

Chairman; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Troy Buswell; Mr Bill Marmion; Mr Joe Francis; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Andrew Waddell; Ms Janine Freeman; Mr Martin Whitely; Mr Frank Alban; Mr Murray Cowper

Division 40: Commerce, \$126 262 000 —

Mr M.W. Sutherland, Chairman.

Mr T.R. Buswell, Minister for Commerce.

Mr B.T. Bradley, Director General.

Mr D. Goodwin, Director, Finance and Administration.

Ms A. Driscoll, Commissioner for Consumer Protection.

Mr P. Viney, Executive Director, Science, Innovation and Business.

Mr B. Horstman, Acting Executive Director, Labour Relations Division.

Mr K. Bowron, Executive Director, Energy Safety.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIRMAN: The member for West Swan.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: My question relates to item 3, “Science, Innovation and Business”, under the heading “Services Summary” on page 518 of the *Budget Statements*. Could the minister explain the dramatic reduction in funding over the forward estimates for the science program?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: The member is referring to the out years. Currently, the science and innovation area has a significant pool of funds that has almost been completely allocated. The \$72 million science and innovation fund, which was attached under the previous government, has been largely allocated and over the next couple of years will be drawn down. There are also some existing draw downs from previous funding rounds, Innovate 1 and Innovate 2 and various centre of excellence funding rounds, that feed into that part of the portfolio. As those grant moneys run down, I can only imagine that the expenses out of the agency decline.

What is the new government doing in relation to science and innovation? We have set in place a significant review of the government’s activities in science and innovation space, and that process is rapidly approaching completion. It is my view that we need to take stock of government activity in the science and innovation space to deliver more strategic outcomes on how our spend in science and innovation can be better leveraged to deliver better long-term outcomes for the state. I also have a view that the nature of the funding available under the \$72 million science and innovation fund meant that some of that funding was spent in a way that some argue was not in the best strategic long-term interests of the state. In other words, I want to review the whole activity of government in the science and innovation space, which includes the activities of the Science Council, the Technology and Industry Advisory Council and the Chief Scientist and the activities of the department in and around the science space. Once that process is completed, the way in which the government provides grants and other incentives through to the local science community will be, I think, significantly reshaped and redefined. At that time, and following the adoption of that advice and any changes by government, that funding model will be looked at. I am not going to sign off on topping up the existing funding models that sit in and around science and innovation in Western Australia.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: The budget papers indicate that the review was scheduled to report in June. Who is undertaking that review and will the report be made public?

The CHAIRMAN: What is the line item?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I am asking for further information on the same line item, which is the third dot point on page 518.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: It is being conducted by a body called the Centre for International Economics that is based in Canberra. Representatives have been to Western Australia a number of times consulting with industry, universities, and government sector agencies right across Western Australia. They are well on time to complete that review and present it to government. I am keen, as I am with any of these types of things—once government has given it consideration—for the outcomes to be made public. The public has played a major role in providing advice and guidance to the reviewers. It is a very important opportunity for us to take stock of where we are at with our activities in the science and innovation space. I am a very strong supporter of the review process. The government has encouraged the people undertaking the review to consult widely with the Western Australian science community, and that has happened.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Is the Science Council continuing to exist, and what role does it play in this review?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: The Science Council still exists. The functions of the Science Council are being reviewed as part of this process. I am not necessarily sure that we need a Science Council and a Technology and Industry

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Advisory Council. I will be interested to see what advice we receive from the reviewer about the ultimate shape of government activities and the capacity for government to stimulate and direct activity in that science, innovation and research space in Western Australia. I have a very open mind about the outcomes that they will produce.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: As the minister explained, a lot of the funding in the forward estimates has been earmarked for existing projects that were committed to by the previous government, including specific major research facilities and also centres of excellence plus some fellowships. By way of supplementary information, could the minister provide a list of all the projects that are funded under this item?

[7.30 pm]

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I will provide a copy of that list as supplementary information.

The CHAIRMAN: I will give it supplementary information No B23.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I just need some clarification.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: The clarification is that it is supplementary information being provided to show the breakdown of the numbers shown on page 518, which is the funding in the budget year and over the forward estimates, of all the projects that funding is earmarked for, so it includes all the science and innovation projects, including all major facilities, the fellowships, centres of excellence and any unallocated funding.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I will provide by way of supplementary information all the details of the moneys that have been planned to be expended, planned to be committed or whatever in relation to the \$72 million science innovation fund. We can provide details of the centres of excellence, and the funding that sits in and around those. We can also provide details of the two rounds of the Innovate WA funding. I am pretty sure that would capture most of everything the member has asked for. If it does not, I am sure that the member can ask follow-up questions, but I think she will see that there is quite a comprehensive list that I am prepared to provide by way of supplementary information. Depending on the commercial confidentiality that sits in and around any of the other grants or grants-loans that have been extended from the government to individuals and/or corporate entities over the past 10 years or so, because some grants have been converted to loans and some are outstanding, I will be happy to provide that information.

[*Supplementary Information No B23.*]

Mr W.R. MARMION: The last dot point of the significant issues impacting the agency on page 519 refers to major capital works at the Australian Marine Complex and the department's continued pursuit of opportunities for Western Australian industry to participate in local and international marine and defence offshore oil and gas markets. My interest is in the progress of the associated works that would also help to pursue opportunities at Bentley Technology Park. I am particularly interested in the situation of the works at the moment and their planning, project funding and multinational interest in the complex.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: AMC is a good investment that successive governments have supported in Western Australia. My understanding is that significant work has progressed with AMC, particularly in recent years around the floating dock, which has the potential for significant benefits to Western Australia. There was also a very important funding commitment in the budget as it related to AMC, and specifically as it related to the provision of a supply and maintenance base for the Chevron Gorgon project. The government has committed through LandCorp \$35 million for the provision of effectively a wharf or berthing facility, which will be made available, as I understand it, on an exclusive use basis to Chevron for four days a week. I will get Mr Viney to provide some more information in a minute. That is a really important investment in linking Perth and the south west to the Chevron Gorgon project. It will effectively be, if I may use the term, a pipeline between Perth and the Chevron Gorgon project. It will mean that when Gorgon gets its final investment decision, a lot of the infrastructure that flows to Barrow Island can come from Perth. That is a positive for Western Australia, because if it was not coming through that facility, there is always a probability that it might have come from somewhere such as Singapore. I think it is a positive outcome for Western Australia.

