

APPROPRIATION (RECURRENT 2019–20) BILL 2019
APPROPRIATION (CAPITAL 2019–20) BILL 2019

Estimates Committees A and B Reports and Minutes — Presentation

MS J.M. FREEMAN (Mirrabooka) [4.22 pm]: I rise on behalf of the Deputy Speaker to present to the Legislative Assembly the reports and minutes of Estimates Committees A and B.

[See papers 2482 and 2483.]

Estimates Committee A Report — Adoption

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms S.E. Winton): The question is —

That the report of Estimates Committee A be adopted.

MS J.M. FREEMAN (Mirrabooka) [4.22 pm]: I have been given an hour to speak on this—goodness! How lovely is that? I am not sure I will speak for that length of time. The Legislative Assembly estimates committees were held from Tuesday, 21 May, to Thursday, 23 May, as we all know. Both the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council chambers were utilised on each of the three days, and I thank the Parliament for that. Committees A and B sat between 9.00 am and 10.00 pm for a combined total of 66 hours. For 66 hours, members would think that I could manage a 60-minute speech, but I will not put us through that!

I thank the Deputy Speaker, the member for Maylands, who once again successfully oversaw the estimates process in its entirety. The member for Maylands would normally stand to speak on this, but unfortunately she is not in Parliament today. I know that she worked very hard to ensure that the process ran smoothly, that all of the Chairs were well briefed, and that when there were any crises, such as when one or two of the Chairs were ill, people were quickly able to respond. I give my particular thanks to the member for Joondalup for sitting in the chair for me when I was running late for the start of one of the committees because I mistakenly got caught in traffic on the freeway first thing in the morning. I thank people for their flexibility and their capability.

I want to thank the Whips. They did a sterling job ensuring that all members were able to be in the chambers and asking very comprehensive questions. In fact, a total of 1 891 questions were asked in both committees. In committee A, 934 questions were asked, of which 95 per cent came from the opposition. In committee B, 957 questions were asked, of which 97.6 per cent came from the opposition.

I thank government members who were very patient in allowing the opposition to use the estimates committees as an opportunity to scrutinise the budget. It is an interesting situation to be in after having been in opposition for many years and being involved in that scrutiny. I have regard to the fact that we as a government were very patient in ensuring that the opposition was given every opportunity to ask questions. When I first came into this place, I remember that it was not quite as congenial. Opposition members quite often had to put forcefully that estimates was for the opposition, and that the government should not be asking as many questions. Since 2013 there has been an understanding in this house about the importance for the opposition to be given an opportunity to ask good, probing questions. It is obviously an analysis for others to make as to whether those questions were probing.

A total of 83 supplementary questions were recorded—45 in committee A and 38 in committee B. I note that a number of ministers have stood up in this house and put in supplementary answers after the deadline. That is because answers to supplementary questions were due on Friday, 31 May. For committee A, 47 per cent of those answers were provided on time, and 97 per cent were provided on time for committee B. It has to be understood that although ministers want to meet expectations, sometimes meeting that deadline of Friday, 31 May, was quite difficult, so there should be no criticism of them for standing up today and providing those answers. It is important for both sides to understand that that tight deadline is quite difficult to meet, and that there might be other ways of ensuring that supplementary information is provided.

I would like to acknowledge the combined effort of all Legislative Assembly staff and members who facilitated an efficient operation of the committees. In particular, I thank Matthew Bates, Clerk Assistant (Procedure), for the great work he does in ensuring that the week runs very smoothly. In total, 14 clerks and seven Acting Speakers assisted across the two chambers. I make special mention of the two principal clerks, Rachel Wells and Lachlan Gregory, who oversaw each committee. I also acknowledge the Department of the Premier and Cabinet for their invaluable assistance with drafting the estimates timetable and coordinating the attendance of ministers and advisers. That is no easy task.

