The result of that is that there is only \$5.26 million in the upcoming budget. We might go into a bit more detail. Can the minister explain why there has been an apparent reduction in the ability to spend the budget for 2006-07 and what appears to be, as a result, a reduction in the budget for 2007-08? There might be a perfectly logical explanation.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I can provide that information, which will satisfy the member's concern. The difference in the budget statements between the 2006-07 budget and the 2006-07 estimated actual for service 2 is \$1.279 million. The difference mainly represents the surplus for bushland management in Kings Park, which was estimated at the time to be \$800 000, and bushland management for Bold Park, which was estimated to be \$500 000. Those works are expected to be completed by August 2007. As a consequence, the authority is likely to report a surplus on operations of about \$2 million across both services.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** Is it a cash accounting system? There will be a cash surplus of about \$2 million based on the transfer over the end of the financial year.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** That is correct.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** None of that cash transfer will be reflected in the budget. I commend the work of the Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority for its biodiversity conservation; I think it is very good. However, I am concerned that it is inadequately funded. If the minister slipped out of the chamber for a minute, his advisers might tell the committee that they are able to spend significantly more than they have on biodiversity conservation and scientific research.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Somewhere I am going to get a question rather than a speech, I am sure.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** Given that the figures do not reflect that cash situation, why is there not an increase up to the \$6 million or just over for the 2007-08 budget? The change is not reflected; it is a cash position and not an accrual one.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I will ask the manager of finance to respond.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** Tell us how much more he could spend!

**Mr R.M. Ibbitson:** The moneys that are spent on bushland management are continued through from year to year. For those projects that we have just mentioned, because of reasons beyond our control, we have not been able to spend the money this financial year. That is likely to impact on what we can do next financial year. We are actually spending a year behind, if the member gets my meaning. Moneys that are scheduled to be spent in 2007-08 were not spent in 2006-07 so those works have to be completed first before we can do anything else.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** Can the authority not catch up in that process? Is it a labour or management issue?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I will ask Mr Webb to answer.

**Mr M. Webb:** The works that the minister indicated have not been finished are underway. The works will probably be completed in August 2007, as we have indicated. The moneys of \$5.26 million for next year do not include the carryover. They reflect the fact that most of the major works on the scarp have been completed and, therefore, we do not require that money in next year's budget. We are also completing some major works in Bold Park and we therefore do not need them in next year's budget either.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** I am sure that the authority could spend more money if it was given it.

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** My question refers to botanic gardens in my electorate; namely, Araluen Botanic Park. I am in the minister's hands a little because there is no line item for it in the budget.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The member is then going to have real difficulty with me!

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** However, I understand that there is talk of transferring the land ownership of Araluen from the Department for Planning and Infrastructure to the Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Before he goes any further, I suggest that the member finds a line item in this budget. I am sure he can. Someone will help him out.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I am always accommodating.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Before the minister is, I need the member to provide a line item.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I think page 1127 would help the member. To answer the member's question, the final determination in terms of the policy decision has not yet been made and would need to be made by cabinet. The member's question in terms of whether the decision has been made is answered as no.

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** If it were to go through that process and come under this authority, would there be a line item for the park; would it be in the same situation as Kings Park and Bold Park?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Yes. My understanding is that if cabinet decides that the operation of Araluen comes under the jurisdiction of the authority, it would appear as a line item in a future budget.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Now the member knows where to look next year. I would be going for that if I were him.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** I refer to the first dot point under major achievements for 2006-07 at page 1126 of the *Budget Statements*. It refers to stage 2 of the deep sewerage program in Kings Park, which was completed in October 2006. The second sentence of the dot point states -

Connection to deep sewerage reduces the environmental risks associated with a septic system, provides environmental benefits by having a more sustainable waste management system . . .

Can the minister please tell us what the environmental risks are associated with a septic system and what the environmental benefits are in having a more sustainable waste management system?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I think it is widely understood that the phasing out of septic systems is a better environmental option. When there is a conversion to infill sewerage, there is a positive result for the environment. In terms of developments and other options there are some systems that have been developed for alternative sewage treatments. The member would be aware that it is widely viewed that if there is a choice between a septic system and connected sewerage, sewerage is the preferred option.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** What would the minister say to a person who was concerned about having septic tanks in environmentally sensitive areas who received a letter from the Minister for Health that suggested that there were no negative environmental impacts in having septic tanks?

**The CHAIRMAN:** If the member wants to direct a question to this minister about something that was sent to the Minister for Health, he is really going to have a hard time getting through me. The member needs to rephrase that question in terms of a specific environmental question that he can address to the minister.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** Will the minister confirm that there are environmental concerns about having septic tanks in environmentally sensitive areas?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** My knowledge and understanding is that there are environmental concerns when we look at septic systems. That is one of the reasons it is preferred that sewerage be the option. The member's reference to a letter is something that I cannot comment on because I have not seen the letter and it is not appropriate for me to comment because it concerns the Minister for Health. I think I have answered the member's question.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** The minister has done very well.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

[9.30 pm]