A lot has been said about the Technology Park at Bentley. I think the term the former Minister for Science used to use was "Silicon Valley with soul". There was a lot of talk by the former minister about some of the deliverables as they related to Technology Park. The fact of the matter is that the announcements that the former minister made in April 2008 created an expectation that was never going to be delivered. The minister claimed in April 2008, when he made, as I consider it, his now famous remark that the Technology Park precinct would hold 50 000 people and would be Australia's silicon valley with soul, which is a very exciting turn of phrase, that by March 2009 it would be up and running. He said that we would be injecting soul and a silicon valley into Bentley. We had phone calls in March 2009 from people asking where their soul was out there and where that silicon valley had gone. The fact is that it was never going to be delivered in that time frame. It was unfortunate

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that the former minister created that expectation. For example, a planning process must be engaged in for that precinct. My advice is that that planning process will take between 12 and 18 months. The plans were not lodged until 28 June 2008. There have not been delays; it has just been a case of working through the process. However, the former minister created an expectation with that lovely turn of phrase of silicon valley with soul, which we quite simply could not deliver on. What are we doing? We are continuing the work by moving forward with the planning for the long-term development of Technology Park. Both Technology Park and AMC are very important aspects of our government's activity in the science and innovation space. Mr Viney heads up that division of commerce. I might just see whether he wants to make any comments in relation to either AMC or Technology Park.

Mr P. Viney: If I could just say on AMC, the supply base has the significant additional benefit of reducing transport movements between here and the north west, particularly heavy truck movements, which has very significant safety implications. It has that additional benefit. Of course, the local opportunities will be maximised much more through a local supply base. The other important thing about AMC is that it complements the common-user facility. That facility is operating in what they almost describe as full capacity because it is at usage levels that it cannot exceed much more without this sort of investment.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: The planning will take 12 to 18 months and there is also a budget requirement with that expansion. Will it be part of the 2010-11 budget process?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: As I said, we are still working through the planning process. We have committed to the planning process. As to what happens subsequent to the planning process, that will be dependent on the business cases that are developed around the options that emerge through the planning process.

Mr B.S. WYATT: The sixth dot point on page 519 refers to the extension of metropolitan weekday retail trading hours. This tends to get floated by the Premier. Is the minister able to give us a time frame? Is cabinet likely to consider it and can we expect it this year? Does the Department of Commerce have any role to play in providing policy advice on this proposed extension of retail trading hours?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Yes. The consumer protection division of the Department of Commerce has been providing advice to the Premier and me on the proposed changes to weeknight trading hours as they relate to the metropolitan area. In terms of the time line, the matter is proceeding through government. As and when opportunities present to Parliament it will be presented for consideration.

[7.40 pm]

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I refer to page 519, the eleventh dot point. I am sure that if the member for Geraldton were here, he would be just as keen to ask this question. My question is about the International Centre for Radio Astronomy Research, which is a significant factor in the enhancement of Australia's bid for the Square Kilometre Array project. My question is fairly simple. How is this state progressing with that project?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: This is, again, another initiative that was commenced under the guidance of the former government, in partnership with the federal government. It is an initiative that we are very keen to continue to support. The Square Kilometre Array project is a once-in-a-generation scientific opportunity for not just Western Australia but the globe. It has been put to me that the capacity of the SKA is such that we may be able to see far enough out into the universe to detect the light that was emitted at the dawn of time—the big bang! I was actually explaining this theory to a meeting of seniors in my electorate, and I do not want to indulge the committee too much, but I will quickly share this story, Mr Chairman —

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much, minister. We are very interested.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: An elderly lady said to me, “Why would you want to spend \$2 billion or \$3 billion to see the big bang?” I thought very quickly on my feet, and I said, “Because we want to make sure it does not happen again!” This is a very exciting science project.

Mr B.S. WYATT: Did they get the joke?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: They got the joke! The people in my electorate are very good at getting my jokes, member for Victoria Park. Even when I do not get to a joke, they still get it!

Mr B.S. WYATT: I do not think anyone on the minister's side got it! They are not bursting with laughter!

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: That does not matter. It is an interesting story.

We have invested a lot of money in supporting the bid for the SKA.

Mr A.J. WADDELL: It is a very good recommendation from the Science Council.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Which the minister is about to abolish!

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Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I am not abolishing the Science Council at all.

This is a great project, and we are very committed to supporting it. However, if we are to spend \$20 million or \$30 million of state taxpayers' money on this project, we need to be able to articulate the advantages of the project to the broader community, and that is what we intend to do.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: If this state is successful in attracting that project, what amount of money will be invested in the Geraldton area?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: The point to note is that this is a competitive process. The last two possible sites for this project are in South Africa and Australia. Mr Viney and I, and some other people, recently went to a meeting on this project, along with two of the traditional landowners in that area from the Ngarantjadu people. I sensed that what the international community wants to see for this SKA project is greater international collaboration to make sure that we deliver the best outcome.

From Western Australia's point of view—this relates to the International Centre for Radio Astronomy Research—the greatest advantage to us in terms of how we can leverage off the SKA is from the computing side of the project. The computing requirements for the Square Kilometre Array project in its totality are massive. The computing requirements are equivalent to combining the power that is found in every computer that exists in the world today into one EXO file. Is that right, member for Forrestfield?

