

APPROPRIATION (CONSOLIDATED FUND) BILL (NO. 2) 2001

Third Reading

MR KOBELKE (Nollamara - Leader of the House) [3.36]: I move -

That the Bill be now read a third time.

MR MASTERS (Vasse) [3.37 pm]: I am grateful for the opportunity to spend a few minutes completing the remarks I was unable to complete yesterday because of time constraints.

When one deals with budgetary matters, it is tempting to cover a very wide field of issues that are important to both the Government and the Opposition in the expectation that they are of interest to the broader community. If the situation were appropriate, I would love to talk about all the newspaper headlines I have here.

Mr Kobelke: I will not take a point of order, but the third reading does not allow general debate. I have not taken points of order before because I did not want to curtail people contributing. As we are now on the second budget Bill, I will point out that the third reading must be confined to matters in the Bill.

Mr MASTERS: I will speak generally very briefly by way of introduction, then I will talk about the budget papers.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Dean): I draw the member's attention to the Bill. The member must speak to the capital items in the Bill.

Mr MASTERS: In that case, I shall quickly move over the fact that Hon Kim Beazley has made a pledge to support the Kyoto Protocol, and yet -

Mr Kobelke: This is the wrong budget.

Mr MASTERS: It is, but in the same breath I wish to talk about the potential for this Government to fund through Western Power a coal-fired power station in Collie.

Mr Kobelke: That is not in this budget.

Mr MASTERS: No, but I suspect money will be spent there. I would love to talk about the HIH Insurance collapse, and the minister's -

Mr Kobelke: That is not capital expenditure.

Mr MASTERS: No, it is not. I would love to talk about these things but I will not, even though I have a headline which states that seminars do not satisfy builders. At some time I would love to talk to the minister about that. Instead I will talk about two issues that are budget related. The first is the lack of capital expenditure on education in my electorate of Vasse.

Some weeks ago I wrote to all the parents and citizens associations and school principals in my electorate, and asked what they thought needed to be the subject of capital and general expenditure items within their schools. I have had a number of responses, although I have not brought them all along today. In spite of the previous Government spending enormous sums of money on education over the previous eight years, the electorate of Vasse has not done particularly well out of the budget we are discussing today. The Capel Primary School has advised me that it thinks it is getting close to the top of the list for an administration building upgrade. I am sure the budget does not go into that level of detail on the capital expenditure items for particular schools such as administration upgrades and other building needs. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the Capel Primary School, which missed out on any capital expenditure in the budget, is hopeful that Education Department funding will be forthcoming at the appropriate time and will allow for an urgent upgrade of the administration building and the other works that need to be carried out.

Probably the school that is in the worst position from a capital expenditure point of view is the West Busselton Primary School. I was able to take the previous Minister for Education to visit that school last year. I wrote to the previous Government on two or three occasions strongly urging it to consider capital expenditures in the West Busselton Primary School. I am sorry to say that the previous Government was not able to find the appropriate capital expenditure to assist West Busselton Primary School, although the former Government found sufficient funds for a new South Busselton Primary School, which will remove a lot of the pressure from West Busselton and the other primary schools in the Vasse electorate. The West Busselton Primary School is an old school. All of the classrooms are comparatively small. Even with class sizes of 24 students, and in this modern day and age in which all of the classrooms have two, three, four or thereabouts computers along with a range of teaching aids, the bottom line is that the classrooms are far too small. The West Busselton Primary School has converted its canteen into a music room. When the school has to fit 24 or 26 students into that room, which measures about three metres by five metres, the students know whether the student next to them is a good singer

or can play a musical instrument well, because they are only a few centimetres from their left or right ear. That school desperately needs capital expenditure to allow it to build a canteen as well as a genuine music room. I can do no more than highlight that to the Government and the Minister for Education. I commend the minister for staying here and listening to the comments I have on education. As I said yesterday in response to the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, as a member of Parliament, one of my roles is not just to oppose because I am in opposition, but also to help the Government understand the issues in my electorate and in the broader sense throughout Western Australia.

I also received a letter from the Vasse Primary School in response to my communication with it a couple of months ago. It arguably has the prettiest and the best aesthetic setting of any primary school that I am aware of in the south west, and certainly within my electorate. The teachers and the parents value those aesthetic qualities at the school very highly. It should not be forgotten that the students understand that by being educated in a school that is so well sited and so well laid out that they are benefiting in a number of ways. I can remember going to a school bus committee meeting there probably 18 months ago, when we stopped our meeting and walked over to a window of the library because a brush-tailed possum was climbing up and down one of trees just outside. I am not sure whether a student was harassing it and causing it to leave its resting place. Nonetheless, that school is located in a very natural setting. Not only do the parents, teachers and students appreciate that, but also the students benefit significantly from it. The Vasse Primary School's major deficiency is that it does not have an art room or a dedicated art building. If the minister has a chance to go there, he will see that the art room is an internal space, which is some sort of entryway into three or four adjoining classrooms.

Mr Carpenter: I went there when I was in opposition and to West Busselton. I am familiar with the situation the member describes. Vasse is beautiful little school.

