

**APPROPRIATION (CONSOLIDATED FUND) BILL (NO. 1) 2003**  
**APPROPRIATION (CONSOLIDATED FUND) BILL (NO. 2) 2003**

*Estimates Committees A and B Reports and Minutes - Presentation and Adoption*

**MRS D.J. GUISE** (Wanneroo) [4.28 pm]: I present the report and the minutes of Estimates Committees A and B.

[See papers Nos 1179 and 1180.]

Mrs D.J. GUISE: I move -

That the report of Estimates Committee A be adopted.

Some 68 hours of debate ensued during the estimates week. Estimates Committee A was held in this Chamber and Estimates Committee B in the Legislative Council Chamber. I will get to that shortly. By all accounts, the estimates week proceeded smoothly. The intention of the Chairman's guide approved by the Speaker was to ensure that assistance was given smoothly during the week and that there was some consistency during the running of the Estimates Committees. To all intents and purposes, that is exactly what happened and what was achieved. However, some discipline needs to be provided in the asking of some questions. It is pretty hard to rein in a minister when he or she is asked a rather lengthy question. The Chairs recognised that some issues were indeed complex and deserved a full explanation of not only the question, but also the answer from the minister.

Mr P.D. Omodei: Is that questions and answers?

Mrs D.J. GUISE: That is both questions and answers, member. The Chairs, committee members and others who were present gave recognition to the need for flexibility to allow a little collaboration and understanding. The point must be made that a continuing difficulty of the committee is when those bounds are sometimes overstepped. I noticed in one of the sessions that a debate ensued regarding a minister's request that a question be put on notice. I was disappointed to read in *Hansard* that a lengthy debate ensued about that matter rather than the budgetary item that was under scrutiny. I suggest to members that it is acknowledged practice that the minister can answer questions in such a manner. If ministers do not agree to provide an answer by way of supplementary information, they can request that the question be put on notice. That is made clear in the Chairman's opening statement. I suggest that members question whether it is worth debating that issue or whether it would be better to make the point and move on so that quality time can be spent scrutinising the budget.

Unfortunately, because I was sick last week I am not able to provide members with a complete analysis of the committees, which has been my practice in the past. However, I have compiled some indicative figures that give an idea of how the week went. I have been able to complete my analysis for committee A. During divisions 1 and 2, Parliament and Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations, a total of 31 questions were asked. The Liberal Party asked 19 questions and the Labor Party asked 12 questions, which is a good balance. During divisions 25 and 26, Consumer and Employment Protection and Registrar, Western Australian Industrial Relations Commission, 118 questions were asked. The Liberal Party asked 86 questions, the Labor Party asked 22 questions and the Independent member for Alfred Cove asked 10 questions. The other session conducted on the Monday was Premier and Cabinet. The Premier is the Minister for Public Sector Management; Federal Affairs; Science; Citizenship and Multicultural Interests. In total, 155 questions were asked and answered. Liberal Party members asked 87 questions, Labor Party members asked 49 questions, National Party members asked 16 questions and the member for Alfred Cove asked three questions.

The bulk of Wednesday was taken up by division 55, Education and Training. Members asked 133 questions in total. Liberal Party members asked 67 questions, Labor Party members asked 13 questions, National Party members asked 23 questions and, the member for Churchlands asked 30 questions. During division 56, the Country High School Hostels Authority, a total of 11 questions were asked. Liberal Party members asked seven questions and National Party members asked four questions. During division 57, the Curriculum Council, a total of 14 questions were asked. The Liberal Party asked four questions, the National Party asked three questions and the member for Churchlands asked seven questions. During division 58, Education Services, a total of 23 questions were asked. Liberal Party members asked 17 questions, the National Party asked two questions and the member for Churchlands asked four questions. During division 59, Recreation Camps and Reserve Board, a total of 15 questions were asked. The Liberal Party asked eight questions, the Labor Party asked two questions, and the National Party asked five questions. During division 60, Sport and Recreation, a total of 20 questions were asked. The Liberal Party asked 10 questions, the Labor Party asked one question, the National Party asked five questions and the Independents asked four questions. During division 61, the Western Australian Sports Centre Trust, five questions were asked. The Liberal Party asked three questions, the Labor Party asked one

question and the National Party asked one question. During division 62, Indigenous Affairs, a total of six questions were asked. The Liberal Party asked four questions, the Labor Party asked one question and the National Party asked one question. During division 53, the Western Australian Tourism Commission, the Liberal Party asked 25 questions, the Labor Party asked five questions and the National Party asked two questions. The Rottnest Island Authority was the first off-line budget item. The Liberal Party asked 18 questions, and the Labor Party asked one question. That day finished with division 54, the Small Business Development Corporation, during which a total of 29 questions were asked. The Liberal Party asked 20 questions, the Labor Party asked five questions and the National Party asked four questions.

