

*(WHEN SPEAKER CALLS FOR PAPERS)*

MADAM SPEAKER, I TABLE THE REPORTS OF THE ESTIMATES COMMITTEE AND THE GOVERNMENT OWNED CORPORATIONS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE.

MADAM SPEAKER, I MOVE – THAT THE REPORTS BE PRINTED.

(when motion agreed to)

Madam Speaker I am pleased to table the reports of the Estimates Committee and the Government Owned Corporations Scrutiny Committee on their consideration of the Estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the schedule to the Appropriation Bill 2013-14.

These are the final reports of the 2013 Estimates Committee and Government Owned Corporations Scrutiny Committee. Each report outlines the key areas of interest or concern reflected in the lines of questioning that became evident as the hearings progressed.

The questions taken on notice will be tabled with the Speaker on 12 July. Answers to questions on notice must be with the Committee Secretariat by 11 July. I note that these deadlines are those set by the Assembly. I understand that Government agencies are working to a

tighter deadline and answers will go on the database on the Assembly's website as they are received.

Madam Speaker, I turn now to the process of the Estimates Committee public hearings for 2013. This year saw a number of changes to the Estimates process. Written questions were submitted beforehand to be answered at the hearings. The number of hours of the hearings was not limited by the Assembly. The number of participating members was reduced from seven to six. Also, Ministers chose to limit the number of officials to support them in giving evidence with a view to answering more questions themselves.

I will briefly reflect on how each of these changes operated and highlight issues for future consideration.

In establishing the Committee, the Assembly allowed for written notice to be provided for questions which were to be answered during the hearings. A total of 38 Whole of Government questions were received, with a further 31 questions relating to specific Ministerial portfolio areas. This process did not limit the questions that could be

asked without notice but enabled targeted preparation of answers.

There was a view in the Committee that it was important that these questions be answered orally during the hearings, and at most hearings the Minister read through their answers. While this increased the level of scrutiny of the issues raised in those questions and allowed quite broad questioning, it did so at a significant cost to the Committee's time.

For future committees, further consideration will need to be given to how best to manage the answering of written questions to maximise the improved scrutiny they provide in a more efficient manner.

In recent years, the Estimates hearings were limited to a total of 60 hours, with the Treasurer and Chief Minister limited to eight hours and other Ministers limited to seven hours. This year, the Assembly did not set any time limits. The Estimates Committee sat for 70 hours and the Government Owned Corporations Committee sat for three and a half hours. The Treasurer was

questioned for a total of 17 hours and the Chief Minister for 20 hours.

While the hours were not limited, there were only six days set for the hearings. It was left to the Opposition and Independent Member to manage their questions so that they had ample opportunity to question any area of the Budget that they wished to examine. Unfortunately, time management skills were in short supply and the hearings went past 1 am on the first Wednesday morning and 2 am on the first Thursday, by which time only the Chief Minister and Government Committee Members remained to continue questioning. This was clearly intolerable, so on 20 June the Committee agreed to set a closing time of 11 pm for the remaining evening hearings.

The assumption that not limiting the Opposition in the time it had to ask questions would assist them proved wrong. The scheduling of hearings is therefore another issue that will require further consideration before the next Estimates hearings.

The reduction of participating members from seven to six had small but notable positive and negative impacts. On the positive side, it meant that Members at the table had more room to keep their papers over the many hours of sittings. On the negative side, the reduced number of Opposition Members meant that the Government and Independent Members frequently bore the burden of maintaining a quorum. Given that Estimates provides the Opposition with the opportunity to ask Government questions, I note that it was a significant gesture of goodwill for the Government Members to maintain the quorum during the five days of Estimates hearings whenever no Opposition Members of the Committee were attending.

Unfortunately, when one Government Member could not attend the Government Owned Corporation hearing due to health reasons, the Power and Water hearings had to be suspended until the Opposition could find an Opposition Member of the Committee to attend the hearing. This reduced the time available to question Power and Water.

Much was said before the hearings about reduced access to officials that was alleged to occur. I note that where possible all officials requested by the Opposition attended the hearings. I also note that even though there were far fewer officials attending hearings to support Ministers and more time to ask questions, there were fewer questions taken on notice than in recent years.

Madam Speaker, there were 119 questions taken on notice this year, a decrease of 23 questions on last year. Today at the close of hearings 20 per cent of questions had been answered.

With another first for this year, people were able to follow the progress of the 2013 Estimates hearings on Twitter. With the flexible schedule the committee followed, the twitter service enabled people to see where the committee was up to at any time.

Even though the number of hours was not limited by the Assembly, the Committee did not examine the following agencies and portfolios:

- Land Resource Management

- Territory Wildlife Parks
- Arts and Museums
- Alice Springs Transformation Plan

Madam Speaker, this is the Legislative Assembly's 12th year of Estimates Committee hearings. The Assembly continues to learn from its experience and, over the years, it has improved its Estimates process greatly. While we are still refining the process, overall the hearings worked very effectively and provided the Opposition and Independent Member with ample opportunity to question any areas of Government they chose.

With the Government Owned Corporations Committee, in contrast to the previous year, neither the Share Holder Minister nor the Essential Services Minister accompanied the Deputy Chairman and Managing Director at the hearing earlier today. However, this did not impact on the robust and productive questioning and answering.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all Members who participated in the 2013 Estimates process. I would particularly like to thank the Ministers and Madam Speaker for their co-operation throughout the process. Special mention in this regard should go to the Chief Minister who not only outlasted the Opposition Members in being available for question throughout the night but, to ensure complete accountability, made an unscheduled return to the Committee a few hours later to again allow questioning of areas not yet covered.

I would also like to thank the Members of the Public Accounts Committee, who form the core membership of the Estimates Committee, for the manner in which these public hearings have been conducted.

Thank you also to the staff of the Legislative Assembly for their work to ensure the whole process ran smoothly. Special mention must be made to Hansard, Building and Technical Services, Chamber Support Services and Committee staff.



Madam Speaker, I wish to place on the record my sincere appreciation to the staff of all agencies involved in the Estimates process over the six days. The process could not be effective without their hard work and dedication.

Madam Speaker, I commend the reports of the 2013 Estimates Committee and Government Owned Corporations Scrutiny Committee to the House.

Madam Speaker, I move that the report be noted.

**END**