Mr MASTERS: It was allocated major expenditure two or three years for a new library, but one more capital item is needed and that is the art room and associated works.

The final topic I will talk about relates to the health budget. I appreciate that the Minister for Health has enormous difficulties for a range of reasons. The bottom line is that I have been told by a number of different people involved in the provision of health services that the budget for the Vasse-Leeuwin Health Service in my electorate for both capital and operating expenditure is totally deficient. I would like to talk about operating expenditure.

Mr Kobelke: You cannot at the third reading stage - only about capital.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Dean): There is an item of \$101 million in the health budget, and you can talk about that.

Mr MASTERS: I will talk about the fact that there was no capital expenditure in the budget for the Vasse-Leeuwin Health Service. If my memory serves me correctly, the Busselton District Hospital was opened in the mid-1960s. I have previously described it as a rabbit warren that, for the sake of everyone in the south west, deserves to be bulldozed and replaced by a modern facility. It is still serviceable and the previous Government spent \$1.3 million to provide day surgery, a second operating theatre and a number of other facilities that were needed so the hospital would meet modern expectations and needs. However, the very best estimate was that that expenditure would allow the hospital to survive in an efficient manner for only five years, while other people were saying that it would be overloaded within three years. The bottom line is that not only does there need to be some genuine emotional commitment on the part of the Government to rebuilding that hospital or doing something to upgrade it, but also there needs to be capital expenditure - which is not there in the current budget - to allow the planning and the first stage of the hospital rebuilding or upgrading to go ahead.

In the same breath that I talk about the hospital, I also have to talk about the Busselton (Kevin Cullen) Community Health Centre, which is located 100 metres to one side of the hospital. It is an old building; it is a little younger than the hospital, but it suffers from a poor design, and maintenance money has not been made available over most of the past 10 or 15 years. For some years Governments have failed to understand the severity of the problems. That building is no longer able to meet the community's expectations. The planning of the Busselton hospital is a high priority, and so is planning for a new Kevin Cullen Community Health Centre. In the health sphere they are clearly the biggest capital expenditure items, and they were not in the current budget. I am also disappointed that there was no indication in the forward estimates that the Vasse-Leeuwin Health Service would get any sort of funding either to upgrade the hospital and the community health centre, or in the operating side of things to allow the planning process to start.

There are many options available to the Department of Health and to the Vasse-Leeuwin Health Service for the future of the hospital and the Kevin Cullen Community Health Centre. There is sufficient land to allow a new hospital and a new health centre to be built on the site, to transfer staff, patients and equipment, and then bulldoze the existing structures. It is a large site and there would be no logistical problems if those two buildings

were replaced. Suggestions have also been made that those two facilities, or one or other of the facilities, could be relocated in the Vasse area where a new development is being proposed. The Vasse-Newtown development has gone through all the planning stages of the Department for Planning and Infrastructure and the Shire of Busselton's planning section. It will be a new urban area for up to 5 000 people. I know that the member for Bunbury, who is currently in the Chair, likes to think that Dalyellup and other parts of the Bunbury region are experiencing fast growth, but I emphasise once again that Busselton is the fastest-growing local government area in Australia. That has been shown to be the case by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and other data for three of the last four years, and certainly it is the case at the moment. Therefore, it does make some sense for 5 000 extra people over the next 15 to 25 years to be located in the Vasse-Newtown area. It may not be the best option, but it needs to be investigated. It makes some sense to consider the Vasse-Newtown area as the location for the new Busselton hospital and the new Kevin Cullen Community Health Centre.

One of the arguments, of course, is that the land is available for the siting of those two facilities at Vasse-Newtown, and it would be a major incentive or encouragement for people to move to that area and to get that urban community up and running, in the same way that Dalyellup has developed in the past 12 to 18 months. Another argument is that the Vasse-Newtown area is centrally located to Margaret River, the Yallingup-Dunsborough area and, of course, Busselton. For example, if there were a need to transport someone by ambulance to the Bunbury Regional Hospital because the smaller hospitals in the south west did not have the appropriate facilities, at least the patient could first be stabilised at a hospital located on the Vasse-Newtown site.

Since I am not able to talk about expenditure items of an operating nature, I shall leave it at that. For the record, I point out that I do have with me a number of clippings from south west newspapers, referring to operational issues and the lack of funding. Since I am not allowed to discuss those, I will not.

MR OMODEI (Warren-Blackwood) [3.55 pm]: I shall make some brief comments in the third reading debate, and refer to some of the matters in my electorate that have not been funded in the current budget. I refer, in part, to the Margaret River Hospital which has received some funding for planning capital works for an urgently needed \$3 million project. Margaret River is a growing area with large tourist numbers, which is experiencing a huge demographic change. The hospital requires an operating theatre and extra room, and that has been planned for quite some time. The hospital is about 10 years old and it needs upgrading.