Just before I finish, I have not written it into this speech, but the Chairs were going to keep a tally on which minister could bring in the most advisers. I understand it was not recorded anywhere, but I certainly kept a tally. From face value, I think the Minister for Health won on the number of advisers who came into the room, understandably, given the percentage of the budget that health takes. It seems to me that that is a great way of ensuring that the

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opposition's questions can be answered. I will also say that as a Chair, sometimes members need to be cautious about how they frame questions and then use snippets of those questions to promote themselves in a manner that seems less than complimentary to all of us in this place. In that week we deal with public servants, and when we do such things, we undermine the faith of those public servants in us, and that is not a good thing. I thank all members for their participation and cooperation during a long and at times tiring week. I commend the reports to the house.

MR D.R. MICHAEL (Balcatta) [4.31 pm]: It is tradition that a speech is made to talk about some of the happenings during estimates week. I do not know when it was started—possibly under the former opposition Whip, the member for Mandurah. I will get into it a little later, but to be up-front, I say that there will not be too much malice in anything I say. Firstly, the estimates committee met on the Thursday the week prior to the estimates hearings, when we approved the timetable. The Chairs, members, opposition Whip, as well the Leader of the House and I attended in the Clerk's office. The manager of opposition business, who was meant to be there, gave his approval by phone; I do not know how that complies with standing orders, but we winged it on the day. I timed the meeting this year, and it went for 68 seconds. Unlike every other committee that I hear of in this place—I am not on a committee, but I hear of it—there was no catering. There was not one Milk Arrowroot or sandwich, but in 68 seconds we approved the timetable.

Estimates is important. As I have always said, it is about finding out what the government departments are up to. Sometimes getting that information is difficult. I remember once, when I was involved in estimates in the other place while Labor was in opposition—the shadow minister and minister shall remain nameless—representatives from the Barnett government's ministerial office came to the opposition and said, "We cannot get an answer out of a certain government trading enterprise. Do you mind asking them some questions, please?" We all had a bit of a laugh, asked those questions and hopefully helped the government get some information out of the GTE. One of the key performance indicators from estimates is getting media attention. I did not see a lot of media this year from the, I think, 1 800 questions, but one of the biggest stories was to do with Horizon Power. Unfortunately for the opposition, it was probably to its detriment—a gotcha moment for the government.

Before I get on to the some of the highlights and maybe lowlights, I want to thank a few people. Firstly, I want to thank Rebecca Neilson and her team at the Department of the Premier and Cabinet; Whip assistant Nathan Batskos for the long hours; the Deputy Speaker and the Chairs; the Department of the Legislative Assembly, including all chamber staff and clerks; AV down below; Hansard; catering; cleaning; maintenance; security; and the police for having to stay around for very long days from 9.00 am to 10.00 pm. I also want to thank the public servants, especially those who stayed here, did not get a guernsey and were told that their division had been passed; the ministerial staff for their hard work to prepare ministers; and, I should say, given I did it for eight and a half years in both this place and the other place for annual report estimates, the opposition staff for the long hours comparing budgets, dusting off old budgets and looking at numbers, numbers and more numbers, and for researching the questions for their shadow ministers. I thank the member for Vasse as the opposition Whip. I saw the member for Vasse a few times during the week, and given we were both here for most of the estimates period, at times we looked like zombies. I got a bit tired on a few afternoons. One afternoon I was about to doze off reading *Hansard* from the day before, looking for some material for this speech. I thought *Hey Hey It's Saturday* had started up on television, and Elliot Goblet the comedian was there, but it was just the member for Roe. If members do not know what I am talking about, I ask them to look on YouTube for Elliot Goblet; there are some similarities there.

Besides the regular flashpoints, such as the member for North West Central always being grumpy with the Minister for Fisheries and the member for Darling Range always being grumpy, well, with everyone, here are some highlights and lowlights. Firstly, it is always fun to watch the Minister for Culture and the Arts toy with the member for Carine. I reckon during estimates the member for Carine's word of the week must have been "disgrace", because, with his typical disproportionate nastiness, Safer Venues WA was a "tokenistic disgrace", and later he had to withdraw saying, "This is a disgrace" as the minister answered a question on Art on the Move. I think the member for Carine has some unresolved tension with these little arts programs. The Minister for Culture and the Arts suggested the member for Perth could get a gig as a lift attendant on the series *The Heights*, which is not something I watch. The member for Moore got a bit testy with the Chair, the member for Geraldton, his former coalition colleague, or whatever is going on with those guys at the moment, saying —

After one hour and 10 minutes of sitting here, it is good to get to ask a question.

