

ESTIMATES OF REVIEW AND EXPENDITURE

Consideration of Tabled Papers

Resumed from 25 September on the following motion moved by Hon N.D. Griffiths (Minister for Racing and Gaming) -

That pursuant to Standing Order 49(c), the Council take note of tabled paper No 657 (Consolidated Fund Estimates 2001-02), laid upon the Table of the House on 13 September 2001.

HON W.N. STRETCH (South West) [5.51 pm]: I take note of the budget papers and will make a few comments about the budget papers specifically. I will also talk generally about the overall effect of those budget allocations on various areas of my electorate. I want to resume where I left off in my speech during the Address-in-Reply, in which I did not take advantage of the kind offer of an extension of time because I thought I would have another opportunity to speak. In that speech I referred to forest management and the important role of forest burning. The Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries was involved in that discussion, and we have since had a dialogue in question time about the risk that is facing the forests in this extremely dry season. I have discussed this matter with other members and with forest protection staff, and they are very concerned at the large amount of money that will be required in a budget allocation if we are to adequately protect the forest estate in its wider terms. When I use the term "forest estate", I include the reserves; in other words, any area that has reasonably heavy timber on it.

Hon Kim Chance: I hope you will also take this up with vigour in the estimates process.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: I will do that. As I said, I will range broadly over the subjects in the budget, and I will also look at that matter in more detail in the estimates. The question of fire control is never easy. I have referred to the major timber areas. We need to extend that also to some of the coastal heath lands, in view of the events that have taken place in the Waychinicup National Park in the past few weeks, because that reserve is unusually tinder dry for this time of the year, and that has already caused some problems.

Hon Kim Chance: I imagine the situation in Fitzgerald National Park would be similar.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: Yes, it is. For better or for worse, Fitzgerald National Park has had a fairly severe fire go through it in the past few years. There is some debate about how often that country can carry a fire. However, we can assume that that area will not again have a fire of such devastating proportions, although a fire may still run through that area, as the minister will know. There has been a lot of publicity, and some outrageous comments on radio by Peter Robertson from the Conservation Council of Western Australia, about the effects of the fire in Waychinicup National Park. Peter Robertson has also made some rather wild accusations that the Department of Conservation and Land Management had poor management and let that fire escape and burn more than was anticipated. The difficulty is that because dieback is rife throughout the coastal areas, people and forest managers are very loath to put machinery in the forest to build adequate firebreaks. They also discourage what they call internal firebreaks. Therefore, the normal practice is to light up a perimeter fire at an appropriate time of the day when it is estimated that the fire will burn far enough into the forest to create a protective buffer zone. That is a judgment made by man; but, unfortunately, men and women are fallible at times. When there is no physical firebreak for the reasons that I have mentioned, the forest managers need to rely on the fire to just burn out. Unfortunately, the fire in Waychinicup National Park did not burn out, because it happened to be a very hot night, which is unusual for the coast, and the wind stayed in the same quarter, and that meant that the fire burnt a bit further than it should have.

I took particular umbrage at the implication by Peter Robertson that CALM should have known better and it thereby brought about the demise of up to 20 colonies of noisy scrub birds. Approximately 600 habitats are known to be inhabited by that rare bird, and although the loss of those 20 colonies is deplorable, it is not a major ecological disaster, and those colonies will breed up again. That fire was not particularly fierce, and it is expected that although some of the nests of those birds might have been destroyed, many of those birds escaped; therefore, the damage was not as great as the prophets of doom would have us believe. We need to be aware of the prophets of doom to a certain extent, because, as in all walks of life, the management of the forest estate is a question of judgment and balance. There will always be error on one side of the argument; it depends on which side of the argument one sits.

We need to be careful not to destroy the morale of the people who are charged with the enormous task of managing the forest estate. The jury has been out for long enough to come down in favour of protective burning as the only real tool we have to protect the forest estate from wildfire; and although it may not please many people, and it does not always please me, reality dictates that we will be landed with that regime for a long time. The people who fight wildfires put their lives on the line equally as much as do the firefighters in the metropolitan area or elsewhere who are called in to fight a fire that is temporarily out of control. In the past,

sadly, firefighters have lost their lives in the protection of the forest estate. However, the likelihood is that if we do not carry out protective burning, in the future an even greater number of people will need to be put into hazardous situations to control fires, and that does not please me either.

The risk of putting machinery into dieback areas to create wide firebreaks and access roads must be balanced against the risk of spreading dieback. Members who have been in this place for a while may remember that in 1991, I had the honour and onerous task of chairing the Select Committee on Dieback. The other members of that committee were Hon Bob Thomas and Hon Murray Montgomery, and we did a lot of work and looked extensively at many areas of the State, assisted by some very fine people from Hansard, who I think enjoyed the trips as well. We looked at the south coast, at areas in the minister's electorate around Eneabba, at the impact of mining, and at the Alcoa situation. It is interesting to note and acknowledge the major contribution made by some of the mining companies to the fight against dieback disease; and it is probably fair to say that Alcoa World Alumina Australia was a major contributor to the research into dieback control, if such a thing were possible. Dieback control is very much a matter of quarantine, isolation and hygiene, and I do not think that has changed very much. The committee made a lot of recommendations, and considering that report is now 10 years old, members will probably find it worth their while to read that report and consider what has been achieved since.

Sitting suspended from 6.00 to 7.30 pm

Hon W.N. STRETCH: I appreciate the presence of the Minister for Government Enterprises, so I will readjust the order of my topics somewhat. I wanted to talk about water supplies and the problems facing the great southern and the south west. It is very unusual, in fact it is unique in my experience, to have had water restrictions in the areas we now have them, such as Boyup Brook and Bridgetown in the core of my electorate. People in Manjimup and Pemberton are also talking to me about the shortage of water and the low water levels in their dams. It is quite unheard of. I want to make some constructive comments about that, because it has been brought to my notice that since the change in farming practices in many of those areas a lot of former irrigation dams are not being fully utilised, and I am aware of cases where farmers who have dropped the level of the retaining walls of their dams to let water escape because it is not needed. It was put to me that with a certain amount of forewarning and early consultation these landowners or water owners would be very happy to put their boards back in - most of these are fairly simple dams that have retaining boards, although a few of them have concrete or steel sluice gates. The landowners would be happy to close them because a lot of that water has been flowing down the watercourses for some time now. This, of course, in a State like Western Australia is a waste of resource.

The difficulty that the minister and his department would face is that they never know when these sorts of years will arise, and an overfull dam in a flood rain can be as damaging as water shortages in some cases. I was referring earlier to the question of balance in forest management, and we also have the great question of balance in water management. This is something that all ministers should take note of, because no minister likes to be the minister for cutting off people's water supplies. That is what we have been faced with in the last little while, and it is an unenviable situation. If it can be alleviated in any way, I think we should look at all possible courses of action.