Mr A.J. WADDELL: Yes.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I knew the member would know what an EXO file is! That is how much power the SKA project will require. It is 1 000 times bigger than the fastest computer that exists in the world at the moment—the Roadrunner in Los Alamos, New Mexico. It is massive. Some of the areas that we can focus on from a Western Australian point of view are handling the data, transmitting the data and managing the data. That is one of the things that we have started to work on at the International Centre for Radio Astronomy Research. That centre is run jointly by Curtin University and the University of Western Australia, under the guidance of the director, Dr Peter Quinn. Dr Quinn is one of the world's foremost radio astronomers, and he has been awarded, by the former Premier of Western Australia, a Premier's Science Fellowship. He is a great guy and he is doing a fantastic job. He has great links into the international science community. Indeed, one of the areas that we are pursuing at the moment with Dr Quinn and ICRAR is a memorandum of understanding with the SKA project office in Manchester. That is something we are very interested in. When we are in Treasury and are looking at facts and figures all the time, this is very interesting. We want to form that memorandum of understanding so that we can take responsibility for a lot of that data management work. Secondly, we are trying to work with IBM to develop a centre of excellence in Perth so that a lot of that computer technology can be developed in and around Western Australia. There will be massive benefits in the short to medium term for the information and communication technology industry in Western Australia to leverage off that. It is a very exciting set of opportunities. Some recognition of that can be found in the fact that some \$80 million has been committed in the commonwealth budget to the ongoing development of additional facilities around that principle in Western Australia. That is very exciting. We are focused on doing all we can to make sure that Geraldton and the mid-west will play an important role in the development of the SKA. That project will be located in the Murchison, but Geraldton is the logical centre from which it should be serviced. We will continue to move forward on that. The federal government is also progressing with what it terms the Pathfinder Project. That project is really Australia's precursor to the SKA, and that in itself is very exciting. One of the fundamental challenges that we face—we are working very hard on this with our new good friend Senator Conroy in Canberra—is to get some funding to improve the broadband connectivity between Perth and Geraldton, so that project is already bringing significant benefits to the mid-west.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I refer to pages 516 and 517, in particular the second item under the heading "3% Efficiency Dividend", the "Aboriginal Economic Development Unit (AED) — Discontinuation of Non-Operational Program". Why has that program been discontinued? I notice later in the budget papers that \$300 000 has been allocated to the Small Business Development Corporation. The discontinuation of the AED unit is disappointing, given the success of this organisation and its history in being able to achieve outcomes for the people it services.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: The member is right. The Aboriginal Economic Development Unit as it has historically existed within the former Department of Industry and Resources and now the Department of Commerce no longer exists in that form. Some funding has been provided from that area of commerce to the Small Business Development Corporation to supplement the funding that it currently receives.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Only \$300 000.

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Mr T.R. BUSWELL: We will be dealing with the SBDC later in the estimates and the member will be able to ask questions of the officers at that time. That funding will be transferred to assist the SBDC in the development of an Aboriginal business development unit, which is well underway. Another parcel of funding has been transferred to the Department of Agriculture to assist it in the development of pastoral businesses, predominantly for Aboriginal people. My view, having reviewed what the Aboriginal Economic Development Unit has been involved with in recent years—I acknowledge that it has achieved good outcomes in some areas, particularly in and around the commercialisation of Aboriginal art, and also in and around tourism—is to find better ways in which the government can deliver improved economic outcomes for Aboriginal people. A number of the activities that the AED unit was involved with were activities that I have seen replicated in other areas of government. I will share with the member a trip that I took to Fitzroy Crossing, Halls Creek and Balgo, and a few other places in the Kimberley, and I will be going back there again in about three weeks. One of the things that became incredibly apparent to me during that visit was that we as a state need to be doing more on the ground to assist those communities in building economic opportunities moving forward. The agency of government that will be engaging with and assisting those communities to leverage off, in particular, the funds made available by the commonwealth Indigenous Economic Development program will be the Small Business Development Corporation. The SBDC will be involved in Halls Creek with, I think, the Halls Creek Better Life program, and it will also be involved in the Fitzroy Valley with the Fitzroy Futures program. The managing director of the SBDC also informed me yesterday that he has been invited to join—I am sure he will correct me later if I am wrong—the board of the specific tourism-related body that Aboriginal tourism businesses work in and through. I think it is a positive step forward. I formed a very strong view when I was in the Kimberley that we had to take a different approach to assisting people in that area in economic development. People may well criticise the approach we have taken, and my advice would be to wait and see what outcomes the Small Business Development Corporation, with its on-the-ground, in-the-trenches approach, can deliver for Aboriginal people through the development and promotion of Aboriginal businesses in those towns and those communities.

[7.50 pm]

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: As a point of clarification, given that the minister was just saying that there were areas in which they had been successful, and that he wants them to do additional things, how does he expect them to do that sort of work on less income? If he wanted to transfer the funding, why would he not transfer it all across?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I said that they have done things in areas that have been successful. My view is that we need to move on and focus on alternative delivery models with a ground-up approach, and that is what we intend to do. The member has an alternative view, and that is fine. I will be working very closely with the SBDC and the communities in the Kimberley in the first instance to see how an alternative model can work. I use the case in point of the programs that are running in and around Halls Creek. The Halls Creek program is called Better Life, or Better Living.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: It is a federally funded program.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I will get to that in a second. The program works with groups like that and other service providers in the area, such as Wunan, who are doing a fantastic job, to help them access additional federal funding and help them deliver better outcomes. I will give another example of what we are doing. In conjunction with the lady Shona—her surname escapes me—who is heavily involved, and a lot of the Aboriginal people involved with that project in Halls Creek, the state recently purchased a small station on the edge of Halls Creek, called Bert Park. At Bert Park we are now building, with Wunan, a hostel for young Aboriginal people in that community who are either working or in training, in line with the philosophy that Wunan applies at its facility in Kununurra, where I am going in a couple of weeks. This is something completely different. We need different approaches to deliver on-the-ground outcomes to many of the people I met during my trip there recently. I may well stand corrected in a couple of years' time but, firstly, as the Minister for Housing and Works, which does a lot of the heavy lifting in the social and economic challenges confronting Aboriginal people, and also in relation to small business, we must try to do different things to achieve better outcomes. A considerable area of strength in the on-the-ground work the SBDC does is leveraging off commonwealth programs in those areas. I accept that people are critical of the decision. We are certainly working hard at the moment through Director General Brian Bradley to relocate the people of the Aboriginal economic development unit. I will ask Brian to make some comments on that in a moment.

I make no apologies for the fact that we must try different approaches. We are trying different approaches in house design, to deliver more sustainable housing outcomes. We currently have architecture students from the university working with the community in Balgo to try to come up with better house designs to achieve more sustainable forms of accommodation. Why? Because that is what the people in the communities have asked for. If we cannot make communities like Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing, which are towns, economically and

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socially sustainable, what chance do we have with communities like Balgo or smaller communities? It is a very challenging area of public policy. I would rather try, and come back here in a couple of years' time and have the opposition ask me how I went. Before I take any other questions, I will ask the director general to provide an overview on how we are managing the staffing in and around the Aboriginal economic development unit.