Maybe a little more cooperation is needed between the Liberal and National Parties. The member for Warren-Blackwood caused a little confusion by inflecting the end of a statement, indicating that it was a question to the Premier. The Chair, the Deputy Speaker, asked the Premier if he wished to respond to the inflection, which was an interesting part of estimates. The members for Perth and Morley have a deep interest in the regional trainee grant program, and that is why both of them asked a near identical question. I am not

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sure how that unlikely coincidence could have happened, but thankfully the Premier was onto it, stating, “I think we have done that.” There was an odd exchange between the Premier and the member for Dawesville about airplanes and jets, the age of aircraft in the United States Air Force, B-52s possibly being the next government jet, and the member for Dawesville’s knowledge of the age of Air Force One. Someone has been bingeing *The West Wing* a little too much on Stan, I think. Speaking of the member for Dawesville, surprisingly we saw what could be his first movement towards the slippery slope of republicanism, with his brutal attack on the Queen of England’s representative in Western Australia. Member for Dawesville, membership forms can be found at republic.org.au. Join us!

I move on to the WA Police division. I have to report that there must have been a mix-up with a printer in the Legislative Assembly. As a committee member, along with the members for Mount Lawley and Swan Hills, we were all ready to go to ask some very important questions of our minister, but the opposition must have accidentally got our paperwork as our questions were asked one after the other by the members for Kalgoorlie and North West Central, and we thank them for that. Late on Tuesday night, the normally unflappable member for Hillarys got a little testy, firstly with the minister calling him the “minister for Hillary”, and, secondly, the member for Mount Lawley doing his job and asking about policing in the electorate of Mount Lawley. The member for Southern River, as one of the hardworking Chairs, gets a special mention this year for causing panic with the Legislative Assembly staff for not once, but twice, attending the wrong chamber on both Tuesday and Wednesday. During the Mental Health Commission division, there was great cooperation between the minister and shadow minister, with the member for Churchlands stating —

... I am more interested in maybe not having a dorothy dixer, so that we can get to the health section sooner.

With the minister replying straight out of *Bill and Ted’s Excellent Adventure* —

Yes, I am hip; that is cool.

Later, during the Department of Health division, we heard the member for Darling Range invite the minister to stop and say hello the next time he was in her electorate, then the member for North West Central suggested that a lot of members on the type 2 diabetes inquiry “have lost weight”. During the Treasury division, the Leader of the Opposition and the Treasurer had an interesting exchange about royalties for regions. The Leader of the Opposition said —

I just cannot understand why you are evading this question. It is quite simple.

Mr B.S. WYATT: I am not evading it. I have not gone to work it out, but I am sure you can work it out.

Dr M.D. NAHAN: No, no, no.

With quite an appropriate response from the Treasurer: “Yes, yes, yes.”

The Leader of the Opposition later asked a question about the whereabouts of the Ellenbrook line in the budget. There was a swift interjection from the member for Swan Hills, who offered to assist the Treasurer. He did not need assistance and answered the question himself.

During the Minister for Housing’s turn in the hot seat, he was questioned by the member for Churchlands about the public availability of the international education action plan and strategy, to which he replied, “It’s on the web. Look it up.”

There was some confusion during the Tourism division when the Minister for Tourism and the shadow Minister for Tourism argued about what was more stupid—the question asked or the answer provided. The exchange was cut short by the member for Carine, who confused the Chair, the member for Moore, by sitting in the wrong seat. While I am talking about stupid questions, the member for Roe asked the minister whether he agreed that the government had been in office for over two years. The question was not answered because it did not relate to a page or line item!