The fact is that these dams could be enlarging our holding capacity cheaply and this water could be pumped into storage areas, such as the Millstream Dam, which serves Bridgetown and Boyup Brook, because there is enormous potential in some of those streams. This is a small thing. The dams are there; the potential is there. A little bit of conservation work would be needed in places, but the department's depots still have a fair bit of mechanical assistance available. Some machinery could help with spillways and a little bit of restoration of catchments, and we would then have a much increased storage available for the people of this State at a relatively minor investment.

Hon Kim Chance: This is a matter where long-term weather forecasting also plays a role.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: How long have I been farming? There is no question that weather forecasts are more accurate.

Hon M.J. Criddle: It would be a bold farmer who relied on the weather forecasts.

Hon Kim Chance: I encourage the member to raise this matter during the estimates hearings on the agricultural division, because some significant work has been done in this area.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: Yes. I have a son running our farm who spends a considerable amount of time each week downloading weather forecasts. We know what is available and we use what is available, and it is most efficacious in our farming practices.

Hon Kim Chance: By the time we begin our estimates our web site will be up and running on a much improved system.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: The law of probabilities is useful, but it is just that. Most people can take some advantage from those systems, and the farmers of whom the minister and I are aware are using all these possible tools to implement these sorts of practices. They are certainly utilising the weather services, and interestingly they are paying quite a bit of money to do that because they recognise the value of a prediction as accurate as it is possible to get. Yes, I will take that point on board. It is something that will make life easier. Again, I wonder if the department is always as diligent in looking at those weather forecasts over the long term as are the farmers whose very livelihood depends on them. I presume they are. If it is not, this is probably something that should be taken up by the minister.

Hon Kim Chance: In the system that will start very soon, we will be using an amalgamation of four different and totally unrelated long-range forecasting systems, which over the past few years now we have been relating back to actual events. The member will find a fairly high degree of reliability.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: That is a valid conjecture, but they are still just that. We have all seen these very promising fronts come in, but somehow they slip to the south east and are of great benefit to the Eyre Peninsula. We sometimes miss out on them altogether. Then at other times, as occurred last week, we have rain blessedly fall out of the sky when we least expect it. So, thank God, surprises happen in all cases.

I make the general observation that this is a resource that needs to be assessed on a friendly basis. The important point is that in this Parliament over the past five or six years we have been battling with the new water Bill, which sets up the portability of water rights and, I understand, the transferability of water for money. I am sure that the sale of surplus water from some of these people who are now not using that capacity could be negotiated, because there are not many farmers who could not handle a little bit of extra cash at present. Once it becomes known that they are actually water farming and that water has become a saleable resource, it would take very little incentive to buy some of that water for public use - not all of it, because many of the farmers are changing from one irrigation use to another. In other words, a person who was growing fruit is probably now growing grapes or something else, or a more diverse vegetable.

It has been brought to my notice that these dams are around, and I put that forward as a constructive suggestion so that the Water and Rivers Commission can enter into more dialogue with these people. The department has a pretty fair idea of where most of the significant water resources are, but they are not all registered, because they are not necessarily on registerable streams, but where there is a resource and where it is surplus, let us look at it. I would be obliged if the minister would take that on board and give it some thought.

The other night during the adjournment debate I had the pleasure of raising the success of the Blackwood Basin Catchment Group. It is now my pleasure to announce that the Boyup Brook Telecentre has been awarded the crown for the best country telecentre in Western Australia. It is a small, very dedicated centre run by Jenny Clark and a team of capable people, some of them on a part-time basis, and it is providing a very good service to the town and the surrounding hinterland. I pay credit to the former minister, Hendy Cowan, for strongly pressing that telecentre concept through the country, and it is one that I urge all Governments in the future to keep up with. Although it will never replace the role of the member of Parliament three doors up from the telecentre in Boyup Brook, it is nevertheless a highly technological advance for the town. It is widely utilised by the younger generation, which is switching onto the newer technology. It is also greatly valued by the community generally.

I know the Leader of the House is not the Attorney General, but he is involved in money matters and is very experienced in legal issues. I refer to the fees paid to receivers. Many companies are sadly running into financial trouble and receivers are being appointed. A friend commented - I do not know whether the comment was cynical - that if a company was not in trouble before it paid the receiver, it certainly would be after it had.

Hon Kim Chance: Exactly!

Hon W.N. STRETCH: My friend said that perhaps Governments should examine how receivers' fees are assessed. I understand the fees come under commonwealth control, and I do not know how much room the State Government has to move. Being a member of the august Standing Committee on Legislation and having dealt with many intergovernmental agreements, I know that sometimes our scope is limited. It is a major problem. I am not a prophet of doom, but I grieve for the many small outfits going into receivership - sadly many are in the country. Having to pay these hefty fees is the last straw. I said I would raise the issue in this place because I am not sure to what extent we can control the situation. I urge the leader to raise the issue with the Attorney General and whoever else is involved.

We spent much of the last election campaign arguing about finance brokers and where money had gone. At the same time, under our noses, many outfits slipped into difficulty. I do not believe that a reduction in receivers' fees would save those companies, but they are unjust and paying them rubs salt into the wound. I understand

that lawyers' fees can be taxed by the Supreme Court, but it appears that there is no avenue for relief in the case of receivers. If there is, I would like the leader to examine it. I am not a great supporter of regulations, but I strongly support protection of people's rights. I am a keen supporter of giving people a fair go. The ability to set fees appears open-ended and it should be examined.

Hon Kim Chance: Some of their actions amount to economic vandalism. I tried to get a copy of the code of practice. It is the most secret document in Australia; it is impossible to get. I tried for three days; I got the runaround all over Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne, but I could not get it.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: I have not had that problem, because I have not looked for the code. I understand that is a major problem. It is beyond the capability of Her Majesty's Opposition to draft complex Bills to deal with this situation. There is a problem. If the leader were able to fix it, he would earn the Parliament some brownie points.

Much has been said recently about the goods and services tax. I know that the rhetoric is part of a government campaign to assist its party in the runup to the federal election. That is a justifiable tactic; it is fair game. However, members opposite should be careful how far they go.

I refer members to the famous Keating tax summit, at which the then federal Labor Government had a goods and services tax on the agenda. It is no secret that Paul Keating was pushing option C, which was an indirect tax. He was called across Canberra late at night by Messrs Kelty and Crean and told to take option C off the agenda. The unions would not stand for it; so it was removed.

Hon Kim Chance: That proves the wisdom of having unions involved in policy development.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: That could be true.

Hon Barry House: So much for the good of Australia.

Hon Kim Chance: Unions are democratic institutions. Is it all right to have the Business Council of Australia dictating policy?