On Thursday, during division 3, Premier and Cabinet - Office of Native Title, 14 questions were asked. The Liberal Party asked 13 questions and the National Party asked one question. A total of 39 questions were asked during division 9, Treasury and Finance. The Liberal Party asked 20 questions, the Labor Party asked one question, the National Party asked seven questions and the Independent member for Pilbara asked 11 questions. During division 10, Office of the Auditor General, 23 questions were asked, predominantly by the National Party. The Liberal Party asked five questions and the Labor Party asked six questions. During division 11, Office of Energy, 43 questions were asked. The Liberal Party asked 29 questions, the Labor Party asked six questions and the National Party asked eight questions. During division 67, Racing, Gaming and Liquor, the Liberal Party asked six questions. During division 68, the Goldfields-Esperance Development Commission, the Liberal Party asked two questions and the Labor Party asked one question.

Questions were asked of two more off-line budget authorities. Fourteen questions were asked during the division for Western Power. The Liberal Party asked 10 questions, the Labor Party asked three questions and the National Party asked one question. Members asked 14 questions of the Water Corporation. The Liberal Party asked six questions, the Labor Party asked five questions and the National Party asked three questions. That day finished with division 3, Premier and Cabinet - Office of Road Safety. Members asked 22 questions. The Liberal Party asked nine questions, the Labor Party asked six questions and the National Party asked seven questions. During division 45, the Police Service, 78 questions were asked. The Liberal Party asked 52 questions, the Labor Party asked 21 questions and the National Party asked five questions. We finished in short time with division 46, the Fire and Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia. Unfortunately there was time for only six questions. The Labor Party asked four questions and the National Party asked two questions. Finally, the only other committee session I was able to analyse was division 66, Health, which was held on the Friday. Members asked 110 questions during that division. The Liberal Party asked 49 questions, the Labor Party asked 25 questions, the National Party asked 31 questions and other members asked five questions.

I believe that these figures are reasonably indicative of how the week panned out. Our intention was to ensure that all members were able to participate fairly in the Estimates Committees and properly scrutinise the budget papers of the House. We dealt for the first time with five off-line budget authorities. Some members were frustrated that only 30 minutes was allocated to those off-budget authorities, although it was the first time it has ever been done. Some questions were asked and answered. I think all members enjoyed doing that. The process worked reasonably well.

In Estimates Committee A, there were 61 requests for supplementary information. I am pleased to advise the House that all that information has been provided to the members who requested it. I extend my thanks for the tremendous support of all the parliamentary staff who assisted throughout the week. They did an outstanding job in offering support to the Chairs and the committee. I especially express thanks to my colleagues the Acting Speakers who supported me throughout the week. They did a tremendous job. I thank also the committee members and others who participated. A spirit of goodwill prevailed. The committee was conducted in an atmosphere of collaboration and cooperation. In fact, at times it was very casual. From time to time I had to remind members of the standing orders to ensure there were no free-flowing conversations between the advisers and members rather than the minister. Members sometimes got carried away with themselves. It was one of the most laid-back Estimates Committees I have seen for a while. Any member who wishes to speak to the debate on the committee can do so, and if any of the staff wish to provide feedback, if not today, then in the next few weeks, I will take note of these comments and members' requests. If anything further needs to be reviewed, I will take that on board.