Mr B.T. Bradley: It is a very traumatic period for the staff. We have given a commitment to relocate 23 staff. At the moment, the staff are very active in developing an exit strategy. There are a number of programs that some of them have been in for some time, and some of them have just commenced. We are bringing that together. We also need to have some consideration for the clients, because they have built this client base up over many years. Counselling has been provided to all staff. I will be addressing the staff again tomorrow; I have already addressed them on the day that the budget was brought down. We are working through all the issues with them and trying to relocate them, firstly within the agency and then with other government departments, and we are trying to support them in every possible way we can.

Mr M.P. WHITELY: I do not think that an extra \$300 000 for the Small Business Development Corporation is a replacement for annualised funding of \$4.4 million in 2009-10, \$3 million in 2010-11, \$2 million in 2011-12 and \$2.1 million in 2012-13. How can the minister make any comparison, or say that he is looking at different ways of doing things? The truth is that he is actually stripping \$4.1 million from the budget in a year. That makes an absolute nonsense of his argument that he is looking for different ways to do things. The government's special adviser on Indigenous affairs, John Sanderson, has had a number of very complimentary things to say about the coordination role of the Aboriginal economic development unit. What discussions did the minister have with John Sanderson in making this decision? He is the one who has been charged with having an oversight for the government. He has been tasked by the Premier with having that oversight of the whole suite of policies affecting Indigenous people. What discussions did the minister have with him? Also, what discussions did the minister have with the Minister for Indigenous Affairs? Where else, other than in the transfer of that \$300 000, are these functions being picked up?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I have not had any discussions with John Sanderson in relation to this matter.

Mr B.S. WYATT: It is good to see that he has a role to play.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: John Sanderson reports, as I understand it, through the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, and the member can direct his questions to that minister.

Mr M.P. WHITELY: What discussions has the minister had with the Minister for Indigenous Affairs? None.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: The salaries and the non-salary costs of the AED unit that have been transferred amount to \$1.9 million. Of that, \$600 000 has been transferred to the Department of Agriculture and Food and the Small Business Development Corporation. It is my expectation that that money will be supplementing existing funding in agriculture, and in the case of the SBDC the money will be used to supplement existing agency resources and additional resources from within the agency that will be moved into the Aboriginal business development unit of the SBDC. This is part of my plan to expand the role of the SBDC in supporting business right across Western Australia.

Mr M.P. WHITELY: The minister's answer is that basically a tiny fraction of this money is being distributed to other agencies with no history of, and no experience in, delivering Aboriginal economic development outcomes. He has not consulted with the government's special adviser on Indigenous affairs. He did not answer the second part of the question, but I presume that he did not even consult with the Minister for Indigenous Affairs. He has just made an arbitrary decision to terminate this important unit's work with no warning to the staff, save for hearing it in the budget, and no warning to John Sanderson or the Minister for Indigenous Affairs.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Firstly, it is not incumbent on me to inform John Sanderson about decisions made in my portfolio area—full stop. Secondly, the SBDC, in my view, is well situated to provide support services to business in remote areas of Western Australia, including, but not limited to, Aboriginal businesses.

[8.00 pm]

Mr M.P. WHITELY: Does the minister believe they can do that with \$300 000 better than what the Aboriginal economic development unit could do with \$4.4 million?

The CHAIRMAN: I ask the member for Bassendean to let the minister answer the question.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I understand that the SBDC currently has a pilot program running on Aboriginal business development.

Mr B.S. WYATT: Based out of where?

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Mr T.R. BUSWELL: When the managing director is here, the member for Victoria Park can ask him.

As I said, a pilot program is currently running. I am keen for them to expand that activity and, where possible, reallocate internal funding to the development of this service delivery. That is what we intend to do.

Mr M.P. WHITELEY: The minister still has not answered the question. Did the minister consult with the Minister for Indigenous Affairs?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I have spoken to the Minister for Indigenous Affairs about this decision.

Mr M.P. WHITELEY: Did the minister tell him specifically that he was going to cancel the Aboriginal economic development unit?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: The Minister for Indigenous Affairs is well aware of the decision that cabinet took about this and a range of other items as part of the budget process.

Mr M.P. WHITELEY: Was the cabinet decision to do with using \$300 000 from the Small Business Development Corporation to do what was previously done with a budget of \$4.4 million from a specific unit? According to my figures, in 2007-08 it had 26 staff and a budget in 2009-10 of \$4.4 million. A non-expert group will be expected to achieve with an amount of \$300 000 what would be achieved by an expert group with \$4.4 million.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: The member is right, but it was a cabinet decision.

[Mr P.B. Watson took the chair.]

Mr B.S. WYATT: In light of the comments being made by the Premier about the importance of the Kimberley gas hub and the economic opportunities it will have for Aboriginal people in the Kimberley, this will be one of the weakest policy units for Aboriginal policy development in this state for many years. The government has effectively canned the one successful Aboriginal unit within the state government, without consultation with John Sanderson or the Minister for Indigenous Affairs. I have been sitting here for a number of hours and this is the first answer that the minister has given that is tripe. The unit has been canned and \$300 000 has been allocated to the SBDC to expect it to perform a different role, but a more successful role, across Western Australia. Does not the minister think that a unit which had a role to play in the deal done with the Kimberley Land Council and which would otherwise have had a significant role to play in developing, as the Premier highlights time and again, significant downstream economic development opportunities for Aboriginal people in the Kimberley would be best placed keeping its money and going forward?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I think I have answered that question. The facts are that that was the decision of the government. Of course we will monitor the situation. Of course we will work with the SBDC in the development of this new role to support business across Western Australia and, in particular, the creation and development of an Aboriginal development unit within that body. I also understand that funding has been provided to the Department of Agriculture and Food to assist with ongoing development of the Aboriginal pastoral industry.

Mr M.P. WHITELEY: At a local level the Pyrtton site, which the minister and I have had discussions about, is an area of particular significance to Aboriginal people. The Aboriginal economic development unit was involved in ongoing discussions about Aboriginal economic advancement in my electorate. My electorate probably has the largest Indigenous population in the metropolitan area. I have a list of 17 government agencies that have a role in Aboriginal economic development. It appears that the AED unit is the only unit that had the ability to work across the scope of government—employment, training, opportunities for business development and investment in regional development. The AED unit is the only agency that had the opportunity to play that role. Where else within government is that role going to be played? Who will play that sort of lead coordination role?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: In relation to Pyrtton?

