

Division 6: Western Australian Electoral Commission, \$13 542 000 —

Ms M.M. Quirk, Chair.

Mr J.R. Quigley, Minister for Electoral Affairs.

Mr R. Kennedy, Electoral Commissioner.

Mr G. Meyers, Acting Deputy Electoral Commissioner.

Ms M. Buchanan, Principal Policy Adviser.

Mr J. Lee, Principal Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: The estimates committees will be reported by Hansard and the daily proof will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point. Consideration is restricted to items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must relate to a page number, item or amount related to the current division, and members should preface their questions with those details. Some divisions are the responsibility of more than one minister. Ministers shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 2 June 2023. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

I am afraid that members on this side already know my form. I am more than happy to give you further questions, but keep your initial questions short and to the point, with no hyperbole, rhetoric or preamble—just short sharp questions. The Minister for Electoral Affairs will no doubt do likewise. The first question goes to the member for Central Wheatbelt.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 94 of volume 1 of budget paper No 2 and the FTE staffing, which is a consistent 45 across that line item. I think we talked about this last year as well, but I thought I would have another go. Is the staffing sufficient for what the Western Australian Electoral Commission is likely to be undertaking at the next election with the redistribution and the significant changes that are happening in the Legislative Council?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Yes, the staffing levels are sufficient. The member mentioned the electoral redistribution. Electoral redistributions are undertaken by the Office of the Electoral Redistribution Commissioners, chaired by Hon Eric Heenan, KC. The amendments to the electoral system in the Legislative Council, apart from a little more complicated count, will not throw any more work onto the commission. In relation to the count, because this will be the first year that local government will have preferential voting, a program will be made available to local government that distributes the preferences. We are fully confident that we have the commission staff at an adequate level.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Because the minister raised it, local governments will be able to access that function. How many does he anticipate will use it?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I think there are 139 local government municipalities in Western Australia. It is done on a cost-recovery basis. So far, 121 have signed up with the commission to do the count on a cost-recovery basis. Many of the other 18, as the member will appreciate, are from the wheatbelt and places like that, so there are some small local government areas. I think there is one up north with about 100 electors, so the smaller ones will predominantly do their own count.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Following on from the minister's comments about cost recovery, what is the cost to those local governments for engaging the Electoral Commission?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: It is not broken down per vote, because, as the member knows, it is not mandatory to vote in local government elections. Of course, how much each local government is charged will vary across local governments, but overall, as a global figure, it is a sum of \$9 million.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is that \$9 million what will be recovered or what the local government sector will be charged for the commission to carry out the elections?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: That is what is anticipated, yes.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: How are those charges being determined?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: On a cost-recovery basis.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is it based on time taken or per vote? What is the model?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I will defer to the commissioner on that technical point.

Mr R. Kennedy: Essentially, the costs are what it costs us to operate those elections. It is everything from compiling, printing and posting voting packages to costs for the time of the commission's staff, the costs for what we call temporary election staff whom we bring in to assist mostly with the counts on the night and any other costs that arise in the course of delivering those elections, with the exception of advertising. We do not do the advertising; that is handled by the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries. That is simply because if we did it, we would have to pass the cost on to the local governments.

The CHAIR: Member for Thornlie, did you have a further question on this or is it a new topic?

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: It is a new topic. I refer to page 93 of budget paper No 2 and the third paragraph under "Significant Issues Impacting the Agency". I am very interested to know what the commission's efforts are towards ensuring that at state elections there are facilities for booth workers especially and for party volunteers? I have raised this over a number of years and been sorely disappointed. It is a problem that I do not think has been addressed at all in the past. Indeed, it is my observation over a number of elections that the commission has had no regard for the comfort and wellbeing of party and booth workers. I am not just referring to those very good people who are paid by the WA Electoral Commission; I am referring to those wonderful people who work for all parties—the Nationals, the Liberals and Labor. They are committed people who are involved in the democratic process. I want to know what basic facilities, such as toilets, might be provided for them. How can we ensure that those facilities will be available to them and what consideration is being given to shady spots and spots that are not dangerous in terms of traffic flow and busy car parks? I am really keen to hear what we are doing to ensure that future elections are conducted in a manner in which our volunteers are respected for the fine contributors they are.