**MR R.F. JOHNSON** (Hillarys) [4.39 pm]: I will be brief, but it is incumbent on members on this side to respond to the comments made by the Deputy Speaker. In doing so, I compliment the members of the staff, as always, for their excellent job in attending to the Estimates Committee. This year I felt that the attitude of the committee chairmen was more conducive to ensuring that members, particularly those on this side of the House, had adequate opportunities to ask questions. This is the third budget that the Gallop Government has brought down, and this is the third estimates we have had to deal with. I could not possibly agree that it was a good budget, but I concur with the Deputy Speaker that the way in which the Estimates Committees were worked and

managed was the best since the Labor Party came to power. Some of the credit for that must go to the Deputy Speaker, who shows extreme skill in presiding not only over the House, but also the budget Estimates Committees. Some chairmen do not always exercise the same tolerance as the Deputy Speaker and the member for Southern River. I highlight those two from the Labor Party as being exceptionally tolerant chairmen who do a very good job in a very unbiased way. They ensure that members on this side of the House get the opportunity to ask questions. I also compliment the members on this side of this House who acted as committee chairmen. They also did an excellent job.

I was very interested to hear the Deputy Speaker tell us how many questions had been asked. She did not tell us how many questions had been answered. There is often a very big difference between asking a question and getting an accurate and relevant answer. One of the committees on which I served as a member dealt with community development and seniors' interests. I am afraid that the minister did not really answer the questions in that instance. It is very frustrating for an opposition member, trying to get some accurate answers from the minister or the advisers, to receive nothing but a tirade of abuse about what is wrong with the Liberal Party. That can hardly be described as an accurate or relevant answer. I had a problem to some extent with the reaction of some ministers when asked for supplementary information. The Deputy Speaker is quite right in saying that all the supplementary information the ministers agreed to supply was actually supplied. However, on quite a few occasions, supplementary information was requested and the minister refused to supply it. It appeared to be a tactic adopted by some ministers who perhaps felt insecure, to not supply supplementary information. Supplementary information is required to be absolutely accurate, otherwise the minister is misleading Parliament.

Some ministers, instead of agreeing to supply supplementary information, asked that the question be put on notice. That is all very well, but many of my colleagues on this side of the House have put questions on notice only to receive non-answers - a refusal to answer the questions on the grounds that it would take too many staff hours to provide the requested information. A member can ask a question, and the minister can sign off on it by basically refusing to answer. That is an absolute disgrace. That is why, at the budget Estimates Committees, there has always been a convention that, if supplementary information is requested, 99 times out of 100 it will be supplied. That certainly happened in the eight years in which I was part of the previous Government. For much of that time I was either an Acting Speaker or the Deputy Speaker. I have chaired many budget Estimates Committees so I am fully cognisant of the difference between what happened during the time of the previous Government and what happens now. Very often there is a reluctance to answer questions during question time.

When I chaired the Estimates Committees during the eight years of the coalition Government, supplementary information came in reams - in fact, there was probably miles too much of it - but the amount of supplementary information I have seen this year has been minimal in paper content. I know we are trying to save trees and the rest of it, but we would really like answers to the questions. It is no good a minister saying that the answer will not be provided by way of supplementary information, and then asking for the question to be put on notice, because very often we will not get an answer to that question. That is not on. The Opposition must ensure that the Executive is kept accountable, and the only way that can be done is by asking questions in this House and at Estimates Committees. We will accept nothing less than that, and this Parliament should accept nothing less than that. This Parliament has the obligation to ensure that any member can ask a question, and that member deserves an answer. It is not good enough for a minister to say that it would take too many staff hours to find the information, or that this information is spread across the portfolio, and therefore the minister is not prepared to answer. We have had responses like that. Members on the government back bench do not get such a response, because they very rarely ask questions on notice; such questions are normally asked by the Opposition. Government members are not aware of the frustration on this side of the House that results from not getting answers to questions on notice.

In 18 to 20 months time, those members of the present Government who make it back into office will have the same problem. Some of those who are here today will not make it back. My good friend the member for Joondalup went into hiding during an important debate. Talk about hypocrisy! He says in the newspaper that he does not support deregulation of trading hours, but when it comes to the vote in here, and the bells are ringing, he is conveniently on the telephone in the corridor. That is total hypocrisy as far as I am concerned, and he will pay for it, because we will tell the people in Joondalup where he was, and that he was not prepared to come in here and express the courage of his convictions. I have digressed to some extent, but not too many members are in the Chamber, and I am sure that there can be some indulgence, in the name of honesty and an open and accountable Government at budget estimates time.