Mr M.P. WHITELEY: There have been ongoing discussions about the opportunities at Pyrtton.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Is that the body of land on the river?

Mr M.P. WHITELEY: The minister and I have had discussions about that and I am happy with those discussions. However, there has been ongoing involvement of the AED unit in the sorts of opportunities that might provide for Indigenous employment. What agency will fill that role? Who will have the expertise in that role? Whom will I be able to approach? The minister referred to the Kimberley and Halls Creek. My issue is closer to home, and it had an across-Western Australia brief.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I understand that in terms of the overall development, the Department of Housing is effectively the lead agency.

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Mr M.P. WHITELEY: It was dealing with the AED unit.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I understand that. My belief is it would engage agencies such as Indigenous Affairs to address some of the issues the member raised.

Mr M.P. WHITELEY: Will the minister tell me about the specific economic development focus that exists in the agency? What discussions did the minister have with the Minister for Indigenous Affairs to make sure that these functions are picked up by that agency?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I have said that the minister and I have discussed this matter. Cabinet made the decision, and it is represented for members in the budget papers.

Mr B.S. WYATT: In light of the fact that not long after the Premier was sworn in, he said that Aboriginal economic development would be the key aspect of his premiership, what conversations has the minister had with the Premier about canning the AED unit?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I will not disclose comments made in cabinet or the budget subcommittee of cabinet and the economic and expenditure review committee. The Premier is a member of that committee. These matters passed through that committee en route to the budget. The outcomes of the economic audit passed through that committee en route to cabinet as part of that budget.

Mr M.P. WHITELEY: The minister, like other ministers, had responsibility for delivering three per cent cuts. It seems to me that this minister has found an agency that sits uncomfortably with him for whatever reason. Perhaps it is an uncomfortable fit with the agencies that he runs. What efforts did he make to perhaps rehouse the AED unit within the control of the Minister for Indigenous Affairs or other ministers or even the Premier? Did he say it sits uncomfortably with him and he would slash it? It seems that he had responsibility for delivering the three per cent cuts and he thought that this would be a good cut. Did the minister ask anyone if they wanted to pick up the AED unit and include it within their portfolio, or did he say that it was under his control and he would slash it?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: So that members are aware, the three per cent efficiency dividend revolved around some adjustments to the Aboriginal economic development unit program. It was the economic audit process that recommended the action that was adopted in the budget.

Mr M.P. WHITELEY: I take that point but the question remains: what discussion did the minister have with other ministers about rehousing this within their portfolios? Did he go to the Minister for Indigenous Affairs and say, "Is this something of value to you and do you want it rehoused within your portfolio?"

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: My discussions were with a range of ministers around a range of issues in the budget. I had discussions with the Minister for Indigenous Affairs around this decision. The directors general of the respective departments are continuing to have discussions around the decisions embodied in the budget.

Mr M.P. WHITELEY: I presume they are working on ongoing projects. I heard what the director general said about looking after existing staff. My concern is about existing programs. What measures did the minister put in place to ensure that the ongoing projects that they were involved in delivering and developing could move forward, or did he simply cut them?

[8.10 pm]

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: The issue of ongoing programs is a subject of continuing discussions between Mr Bradley, the Director General of the Department of Commerce, and the Director General of the Department of Indigenous Affairs.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I refer to page 516 of the *Budget Statements*. The consumer protection division line item shows an efficiency dividend worth more than \$700 000 per annum as a result of a reduction in non-core activities. What does that represent in respect of FTEs, and in respect of non-core activities in the consumer protection division? I ask the Minister to illustrate his answer by way of one or two examples.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: The advice I have on that specific activity of the reduction in non-core activities in the consumer protection division is that, over the coming year, up to 11 FTEs will not be replaced or recruited as planned. I am sure that the member will be aware that if she looks through the three per cent efficiency dividend outcomes presented in the budget, she will see that non-replacement of staff is one of the measures that have been taken up. I will ask Anne Driscoll, the Commissioner for Consumer Protection, to provide some more background. My understanding is that these cuts will be from the areas of regulations, associations and charities, finance and valuation industries, motor dealer regulation, registration services, business names, trading standards units, and policy development advice. There will be additional reductions in the budget for non-salary costs, such as legal services and publications. I ask Anne Driscoll whether she wants to make any further comments on that specific line item.

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Ms A. Driscoll: The initial focus was to ensure that we did not make any modifications to key areas. Investigations, the call centre and, in particular, tenancy support, which has been a focus over the past 12 months in addition to retirement village issues, were areas for which we decided to retain the current funding arrangements. The focus was largely on maintenance activities; associations, business names and the register of encumbered vehicles as essentially backroom work associated with maintaining the registers and compliance activities in those areas. We had provided additional resources for trading standards over the years to enable the transition into the new legislation, so that was an area that we could pull back on. Over the past six months we have also pulled back on proactive credit because, as members will be aware, we are transferring the regulation of credit to the commonwealth government within the next six months. It is appropriate to focus on closing those investigations as opposed to identifying new issues. The areas of education and media were marginally adjusted, along with motor vehicle dealer compliance inspections. Again, the focus was to ensure that mainstream investigations, call centre support and the key areas of tenancy and retail were retained. Of course, the industry funded areas were not affected, so real estate, settlements and motor vehicle repairers continue to be a focus for us.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I refer to the first dot point on page 519, which concerns the public sector wages policy. Given that the Western Australian Police Union has overwhelmingly rejected the government's pay offer, how sustainable is the government's public sector wages policy? Given that the point of wages policy is to negotiate over these issues, will the Minister consider a one-year enterprise bargaining agreement—provided the offer is agreeable to the police union—that takes into account the changing circumstances?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: The government's negotiations on police wages outcomes will be conducted with the police union. I know that the member for Nollamara has expertise in industrial matters but she is not, as I understand it, an official of the police union. Even if she was, I would not conduct those negotiations in this place. The fact that the police union has rejected, by way of ballot, the government's initial EBA offer should not be seen as signalling the collapse of the government's wages policy. The government's wages policy is not dictated to by people rejecting the offers we make as guided by that policy; the government's wages policy is the government's wages policy. The wages outcomes that the policy will deliver will be impacted on by a number of factors. We have the capacity within that policy to negotiate within certain parameters. Those parameters range from the consumer price index at the bottom end, so that we protect people's real wages, up to the wage price index, or the percentage increase equivalent to the cumulative impact of the wage price index. I will try to find the relevant point in the document in front of me to outline those parameters for the member. I will do that in due course.

