

Division 67: Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority, \$12 752 000 —

Mr N.W. Morton, Chairman.

Mr A.P. Jacob, Minister for Environment.

Mr M. Webb, Chief Executive Officer.

Mr I. Biddle, Business and Finance Manager.

[Witnesses introduced.]

[8.40 pm]

The CHAIRMAN: Member for Gosnells.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I refer to the first dot point under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency” on page 813. Reference is made to the high level of visitation; in fact, some 5.8 million visits. Does this include the Anzac service? How many people were involved?

Mr A.P. JACOB: Kings Park, more broadly, had roughly 5.8 million visits in 2011–12. I presume the member is specifically referring to the dawn service?

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Yes.

Mr M. Webb: The RSL estimates that approximately 45 000 people attended the Anzac service.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I am keen to know about Kings Park’s capacity to cope with such numbers. I am also aware of other events that are sometimes held at Kings Park; for example, the Eid festival. I am curious to know how Kings Park can cope with those numbers, what those numbers might be and how well they are handled.

Mr A.P. JACOB: I understand that the size of the event requires a certain level of management and planning. The larger the event, the larger the levels of management plans, infrastructure and resources that need to be in place to manage that number of people. Those requirements are just indicative of how many people are expected to arrive at a particular event according to their management plan, but I will pass that over to Mr Webb.

Mr M. Webb: If I understand the question correctly, it goes to how we manage events, particularly events such as Eid; is that correct?

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Anzac Day and Eid.

Mr M. Webb: We have a number of events that range from large gatherings through to Anzac Day. If they are a moderate or a large event, we manage it with an event management plan, which each proponent must submit before the event to ensure all the appropriate issues such as public safety and asset protection are provided for. We then work with the proponent before the event. We work with them on the day of the event to ensure that we deliver those outcomes. In the case of Anzac Day, we have already described the visitation to that. For Eid al-Fitr, I think there was approximately 4 500 people last year. There was about 4 000 for Eid al-Adha last calendar year. This calendar year, because of the very inclement weather on 8 August, Eid al-Fitr only attracted approximately 600 people.

Ms L.L. BAKER: I refer the minister to “Customer Service and Cultural Heritage” on page 815. In the FTE count, I note that the authority started 2012–13 with an FTE budget of 63 but the estimated actual for 2013 is 60. That seems to be held over for the next year as well. Given that this is a small agency, what were the three jobs that were going to be done in that budget? What happened to them, how did the authority cope with that and why did it drop back to 60 when it thought it was going to need 63 people?

Mr A.P. JACOB: I thank the member for the question. I think it is important to say that I have been minister for less than five months. The estimated actual for the period prior to my becoming minister was obviously in the earlier budget. Examples of the positions that may not have been filled include a nursery horticultural position, a botanic garden horticultural position and a bushland operation position. They were not ultimately filled in this year’s budget papers and represent what the actual was for last year.

Ms L.L. BAKER: I am sure you probably have other positions like that in the department. Has a decision been made that those three FTEs are no longer needed? What was the rationale around going from 60 to 63? I understand that the minister might not have been there for that. Somebody else might have.

Mr A.P. JACOB: For that detail, it might be best to hand over to Mr Webb.

Mr M. Webb: Again, if I understand the question, it relates to the reduction of FTEs in the past financial year.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Yes.

Mr M. Webb: That was partly related to an FTE cap that was put on this agency.

Ms L.L. BAKER: They were vacant anyway, so they were just not filled?

Mr M. Webb: They became vacant.

Ms L.L. BAKER: So they were just not filled?

Mr M. Webb: Correct.

Mr D.C. NALDER: I also refer to page 815. The last efficiency indicator in the second table on that page indicates a 42 per cent change in the number of refereed journals published per government-funded position compared with the previous year. I must express surprise at the size of that number. Can the minister please explain the significant variation in output by the science staff at Kings Park?

Mr A.P. JACOB: We went from zero per cent to a 40 per cent decrease this year. However, I think it needs to be noted that last year was an exceptional year for Kings Park scientists, having 16 per cent more publications than the floating average of the previous five years. The success of our Kings Park scientists in advancing this humanities knowledge on practical matters such as improvements in seed germination for restoration outcomes is acknowledged by the University of Western Australia with which Kings Park has formed a formal relationship. The university acknowledges that this relationship is part of what is contributing to the UWA being considered amongst the world's top 10 plant science universities. The predicted reduction in the number of publications for the next year reflects a natural part of the research cycle as projects finish and papers have been written and published. In some years the number of publications will be higher and in other years, such as this year, it will be lower. It also demonstrates a focus by Kings Park scientists on targeting key publications to higher impact international scientific journals. These leading international biological journals require greater time and research input for each publication but they also have a far greater reach and a far greater impact. I will ask Mr Webb to confirm but I think the number he gave me earlier when we discussed it was somewhere around 7.4 publications per science FTE on the team.

Mr M. Webb: The minister is correct. Publications per permanent FTE is about that number.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I refer to "Biodiversity Conservation and Scientific Research" on page 815. There has been a substantial drop-off in income—about \$500 000. What would explain that?

Mr A.P. JACOB: Does the member mean between the budget and the estimated actual?

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: It is the other way; it is an increase. I seek an explanation for the change. Can the minister explain the increase, given that it revolves around outsourcing and work conducted by the agency for developers and the like?

Mr A.P. JACOB: Is the member specifically asking why the \$1.966 million increased to \$2.490 million?

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: That is right.

Mr M. Webb: I will try to answer the question. Each year the Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority gets just over 60 per cent of its cash income from appropriation and just under 40 per cent of its cash income from external fee-for-service projects and other sponsorships. The variation in our budget can be explained by projects that we are successful in bidding for and then receiving. There will be a natural fluctuation from one year to the next.

Mr A.P. JACOB: More broadly, I think it is reflective of some of the significant partnerships that are picked up through Kings Park.

The appropriation was recommended.

[8.50 pm]