In the Disability Services division, the parliamentary secretary to the minister in the other place did a very good job; indeed, the Chair, the member for Wanneroo—who is now Acting Speaker—was happy to promote him and call him minister. However, the promotion was soon withdrawn because the Chair had to remind the parliamentary secretary that Hansard was recording his words as he joshed with the member for Nedlands that a new expensive jet, or personal jet skis, would be needed for department staff to access the Abrolhos Islands. I noted with interest—the Minister for Sport and Recreation is in the chamber—that a wager was had between the member for South Perth and the Minister for Sport and Recreation on the amount of community sporting and recreation facilities funding there was under former Minister Tuck Waldron. I have some recollection about this, and I am confident, Minister for Sport and Recreation, that you owe the member for South Perth a lotto ticket!

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Point of Order

Mr M.P. MURRAY: The research has not been up to scratch and I appeal that decision.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms S.E. Winton): That is not a point of order!

Debate Resumed

Mr D.R. MICHAEL: A bipartisan unity ticket saw the Minister for Child Protection and several opposition members declare their support for our local Men's Shed's peak body—"We have had it with the mob over east."

Before the Western Australian Industrial Relations Commission division, the Minister for Industrial Relations and the member for Hillarys conspired in what can only be described as an unruly and appalling display as the minister yelled, "Go the Pies" to which the member responded, "Yes, definitely—go the Pies!" As a Dockers supporter, all I will say is that I am glad that the AFL still has not got its score reviews right!

Also on the sporting theme, in addition to having to deal with the predictable unpleasantness of the member for Darling Range, the Minister for Transport; Planning also had to defend the Premier when the member for North West Central laid the blame for Perth Glory's grand final loss with the Premier because he wore their colours during question time, describing it as a bad omen. I also note that the member for Kalgoorlie asked a question of the Minister for Sport and Recreation about funding for the redevelopment of the Western Australian Cricket Association. The member for Girrawheen, who was in the chair, suggested that all they needed was a bit of sandpaper. On that note, I pass on my best wishes to the Australian World Cup side in England.

Over in Corrective Services, after a question on recruiting new staff, the minister suggested that the member for Dawesville could apply in two years' time if he loses his seat. The Chair, the member for Girrawheen, told the minister that he had a fantasy about seeing the member for Dawesville in uniform. The mind boggles.

The member for Dawesville—I will be a bit controversial here—asked about the spiffing new Parliament website and the amount of money that was spent on it. Despite liking the Freo colour scheme, I find it a bit difficult to find information on it. With some indulgence, I plead with the powers that be that before they fix and reskin POWAnet, they look at Lotus Notes—the back-end database software that was developed 30 years ago—and retire it for a more modern database solution.

Finally, the Leader of the Opposition raised the issue of the week—muffin-gate—when he spoke about the number of children in his electorate who come to Parliament and the vigorous complaints he has received about the shift from muffins to orange juice and how this issue is almost at "crisis point"! Government members echoed his concern. The Leader of the Opposition said that he would bring a petition on this issue to Parliament. He has my full support, as well as that of many members with whom I speak, to have this decision reversed.

Again, I thank all those who contributed to estimates week. Given some of the issues that were aired during this process—or the lack thereof—I congratulate the Treasurer and his ministry on their outstanding 2019–20 budget.

MR Z.R.F. KIRKUP (Dawesville) [4.44 pm]: I rise on behalf of the opposition. I am not the opposition's lead speaker, not that that is of any point. Our Whip, who is the lead speaker, is out of the chamber at the moment. I enjoy a good estimates contribution. It is one of the few speeches that matter only to the members who are in the chamber and to those who helped make the legislative process go along, including the parliamentary staff who, of course, the opposition thanks. As a former staffer, the member for Balcatta noted the hard work of government and opposition staffers to help get the budget passed.

One of the things that have always interested me is the number of dorothy dixers or government-generated questions asked during estimates. I note that the member for Mirrabooka said that the percentage of dorothy dixers during Estimates A and B was in the high 90s. I made a tally of those questions and of the ministers who took dorothy dixers and those who did not. Kudos in particular to the Treasurer and the Minister for Housing who took no dorothy dixers or government questions whatsoever. That is of particular note given that the Treasurer had to set aside quite a significant period for the estimates. Conversely, on my count the Premier took 10, which is not an insignificant amount. One of those questions was asked by both the members for Perth and Morley—it was asked twice—which I found remarkable.

Mr D.A. Templeman: They didn't like the first answer!