The fact that the police union has rejected the government's initial offer will be a matter for further negotiation. The government has given a very clear indication to the police union that we will negotiate with it in good faith as we move through what I am sure will be an interesting process.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Further to the question, I refer to the general sector wages policy. I accept what the minister says; I am not an official of the police union. The wages policy is currently a three-year policy, but given the changing nature of the economy and the uncertainties surrounding it, I ask whether there is enough flexibility in the policy to offer a one-year EBA instead of what has already been offered to the police union, as outlined in the government's wages policy?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: We will negotiate the upcoming EBAs in a timely way. I might ask Mr Horstman to provide some more comments. Without having been involved in many negotiations previously, I would have to say that I do not think—given that it takes a year to finalise an EBA—that the government would sign a one-year EBA. We are flexible, but I am not sure that we are that flexible, and I will get some more advice on that from Mr Horstman. We made an initial offer to the police union of 9.5 per cent. I understand the frustration of the police; that is not the sort of offer they have seen being made to other groups, such as schoolteachers, for example. The point we make and will continue to make is that circumstances have changed, and we are now attempting to manage the state finances in a vastly different climate. Across Western Australia, the focus for a lot of people is on keeping their jobs. We are negotiating in a different environment and the wages policy is reflective of that. For the member's information, our initial offer to the police union was 9.5 per cent. I am sure that there will be some ongoing negotiations, and those negotiations will be conducted in good faith by the government and its representatives with the police union. There will be an opportunity to negotiate for an improved outcome, over and above the 9.5 per cent, within certain parameters, but there will have to be some demonstrated productivity outcomes. As the broader wages policy stands, the parameters are between 8.2 per cent and 9.3 per cent. That is the wages policy that the government will take into our negotiations at the end of the year across three different areas of government in the first instance.

[8.20 pm]

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That will take place with the member's former union, the miscellaneous workers' union, in relation to employees in the health sector, in relation to education, and in relation to some employees in Main Roads. We went through this earlier today. The way we are conducting these negotiations now is in a far more controlled way. The government will be establishing, for each of those enterprise bargaining agreements, a bargaining coordination team or a bargaining coordination unit. I have ministerial responsibility now for all government wage negotiations. I will be the one who will ultimately report to cabinet on the success or otherwise of those negotiations. The parameters are fairly clear.

The member indicated police are not happy; and I understand that. I wish we could pay them more. The police offer was made outside the parameters of the new government wages policy that applies to EBAs that expire from 1 July. The offer to the police is higher than the offers that will be made to employees at the end of the year. Revised consumer price index and wage price index figures came out subsequent to that. It may well be that we ultimately cannot reach a negotiated outcome and a third party—that is, the commission—becomes involved in wage determinations. If we work through that process, that outcome will be delivered and government will have to get on with life. That is where we are at. We are moving into a formal bargaining process as quickly as we possibly can.

In relation to the police union, it took the option to ballot its members. That process took, as I understand it, about three weeks. That process is now complete and we intend to move forward through the process. The police union may be contemplating some forms of industrial activity to pursue its case. If that is its lawful right, I am sure it will exercise its normal discretion in doing that.

Mr F.A. ALBAN: I refer to page 518, the first dot point under "Significant Issues Impacting the Agency". It refers to Council of Australian Governments reforms and their impact on the agency. Can the minister please explain how a harmonised occupational health and safety regime will deliver better outcomes for workers and employers in Western Australia, particularly given our proven record in this area and the success of the tripartite system we have?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I thank the member for his question. It is a very vexing policy point at the moment and one we are in conversation with the commonwealth about —

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: The minister has not agreed to it, has he?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: No, we have not. I will explain why. We support in principle the harmonisation process as it relates to occupational safety and health. We also think that in Western Australia, through successive governments—and not the least of which because of the activities of the tripartite Commission for Occupational Safety and Health —

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Which the government does not fund participation in anymore.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: It advises me that we have a good system. When I sit down, as the responsible minister, and look at the COAG reform agenda, I apply a pretty simple test. That test is: if it is good for WA, then we should proceed forward.

In relation to industrial relations, for example, I did not think it was good for WA that we assigned our industrial relations powers to the commonwealth. That was a position that cabinet endorsed; and we will not. Work will start soon on a review of the Western Australian Industrial Relations Act and associated industrial relations system.

In relation to occupational safety and health, we have some concerns about the model legislation that is being developed. Those concerns revolve around issues like right of entry, the capacity of safety representatives to stop work on building sites, the application of reverse onus of proof in certain areas, and the fines regime. The fines regime is quite a significant increase on the fines regime that currently exists in Western Australia.

We have made our differences known to the commonwealth on those issues. Notwithstanding those issues, my main concern is about the application of a two-thirds voting majority in relation to future changes to the act. It may well be that we can settle our differences around those four points. It may well be that we can adopt model national legislation. It is a big challenge because of what that legislation looks like today. There is also a big challenge in what that legislation will look like in two, three or four years' time. At the moment that can be changed with the approval of two-thirds of the participants—which is the states and the commonwealth. I have seen that in action. It is not much fun being the one-third because you get rolled over. My concern at a broader level is what happens following application of that two-thirds regime post the adoption of the harmonised system. In New South Wales, for example, where trade unions can take action against employers, what happens —

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: So they should!

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Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I am glad we have that on the record from the member for Nollamara, who thinks that trade unions should be able to initiate occupational safety and health matters. That is not the view of this government. It is definitely not the view of this government. That is not in the model legislation at the moment. Not only can they take action, but as I understand it, in certain circumstances they get a success fee. A trade union can take an action under the occupational safety and health regime in New South Wales, and, if that conviction is successful, in certain circumstances it will keep a percentage of the fine. I find that quite —

Mr M.P. WHITELEY: If a union is exposing a risk to workers' health and is expending its resources in doing that, and is successful in exposing that risk as judged by the court system, what is the problem with that?