[2.10 pm]

The CHAIR: Minister, we are all in fierce agreement about that. I was once told to go to the toilet behind a bush at a polling booth.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I do not want to in anyway be demeaning, but come election time, I might have to become Kenny the plumber! We are going to ensure we are putting forward a budget for the midyear review for enough funds to locate porta-potties—that is, portable toilets. It is very important. It is laughable here, but —

The CHAIR: No, it is not.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: It is not laughable, minister; it is deadly series. As someone who has been to many polling booths, I am in full agreement with the member. More needs to be done.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I am just saying that like Kenny the plumber, we are going to deliver porta-potties to the polling stations, because to have convenience at polling stations is critical. That is in a budget bid for midyear. We want to wait until the redistribution is known and we find out where these booths will be and how many we will need and then we will put in our budget bid. We take it most seriously, member.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: That is a very good question. To follow on from that, the pre-poll station for the North West Central by-election was incredibly busy and incredibly dangerous, for not just the booth workers, but also people who were trying to cast their vote. It was on a very busy section of road. In the car park, honestly, we saw that many near misses of people nearly being cleaned up by cars. Can we please have some consideration given to making sure that we do not select locations like that, particularly when we know there is a tendency for the Electoral Commission to go toward pre-poll for extended periods? It was chaotic in Geraldton—no, perhaps it was in Carnarvon; it might have been the one before, in 2021. Regardless of the year, which I will check, the location of some of these centres are inappropriate, particularly in regional communities.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: That is a comment and not a question.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: My question is: can the minister exert some influence over the Electoral Commission to make sure that we do not end up with similar situations?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I am sure there is, and I am sure that I will bring to bear what little influence I have. Following the redistribution, which we know will be sometime in October or November, we will know where the polling places will be located. Once we know where the polling places are located, it might be incumbent upon some members with local knowledge about what is happening, if they are concerned about the situation of a polling place—well, the member has indicated she will not be standing.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I will still be standing at a polling booth.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: If there is a concern about a situation, I invite the member to write to me and I will be straight on to the commission.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I am greatly heartened by what has been said. I have one final question on this. On election day the majority of polling booths are at government-owned primary schools. I would like some reassurance that

perhaps in the contractual arrangement between the Electoral Commission and the Department of Education, access could be given by schools to facilities on the school grounds rather than having the expense of paying for portaloos.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: The facilities on the school grounds?

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Schools have a lot of toilets, but in the past they have been locked off to booth workers. It is simply an oversight in the contract arrangement between the Electoral Commission and the Department of Education that means people cannot access those facilities. I would like to be reassured that in the next round of agreements between the commission and the Department of Education, there will be a line that says toilets will be opened up for booth workers.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: That will have to be directed to the Department of Education. We will speak to the Department of Education, but we cannot compel the department to open any toilet block.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: We sign the contract with the Department of Education.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: We cannot force it to open any toilet block. I notice that at the schools in Butler that are polling places, the toilet blocks are open, but the object of my endeavour is to ensure that conveniences are available at every polling station. I cannot give members any detail of contract details yet, but it is my remit to make sure that people can visit a convenience when they go to vote.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 93 in budget paper No 2, volume 1, and paragraph 4, which is below the paragraph we were just talking about. It states that there will be continued efforts to increase engagement with Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse electors as a priority. It notes the upcoming referendum on the Voice and the opportunity for the commission to harness this energy to, in particular, engage with the Aboriginal community in advance of the next election.

Specifically going back to the North West Central by-election and looking forward, what efforts are being made to try to increase the number of Aboriginal people on the electoral roll and how are they then encouraged and enabled to actually vote? I am talking about remote communities.