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: They did not like the first answer and had to ask it again. It was almost exactly the same.

Mr D.R. Michael: An estimates miracle.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Estimates miracle, indeed! I suppose some staffers in the Premier's office were working very hard to make sure that they were both educated on the important parts of the budget that they needed to highlight.

I take some issue with government members who ask questions that are so obviously outside the realm. As the shadow Minister for Corrective Services, I was in estimates with the Minister for Emergency Services; Corrective Services.

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The member for Bicton asked questions about Bidyadanga and Broome. I appreciate that there is interest in issues up there, but in future I hope that members localise their questions so that they can use the information they receive in their ongoing correspondence with their community. I am not sure that many voters in Bicton are interested in what is happening in Broome, for example. I am sure that some work could be done there.

I was interested in Minister Logan's conduct, generally speaking. One of the questions I asked him referred to a quote from the budget papers, which he refuted. I had to put it to him that he was disagreeing with something in the budget papers. It was late in the night for both the minister and I. It seems that Minister Logan's divisions are particularly late on a Thursday night just in case anything blows up under the minister's purview. If it does, it will not get too much media because the next day is Friday and it is all over and done with. Minister Logan disagreeing with the budget papers was of interest to me.

From our side, the member for Carine deserves a dishonourable mention for being the only member who was called during estimates. That is one of the few times during my observation of estimates that a member has been called. He was called by the current Acting Speaker (Ms S.E. Winton), who was Chair at the time, and asked to withdraw.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: I don't think that was the only one from what I heard.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Member for Midland, there we go! Certainly, from my observations, the member for Carine deserves a dishonourable mention.

I note the work of the two Chairs whom I found of great use—namely, the member for Girrawheen and the member for Mirrabooka. Of course, I note the member for Wanneroo, but the other two members were particularly steadfast in their approach towards members' conduct during estimates. I note the Whips' work and thank the member for Vasse and the member for Balcatta on behalf of those who are not Whips. Finally, I note the member for Balcatta's offer to join the Republican movement. I note to the house that I have been observing this place in earnest since 2008 when the former Liberal government got in.

Mr D.A. Templeman: When you were in year 7?

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: I was not in school shorts then—but I was close!

This is the first time in more than a decade that the Governor's Establishment was called in. Often times the Governor's Establishment advisers have to sit at the back of estimates and go through the rigmarole of agencies that are called in but have their budgets passed without question.

Mr D.R. Michael: A Christmas miracle!

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Another Christmas miracle! They were brought in and thoroughly inquired upon by the opposition.

I commend all opposition members for their hard work and the late nights and, indeed, our friends in the Nationals WA for holding this government to account. With that, I will let the member for Vasse continue the opposition's remarks.

MS L. METTAM (Vasse) [4.49 pm]: I would also like to make a contribution to this debate, and I start by thanking the Clerks, the Legislative Assembly, catering, building management and Parliamentary Services staff, and the Department of the Premier and Cabinet for putting together the timetable. I also thank the staff in the opposition offices that have supported the shadow ministers and electorate staff who have all contributed in some way towards the estimates schedule and the questions that were prepared for what is a really important part of the parliamentary process, particularly from the opposition's point of view. I thank the Leader of the House and the speakers for their diligent work in ensuring that the estimates process was undertaken in a fair manner and I acknowledge the work of the member for Balcatta as the government Whip, with whom I have been able to work very well.

The estimate hearings evenings and days are certainly very long and there is a great volume of work. As I stated, the estimates process is particularly important for the opposition. It is an opportunity for us to ask some questions on the budget and provide some scrutiny of the detail the budget papers provide. As opposition members, and with our Nationals WA colleagues, we had the opportunity to ask these questions on behalf of not only the industries that we represent in our shadow portfolios or the regions that we represent, but also, most broadly, the people of Western Australia.

It is fair to say that there is a great deal of variability between ministers in their cooperation during the estimates process. The member for Dawesville pointed out some of the ministers that did not allow for dorothy dixer questions from government members. This is a really important process. It is also a very challenging time with the number of questions we can ask, and it is always appreciated when the government ministers are up-front and able to answer those questions in a very succinct way. The filibustering that happens—it is only a number of ministers, not all of them—undermines the process, which is in many other respects such a good one.