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Unlike this state, where they do not have prosecutions. We do not prosecute people.

The CHAIRMAN: Order, member for Nollamara!

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Fortunately, for members opposite, that was not a model that the former state Labor government adopted. It refused to do it. In my view that was a smart move. However, it now seems that with the new blood that has emerged —

Mr M.P. WHITELEY: It is called the “incentivation”.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: New blood has emerged on the government benches. I think some members are making a great contribution. There is a change in the wind. Anyhow, my view is that there is nothing to stop, in due course, New South Wales and/or the ACTU mounting a vigorous campaign to get two-thirds of hands up to introduce that. There is nothing to stop those states getting two-thirds of hands up, as they are trying to do, to introduce reverse onus of proof. That basically means that the person is guilty of an offence until they prove otherwise.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: That is not exactly what it means. That is not how reverse onus works.

The CHAIRMAN: Member for Nollamara, do not interject while the minister is speaking. You can speak afterwards.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: In layperson's terms that is how I interpret it as working. We do not want that. I do not want to expose our state to that type of framework. Until we have resolved those issues, member for Swan Hills, we have reserved our right not to participate in the harmonisation process. I had this discussion with Minister Gillard. We try to have a positive, non-political relationship with our commonwealth colleagues. These issues are sensitive and we try to engage in a proper manner. We have a fundamental point of difference around this issue. Where we end up, we will see.

The former government had signed on to the COAG process. Our view is that we are not necessarily bound by those commitments. Ultimately, as I said to Minister Gillard, they are far more lofty issues than I can get my head around. They are really matters for the Prime Minister and the Premier to discuss. At this stage, in relation to occupational safety and health, we are supportive in principle. We are participating where we get the opportunity to participate, but we are publicly and privately reserving our right not to engage in the harmonisation process.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: I have an additional question on that point. In terms of harmonised legislation, such as the consumer legislation, is that of a similar nature to the two-thirds or is that different?

[8.30 pm]

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: My advice is that it is different.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Is that what we are pursuing? What is it, in terms of the voting rights, that would bring this government into agreeing to the harmonisation legislation?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Before I ask Anne Driscoll to provide an answer to that, I have to say that where we could end up in the long term on what happens on Western Australian work sites will not be impacted on by what happens under those reforms. As the minister, I have sensitivities around what happens on Western Australian work sites. We are keen to make sure that we do everything within our powers to prevent a return to the sorts of industrial activity that we saw on Western Australian work sites post-2001. I know that the member for Nollamara's union was not involved in that. I am very careful to make those comments because I do not want to use the behaviour of a few to tar the many. Unions have a positive role to play. Some people on some work sites, particularly in the building sector, did no-one any favours, in my view. I ask Anne Driscoll to provide more detail around consumer, finance and some of those other areas.

Ms A. Driscoll: In essence, intergovernmental agreements are being signed for each of the initiatives that are subject to review. For example, in relation to Australian consumer law, which will be the composite Trade

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Practices Act and fair trading acts around Australia, a particular IGA is being developed and is still the subject of negotiation. However, at this stage, the proposal is that the commonwealth plus four jurisdictions would be able to determine future changes to the law with consensus being the initial starting point to achieve passage of the legislation through each state.

The reality is that each of the other initiatives often has different arrangements. For instance, business names and credit are each subject to a different IGA. In the case of credit, it is intended that that activity will be through the Standing Committee of Attorneys-Generals and, again, the arrangements will be different there. It is my understanding that it is as much as commonwealth plus two. Obviously each of those issues will be the subject of consideration as the legislation goes through Parliament and consideration is given to the degree to which the state will have any intervention in the referred law down the track.

It is important, too, to point out that some legislation will potentially be referral legislation and may be text or subject-based referral, or alternatively will be template law. These, again, are issues that will need to go through Parliament in consideration of the voting arrangements that will apply in each case.

Mr A.J. WADDELL: I refer to the seventh dot point on page 519 beginning with “Following reviews of relevant legislation”. Could the minister please outline the status of each of those reviews and when they are due to be completed?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Yes, I am happy to. I will provide some advice, and depending on the specific legislation, I will ask Anne Driscoll, the Commissioner for Consumer Protection, to provide some additional details. This is only some of the legislative reform with which the agency has been involved. Members may recall that the Co-operatives Bill 2009 recently passed through the lower house and is now on its way to our fantastic chamber of review. There are other areas, including retail trading hours, that the agency has been involved with. I will ask Anne to provide some more details on the first few issues. However, the Hairdressers Registration Board—I mentioned this very interesting initiative earlier today—will be abolished, and that legislation is going through the drafting process as we speak. I talk often about that as being a symbol of our commitment to reform of the public sector; it is only a small symbol but it is important. A number of governments tried to get that legislation through this place. We have not got it through this place yet, and I would never presuppose that the Parliament necessarily delivers on the outcomes that the cabinet desires, but we will see what happens in relation to that.

It is my understanding that the drafting of the commercial tenancies legislation is proceeding. There was a review of commercial tenancies in 2004, as I recall, and legislation passed through Parliament in 2007 as a result of that review. The second component of legislation that flowed from that review of commercial tenancies is currently being finalised, and that will be presented to Parliament in due course.

In relation to the first three of residential tenancies, retirement villages—an important area—and associations, I will ask Anne Driscoll to provide more detail.

Ms A. Driscoll: The legislation for residential tenancies is currently being drafted. It is a significant piece of legislation. We expect to seek to introduce a bill in the spring session. In relation to retirement villages, a comprehensive 160-page report has been prepared and will be submitted to the minister in the next two weeks. If the minister endorses the recommendations within it, we expect to release that to key stakeholders for final comment in June. In relation to the associations incorporations review, initially a significant draft green bill was produced. Following feedback from a range of stakeholders, it has been decided that it may be appropriate to look at a more simplified set of amendments. We are very mindful that voluntary associations do not want to be hampered with a massive piece of legislation. Taking on board some of the feedback on not overcomplicating the obligations in regard to audit returns, annual returns et cetera, a set of amendments will be proposed to the minister in the next two to three weeks seeking to amend the current legislation but retain its simplicity and, of course, focus on some new model rules that have been raised by stakeholders.

The CHAIRMAN: Members, we have two more questions. I think everyone wants to move on.