The PRESIDENT: Order! Hon Bill Stretch has the call.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: A little good-natured banter is in the spirit of this House, but it is good that it is recognised for what it is. When we hear genuine screaming and yelling from the rooftops about the GST, we must accept that it is a difficult tax to come to grips with and that it is causing problems for some small businesses. It is also true that many businesses have got on top of the machinery of it, and are finding that their businesses are operating far more efficiently. They have better control of cashflows and they know where their businesses are going. Many have been forced for the first time to keep understandable and meaningful sets of books, and that is having a beneficial effect. That is true for many businesses.

Hon Peter Foss: They finally installed cash registers when decimal currency came in.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: The world was going to stop then. Strangely enough, it works. Port authority representatives were taken to New Zealand for a conference prior to the implementation of the GST. David Lange, the former Labour Prime Minister of New Zealand, told the conference in his expansive way with his arms stretched wide, "Gentlemen, you are in for two years of hell. However, at the end, you will be very glad you did it."

Hon Kim Chance: Interestingly, that is not what he said in Australia.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: It depends on the audience.

Hon Kim Chance: More with the benefit and wisdom of experience.

Hon Peter Foss: I have heard him speak very positively in Australia.

Hon Kim Chance: Somewhat later he said it was the biggest mistake they made.

Hon Peter Foss: He said Roger was the biggest mistake.

Hon Kim Chance: Everyone knows that.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: Many of these people are years before their time. It is interesting. He pointed out that, with hindsight, Australia could avoid many of the mistakes that New Zealand made and that, with any luck, the two years could be reduced. That might not happen. Many small business proprietors say it is hell, but that it is making them do their bookwork more effectively than they have done in the past, and that is having a positive effect on their bottom line. Let us not get too carried away with propaganda and destroy the initiative of those who are trying and making advances in their businesses because of it.

Some people of my generation are struggling with it. There is no doubt about that. The younger farmers and businessmen are taking it on board and using it properly. They are learning to manage their purchases and expenditure to gain the most benefit. Taxation is always a blunt instrument, but it is unfortunately a fact of life. It is up to Governments to take the steps that must be taken. There has not been a demand to cut expenditure, and while that is the case, we must spread the tax base as widely as we can. The goods and services tax is not operating as effectively and quickly as the Liberal Party had hoped, but it has great promise. Although it may be in the interests of the Australian Labor Party to roll it back at the edges - to use Labor's term - I do not think we will see any major move by the Labor Party to repeal that system. That is because sooner or later Australia had to join the rest of the world and move to that sort of tax base. Let us not despair. Let us fine-tune it where necessary. We should not throw the baby out with the bath water and destroy the morale of the business community when, with a little more fortitude - and presumably a bit of luck in the business climate, which has nothing to do with the GST - business will prevail and come through.

The other serious topic is the structure, decor and the general management of Parliament House. I have been a member for nearly 20 years, and I have a great affinity for the building. It has the potential to be a fine building, but it needs a lot of preservation work done on it. I am a little concerned about the plans being made for it at present. I am not altogether happy with the way in which the planning is being carried out. I guess I can take a certain amount of the blame on my own small shoulders, because for many years I have been a member of the Joint House Committee and later the Parliamentary Services Committee. The Joint House Committee was initially a governing committee of the building. By some strange alchemy it became an advisory committee to the management of the House, with no actual power to change decisions made about the structural changes to the House. That concerns me.

Hon Ken Travers: When did that occur?

Hon W.N. STRETCH: It is difficult to put one's finger on a date. It was some time ago. It is not because we have had two Labor presiding officers.

Hon Ken Travers: I am genuinely interested in when it occurred.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: It occurred gradually. There were times in the early days when it was not satisfactory having the management of Parliament House in the hands of a partisan committee. It was never set up to be a partisan committee; it was always meant to be a management committee made up of members of all parties who left their ideology behind and just looked at the operation of the House.

The important point to remember about Parliament House is that it does not belong to the Executive Government it belongs to the Parliament; and if we want to be romantic, it belongs to the people. There has always been conflict between the executive arm of government and the management of Parliament House over the issue of obtaining funding. When parties are trying to win elections, and with the cheap snipes that are made at parliamentarians, Parliaments and their facilities, it is difficult to put money aside to build a new Parliament House. In 1984, when Brian Burke was Premier, he recognised, along with the Joint House Committee managers, that there was a need to spend a lot of money on Parliament House. They saw that the building would never house the increased numbers of the bureaucracy that ministers wanted to bring into the Parliament building.

They came up with some pretty exciting designs, which I think are still in the archives. One design was for office towers to be sunk into the ground at the two far corners of the building facing the city. These buildings would have accommodated ministerial offices. Rather than renting a great deal of space in the city, ministers would have been in proximity to the Parliament, but not on top of it. There was to be underground parking under those two towers for members and staff. It would have released a lot of parliamentary precinct land along Harvest Terrace. It had all sorts of other, somewhat futuristic and quite attractive designs, like a roof garden over the freeway joining up the main entrance of the House with the Barracks Arch, which may have needed some strengthening because some of those convict bricks might be a little crumbly. Nevertheless, that was a bold scheme. It was brought to the Parliament, and Premier Burke said he would go ahead with it if there was bipartisan support. Unfortunately, that plan became a political football and never eventuated. Somewhere, sometime, someone has got to bite the bullet and go ahead with this.

I diverge somewhat from my theme, which is the Parliamentary Services Committee's ability to have some say in the management of the House and in what will happen to it. The latest plan I hear is to move the Parliamentary Library to the other side of the building, which may or may not be a good thing. I am informed by innuendo and rumour, but not by fact and certainly not by the Parliamentary Services Committee, that the library wing will be converted to ministerial offices. If that is so, that is not fair; it is not on. The Parliament is not a ministerial building. Ministers have no recognition in the Constitution. They are a creature of the Executive and

as such they have no particular privilege in the Parliament building. They have the budget, the ability to have whatever offices and staff they want, but it is not their prerogative to move into Parliament House and convert it.

Hon Ken Travers: All they will get is an office to themselves as a member of Parliament, which they do not currently have.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: Most members here would swap their facilities for a ministerial office.

Hon Ken Travers: They will have offices for when they are in Parliament.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: No. I have been the Liberal Party secretary for some time. One of the complaints from ministers when we were in government was that they had nowhere to put their cases, to sit down at a chair and a desk and use a telephone; they had to go out in the corridor or borrow an office. That was untenable. With the exception of the Premier, the Deputy Premier and a couple of other officers who had stipulated offices, which are mainly ceremonial and not portfolio offices, there was no accommodation for ministers here. By dint of much juggling, we managed to provide cubicles - dogboxes, whatever one calls them - in part of the old select committee room. We managed to get ministers a chair, a desk and a telephone, which is reasonable. However, a minister's place in Parliament House is not in an office; a minister's place in Parliament is sitting in the Chamber. A ministerial room is available to ministers. The argument has always been that if the ministers were not properly served in the House they could be accommodated - in either a tower block or a separate block over the road or wherever - in proximity to Parliament House, but not in the fabric of the House. Ministers do not have recognition within the Parliament.