In conclusion - those two favourite words my colleagues on the other side of the House always appreciate - it was a pretty good Estimates Committee this year. I will be arguing next year for an extension of time for some divisions and a reduced time for others. The overall time allocated is fine - I do not have a problem with that - but we must look closely and determine which divisions finished early. For tourism, for which I personally have

responsibility, an hour was not long enough. I was able to ask only about 10 per cent of the questions I wanted to ask.

Mrs D.J. Guise: That is probably because you had a lot of questions to ask.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I did not have that many. I purposely did not have reams of questions, because I knew that I had only an hour. There was no point in going to inordinate lengths to work out loads of question; I tried to gear the quantity to what I thought would take an hour. Members do that thinking they will be the only ones asking questions. Of course, they will not be. Colleagues will ask questions and Labor Party members will ask dorothy dixers. In all honesty, they did not ask quite so many this year, certainly not on tourism. Community development did not start off too well because the member for Mandurah was present and he is a naughty boy! He can behave quite badly. He can make out that he has a genuine question when he does not really have one. He just panders to the minister and tries to help the minister fend off the questions of the nasty Liberal and National Party members - members with genuine questions who want genuine answers. They do not ask stupid dorothy dixers. God forbid that I should ever play a part in that sort of game!

In conclusion, finally - the one word members opposite want to hear -

Several members interjected.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: That is the trouble. When members interject on me I cannot resist responding, because I am a very warm person. The Estimates Committees were quite good this year. However, we need to adjust some of the times. It was a great idea to trial the five off-budget agencies. The people of Western Australia deserve, through members of this Parliament, to have questions asked of the off-budget agencies. The people of Western Australia cannot normally ask such questions. The only way it can be done is before an Estimates Committee. In the main, the sessions were well chaired. Most members on both sides of the House cooperated well. Some members got a bit het up to start with but once they realised they had run out of dorothy dixers they let other members ask real questions.

Mr M.J. Birney: The member for Wanneroo was a bit nasty to me in front of some police officers.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I am sure the member will take it up with the member for Wanneroo at a later date.

**MR P.D. OMODEI** (Warren-Blackwood) [4.52 pm]: I will keep my comments brief. I join with other members in thanking the staff for their support during the deliberations of the Estimates Committees. Unlike previous speakers, I do not believe that the estimates hearings were fruitful. At times they bordered on high farce. In many cases, areas of ministers' portfolios were not explored at all. As shadow spokesman for emergency services, I was disappointed that no time was allowed for that portfolio. Something must be done about setting aside specific times for each portfolio. At a time when the State could be at risk from a terrorist attack no time was spent by the Estimates Committee debating emergency services and what actions the Government would take and what was in the budget. It is a reflection on the whole Parliament. The hearing went late on Thursday night at a time when I could well have been on my way home. We ran out of time and the emergency services portfolio was not debated at all. The committee also ran short of time with the Department of Agriculture and the Agriculture Protection Board. Many questions needed to be asked on behalf of concerned people across the State. The issues included dogs mauling sheep throughout the eastern wheatbelt, the Nullarbor and pastoral areas. Members were unable to get to the bottom of the issue, effectively scrutinise the budget, and make a plea to the responsible minister. The same problem occurred with regional development. There was limited time to discuss issues. At one stage, the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure quoted from a pamphlet in response to a dorothy dixer. It would have been simpler for the minister to give the pamphlet to the member.

The system of asking questions on a rotational basis lacks effectiveness and contrasts greatly with the way the Estimates Committee operates in the Legislative Council. In that House, government and opposition members are able to develop a line of questioning and obtain reasonable responses. I represent the shadow spokesman in the other House for the Disability Services Commission. During the estimates hearing I was allocated the ninth question. That was 25 minutes after the division had started. I am not reflecting on Mr Acting Speaker (Mr A.J. Dean), but I would have thought that if there was a policy to give Her Majesty's Opposition the ability to adopt a line of questioning and reach a conclusion before allowing other members to ask questions, the outcome of the estimates hearings would be more effective. Some members of the Government asked genuine questions. To that extent, I compliment them. Dorothy dixers are patently obvious. The problem goes back to the previous Government when members asked questions based on program statements in order to take up time. It is all too obvious and counterproductive. We are all members of this Parliament. Parliaments are designed for Her Majesty's Government and Opposition to discuss matters. We must develop cooperation and bipartisanship during the estimates hearings and make the maximum effort to understand what is contained in the budget.

