

Division 70: Swan River Trust, \$13 735 000 —

Mr A.P. O’Gorman, Chairman.

Mr W.R. Marmion, Minister for Environment.

Mr R. Hughes, General Manager.

Mr M. Cugley, Manager, River System Management.

Ms K.A. Rogers, Manager, Business Services.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIRMAN: The first question is from the member for Gosnells.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: The first dot point on page 831 refers to the draft river protection strategy. How much has the strategy cost so far and what funds and other resources will the Swan River Trust put towards finalising the strategy in 2012–13?

Mr W.R. MARMION: I am advised that there is no cost at this stage for production because it is all done internally. Perhaps the general manager will be able to give the member some more information on specific costings for that particular program.

Mr R. Hughes: The cost of producing the river protection strategy are essentially covered by staff. In terms of costs for the implementation, within the documents that have been out for public review we estimate that about \$70 million a year is being delivered through the various partners of the river protection strategy.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I have a further question. When will the document be finalised and when will it be made public?

Mr W.R. MARMION: Mr Hughes.

Mr R. Hughes: The river protection strategy has been out for extensive public consultation. We are now reviewing the document and hope to be presenting it to the Swan River Trust board in about two months and then to the minister.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I refer to the first dot point under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency” towards the bottom of page 831. Was the minister or the Swan River Trust consulted at all about the naming of the new Perth Waterfront project under the title “Elizabeth Quay”, given that the Swan River, of course, is a key aspect of that development?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: That is K-E-Y, as opposed to Q-U-A-Y!

Mr W.R. MARMION: I do not believe that the Swan River Trust was consulted but certainly I was consulted.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: What did you say?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: When was the minister consulted?

Mr M.J. COWPER: Cabinet confidentiality.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Come off it!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Can I ask when the minister was consulted?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: That is not cabinet confidentiality.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: When was the minister consulted?

Mr M.J. COWPER: It was in the cabinet.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: No, it is not. Let him answer it. The member for Murray–Wellington is not the minister.

Mr W.R. MARMION: I am sorry?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: He is not the minister. He is answering for you.

Mr W.R. MARMION: I am not going to divulge cabinet information.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: We are not asking you to, minister; we are asking you when you were consulted.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Was the minister consulted the day the Premier presented it to him or was he consulted prior to that?

Mr W.R. MARMION: I was consulted in cabinet and I will not divulge what happened in cabinet.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Was the minister consulted prior to it going to cabinet, or was the Swan River Trust asked for its opinion with regard to the proposal to name the waterfront project “Elizabeth Quay”?

Mr W.R. MARMION: Mr Chairman, I have already answered that. The Swan River Trust was not asked, as far as I am aware, because of course that is not my decision. I am not aware that the Swan River Trust was consulted in relation to the name of the Perth Waterfront project.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I have a further question. Is the Swan River Trust, when names —

Mr M.J. COWPER: What line item?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am referring to the first dot point under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”. Is the Swan River Trust ever consulted on the potential naming of elements that directly affect the jurisdiction of the trust or affect elements that the trust may have an interest in?

Mr W.R. MARMION: I am advised that it is not consulted on names.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I refer to the first dot point at the top of page 832. There is a reference to the efforts of the Swan River Trust in managing the oxygenation levels of the river with respect to fish kills. When fish kills occurred in the Swan River a few years ago, they had a tremendous impact on recreational fishers in the river. I am interested to know how the oxygenation program is going in the river with respect to the health of the water, whether there has been any monitoring of the fish stocks and whether the Swan River Trust has had any engagement with the Department of Fisheries on that matter.

Mr W.R. MARMION: I thank the member for the question. We have four oxygenation plants in the Swan and Canning river system. I guess they are a fallback position because when the nutrients build up, we have the oxygenation programs that are operating to make sure that we get oxygen into the lower reaches of the river. Indeed, on 21 January this year, when 80 millimetres of rain fell into the upper Swan catchment, it caused significant de-oxygenation and there was a fish mortality event. We therefore cannot prevent total fish stock deaths in all cases. However, there was evidence of a recent event in the oxygenation plants when we thought there was the possibility of de-oxygenation of the river. The actual oxygenation has come good and there has not been to date any problem with fish in this particular area of the river. I can say that the state government has committed \$1.4 million in the budget to allow for a substantial upgrade to both existing oxygenation plants on the Canning River in the next year. An additional allocation of \$1 million was announced last year to design and build one on the Canning River, and construction of that is due to commence in 2013.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I have a further question. Is there any interaction between those oxygenation plants and the chlorophyll levels in and around where the oxygenation plants are operating? The chlorophyll and oxygen systems interact, do they not?

Mr W.R. MARMION: Yes, that is correct. The member has asked for a fair bit of detail on the biology of the river and I will refer that question to Mr Cugley.

Mr M. Cugley: Yes, we do run the oxygenation plants particularly closely, depending on the level of algal activity in the rivers. Algae, by photosynthesis, will produce oxygen from the water column during the day. Of course at night the algae will expire, and that is the time at which oxygen levels within the water column can become depleted, and that is the time in particular when we run the oxygenation plants to provide some relief from that low oxygen level.

[8.30 pm]

Dr G.G. JACOBS: My time will be very short so that the opposition does not get further upset. I refer to the ecological health of the Swan River on page 832. A couple of years ago there were some issues and deaths among dolphins. What is the latest situation with the dolphins in the Swan and Canning Rivers? Have there been any more issues with dolphin deaths and disease?

Mr W.R. MARMION: Everyone is interested in the dolphins in the Swan River, including me. We commissioned Murdoch University to undertake a detailed assessment of the size and structure of the current dolphin population in the Swan River. The interim report suggests that the resident dolphin population has recovered since the deaths of the six dolphins in 2009. It is estimated that 20 dolphins are regular users of the Swan River. This is similar to population estimates way back in 2003. Among the resident dolphin population are four mother–calves. The report on the dolphin population will be completed in September this year, so it will be a bit of an update. The university has also contracted to look further into dolphin health and understanding the factors that contributed to the deaths of those six dolphins in 2009. It is known that two of the dolphins tested positive to the morbilla virus. While the virus was not found in the tests carried out on the other two deceased dolphins, its presence in them cannot be ruled out. We are not 100 per cent sure what caused their death. Obviously urban estuaries with the run-off of nutrients is challenging for the environment, so we need to do more research on the dolphins to determine the symptoms. When the report was released by the Chief Scientist, it was a bit inconclusive. Dolphins can be healthy in what we might consider to be unhealthy estuaries, and, in what might be a healthy estuary, dolphins can be struggling, so more research has to be done.

Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Bill Marmion; Mr Murray Cowper; Mrs Liza Harvey; Dr Graham Jacobs

The appropriation was recommended.