Next I refer to the Manjimup Primary School. I understand a delegation visited the Minister for Education yesterday. A project was committed under the previous Government, by the current Leader of the Opposition when he was Minister for Education, for a school to be opened in 2004. There is some debate about the site. The local community favours a site adjacent to the school, at a cost. However, its main objective is to have a new primary school. I am very concerned about the safety aspect of the current school, and this is a matter that I will continue to take up with the minister, but I wanted to mention it in this debate.

The issue of roads is an ongoing concern. Muirs Highway, which is the east-west link to the lower south west, is a very important transport route. Large volumes of heavy traffic - B-trains with pulpwood, blue gums for chip, and a mixture of heavy transport and school buses - are a real issue on that road. The previous Government has deferred improvement a number of times in favour of the dual carriageway on the Old Coast Road, and I can understand the reasons for that. However, this is a disaster waiting to happen. A death occurred there only about three weeks ago. The road surface is very narrow with very sharp shoulders, and in the winter time in particular when the surrounding land is inundated, the shoulders of the road become very soft. Obviously there is a problem with heavy traffic which tends to stick to the hard surface and force smaller traffic off the road. In particular, the Muir family has been lobbying very strongly for an upgrade to the Muirs Highway. This is absolutely essential, and it has been left off the program or deferred again under the 10-year strategic road plan. I urge the Government to look at that question closely. It is a matter that is easily deferred because there is no local community. A large amorphous community uses that road. The people who use that road fear for their lives every time they travel on it. It is in poor condition, it has been planned for upgrade now on several occasions and has been deferred under successive Governments. It is time that a Government grabbed this issue by the throat and got on with the business of upgrading the road.

The other road I travel on a great deal that concerns me is the South West Highway. We heard this morning about the siting of the chip-mill at Donnybrook and the number of road trucks that would be using the South West Highway to transport chip logs to that Donnybrook site. If the figure of 65 000 truck movements per year is correct, the South West Highway is the direct route into the south west corner. The people in that area are expecting tourism to assist the local economy, which has been hit by the restructuring of the timber industry, and it is very important that the South West Highway be upgraded. The passing lanes are very short at both Newlands and close to Donnybrook; they are too short to allow B-trains to pass safely. If we add to the proposed trucking movements for the chip-mill, a large number of B-trains that transport fresh produce from the south west corner, including apples, potatoes and other vegetables, and the large number of trucks transporting

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Mr John Kobelke; Mr Bernie Masters; Acting Speaker; Mr Paul Omodei

pine logs to the port for export to India under a recent contract, then large volumes of heavy traffic will be using the South West Highway. I know some funds have been provided over different periods under the previous Government, in particular to upgrade the South West Highway, but that stretch from Boyanup to Bridgetown and Manjimup certainly needs an upgrade.

The other issue is the never-ending saga of Mowen Road, which heads east-west from Nannup to Margaret River. It is a very important road as far as traffic is concerned, and goes into the Nannup valley, Balingup, Bridgetown, Manjimup and Pemberton. At the moment it is a gravel road.

Mr D'Orazio interjected.

Mr OMODEI: The member is talking about Balingup Road. Mowen Road is about 65 kilometres of gravel that needs upgrading. It is being upgraded at the Margaret River end, and needs to be upgraded at the Nannup end as far as St John's Brook and the excellent tourist attractions there. The road in between of about 40 kilometres needs to be upgraded also.

I shall refer to tourism matters now. The tourist bureaus in the south west are suffering from the lack of a financial base. I have written to the Minister for Tourism and the Premier on this issue, as it is a matter that must be addressed at not only a regional level, but also the individual tourist bureau level. The Government is well aware that the Pemberton and Northcliffe tourist bureaus in particular are in difficulty, and that the issue must be addressed.

The second last issue I raise is the proposed Northcliffe information and cultural centre, which would include a library, an information and cultural centre and a meeting place for professionals at Northcliffe. Funds for the centre have been applied for from the Commonwealth Government, and I expect those funds to be provided. The shire will allocate funds for this \$1 million project and the State Government must also consider providing some funds. It is a small community that has been devastated by the changes to the timber industry and the impact of dairy deregulation. The change in community demography requires that the community have at least decent community facilities where visitors, whether they be ministers or professionals from any sphere, have a place to meet local people.

Finally I make a point - a political hot point currently - about the wine equalisation tax. I suggest to the Parliament that both sides of the House - I have a vested interest in this matter - and the parliamentary parties consider lobbying the federal Government to bring in a volumetric wine tax. Dennis Horgan has been a great stalwart on this issue.

Mr Kobelke: Important as that is, it is not covered by the appropriation Bill before the House.

Mr OMODEI: I know. However, I wanted to bring it to members' attention in the hope that one day we can convince the Commonwealth Government that there is a better way of taxing wine that would assist the wine industry in Western Australia. Although it may not be a line item in the budget, if people in Western Australia make more money out of wine and pay less tax, they will generate more money in the community and the Government will have to spend less. Dennis Horgan has been a great champion of the industry and I want to put in a plug on the wine equalisation tax. The Labor Party talks about 60 000 litres; it should be 600 000 litres.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a third time and transmitted to the Council.