By all means, the Government can build one of the towers, and I do not care whether it is a joint venture arrangement. One of the propositions was to build a totally new Parliament House, for which the Government could cede naming rights for the building. We decided it was an interesting concept. However, it would not be in keeping with this Parliament if we had the two kangaroos, which are the Western Australian Parliament's symbols, overshadowed by a company logo saying, "This building is sponsored by so and so." That was not really on. However, if financing is arranged sensibly and a few floors of the building are leased out, it may be a way to overcome the Government's budget difficulties - or perhaps it could replace one black hole with another black hole with concrete in it! However, it can be done; there are ways to get around the problems.

Hon Peter Foss: There was a proposition to build on some of the land on Harvest Terrace, and for that to be the reward for the person who built the new Parliament, so no money would change hands.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: Yes; there are ways to finance this with the quite considerable assets within the parliamentary precinct. Then again the Government will have to be careful how it handles that. I do not know whether this is fact or fiction. In the estimates hearings, we will be pursuing whether it is proposed to turn that wing of the Parliament into ministerial offices. If so, I will violently oppose it. I doubt that it would be a proper use of the building. As party secretary I had battles with our ministers who believed that the cubicles set aside were grossly inadequate. I knew that they were, but they were 100 per cent better than the facilities that were available before that. There are ways of overcoming this issue, but that is not one of them. We do not want dog boxes back in the corridor. In saying that, I also note that the Parliamentary Services Committee and management have done a superb job in the restoration of the building. I am not denigrating their efforts. Many of the services are greatly improved. We must not get carried away or forget the history and propriety surrounding this building.

I do not know all the facts. However, I am concerned that staff and many other people know much more about the situation than do members and the committee. The change in structure of the Parliamentary Services Committee over the years has emasculated - perhaps I should use a kinder word than that - has altered the committee's role.

Hon Peter Foss: Has it mushroomed - kept it in the dark?

Hon W.N. STRETCH: I would not go that far. There have been many difficulties. I am not criticising you, Mr President, because it would be improper and impertinent to do so. I appreciate that it is often difficult fitting in parliamentary services meetings. As always occurs in government it is difficult to attend the great number of meetings that we need to attend. I presume all those meetings are achieving more and more positive results, but I sometimes wonder. It is certainly difficult to find time to attend those meetings and I know, Mr President, that you have had difficulty setting PSC meetings, with Estimates Committee meetings and party meetings scheduled. It is important that members endeavour to assume a somewhat more assertive role in projects associated with this building. I see Hon Nick Griffiths has his hand up. I cannot accept questions from members opposite, but I will accept comments to the extent Mr President will allow them.

Hon N.D. Griffiths: The Parliamentary Services Committee was an advisory committee during the previous Parliament. Can you tell us when it first became an advisory committee?

Hon W.N. STRETCH: No. It changed when a new book of rules came out, which had different terms. I think the change was insidious.

Hon Peter Foss: Nobody knew it was happening.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: I could use all sorts of farming similes, but I will not.

Hon N.D. Griffiths interjected.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: The minister may be a good gardener, but this is no place to cast his nasturtiums!

Hon N.D. Griffiths: I am not; I am inquiring.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: I understand he has lawnmowing contractors to worry about now! I will raise the issue again because members should beware of what is happening to their building. I repeat: some positive changes have been made, which do not have to end, but at the same time we should not get too carried away and misunderstand the role of ministers. They have their place but it ain't here; it is on the front benches. I went to a great deal of trouble and suffered some pain to make those ministerial spaces available. They were not perfect, but it must be accepted that this building accommodates members, who must have some priority in this building; staff who are essential; and some staff who can be housed elsewhere. Other things can be done to accommodate those people. To convert what would undoubtedly be the prime sites in the Parliament into ministerial offices to become the prerogative of the Executive and probably their staff would not be a proper use of that part of the building.

The library as it is situated is very much a focal point for visitors who visit Parliament House. They admire the library's location, which must have one of the best views in Perth. I am proud to take my visitors up there and ask the librarian if we can look at the library. Not only is it one of the most efficient libraries I know, but also it has one of the loveliest views in Perth. The staff always invite me in and say, "Be my guest." I would not presume to say to a minister of another Government, "Can I show my visitors the beautiful view; this is where the library used to be." That would not be on. If it is a proposal by members opposite, I ask them to bring the building back to basics and do what can be done to preserve it and keep it firmly on track as a building for members.

Hon Ken Travers: How many ministers did you have in the cubicles in the old select committee room?

Hon W.N. STRETCH: Seven or eight.

Hon Ken Travers: Seven or four?

Hon W.N. STRETCH: The previous occupants would tell me in no uncertain terms.

Hon Ken Travers: There are only six spaces.

Hon W.N. STRETCH: I think there were four or five spaces. We had two lots of two downstairs in what was originally the old stationery room and some scattered around. It was by no means ideal but at least ministers had a desk, a telephone and a chair. It was a space they could call home away from home. They fill the purpose, given the role of ministers in the Parliament.

With those admonitory tones I ask that government ministers and members give my remarks some consideration and preserve this building as one of the nicer Parliaments in Australia. It has great character and some great architecture. It needs loving care; it does not need a suite of ministerial offices at the key part of its facade.

HON M.J. CRIDDLE (Agricultural) [8.06 pm]: It is always a pleasure to follow Hon Bill Stretch, who delivers some very sound views.

Recently, visitors from other parts of Australia used this Chamber. To a person, they commented on how lucky we are to have the facilities in this Chamber. They are well recognised across the land.

Hon Barry House: Except on a really hot day.

Hon Peter Foss: Or really cold day.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: Hon Barry House is correct. On the hot days we need the airconditioner to provide cool air. When it is cold we need heaters. I am sure the President will address that issue in the near future.

Hon W.N. Stretch: The Parliament is meant to sit in the spring and autumn, not in the winter or summer months.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: I hope that is true this year. I am sure the Leader of the House is taking note of that comment.

I welcome the opportunity to comment on the budget papers. I am very proud of the way the coalition Government handled the deficit of \$8.3 billion left to it in 1993. When we were removed from the Treasury

benches in February that deficit had been reduced to less than \$4 billion. The Treasurer indicated that the deficit would increase to about \$5.1 billion in the very near future.

I will comment on some of the assets for which the coalition Government was responsible, especially some of those with which I was involved. None is more obvious than the Graham Farmer Freeway and tunnel, with which both Hon Eric Charlton and I had some involvement. I well remember the opening of the tunnel. It was a superb day with something like 50 000 people walking through the tunnel and 20 000 attending the official opening. It is a day I will never forget, especially as the Premier drove through the banner and almost knocked Graham Farmer from the vehicle in which he was driving. It was a spectacular event. Anyone who walked through the tunnel on that day, as I did, would have been very impressed with it. It will be a great advantage to Perth as people move from one side of the city to the other. The savings in time and fuel will be to the advantage of motorists well into the future.

