

**Division 7: Salaries and Allowances Tribunal —**

Mrs M.R. Marshall, Chair.

Mr R.H. Cook, Minister for Public Sector Management.

Mr L. Cullen, Executive Officer.

[Witness 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, 31 May 2024. 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 give the call to the Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** On page 98 of the *Budget statements*, item 1 under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency” refers to research on the situation around the level of allowances to be provided to Legislative Council members as a result of the change to a whole-of-state electorate. Could I ask a little bit about the timing of that matter and when the Premier expects that a determination will be made? The Premier will then necessarily have to consider that in terms of budget and other matters, so could the Premier explain the process that he sees that following?

[12.30 pm]

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I thank the member for the question. If I may, can I also clarify an earlier answer in the Department of the Premier and Cabinet division. I think the Leader of the Opposition’s question was around who determines electorate officers. I think I said it was an entitlement under the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal. It is actually the Department of the Premier and Cabinet that manages electorate offices and officers. Certainly, allowances, entitlements and salaries are the purview of the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal. The tribunal published a discussion paper in October 2023 about changes being considered to the Legislative Council. The tribunal advertised in *The West Australian* and regional papers in December 2023, calling for public submissions. The tribunal contacted stakeholders directly, providing them with an opportunity to make a submission. This included political party parliamentary secretaries, every member of Parliament, the Western Australian Parliamentary Former Members Association and DPC and Parliament House as administering agencies in order to guide agencies for the tribunal’s determination. The tribunal’s website also provides the opportunity for any interested stakeholder to make a submission to the tribunal. It created a consultative group to continue to guide the tribunal’s thinking, made up of John Cowdell, Barry House, Diane Evers and Colin Holt. As would be expected, they are from different political parties and provided their own perspectives. The group provided general advice to the tribunal around issues such as how members operate, the role of regional members, the types of pressures experienced by regional members, the difficulty of accessing services in regional areas and so on.

The tribunal is currently considering the suggestions made in the submissions to its discussion paper. It is anticipated that the tribunal will release a draft determination of its final decisions in October 2024 for comment, with a final determination to be issued in November 2024. The tribunal has finished its consultation phase. However, if any stakeholder wishes to provide further input on the tribunal’s decisions, they are welcome to contact, or provide their submission to, the tribunal at any time. The tribunal may also choose to run proposed changes past the consultative group prior to finalisation.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Are the parameters of the discussion around just the remuneration—the level of allowances provided—and not the members’ staffing requirements?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I am advised that is correct.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** We attempted to discuss the staffing numbers in the other section, and the Premier directed us here. With his indulgence, could I ask around that? I have right here in front of me the proposition put in writing by the member for Roe. He says that, given that the Legislative Council will be statewide, although some Legislative Council members may choose to be regional, they will not be designated to a particular region. If we look at the Mid-West seat, which I will contest at the next election, there would have been 12 dedicated members of Parliament to cover sections of that seat in the upper house, with six in the Agricultural region and six in the Mining and Pastoral Region. They will all be gone, so the member for Roe’s view, and question, is about the effect

on Legislative Assembly seats that cover large swathes of regional areas. His seat of Roe is another with a large district allowance of over 100 000 square kilometres, with offices in Esperance and Narrogin. Until now, there has been an upper house presence in the Esperance office as well through one of his colleagues, and there has been some resource-sharing to enable that. His question is: with only two FTEs, is that something that can be considered going forward for those large district allowance seats? There is a need to have extra resources because we have seen a retreat of other representatives from the region. I am not saying that there will not be someone there, but no-one will be mandated to be.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** Obviously, the Legislative Council is different from the Legislative Assembly. I do not think it would be appropriate to say, for instance, that the member for Roe has backing from the upper house member in that particular area, because the system is supposed to be blind to political alliances and informal arrangements. We will need to continue, through these electoral reforms, to understand the demands and requirements of members working in regional areas, and we will get some key insights as a result of the tribunal's examination in relation to the upper house. Could the Leader of the Opposition please pass on my apologies to the member for Roe as well. I did not understand that.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Yes, that is fine. We have the answer, and the Premier heard the argument. That is what is important.

**The appropriation was recommended.**