It made me chuckle a little when I spoke to the Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. He offered a full briefing for shadow spokespeople and opposition members. He told the Director General of the Department of Agriculture to give members a full briefing. He did not mean the briefing in the budget papers or the one given to the minister. He was referring to the briefing used by the officers of that department. That speaks volumes. There is much in the budget that is not on the surface. There is much that needs to be delved into to get to the bottom of what is actually in the budget and how money is spent by each government department. I must compliment the Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and the director general for providing members with their own explanatory notes so members could see what was the priority efficiency dividend, where transfers have occurred between government departments, where losses were in full-time equivalent positions, for what reason, and so on. Although members were given that advice on the agriculture budget, it did not occur with any other division in which I was involved. When I was a minister I wanted the Opposition to ask as many questions as possible so that I could show I was across my portfolio. Alternatively, if I did not know about an issue, I would use supplementary information or ask that a question be put on notice. There is much that members can do with the estimates process to the benefit of the State and to ensure that information is made public through *Hansard*. It is a great shame that some members play petty, immature political games in such an important forum. I say that with due deference to what happened in the past and what happened this year. When I say that the budget estimates process was, at times, a waste of time and bordering on high farce, that is my view of what happened.

I implore the Government to make the process more open so that members can ask general questions and adopt a line of questioning to the minister and receive the information that is so important to their constituents. For example, Mr Acting Speaker (Mr A.J. Dean) - I think you might have been in the Chair when this happened - a group of people in wheelchairs were present in the gallery when Estimates Committee B dealt with the division on disability services. All they heard being asked were silly dorothy dix questions, because the real questions that were to be asked by Her Majesty's Opposition were limited because of the rotation of speakers. The Opposition and the Government each elected three members to ask questions, and a number of observing members also had the ability to take part in the questioning process. If the Government does not want a section to be scrutinised thoroughly, it can bring 10 or 12 members into the Chamber and then, if the questions are asked on a rotational basis, the opposition spokesman gets to ask only one question in every 10. That is not conducive to getting proper information on the record for the benefit of the State. I make that plea in good faith and in a bipartisan way and ask that next year, when these issues are debated, these matters are taken into consideration.

**MR J.C. KOBELKE** (Nollamara - Leader of the House) [5.02 pm]: The budget is an important event each year for government and the people of Western Australia. Therefore, it is appropriate that it have proper processes that are recognised in the standing and sessional orders of this Chamber and that members be given the opportunity to scrutinise the budget papers and to form views about the impact of the budget in an overall sense and in specific areas of expenditure. Therefore, it is an important process that is worthy of a debate in this form, which enables members to comment on the Estimates Committees and how they were run.

I was pleased to hear the member who looks after opposition business comment very favourably on the way the Estimates Committees were organised. I had the opportunity to be involved in only the committees covered by my portfolio, therefore, I cannot speak with any breadth of knowledge about other areas. However, the general feedback is that they ran very effectively and that members had the opportunity to ask wide-ranging questions and to provide the scrutiny that the budget requires. From all accounts, it was a successful estimates debate and when we move into the third reading there will be a further opportunity for members to comment on the budget through these two appropriation Bills.

I personally thank the Chairs of all the Estimates Committees. It is a fairly gruelling schedule for many of them and they handle it well. I thank all the members who committed themselves to particular timetables. I noticed on reading the timetables that some members put in far more time than others, which demonstrates a real commitment to the process and to Parliament. Obviously some members had other commitments as well as the committees. I thank the Whips who organised the committees. I cannot speak for the Opposition Whip but the Government Whip, the member for Girrawheen, played a very important role. I thank her for making sure that all the rosters were filled and the members were present at the committees to make sure there was a quorum and that they ran smoothly. I also thank all the staff who serviced the committees. Without their hard work behind the scenes we would not have had the effective Estimates Committees that we had. It was also interesting to note that we had the use of the other Chamber by aligning our sitting program with that of the Legislative Council. That gave us the extra space in which to hold Estimates Committee B, which has been a problem in the past with one of the committees having to use a smaller room. The member for Hillarys also alluded to the fact that the supplementary information came in on time and I thank all the ministers and their staff for that. A few years ago there was some concern that we would not be able to proceed with this debate or the third reading until all the answers were in, and they were not in the hands of members until after the debate had started. However,

this year those answers were in on time and available to members, which again indicates that the system is running well.