Recently, the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure opened the road to the south. Many people have commented on what a good piece of infrastructure it is. It links Joondalup and the Great Eastern Highway east of the tunnel to Mandurah without traffic lights. I know the President welcomes the opportunity to travel to his electorate without having a change of lights. Hon Barry House also indicated that it is well and truly recognised as a great facility. Money has been spent not just in the city. Recently, I was at Kalbarri for the opening of the airport that the previous Government put in place. Unfortunately, having spent so much time on it, I did not have the opportunity to open that facility. The link with the road down the coast has led to an enormous boost in tourism in that area. Money has been spent on many other road initiatives, including the Leinster to Wiluna road, the Northam bypass, the Albany Highway with its passing lanes and many other roads across Western Australia. We had about \$300 million for road funding in 1993 and over \$804 million in the last budget.

Hon Ray Halligan: Don't forget the duplication of the Narrows Bridge.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: There are other issues such as the duplication of the Narrows Bridge, and I will comment on that when I get to the rail infrastructure and the options that are being proposed by the present Government. Hon Ray Halligan is absolutely correct. I have mentioned just a couple of outstanding pieces of infrastructure that the previous Government put in place. We also extended the freeway to the north.

Another of the great initiatives of the previous Government is the regional airport development scheme, which has seen an upgrade of something like 60 projects right throughout the State. I have already mentioned the Kalbarri airstrip, but the Busselton airport is another airport that has been built. The Geraldton airport has been upgraded and it is an absolutely fantastic facility. We must ensure we get our air services back into operation so we can capitalise on the infrastructure that has been put in place. I understand that the RAD scheme will go ahead at least for this year. During the estimates hearings I will ask whether that scheme will continue in successive years, because it is a valuable asset to those people in regional and rural Western Australia.

Another of the real initiatives of the previous Government was the upgrade of the bus fleet in Perth. The central area transit system has proved to be a wonderful success. The circle routes have also seen a major increase in the number of people travelling on buses. A new fleet of over 800 buses is coming on stream, and there must be well over 300 new buses in the fleet at present. It is very pleasing to see such a dramatic increase in the number of passengers travelling on buses.

Another issue that must be put in context is the upgrade of the ports around Western Australia. I spoke to some people in Esperance recently. The upgrade of the Esperance port, allowing cape-size vessels to move the iron ore, has led to an imminent rise from less than 2 million tonnes of iron ore to eight million tonnes. The possibility of further developments in the goldfields area, and I am sure the Minister for Goldfields-Esperance -

Hon N.D. Griffiths: I have inspected the port facility at Esperance and the improvements that have been made. The investment that has been undertaken there is massive. It will be of great benefit to the State.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: Everybody in that area appreciates what has been done. I must also reflect on the fact that the environmental issues that were of real concern in the area have been handled very well. I have watched the vessels load, and a very commendable job has been done to ensure there is no impact on the surrounding community.

Hon N.D. Griffiths: The transport of the iron ore is interesting. I note that Esperance is a different colour from Port Hedland.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: That is due mainly to the use of the shed facilities in Esperance. The people there have also been very conscious of the fact that as the conveyor belts work, there is an extraction ability and so forth to move the product without any injurious effect on the community.

Hon N.D. Griffiths: It was a very good solution, noting that the winds are a bit stronger in Esperance than they are in Port Hedland.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: I am sure the minister will agree that the same sort of upgrade should be done in Geraldton. I will touch on that later.

Hon N.D. Griffiths: Why did you not proceed with Geraldton?

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: We were certainly planning to do the Geraldton upgrade, and it is in the process of going ahead. I more than welcome the opportunity to touch on Geraldton. The southern transport corridor is an integral part of the port's upgrade. The deepening of the port is reliant upon an efficient transport system right across the board, including a rail system into the northern and eastern agricultural areas. That would allow something like half a million to one million tonnes more grain to go through the port. It would assist in the opportunity to deepen the port, which probably will require expenditure of \$100 million. That is a very feasible and self-funding option. The savings from an upgrade of the Geraldton port would be quite substantial when one considers that it is closer to the export markets. There would be no necessity for a vessel to go to the Kwinana port, for instance, for a top up. About 70 or 80 per cent of the vessels must go to Kwinana. That would release the Kwinana port for accessibility by vessels for longer periods so that they can be fully loaded. That means that an almost totally loaded vessel would not need to be brought into the port and would not interfere with the full loading of a single vessel. That would result in a monetary saving, as well as a saving in steaming time. That money would go back into the growers' pockets. There is a two-port loading charge of something like \$2.60 per tonne. Any savings on that could be used to upgrade the channel into the port. That will probably be a self-funding exercise. I hope the minister understands that that is what is proposed. I think a proposition will be put to the Government towards the end of the year. I understand there is talk about its impacting on the AAA rating of the Government. However, sometimes we get carried away with AAA ratings when there could be a substantial advantage in savings to producers. We must be realistic about the possibilities of development. That is what has happened in Esperance and in Albany. They are the sorts of issues that we must keep in mind when we are making decisions about credit ratings and the like. After all, farmers sometimes go into debt when they put a crop in the ground. We repeatedly expect them to go into debt to put a crop in the ground so that they can reap the rewards at the end of the year. It is a similar type of situation. It is purely and simply a business opportunity.

There was quite a deal of talk about Westrail when the freight operation was sold. All the talk I hear about that venture is that it will be very successful. I have already heard talk about a reduction in freight rates from people who are using it. I have not heard anything that would suggest a problem with that operation. It will lead to more product going on rail in the future. That is the whole issue of transport in Western Australia. As much product as possible must be put on rail, bearing in mind that road transport also complements rail. There is no getting away from the fact that an efficient road service is needed. Of course, in the north west of the State, we rely almost entirely on road transport, except for the transport of iron ore. A small shipping freight service goes into a number of the ports in that area. They are just a few of the initiatives that the previous Government put in place. In general, the people from the business and regional areas of Western Australia understand that the previous Government put in a lot of effort in that area.

This Government inherited a budget surplus of \$255 million, which was way above the expectation. It has put in place a number of initiatives that it promised during the election campaign. It needed something like \$850 million to fulfil its promises. It has increased taxes in some areas. I will reflect on some of the taxes. The minister's second reading speech refers to payroll tax. I am concerned about this tax. I spoke to some people in Geraldton who employed something like 100 people in their business. I was told that they would put off 10 people because of this tax. I hope that the impact of the tax is not as substantial as that. It would be a disappointing outcome for that area if people lose their jobs because of the imposition of this tax.