[2.20 pm]

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: This has been a particular concern of mine since taking office as Minister for Electoral Affairs. I thank the member for the question. There are two parts to her question, firstly, how to get them on the roll to ensure that as many as possible are on the roll, and, secondly, once on the roll, how we can encourage them to participate. The WA Electoral Commission is working with the Australian Electoral Commission to increase Indigenous enrolment and turnout. The Western Australian Electoral Commission and the Australian Electoral Commission have a joint role agreement. Under this arrangement, much of the enrolment of Western Australian electors is picked up by the commonwealth processes, which flow through to the state role. The state makes an annual financial contribution to the commonwealth as part of the joint role agreement in return for those services. In 2022–23, our contribution was \$1.77 million per annum.

Indigenous enrolment on the AEC's direct enrolment program is being expanded into remote areas. That is important. In the recent past, efforts have targeted electors in the Broome and Derby communities resulting in an increase in enrolment numbers. Electors in more remote areas were not covered originally due to concern about the reliability of mail deliveries, but those issues have now been resolved. Electors will be contacted via this program as the AEC is made aware of the apparent changes or gaps in information that they hold from commonwealth agencies such as Centrelink and the taxation office, because they swap datasets.

The Australian Electoral Commission has been granted additional funds for 2023 to try to get the enrolments up prior to the Voice referendum. These benefits will flow through to the state for the 2025 state general election. Recognising this effort, and not wishing to confuse the electors, the Western Australian Electoral Commission will engage in efforts in the lead-up to the 2025 election to identify new and disaffected or disengaged Indigenous electors. The challenge is to prepare people, engage with people, hold their interest and ensure that they participate in elections. The WAEC's focus is on improving the accessibility of electoral services to Aboriginal people and tailoring our education and guidance material so that it specifically engages these voters.

Two existing positions in the commonwealth have been repurposed to focus on engagement and communication. This team will be responsible for developing the first reconciliation action plan for the Western Australian Electoral Commission. The key focus of this plan will be greater engagement with Indigenous electors. A further task for the coming year will be to reach out to community development advisers in remote communities to gain a better understanding of the election services needs of each community. Normally, this is done only in the lead-up to an election event to determine remote polling requirements, but the commission is now looking forward to building sustained relationships with these communities to generate improvements in electoral participation at election time. Ideally, the commission would like to have a longer term partnership with these communities, whereby the Western Australian Electoral Commission staff visit for joint educational and engagement activities—the answer

is nearly finished—which is important for the Indigenous communities, and to support the locals operating the polling facilities at election times. This will be a significant change from what had happened before with the fly-in fly-out arrangement. We hope that this approach will generate a sense of ownership of and engagement in the election process and democratic system for Indigenous voters.

I am sorry that the answer was a little bit wordy, but I had to detail all the genuine efforts that the Electoral Commission is making to engage with this cohort of voters.

The CHAIR: Minister, before I give the member for Central Wheatbelt another question, her question related to not only Aboriginal communities, but also the culturally and linguistically diverse communities. I do not know whether the minister answered that aspect of the question.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I specifically narrowed it to the Aboriginal communities.

The CHAIR: Did you? Okay.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: That is the line item.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: My answer was directed to the Indigenous communities.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: That is all right. Thank you, minister.

The minister can correct me if I am wrong, but the Electoral Commissioner said that the commission would manage all this work with the same number of staff. Therefore, will the government significantly increase the effort in dealing with the people of Broome and Derby—I find it remarkable that that was the effort last time because I think about the size of Western Australia and wonder about the remaining Aboriginal population in our state—but not change the budget or the number of employees in the Electoral Commission? But there will be two people from the commonwealth.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: This has been done before, intensively, and approximate to an election. The staff will now be utilised over a longer period and we have the staffing resources to do that. We will also reach out to community development advisers. This cannot be just a single effort. We have the Australian Electoral Commission, the Western Australian Electoral Commission and those advisers who are in touch with the communities. We are confident that we will be able to engage with them.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The minister knows as well as I do that it is a very expensive business, particularly in some of those regional and remote communities. Is the minister appropriately funded? What funding is being attached to this program? Is it reliant on only those two federal FTEs?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I am sorry. I have had a cold and my ear is a bit blocked.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: What funding is attached to this effort to increase engagement with Aboriginal people across Western Australia?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: The two officers that the member referred to are not AEC officers; they are WAEC officers who have been repurposed. As I have said before, I will introduce a bill to the Parliament to do with disclosures. We first have to let the Voice vote go through before we go and engage with people in these communities or we might confuse them. We will review the requirements in the midyear budget review to see whether any further funding for engagement with these communities is needed.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 93, budget paper No 2, volume 1, significant issues impacting the agency, paragraph 3 and project planning for the 2025 state election. The member for Central Wheatbelt and I brought this up in the last estimates. Has the commissioner reflected on the pre-polling policies from the last two state elections? Will there be any changes to the 2025 state election?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: In terms of the length of pre-polling?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Last time there was a two-prong scenario, which was shortening the length of pre-polling and improving the advertising. That was the emphasis that we discussed in the last estimates.