The member for Warren-Blackwood criticised the fact that the opportunity to ask questions was rotated among members. When I was in opposition I was aware of that happening, but it did not happen in any of the committees with which I was involved this year. From my brief discussion with other members, it appears that this did not happen as widely as perhaps the member for Warren-Blackwood suggested. It is always difficult to know when to cut off people. However, my understanding is that generally the committees are run on the basis that the member asking a question can ask subsequent questions to pursue a line of inquiry. That is often very important if a members wants to understand a particular area of the budget. If a number of members align their questions to the same area of the budget, it is often much more productive than flitting around all over the place. However, that will vary from committee to committee and from time to time. There is no wisdom as to how best the process should happen, but I agree with the member for Warren-Blackwood that it is more productive when members concentrate on one area for a while before moving to another, particularly if all the questions come from one member or a group of members who want to ask about a particular point in the budget. However, the other side to that is that all members have a right to ask questions. If one member or a group of members pursues one issue for too long, it may prevent other members from asking their questions on other parts of the budget. It is a difficult balancing act. The feedback to me has been that generally members got the opportunity to pursue multiple questions on one issue but, clearly, the member for Warren-Blackwood felt frustrated that he, at least in some instances, could not do that.

I also appreciate the positive feedback from members about being able to direct questions to the off-budget departments. This is a reform of the Gallop Government and it is the first time that the Legislative Assembly's Estimates Committees have had available officers from agencies that are normally not part of the budgetary process. That is a major step forward in terms of accountability. Time was limited in this area, and we will need to judge from year to year whether particular agencies need more time. The current sessional order allows for that, but it is a matter of judgment and sometimes we do not know until after the event whether too much or too little time was allocated to an agency. However, that is a matter of judgment. Let us hope that we get it right more often than not. It is good that we allowed that reform and it seems to have gone fairly well.

We are currently speaking to Estimates Committee A. The remarks I have made refer to both committees and, in closing, I again thank all the members who worked hard to make sure that the Estimates Committees functioned properly and, by all accounts, were very productive with their input and what members got out of them.

Question put and passed.

**MRS D.J. GUISE** (Wanneroo) [5.07 pm]: I move -

That the report of Estimates Committee B be adopted.

I will not keep the House for long because most of my comments are related to those made about Estimates Committee A. However, in the debate on Estimates Committee A, the member for Warren-Blackwood referred to questions being asked on a rotational basis. That was certainly not the practice that I followed; members had to earn the right to ask questions if they had questions about which they were genuine. We also allowed members to ask further questions. However, one committee agreed to work on a rotational basis. I came across that list and I know that it still allowed further questions. I have not analysed the debate that took place in Estimates Committee B over the full week. Therefore, I will take on board those comments from the member. It was certainly the intention of the Chairs that further questions would be allowed so that members could develop themes, regardless of what the committee had agreed upon. We will consider that matter again to ensure that procedure was followed by all committees, because we want consistency and a smooth changeover between the Chairs so that members know where they stand and do not get any nasty surprises.

I will not be able to provide the analysis that I usually provide about Estimates Committee B because I have not been able to do the breakdown of questions asked and answered. However, the breakdown of questions I gave for Estimates Committee A is probably fairly indicative of what took place in Estimates Committee B. Estimates Committee B had 51 requests for supplementary information and I have been advised that all that information has been provided to members.

I take the opportunity to thank the President and members of the Legislative Council for the use of their Chamber. It was a pleasant place to be in, particularly as it has airconditioning - cooling and heating. It gave us a bit more room than we had in a past year in the Legislative Assembly committee room in this place. We appreciate the use of their Chamber and thank them very much. Again I thank my fellow Chairs, who shared the burden of that task during the week, and did so very well, uncomplainingly, despite their other duties. I thank the staff who did a magnificent job in supporting us and I thank the members for their participation and cooperation.