Since it was announced, land tax has been a talking point among people who have come into my office. It is a great concern. The premium property tax has also caused concern, mainly for the older people who have inherited a valuable piece of land rather than for the wealthy people about whom everybody speaks. Consideration must be given to these matters. I understand that allowance may be given to some people to carry forward the tax, so that when they sell their property, the Government will recoup the tax. That is a strange way for the Government to do business. However, those three initiatives are certainly causing concern in my electorate. Incidentally, I hope that premium property tax will not flow on to farms. I know that Hon Kim Chance has said that there will not be any flow on. However, it would be a real concern if this was a step in that direction.

Hon Peter Foss: When there are no country members, it is almost a certainty.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: Hon Peter Foss makes a very good point. However, we have not yet lost that debate.

Hon Peter Foss: It is a good reason not to.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: That may well be so. I am sure that Hon Dee Margetts will explain the impact of the so-called one vote, one value debate to many people in her area. However, that is a matter for another day.

Hon N.D. Griffiths: You digress from the budget. Vote weighting has never delivered the goods for the country people of our State.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: Government members should look at their budget.

The PRESIDENT: Order! The minister interjected improperly. He digressed and encouraged the speaker to digress.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: I understand the position in which the minister finds himself. Obviously, he is feeling pressure as a result of the points I have raised. The surplus in this budget has decreased from \$255 million to \$51 million. Earlier today the minister answered a question about the Water Corporation, and he indicated that there is a \$36 million issue in that area. I wonder how many such issues will come up as we go through the budget. The surplus is based on the assumption that the growth rate will be four per cent, which is more than double that of last year. That growth rate will be difficult to achieve or maintain in the current environment, in which the agricultural industry is experiencing difficult times in some areas.

Reduced expenditure has been identified in agriculture. In the question I asked last night, I clearly identified that agriculture is facing a 7.5 per cent reduction in the consolidated fund. That will impact on many areas. Savings in programs have been identified. Some of the reductions in management and management support will be welcomed; for example, the amalgamation of cereals, pulses and oilseeds programs to form a grains program. It will be interesting to see the impact of that. Obviously, that is one area that the Government has identified. Meat and dairy programs will be amalgamated to form the meat and dairy program. Trade and development and new industries will be amalgamated; that will be known as the trade and development area. There will be savings in support needed for partnership groups and other groups. People in country areas have gained significantly from partnership groups. They have brought people together. They have been of significant value to the people of rural Western Australia. Trade and development and the Rural Business Development Corporation have been relocated to South Perth. That will result in efficiencies through shared resources. With some of these measures, we will need to see what happens as matters progress. Incidentally, I will be interested in what happens in the transport portfolio, when infrastructure, planning and so on are all brought under the one umbrella. I see the minister smiling gleefully. Much of that legislation will come into this Parliament.

Hon N.D. Griffiths: I look forward to the prospect of even better government.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: We are all looking forward to the prospect of better government.

Hon N.D. Griffiths: You have better government now, and it will get even better.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: There he goes again, Mr President. It is purely and simply a matter of whether the Government can put its theory into practice. There will also be a reduction in the program service and project staff. That will be achieved through natural attrition and the termination of contract and temporary staff. Something like 65 full-time equivalents in that area will be affected. I hope this will not mean a loss of people from rural Western Australia. I know that about 90 more personnel are needed in the customs surveillance area. Perhaps some of those people will gain employment in that field. However, that does not mean that those people will be able to remain in the country. Very few people will be employed in the country areas. Perhaps some staff will be employed in Geraldton, Broome and Karratha; however, it will be very few. Therefore, there may be a loss of personnel in country areas.

I am also concerned about the protection of standards in Western Australia for crop variety evaluation and seed bulk-up projects. They are very important to agriculture in rural Western Australia. I also mention the office of soil and land conservation. I know that a lot of people are interested in those areas, and we must make sure they are maintained. I mentioned protection from diseases. Something like 40 new diseases came into Australia in the past year. With the loss of some of the protection services, it will be interesting to see whether we can continue to control those diseases.

The minister indicated that the health budget received an eight per cent increase in funding in this budget. However, when I go into the country areas, I find an enormous amount of insecurity among the people concerning hospitals. Those people have received some briefings, and it has been indicated to me that there has been something like a \$20 million cut in funding in those areas.

Hon N.D. Griffiths: You are being misled by some very mischievous people on hospital boards and some very mischievous doctors.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: All I do is go around my electorate and listen to what people say. Those people have been briefed by the officers, and they pass on the message. I have brought that message into this Chamber and have passed it on to the minister, and the minister's reply is now on the record.

Hon Peter Foss: It is better to be in denial, isn't it? Members opposite are six months down the track, yet they sound as though they have been in government for six years.

Hon N.D. Griffiths: It is a matter of regret that people are telling lies to Hon Murray Criddle.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: I have put the issue on the record, and now I am sure that no hospitals will close in country areas and the full funding arrangements that we would normally expect will go ahead. I thank members opposite for their help in that matter, and I am sure the Minister for Health will deliver.

Some areas of road funding are of concern to me. One group of roads that has been knocked on the head, so to speak, is the lime sands roads. Another road is the Hyden-Corrigin road. I am concerned about the loss off that road, because heavy haulage intermingles with school buses and travellers on that road, and that raises a road safety issue. That is a high priority road.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: So why didn't you build it?

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: It was in our budget, and it was going ahead.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: It was in there and it was unfunded, as were many things in your budget. That is why we ended up with a black hole.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: I welcome the interjections by members opposite, because it shows how little they know about country areas. Hon Kim Chance said the other day that this road needs attention; and I think that is clearly understood. I have spoken to the minister on a few occasions about the Lancelin-Cervantes road also. That road will be of enormous benefit to that part of the State, and any delay in building that road will put in jeopardy about \$200 million of works that is planned to go ahead in that area. I hope that road will be built. Today I had discussions with other people who want to develop initiatives in that area. We need to bring forward that issue and start that work as soon as possible. I have had talks with the Leader of the House, and he understands that situation, and I hope that initiative is seen as a priority now that people have brought to the attention of the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure the absolute necessity for that road to go ahead. In the electorate of Hon Barry House, Muirs Highway is another road that is an absolute necessity. In the north of the State in the electorate of Hon Norman Moore, there is a serious need for a road from Derby to the turn-off to the main highway.

Hon N.D. Griffiths: What taxes do you want us to put up; what programs do you want us to cut; or how much do you want us to borrow?

Hon Peter Foss: Why did you lie to the people of Western Australia during the election?

Hon N.D. Griffiths: I did not tell lies.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: I welcome the opportunity to answer that interjection.

Hon Kim Chance: Your Treasurer lied to the Western Australian people.

Hon Peter Foss: Rubbish!