The CHAIR: Okay. I think the minister gets the question.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: What I can say about the length of pre-polling is the cabinet's decision will be announced in the not-too-distant future. As I said, we will bring in a bill to confirm some better disclosure rules, and I intend to put before the cabinet the parameters of pre-polling. I note that at least in Butler—it might have been different elsewhere; I do not know—it is reasonably quiet at the start. I think it was nearly 21 days. It was very quiet out in Butler for a while.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That is exactly my sentiment, minister. I would suggest that rather than paying people to sit there for the first week and do nothing, the government uses that money to improve the advertising and shorten the length of pre-polling so that people are aware that it is happening. Seriously, as the minister says about Butler, it was the same thing in Roe and no doubt in the Central Wheatbelt electorate. People were not aware that pre-polling

was open and that was a challenge. To my mind, it is a week wasted for which the money could have been used on advertising.

[2.30 pm]

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: That is a comment, but I will take it as the question: will the government consider the length of pre-polling? If I can infer that is the question, the answer is yes. I cannot say what the decision is before the cabinet makes a decision, but that matter will be on my agenda to look at.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I appreciate that. When there are, say, three pre-polling booths in an electorate, on election night those votes are all blended, so it cannot be pinpointed who voted for who from any of those pre-polling booths. Will that pre-polling information be broken down into the different polling booths?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Could I defer to the commissioner on that, please.

Mr R. Kennedy: Yes, that issue has been raised with us in the past, particularly by the psephologists and the TV commentators who like that sort of data. We are looking at that issue to see whether we can do it. It does create complications for us during the count in that we have to keep all those votes together so that we know where they came from, but I am keen to try to resolve that.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That would be appreciated.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Can I clarify whether the pre-poll decision is a cabinet decision, not an Electoral Commission decision?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: It will be in the legislation.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Okay. Well, there you go.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Sorry. I will ask the commissioner to comment.

Mr R. Kennedy: I think the member will recall from the last time this issue was raised, I was the only one in the chamber who supported a longer period, and my position remains unchanged.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Will the minister introduce legislation so that it will be the government's decision about how long the pre-poll will be for?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Yes.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 92 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, "Spending Changes". I see that the estimated actual to run the North West Central by-election was \$737 000. Does the Electoral Commission conduct a review after the by-election; and, if so, is that review published? Obviously, the numbers and the information are publicly known on the website, but is there a review of the conduct of the election, any challenges that were experienced and those sorts of things?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Yes.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is that made public?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: No.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is there a reason why it is not public?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: It is not made public because it is part of a general review. The commission reviews it and notes it, but it is not in a format that could be made public at the moment.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Could it be put into a format that could be published? Would the minister be prepared to publish it?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: It will be a bit of extra work and then the member will ask, "Where's the money?", but she asked for it. It is possible. We will look at that, but the opposition should not thrash us by saying, "Where's the money to do this?" We are trying to respond to the member in a positive way and be of assistance.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Noting the expenditure, is it comparable with other by-election spends? Do by-elections cost a similar amount? Is there a loading when looking at a regional area? I think the last one was in Darling Range.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: The North West Central by-election would be one of the more expensive, simply because there is a relatively small number of voters spread over quite a vast area, as the member would appreciate. Yes, it is a bit high.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 93 in budget paper No 2, volume 1. Under the outcomes and key effectiveness indicators is the line item "Percentage of enrolled electors voting in State general elections (or by-elections) or referenda".