**MR M. McGOWAN** (Rockingham - Parliamentary Secretary) [5.10 pm]: I will make a short contribution on the conduct of the Estimates Committees. I commence my remarks by congratulating the staff of the House, who have enormous obligations placed on them during this time of the parliamentary cycle. Both committees sat at the same time, but in different places, and an enormous amount of work was required of the Hansard staff. Hansard reporters, in particular, do a very good job on behalf of all members and they certainly make our speeches read better.

I congratulate the public servants who played a role in the parliamentary process by appearing before the committees on behalf of their agencies to explain their budget allocations. I particularly thank the agencies that appeared before the parliamentary Estimates Committees for the first time. In my experience of the estimates process, all those agencies did a very good job. It is a one-week event for members who attend the estimates hearings, but agencies spend a great deal of time preparing their budgets. It is an important event in the annual cycle for each government agency to prepare a budget and appear before the Estimates Committees. It is an opportunity for those agencies to show that they are on top of their activities and expenditure throughout the year.

There is one aspect of the estimates hearings that could be improved, which the member for Warren-Blackwood also referred to. Some agencies do not get a chance to have their say before the committee in some divisions of the budget papers, particularly agencies at the end of a minister's portfolio. The staff of those agencies sit at the back of the Chamber waiting sometimes up to half a day for an opportunity to appear before the committee, yet they do not have an opportunity to present to the committee the work that they have done throughout the year. We could perhaps engage in better time management of the practices of the Estimates Committees to ensure that every agency, no matter how small, obscure or limited in its budget, gets an opportunity to be in the sunshine and to have a say before the committees.

In Estimates Committee B, I spoke to a representative of one agency whom I have known for years. He told me that he had been coming to estimates hearings for five to six years and had never appeared before a committee, although he and his staff are always prepared and ready to be heard. His agency is always at the end of the relevant minister's portfolio. He sits at the back of the Chamber and, when it gets to the end of the time allotted to that portfolio, the bell rings and it is the end of consideration of that portfolio. The officers of that agency have never had a chance to appear before the Estimates Committees. No matter how small an agency is, it should be given at least 15 minutes to appear before the committee.

I think the member for Warren-Blackwood mentioned the portfolio of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services and a range of other agencies. The Police Service, of course, is an enormous agency that requires a great deal of scrutiny, which perhaps results in other agencies not getting a go and having their say, as they should. Every agency should have a minimum allotted time before the committee of 10 to 15 minutes.

A couple of members criticised the working of the committees; in particular, they had a go during the committees about the behaviour of government members. I have been coming to these committees for seven years and I have noted, particularly in the past couple of years, that opposition members get far more opportunities than government members do to ask questions. I attended the division on health in this Chamber and noted that the Opposition spokesperson on health, the member for Murdoch, asked by far the bulk of the questions before the committee, so much so that on occasions he asked 10 to 15 questions supplementary to his original question. In other words, he asked 10 to 15 questions before a government member asked a question. I noted that at that stage it was common practice for government members to ask one question and the Opposition to ask another 10 to 15 questions. Criticism by opposition members of the committee's operations showed a distinct lack of grace and appreciation of the amount of time and consideration given to them in that committee by government members.

I heard the member for Warren-Blackwood criticise the committee. Although I like the member for Warren-Blackwood, he has become particularly cantankerous and rude in this Parliament. He was particularly rude in Estimates Committee B, during which he incessantly attacked the Minister for Disability Services. The audience in that committee could not have missed his rudeness and offensiveness. In fact, he, other opposition members, the Independents and National Party members asked the vast bulk of the questions. As the member for Wanneroo said, the ratio of opposition to government questions was four or five to one, despite the fact that opposition members had not even read the budget papers prior to the commencement of the Estimates Committees. The budget papers were a revelation to them when they opened them to ask a question of an agency.

It is very hard for me to accept opposition members' criticism of the operation of the committees when I know that they had much more opportunity to ask questions than government members had, and when they had received a great deal of consideration from government members who acknowledged the Opposition's need to ask questions. The criticism from opposition members of the committees indicates a lack of appreciation of the

Ms Dianne Guise; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Paul Omodei; Mr John Kobelke; Mr Mark McGowan

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time and consideration given to them by government members, compared with the way in which the Liberal Party operated these Estimates Committees when it was in government.

Question put and passed.