The PRESIDENT: Order! If members want to continue their conversation, they can go outside and continue it.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: Road funding was available to build those roads; namely, the 8.1c a litre fuel tax that was to come back to the State. That money will obviously come back to the State this time, but it will probably go somewhere else; or perhaps the Government has other initiatives. That is where the \$850 million comes in. It is obvious that the Government cannot build these roads and also carry out its projects. That is a decision for the Government. The Government has chosen not to do these things that were in our budget and that I had intended would be done.

Hon Kim Chance: Do you recognise that the goods and services tax has had a substantial impact on our road revenue?

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: No, I do not. I have asked the minister for an answer about that matter, but I cannot get it. I would like the minister to trace through the budget and tell me where those two funding streams - namely, the 8.1c a litre that was raised for that \$1 billion program and that will come back to the State via the GST guarantee, and the \$41 million that was for the national arterial roads program - have gone.

Hon Kim Chance: I will be happy to try, but I was referring to the shortfall on vehicle registrations, which is definitely linked to the GST.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: The shortfall on vehicle registrations this year is not great, and it is only a projection.

Hon Kim Chance: Okay. I hope it does not come true. The shortfall is substantial.

Hon N.D. Griffiths interjected.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: The minister can laugh as much as he likes, but he needs to understand what I am talking about.

Hon N.D. Griffiths: I do understand what you are talking about.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: I am pleased about that. It is obvious that the Government will now place its priorities on things such as the rail line to the north. I wonder whether that project will happen, because I cannot see it in the budget papers. Hon Ken Travers is not here to explain, because he is away on parliamentary business, but I would like to know also whether the Government will build the rail line from Currambine to Clarkson. It takes about three years to build a train. Therefore, it is an absolute necessity that we order the trains now, because if we do not have the trains, it will make no sense to build that rail line. I asked this question about six months ago. The tenders were called some time ago and should have been signed off in about March, but we have not heard a word since; so obviously the timing of the project will go back, no doubt so that the next Government can pay for it.

Hon Peter Foss: It can fund its election promises by putting off the railway.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: I thought the Government had promised to build the railway.

Hon Peter Foss: It is one of those never-never things.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: Okay. A lot of those promises will be never-never things. A number of issues need to be clarified with regard to the rail line from Mandurah to Perth up the freeway and over Mount Henry Bridge, because whether Mount Henry Bridge can carry rail is a moot point. The indication I have is that it cannot carry rail. We built the second Narrows Bridge for light rail, so other expenditure will be incurred on that bridge. Another issue is that north of Mount Henry Bridge, the freeway is built on a very narrow corridor. I wonder how much danger there will be in building a railway on that narrow section of land; there may be some interesting discussions about that. The rail line will then go over the Narrows Bridge and into the tunnels and the like. The water in that area may be a real challenge. The Minister for Planning and Infrastructure told me when we started to build the tunnel that it would float away.

Hon Peter Foss: The Government promised me that it would table the projections of passenger loads. I have not seen that yet. It has vanished.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: A better question is where is the master plan for all this infrastructure that the Government is talking about.

Hon Peter Foss: It is in the minister's mind; and we know what else is in it.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: I am not sure that I do.

Hon N.D. Griffiths: I think you should stop interjecting on Hon Murray Criddle. He is your former coalition partner and he is putting forward a point of view, but you are preventing him from speaking.

The PRESIDENT: Order! The member is receiving a lot of help with his speech.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: And I am enjoying it.

Hon N.D. Griffiths: I always enjoy listening to you speak, because I never know what you will say next, and neither do you.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: The point about the rail coming down the Kwinana Freeway from the south is that when we get the master plan, we can make some real comments about it. I will be very interested to see what happens when we get to the top of William Street and find that the station does not link up with where the train will come out.

Hon Ljiljana Ravlich: Can't you say something positive?

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: I started off by being very positive. I have listened to Hon Ljiljana Ravlich for too long. Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order, members!

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: The member makes a point about being negative, when we already have a very workable rail system. We already had a master plan for the rail to go from Berrigan across to Kenwick and pick up all

those people from that enormous catchment area. They will not be serviced under this latest plan, so how will we look after those people?

Rural and regional Western Australia produces an overwhelming majority of exports. In fact, it produces about 30 per cent of the gross state product. In so doing it also accounts for between 20 and 25 per cent of Australia's total exports. Some blame has been levelled at the goods and services tax, but I think the Leader of the House understands that we have had a tremendous downturn in agricultural production and also income in the last year or so, and that must have had some real impact on Western Australia. At present we have some difficulties, but the bright spot is the very good prices that we are receiving for products. Some sheep prices have probably doubled. The price for old ewes has gone up about four times, and lamb prices have doubled. Cattle prices are very good as well, and grain prices are at almost historical highs. We have a very good opportunity and, given some rain in the future, we will certainly receive some enormous benefits from our rural and agricultural sectors.

These people will need to be supported in this difficult time of drought. I outlined the other day that some areas of the State are still suffering from drought. The north eastern wheatbelt is certainly having a tough time. I was talking to a fellow at Mingenew last week, who said that he will probably get nothing; he was looking anxiously at next year. He was being very positive about it, but said it is probably the first time in many years that he will not receive very much at all.

Hon Kim Chance: Incidentally, on Friday I am expecting to see the final draft of the EC4 application.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: I am pleased to hear that. The minister knows the situation, and I report to him regularly.

In October 2000 the State's unemployment rate was 5.8 per cent; in May 2001 the rate was 7.2 per cent. Approximately 14 000 people were influenced by the loss of that agricultural downturn, and it is the first time for eight years that unemployment in Western Australia has been higher than the national rate. We hope that will not continue. If we receive the rain in the wheatbelt and we get a positive flow-on, we will see a good outcome.

The consumer price index has also had an impact on transport costs, and fuel prices have increased. There is probably some light at the end of the tunnel about fuel prices. I see that the price of oil is in the region of \$US21 or \$US22 a barrel, so maybe we will see some impact on our pump prices in the near future. There have been some rises in communication costs and we hope that will not continue.

We need to encourage people into regional and rural Western Australia. Accessibility of health care is a major issue, and roads need to be built. If infrastructure is put into the country, then people will go there. This is clearly emphasised by the way areas such as Dongara, Cervantes, Jurien Bay and Kalbarri have gone from strength to strength in recent times because of the infrastructure that has been put in place. That is a clear message to the Government.

Hon B.K. Donaldson: Very good people live in those areas.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: They are very good people. That is a clear indication that those sorts of things should continue into the future.

Over the past decade we in Western Australia have diversified and we have moved from alumina and iron ore, which represented 40 per cent of our exports, to a diverse export base. The State's top 10 exports come from the minerals and energy sector, agricultural, foodstuffs and livestock, marine and fisheries. The fisheries industry has gone from strength to strength as have elaborately transformed manufactured goods in that area, such as ships and boats; that is a good story that has been outlined many, many times. There is no doubt that we must continue to put funds towards providing a supporting network for those regional areas.