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I point to the frustration that my colleagues and I felt on Thursday evening with the Minister for Fisheries and particularly during that process. We saw a minister who was refusing to answer questions. I asked that particular questions be provided at least in supplementary information. The minister refused that request and asked me to put the question on notice instead to see how I would do through that procedure. I thought it was relatively insulting regarding what in many other respects has been such a respected convention of Parliament.

The member for Balcatta pointed to an interchange that I had with the Minister for Tourism when it was questioned whether the question or the answer was more stupid. I refer to that section of estimates when I referred to the tourism case management framework, which had been recently introduced. In summing up a rather lengthy exchange between me and the Minister for Tourism, I asked —

To clarify: no funding has been committed, the minister does not take any responsibility for the projects, and no reasonable time frame is attached to this framework.

The Minister for Tourism responded —

That is just about the stupidest thing the member has said this morning.

To which I responded —

I am summing up a pretty stupid answer.

I think members of this place can make their own —

Mr A. Krsticevic: It is very arrogant.

Ms L. METTAM: It is.

Mr D.R. Michael: Then the member for Carine sat in the wrong seat.

Ms L. METTAM: I missed out that part, but I think many of us could make our own judgement on what was more stupid in the words of the Minister for Tourism and me.

A lot of hard work went into the estimates process, and as opposition Whip, I thank each and every person—the agencies, the staff and the parliamentary staff and the staff who support the members of this place for their contributions to this process.

MR K.M. O'DONNELL (Kalgoorlie) [4.55 pm]: Greetings, Madam Acting Speaker. I want to speak very, very briefly. That was my third budget estimates —

[Interruption.]

Mr B.S. Wyatt: Sorry, member.

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: No problem.

I compare that with when I was on the Kalgoorlie council when we used to be given A3 sheets of paper with everything on it. There would be about four or five. We would start to go through the list and if anyone objected to something, we would put a line through it, and then work out what we had left over. I have enjoyed the budget estimates hearings over the last three years. However, I disagree with one thing, and it might not change while we are not in government, but it is one thing I will push for when we are in government.

Mr A. Krsticevic: March 2021.

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: That sounds a very good year. We should have the three members of government sitting in the chamber, but they should not ask any dorothy dixers.

Dr A.D. Buti: Member for Kalgoorlie, I do not disagree, not at all, but during your time in office, your members used to ask more questions—many more questions.

Several members interjected.

Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup: That is not true.

Dr A.D. Buti: It is true. You were not here, member for Dawesville. I was here. Every year I used to be up against Liza Harvey representing the Minister for Education and Training, and the amount of dorothys that she took from her side was incredible.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members! Let us listen to the wise words of the member for Kalgoorlie.

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: If we were in the outside world and not in Parliament here —

An opposition member interjected.

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Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: Excuse me, I was talking. I would say that—"Excuse me, I am talking." I agree. That is why I say that should I be in Parliament when we are in government, I will advocate that the three government members that sit in the chamber do not ask dorothy dixers. Do members know what I mean?

Dr A.D. Buti: But all our ministers did not take more dorotheas than your ministers took.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: All right! Children!

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: I was in three estimates hearings divisions—those of the Treasurer, the Minister for Police and the Minister for Sport and Recreation. In two of those, no dorothy dixers were asked. The Chair tried to get the Labor members to ask a question. She was trying to get them to ask a question but they did not want to ask one. But that is the only thing that I think is detrimental because government backbenchers have access to ministers at all time and —

Ms J.J. Shaw: Sometimes we have to get evidence on the record for committee inquiries and that sort of thing.

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: I can hear that, yes, and understand that, but I dare say that that could possibly come out in another way.

Ms J.J. Shaw: It depends on your time line. Sometimes we are working to time lines and we do not have a hearing scheduled, so just a couple of quick questions —

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: I take it on board, but I will try when we are in government to change it.

Question put and passed.

Estimates Committee B Report — Adoption

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms S.E. Winton): The question is —

That the report of Estimates Committee B be adopted.

Question put and passed.