Mr M.J. COWPER: I refer to the fourth dot point on page 519 under the heading “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”, which reads —

Regulations that require the installation for residual current devices to be installed in a dwelling prior to the sale of the premises and within two years in the case of leased premises are set to be implemented during the course of the year.

Why have these regulations taken so long to address and how will they improve safety in Western Australia?

[8.40 pm]

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I thank the member for Murray-Wellington for the question on this very important issue. I understand it has been mandatory in Western Australia to have residual current devices fitted in new houses

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constructed post-1992. As I am sure the member is aware, they play a fundamentally important role in the home by protecting people from electrocution, whether they are residents of the home or tradespeople who are working on the home. There is a major issue with the installation of residual current devices in properties that were built prior to then. The department's advice to me is that it is estimated that of the 36 non-workplace fatalities over the past six years involving electrical accidents, 31 would have been prevented if an RCD had been installed. It is a significant issue. Indeed, a case was raised publicly earlier this year—I do not want to go into details—in which, sadly, a young 12-year-old boy in South Lake was electrocuted. The advice is that had an RCD been installed, he would not have been electrocuted.

I will give a little bit of history that sits in and around RCDs, because clearly it has been an issue for some time. My advice is that less than 25 per cent of homes that are pre-1992 are estimated to have been voluntarily fitted with an RCD. That voluntary fitting relates only to power circuits. What we are after now is two RCDs, which would enable people to cover power circuits and light circuits in their properties. In February 2003, the then Minister for Energy and the then Minister for Consumer and Employment Protection were in the process of presenting a submission to cabinet that would basically have done a couple of things. It would have required the installation of RCDs in dwellings, if not already installed, as a condition for the sale of a property. If it were a rental property, RCD protection would have to have been provided within a three-year period. That went for consideration by the former government in 2003. At that time the Department of Housing and Works pointed out that if that regulation were to be adopted, it would have cost the department \$7 million to have upgraded Homeswest properties.

Mr M.J. COWPER: How much would it be now?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: My understanding is that it has now been done. Because of that \$7 million cost to government, a decision was made in 2003 not to proceed, although subsequent to that, Homeswest completed a program by 30 June 2006 in the metropolitan area and 30 June 2007 in regional areas to install RCDs into its homes. I will move forward, because I think it is important that we understand the background. As a result of that, in August 2007 the previous Minister for Employment Protection approved the drafting of the regulations. We came to government in September of last year. After a year, nothing had happened with the formal adoption of those regulations by government and the introduction of that much-needed safety regulation. Subsequent to that, and thanks to the good work of the agency, we have been able to expedite the process by which these RCDs will be introduced. That process has been moving forward. My advice is that those new regulations will come into force on 8 August of this year. I think that is a welcome outcome.

The CHAIRMAN: Is the regulation that is coming in for two or one RCD?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: It is for two, Mr Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN: I have just had two fitted, so I am ahead of the law.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: It is very important. As I said, I will not go through the list of people who have been electrocuted and whose lives might have been saved had an RCD been fitted. The process of government takes time. I am certainly not drawing any conclusions there. All I am saying is that it was a really big issue. It reared its head again in March of this year when that young 12-year-old boy was electrocuted. Those regulations come into force on 8 August of this year. There will be a three-month period of grace so that the real estate industry has the capacity to inform and educate people who work in and around real estate of the need to adopt the changes. Clearly, one of the triggers for installation in houses is when a house is sold. Who is involved in the house sale process? It is real estate agents and/or settlement agents. We will be running a major educational campaign based around informing real estate agents and settlement agents of the new regulations and the importance of people understanding their commitments at the time of sale. Why at the time of sale? We would like to think that if at any time people have the capacity to install RCDs, it would be in and around the sale process. As I have said, the other obligation will be on dwellings subject to lease, rental or hire agreement. People will have 24 months to install those two residual current devices protecting both lighting and electrical power points. That will be a welcome outcome. Although it will not do anything for people who have unfortunately suffered electrocution in the past, I think it is a positive step forward. I might just ask Ken Bowron if he wants to make a couple of other comments, in particular about the program that the government has in place to promote the new regulations following their adoption in August. I think it is important that members understand it.

Mr K. Bowron: The minister has it right. The regulations were passed and gazetted on 8 May, with a three-month lead time, to become law on 8 August. We are working very closely with real estate agents, settlement agents and anyone else associated with the housing industry to make sure that there is good education. We are also working closely with the Fire and Emergency Services Authority and other agencies to make sure it aligns

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with any activities for the requirements to put hard-wired smoke detectors in houses. That education program and the liaison with agencies have already commenced.

The CHAIRMAN: I have been advised that there was an informal agreement that there would be some time limits here.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I am happy to move on. Treasury went on for probably 55 minutes more than we had formally agreed.

Mr B.S. WYATT: If we could move on.

Mr F.A. ALBAN: The eighth dot point on page 519 states —

The Department will commence drafting amendments to legislation regulating boards to create efficiencies and simplify consumer and occupational regulation in Western Australia.

I have had several small businesses over the past 40 years. Will the minister explain how the government will assist in reducing the regulatory burden on small businesses?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I appreciate the question. I think the Premier has made a point of this: it is clearly our view that there are too many boards.

Mr B.S. WYATT: The minister has addressed this question before, has he not?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: This is slightly different, but I will be brief. There are too many government boards and committees. I spoke earlier today about the red-tape task force and the Hairdressers Registration Board of WA, which I will not talk about again. What I will say to the member for Swan Hills is that we are committed to looking at ways to deliver better outcomes via a rationalisation of the number of boards and committees that sit right across government. Within the commerce area are a considerable number of committees. Without showing our hand, because we must be respectful to the boards and committees during that process, some fundamental reforms are underway. The director general has just shown me that there are 12 boards, 14 committees and two entities that are not sure whether they are a board or a committee, so we will be working with them to provide some clarity about those definitions. There is certainly plenty of scope for us to look to reduce the number of boards and committees that operate in and around commerce. The member is right: many of them impact upon business, in particular on small business. We need to take a lead from some of the structures that have been adopted and put in place in other jurisdictions. I do not want to answer any more. I appreciate the member's interest in this area. It is certainly something that we are focused on.

The appropriation was recommended.

[8.50 pm]