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I am sorry; I was not concentrating.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: It is on page 93.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Page 93, sorry.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: No. I must have it on the wrong page. I am on page 94. Sorry, I gave the minister a bum steer. On page 94, in that table at the top, it talks about percentage of enrolled electors voting in state general elections or by-elections. I am presuming that that 47 per cent relates to North West Central.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Correct, member.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: That goes to my last set of questions about the review. Was that addressed in the review that was done internally by the Electoral Commission around low voter turnout?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Yes.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Would the minister like to elaborate on what the findings were? It might be one fewer page in the report that he does not want to provide!

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I am happy to provide it. I have not seen the report. Of course, a turnout like that—there are often low turnouts at a by-election—is a concern. The report looked at possible ways that the commission can reach and encourage more electors. The commissioner is happy to expand upon my answer.

Mr R. Kennedy: It was a disappointing outcome as far as participation goes. As the minister mentioned, by-elections traditionally suffer from low participation rates. North West Central was behind the eight-ball from the beginning, because it has a low participation rate, even at state general elections. It was 60-odd per cent in 2021. Looking at 2017 and before, because there have not been a lot of by-elections for a while, when we compared the drop-off from the most recent previous state election participation rate with the next by-election rate, the drop-off was about the same for North West Central. In other words, there was about a 20 per cent drop in what its state election participation rate was. From that point of view, it is not surprising, but it is disappointing.

What we identified in the review is that—we were quite frustrated with our efforts to promote the by-election—it was not a by-election that was active in the media. We tried relentlessly without success to generate some interest in the by-election with the media. As we did with the state election, we made direct contact through email and SMS with electors in North West Central on three occasions, reminding them about updating their enrolment, early voting opening and polling day. One of the interesting observations that the review identified was that a large percentage of those people who were contacted directly still did not vote. I cannot read the minds of electors; I am not sure why they did not vote. Reasons were given to us through the non-voter process that allows people to provide valid excuses to me as to why they did not turn up. From memory, a quick perusal of the reasons that were given to us included, “I wasn’t in the district on polling day”, “I was out of the district and down in Perth” and “I was out of the district and in the south west of the state.” There were those sorts of things. A few people had moved interstate; it seems like there is a fairly mobile population in some of these areas judging by the some of the responses we got. Illness was another common excuse given, and it is one that we will accept as a valid excuse. We have certainly looked at it and, in terms of by-elections, it has given us a lot of learnings that we hope we can deal with when we next face a by-election.

[2.40 pm]

Ms M.J. DAVIES: How much of the \$737 000 was spent on advertising?

Mr R. Kennedy: I did try to break this down the other day; we have it by project code. I have a feeling it was between \$200 000 and \$250 000. I cannot put my finger on it.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: While the Electoral Commissioner is finding that information, did that include an advertisement in *The West Australian*?

Mr R. Kennedy: Yes.

Sorry; approximately \$100 000 was spent on advertising. Just to answer the member’s other question, there were advertisements in *The West* on 13 August, *The Geraldton Guardian* on 16 August, and the *Pilbara News*, *Midwest Times* and *North West Telegraph* on 17 August. We then did regional radio and digital between 22 August and 17 September, which was polling day. We did further advertisements in *The West* and the regional newspapers that I mentioned before on 31 August; in the regional newspapers on 7 September; and in *The West* on 16 September and 17 September, which was polling day.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I recall that one of the advertisements in *The West Australian* about people needing to vote in the upcoming by-election did not detail that the by-election was for the electorate of North West Central.

The CHAIR: Was that a question?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Yes.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: That was a mistake in the first advertisement. It was quickly corrected in all subsequent advertisements. It was embarrassing, but slips happen. It was corrected and readvertised.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: On the same theme of voter turnout —

The CHAIR: You guys won and you are still grilling him!

