

BUDGET ESTIMATES 2011-2012

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5

Trade & Investment Portfolio

Monday 24 October 2011

Questions taken Without Notice during the committee hearing

1.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: The budget papers say the global budget is \$1.9 million. Will you indicate the budget amount for each of the trade posts?

Mr ANDREW STONER: Do we have those figures on hand?

Mr BUFFIER: No, we do not have the precise figures for each of the trade posts. In very broad terms it works out around \$500,000 per post. The posts vary in size but there are two to three staff so that covers total salary and operating costs.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: The budget is \$500,000 for staffing and rental?

Mr BUFFIER: The \$1.9 million is the total operating budget for those four offices. They are roughly equivalent in size in terms of costs, but I will take that on notice. I do not have the precise figures.

Answer: I refer the honourable member to my answer to QON 22.

2.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: I refer to the Parliamentary Secretary responsible for trade and investment, the member for Bathurst. Can you provide a list of all his travel-related costs since 1 July this year, including kilometres travelled, accommodation, airfares and meals?

Mr ANDREW STONER: I take it that that request relates to his duties as the Parliamentary Secretary responsible for the Asia-Pacific and trade?

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Yes.

Mr ANDREW STONER: We will obviously have to take that question on notice because it will require compiling a large amount of information. We will need to speak to Mr Toole to get that information.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Can you also table the number of meetings and events he has attended in his capacity as Parliamentary Secretary since 1 July 2011?

Mr ANDREW STONER: Again, I will take that question on notice. I am aware that he has attended many cultural and business-related events. In fact, he attended one last week on my behalf involving the Chinese business community. It will take a little time to compile that information.

Answer: I refer the honourable member to my answer to QON 24.

3.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Deputy Premier, you may have to take this question on notice, but could you provide a list of the entertainment expenditure of the department since 1 April, where there has been such expenditure by the department and your office?

Mr ANDREW STONER: Do we have that information?

Mr BUFFIER: We certainly have records of all our expenditure. It depends what you want under "entertainment". We do not do much entertainment in the department.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Meals and things like that.

Mr BUFFIER: If you mean meals and accommodation—

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: As I understand the way Trade and Investment works, you do promotions for events and things like that, so maybe you could table those.

Mr BUFFIER: We do promotions for events, but we would not class that as entertainment.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: What about instances where your senior staff meet with delegations visiting from overseas? We would like to see that sort of expenditure as well. I

know they host visitors at dinners and things like that so that they might have a more amenable attitude towards investing in New South Wales.

Mr BUFFIER: Yes, we certainly provide for food and sustenance for visiting delegations on different occasions, so we can provide you with that, but for what part of the department?

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: For Trade and Investment as it relates to the Deputy Premier's responsibilities.

Mr ANDREW STONER: There are various expenditures associated with hosting delegations, sometimes supporting particular events that the department might get behind. For example, an advanced leadership forum is coming up and we are contributing towards a networking function with drinks and canapes for the hopefully global attendees at that function. Occasionally, when you have a visiting dignitary, a gift to that person is normal, so there would be some gift-related expenditure. We will try to break down all those types of events, whether delegations or particular events that the department has sponsored, and to the extent possible break down the various items for you.

Answer: I refer the honourable member to my answer to QON 8.

4.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Since taking office how many times have you or your representatives met with Shenhua Watermark or its representatives?

Mr ANDREW STONER: From my recollection, I have not met with Shenhua Watermark or its representatives since taking office, but I will have to confirm that with my diary secretary and get back to this Committee. I am not aware as to whether any of my staff have met with that company or its representatives. If they have, I would expect they would advise me. Once again, I would have to confirm that with the Committee.

Answer: It is a matter of public record that a member of my staff attended a meeting between the office of the Minister for Resources and Energy and representatives of Shenhua. No other meetings have taken place between my staff and Shenhua.

5.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: On that point, on what research are you basing your assertion that coal seam gas is a cleaner energy source?

Mr ANDREW STONER: That is the advice I have had. Again, we were talking about controversial—

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Who has given you that advice, and what is the research on which you are basing that assertion?

Mr ANDREW STONER: There are a number of articles that I have read in various journals and in the media, and I have had advice from the department that there is high demand for gas. Currently we are an importer of gas in New South Wales. There is a high demand for gas. In fact, it is projected that gas prices will climb very steeply unless something is done about supply.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Can you table that departmental advice? It would be beneficial if you could table the advice that outlines that and the research on which that advice is based.

Mr ANDREW STONER: I cannot table that. I do not have that with me. As I said, it has come from a variety of sources. If you want to table the advice that tells me we can put on a magic switch and meet all our energy needs on renewable energy sources, you are welcome to do that. We can have the debate any time.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: We will have that debate. I am happy to table the research that suggests that we could move to base load solar thermal. I just request that you table the departmental advice and the research on which you made those assertions.

Mr ANDREW STONER: We will have to take that as a question on notice and come back to you with the department's workings around the demand for gas in New South Wales vis-à-vis the supply of gas.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: I assume that was a yes, you will table it—

Mr ANDREW STONER: I said that we will take it on notice.

Answer: Please refer to the NSW Government's submission to GPSC 5 Inquiry into Coal Seam Gas.

6.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Does your department issued grants to non-government organisations?

Mr ANDREW STONER: In terms of non-government organisations performing functions that would otherwise be done by government as opposed to corporate or business organisations, not to my knowledge, but I guess I will have to defer to the Director General and the Deputy Director General.

Mr BUFFIER: I would like to take that on notice, Deputy Premier. I think there have been some instances in the past when we have provided some levels of support, and what comes to mind is an organisation called Business for Millennium Development. But off the top of my head I cannot say. I will have to take that question on notice.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I am happy for you to take that on notice and to get back to us.

Answer: I refer the honourable member to my answer to QON 11.

7.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Have you or has your department had any meetings with coal seam gas companies about export LNG proposals in New South Wales? It has been suggested that there could be export LNG facilities at Ballina, Port Stephens, Newcastle or Port Kembla. Have representatives of your department had any meetings with coal seam gas companies about export LNG?

Mr ANDREW STONER: I have not personally been approached by any company about export LNG.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: Not you personally.

Mr ANDREW STONER: As Minister I have not had any meetings with any coal seam gas company about such a proposal. I have met with Santos, which has advised me about the process for its takeover of Eastern Star Gas. It was at that stage assuming that all the necessary approvals were in place, including the vexed issue of pipelines. It had no firm plans about what it might do with the gas if it were able to extract it.

The Hon. JEREMY BUCKINGHAM: So the department has been meeting with representatives of coal seam gas companies to discuss export LNG opportunities.

Mr ANDREW STONER: I will have to ask Mr Buffier. As I said, I have not met with any coal seam gas company specifically to discuss a proposal about export facilities for LNG.

Mr BUFFIER: I do not have that information at my fingertips, but I will take that as a question on notice.

ANSWER: Representatives from the Division of Resources and Energy of NSW Trade & Investment have previously met with Eastern Star Gas representatives regarding proposals for a LNG export facility at Newcastle as part of a whole of government process led by the Department of Premier and Cabinet.