In the telecommunications area the former Deputy Premier, the member for Merredin, Hendy Cowan, was instrumental in establishing almost 100 telecentres which now link the country. That has been recognised as a very good initiative across Western Australia. I am told of those installations everywhere I go, and they are all recorded as being outstanding. Approximately \$8 million went into satellite technology that now enables data transmission from those telecentres. An amount of \$20 million was invested to cover a gap in mobile phone services in the south west of the State and to produce satellite links for emergency services in remote areas. I cannot help but underline the fact that emergency services are absolutely vital, especially when it comes to fighting fires and the like, or when people may get injured in rural and regional areas.

The coalition and the National Party were instrumental in developing and increasing the support for business enterprise centres. There are 37 of those centres in total, and 27 are in country areas. We saw a massive effort to consolidate the existing markets and to build new support services for manufacturing and downstream food processing. We also have nine development commissions to promote capital expenditure and government services around the State. Those commissions were instrumental in projects such as the Mandurah marina, the

Geraldton and Exmouth boat harbours, the Halls Head and Newdegate community centres and the Avon industrial park.

I again refer to the road funding issue to do with local government and the agreement with the Western Australian Municipal Association. The local road funding went from \$61 million to \$130 million in eight years, and it is absolutely necessary that that level of funding continue so that local government can be involved in road funding. Regional road groups and the like have been a wonderful success. The community builders program in rural Western Australia was developed in recognition of the need to support and develop the people who would help lead the development of the areas. That has certainly been a great initiative. We need to ask the Government to continue these initiatives. There is no doubt that we need to make sure that rural and regional Western Australia is high on the agenda. A number of issues have been picked up by the Government.

We congratulate the Government on honouring its commitment to reduce stamp duty and the rate on workers compensation for small business. I was somewhat disturbed about the imposition of a levy on business to fund workers compensation in connection with the HIH Insurance liability. My views on that are well known. The fact that the Queensland Government is reducing payroll tax and this Government is increasing it is an issue.

The Premier announced on 6 June that Cabinet had agreed to a framework for a \$75 million infrastructure fund to be spent over four years. That will involve spending of \$55 million on capital infrastructure, \$15 million on regional projects - that is, feasibility studies and marketing programs - and \$5 million on smaller non-capital works - that is, industry research and training. The detail of the budget papers reveals that \$19.7 million will be drawn from this fund to part fund the \$54 million integrated package for protecting our old-growth forests. This allocation does no more than compensate for the loss of industry. Much of it will not stay in the south west region. In addition, a review of the regional infrastructure fund indicates that about \$11 million is pre-existing budget commitments. When these figures are subtracted from the \$75 million, we are left with just \$45 million to be spent on infrastructure over four years. It is not a huge fund when one looks at the breakdown of what is already committed.

Hon Kim Chance: I do not understand that.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: It is in the Government's documents.

Hon Kim Chance: There has been no end uses allocated to the -

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: The document states -

Regional Investment Fund

The Fund will provide \$75.0 million over four years, commencing in 2001-02, to encourage, promote . . .

- Regional Infrastructure Funding Program (\$55.0 million). This category includes the election commitments for:
 - South West On-line - \$5.5 million . . .
 - Interpretive Centre at Shark Bay - \$5.0 million . . .
 - Fishing platform at Point Samson - \$500,000 . . .

Hon Kim Chance: How interesting!

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: I have simply read the document.

Hon Kim Chance: I do not deny what you are saying. Is that in volume 3?

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: It is in the *Economic and Fiscal Outlook* under the heading "Local government and regional development".

Hon Kim Chance: That sounds like an interesting topic for the Estimates Committee.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: The document continues -

Building on the \$41.4 million allocated by the previous Government across the forward estimate period, an additional \$18.0 million was initially committed by the Government during the election for the implementation of the 'Protecting Our Old Growth Forests' policy. Further development of this commitment since the election will see further additional funding of \$64.1 million provided over the forward estimate period to allow for more suitable workers packages and industry assistance.

Of the total additional funding, an amount of \$16.5 million is from the Government's newly established Regional Investment Fund . . .

Hon Kim Chance: I am happy with that one.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: That covers the point I was making.

Hon Kim Chance: But that is new investment; it is not allocated to a specific purpose other than within that area. The Government has made a decision to allocate to a general purpose from that fund, but it is a new allocation in every sense. Those others quoted are very interesting.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: I have done no more than read from the budget papers.

Hon Kim Chance: Absolutely.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: The planning and infrastructure portfolio area has undergone significant restructuring. It is very difficult to follow the flow of money in the budget papers because of the superannuation figures, the capital user charges and so on. The transport area is now responsible for only education and regulation. All the other functions have been transferred to the planning and infrastructure portfolio. That includes the passenger and freight services, policies and plans, infrastructure development and management. Responsibility for the Department of Land Administration's development function has been transferred to LandCorp, and the Office of the Valuer General is now within DOLA and accounts for a significant increase in recurrent expenditure. That makes it more difficult to understand the budget papers. The planning and infrastructure budget has suffered a reduction in total consolidated fund appropriations for 2000-01 of a little more than \$46 million. That translates to \$410 million. It will experience a further decrease in 2002-03 to \$402 million.

The \$2.6 million reduction in the regional school bus subsidy is a real concern. Over this Government's term in office, the real reduction will be eight per cent of the \$50 million budget. That is a real concern for those in the country when the impact will be on school children. I will need an explanation of that; I will question the minister about any cut. Tim Shanahan did a review of the school bus operation, and I understand another review is being conducted. I hope that commonsense prevails and that the school bus operation subsidies will not be cut. Any reduction will impact not only on school bus services but also on the operators.

I have commented on the regional airports development scheme. I hope that the \$2 million allocation per year will be available throughout the term of this Government. There was a clear indication to that effect during the election campaign.

The previous estimate for the Main Roads budget was \$304 million for capital services. This Government's budget is \$240 million for the same period, reducing to \$124 million in 2003. That takes me back to the point I made to the Leader of the House about following funding streams. I will be interested to hear what will happen in the Main Roads budget.

Hon B.K. Donaldson: What is that in percentage terms?

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: It is very significant. The reduction for services over the two budgets is about 200 per cent.

I have outlined some of the issues of concern. I realise that this Government has every right to set its priorities according to its pre-election commitments. Everyone in Western Australia should be given due consideration when funding arrangements are put in place. Any negative impact on rural and regional Western Australia will cause huge problems. It will also have a negative impact on the State of Western Australia in the long term. I urge the Government to consider seriously any future funding in those areas. I will watch with interest and I look forward to the Estimates Committee.

Debate adjourned, on motion by Hon Ray Halligan.