Ms M.J. DAVIES: — is the minister aware that there was an early voting centre at Gascoyne Junction for only one day, the Thursday before the election? Gascoyne Junction is the centre for those people who are inland of that community, but on election day there was no polling booth there for the people who turned up to vote, as instructed by the phantom *The West*. For those people who have not done a pre-poll, it is quite a distance to do a round trip from Gascoyne Junction to Carnarvon. That is not acceptable, is it, minister?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I have had no previous notice of this, but I am happy to take the question on notice. This happened locally.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I feel that not as much attention was paid to this election because the Labor Party did not have a horse in the race.

The CHAIR: Member, that is not a question. I have warned the member about editorialising. Is there a further question as opposed to a statement?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I will ask for that to be struck out; it is a free kick.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The Electoral Commissioner mentioned that a large percentage of people did not turn up to vote. What percentage of the near 50 per cent of people who did not turn up to vote have to pay a fine? How much revenue has the Electoral Commission received?

The CHAIR: Is the member restricting his questions to the North West Central by-election?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Yes.

The CHAIR: All right. The member might need to repeat the questions for the minister.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: As I understand it, the first question is: of the 52.5 per cent of people who did not vote, how many were prosecuted?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Yes.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I will defer to the commissioner for those numbers.

Mr R. Kennedy: I cannot say how many will be prosecuted because that is ongoing, but 5 736 infringements were created for non-voting. Of those, 2 649 were excused or closed and 1 622 were paid by the person who incurred the infringement, which leaves 1 463. We have now handed them over to the Fines Enforcement Registry, which is the process that we follow, and it will follow them through.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What is the total revenue up to this point?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I will take that question on notice.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 99, net appropriation determination and sales of goods and services. I want to go back to the costs to local government for running their elections. Will the minister confirm that the global figure of \$9 million is the cost recovery that will be garnered from the local government sector for running its elections?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: Yes.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I have been advised that in some cases, the increase per local government is almost 40 per cent on what has previously been charged. Can the minister provide feedback on that?

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: In some cases—it is not across the board; it depends—there have been significant increases because of the preferential voting system and the need for a count on the preferences. For those municipalities that do not want the commission to undertake the count, the commission has made the software program available at the very reasonable cost of \$10 000, which they then own and can use for future counts. I am told that most of the increases are not due to the changes that the Minister for Local Government made to the count—although some of it is, as I have just detailed—because there are other increases due to inflationary costs. For example, vehicles have to be hired.

[2.50 pm]

The CHAIR: Before we finish this division, I am going to —

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I can give the figure to the committee now.

The CHAIR: The member for Roe is after that and he is not in the chamber. He can look in the *Hansard*, so let us know.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I have just been handed the information. At this stage, the fines for non-voters for the North West Central by-election amount to \$55 000, which goes into the consolidated account and not to the commission.

The CHAIR: I am going to seek the indulgence of the committee to ask the minister a question, as I am entitled to do. I refer to page 93 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the significant issues impacting the agency. My question relates to the conduct of the 2025 state general election to make sure that it is a smooth and successful event. Is any consideration being given to restricting the amount of electoral advertising material, particularly plastic bunting, which is the bane of everyone's life and is inconsistent with our plastic-free future?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Who still uses the plastic stuff?

The CHAIR: Well, we do.

Ms L. METTAM: So good!

The CHAIR: In other jurisdictions, there is a limit on the amount of space that can be used for electoral material.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: There are two issues there, Madam Chair. The first is bunting. People wrap schools in bunting. This is not an issue for the Electoral Act; this is going to be considered by the Minister for Environment in terms of single-use plastic. As to other signage out there like corflutes, consideration was given to saying what size a sign could be, but we are not going to do that. That would have put too much burden on electoral booth workers, who would have to go out with a tape measure to measure the signs and then multiply the dimensions to see how many square inches a sign was—no.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The corflutes get used again. I give them to schools and all sorts, but I completely concur with the chair's question around plastic bunting. That is a good one.

The appropriation was recommended.