

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 3

Tuesday 9 October 2012

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area

UNCORRECTED PROOF THE LEGISLATURE

The Committee met at 12.10 p.m.

MEMBERS

The Hon. N. Blair (Acting-Chair)

The Hon. C. M. Faehrmann
The Hon. A. R. Fazio
The Hon. P. Green

The Hon. S. Mitchell
The Hon. P. G. Sharpe

PRESENT

The Hon. Don Harwin, *President of the Legislative Council of New South Wales*

CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS

Corrections should be marked on a photocopy of the proof and forwarded to:

**Budget Estimates secretariat
Room 812
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000**

ACTING-CHAIR: I declare open to the public this hearing of the inquiry into budget estimates 2012-13. I welcome the President of the Legislative Council, the Hon. Don Harwin, and accompanying officials to the hearing. Today the Committee will examine proposed expenditure for the portfolio of The Legislature. Before we commence, I will make some comments about procedural matters.

In accordance with the Legislative Council's guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings, only Committee members and witnesses may be filmed or recorded. People in the public gallery should not be the primary focus of any filming or photographs. In reporting the proceedings of this Committee, you must take responsibility for what you publish or what interpretation you place on anything that is said before the Committee. The guidelines for broadcast of the proceedings are available on the table by the door.

Any messages from advisers or staff who are seated in the public gallery should be delivered through Chamber or support staff, or the Committee clerks. Mr President, I remind you and the officers accompanying you that you are free to pass notes and refer directly to advisers who are seated at the table behind you. Transcripts of this hearing will be available on the web from tomorrow morning.

The House has resolved that answers to questions on notice must be provided within 21 days. I remind everyone to turn off their mobile phones. All witnesses from departments will be sworn prior to giving evidence. Mr President, I remind you that you do not need to be sworn; you already have sworn an oath to your office as a member of Parliament. For all other witnesses, I ask that each of you in turn state your full name, job title and agency, and swear either an oath or an affirmation.

DAVID MICHAEL BLUNT, Clerk of the Parliaments and Clerk of the Legislative Council,

ROBERT STEFANIC, Executive Manager, Department of Parliamentary Services, and

JOHN GREGOR, Director, Financial Services Branch, sworn and examined:

ACTING CHAIR: I declare open for examination the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of The Legislature. As there is no provision for the President to make an opening statement before the Committee commences questioning, we will begin with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Mr President, are you aware of the allegations made in relation to the Minister for Fair Trading, Anthony Roberts, bullying a member of his staff? That matter was referred to by the Premier as being an issue for the Speaker to deal with. Can you advise us of the procedures you have in place, as the President of the Legislative Council, to deal with similar allegations, if they were to arise?

The PRESIDENT: I think the longstanding practice when those type of matters occur is for them to be handled by, obviously, the relevant staff members where the House departments are concerned, but more particularly within the Human Services section of the Department of Parliamentary Services. Normally they would be referred to me only if it was necessary; if the matter was serious enough. Obviously, if there were allegations of the type of matter to which you refer, those matters would be raised to the level of a Presiding Officer. But in my experience, there have not been any issues like that with any member of the Legislative Council, so I have not had to give consideration to those matters.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Mr President, you would be aware of the parliamentary guidelines that state that members should not use Legislative Assembly or parliamentary crests or the State Coat of Arms with any political campaigning or election material, including when the cost is being met from private sources. Are you aware of the case of the member for Smithfield, Andrew Rohan, sending out an endorsement for one of his staff members during the recent local government campaign?

The PRESIDENT: The honourable member has been here for enough time to know that questions about members of the Legislative Assembly, or staff members of the Legislative Assembly, are outside the purview of this Committee because of the principle of comity between the Houses, so I propose not to respond.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I will rephrase. What procedures are in place within the Legislative Council, if a similar event was to occur in relation to a member of the Legislative Council?

The PRESIDENT: Could you remind me of the particular circumstances?

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Yes. During the recent local government election campaign, the member for Smithfield sent out a letter to constituents, obviously using his parliamentary letterhead and the parliamentary crest, in which he endorsed one of his staff members. Many members of the Legislative Council have duty electorates and they do mail-outs directly into electorates. What procedures are in place to ensure that members of the Legislative Council are not able to act similarly?

The PRESIDENT: The members' guide clearly outlines what are, and what are not, permissible uses of entitlements in terms of publications. It makes quite clear the processes that members are supposed to follow. I do not think much more needs to be said beyond that, but if either the Clerk or the Executive Manager would like to add anything, they should feel free to do so.

Mr BLUNT: I recall, during the lead-up to the local government elections, sending out two communications to members and their staff reminding them of the policies—both the existing and new policies—in relation to the guidelines for staff members who may be contemplating standing for election, and also reminding members of their obligations in this regard.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: When the reporting of this particular incident was made it was reported that a member of the Liberal Party said that no rules had been broken. Would you disagree with that assessment?

The PRESIDENT: To respond to the allegations you are making about the member for Smithfield would be a breach of the principle of comity between the Houses. I am sorry, I am unable to respond.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: I now want to turn to the issue of efficiency savings that all government agencies are required to make.

The PRESIDENT: Indeed.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Under the previous Labor Government the efficiency savings for Parliament excluded salaries of members and members' staff. Can you advise if this is still the case and, if not, what is the impact on Parliament?

The PRESIDENT: I can advise it is not the case under the current Government either.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: So there are no efficiency savings to be made out of members' salaries?

The PRESIDENT: It is the case that the Speaker and I have ensured there is no efficiency dividend that is calculated with members' and their staffs' salaries included in the calculation. The only efficiency dividend is on the balance of the Parliament's budget.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: That is the same as it was in the previous Parliament?

The PRESIDENT: In the previous Parliament?

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Yes.

The PRESIDENT: For that I would have to refer to the Executive Manager because that would precede my time as President. I understand that is the case. Is that the case?

Mr STEFANIC: Yes, it has normally been the case. There has been occasion when Treasury has calculated amounts based on the Parliament's global budget, but in the past whenever we have made representations we have normally been successful in having the efficiency dividend revised so that it applies over what we would call the controllable operational budget of the Parliament. That was also the case this year and the next.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Mr President, can you advise why the security camera that was located in the car park on level 4, basically opposite the ramp that comes down from Hospital Road, was removed?

The PRESIDENT: I would have to refer that question to the Executive Manager.

Mr STEFANIC: That is the first I have heard of it. I will take it on notice and follow it up.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I am interested in third party parliamentary monitoring organisations and their access to the data generated on the public record through the activities of Parliament. I know that previously there have been discussions about allowing material generated by Hansard to be given to third parties, such as, OpenAustralia, so that they could develop websites and members of the public can basically track what their members of Parliament are saying. Are you able to give any update on any progress at all in relation to releasing this information so that third party organisations can use it?

The PRESIDENT: First of all, there is an enormous amount of change going on with our whole capacity to support information communication technology in Parliament, which, to be fair, began under previous Presiding Officers with the Legislative Assembly Chamber broadcast system. That has been upgraded and has now been extended into the Legislative Council broadcast system in this Parliament. There is capital works funding for the whole Hansard digital recording system, which is taking place in this Parliament.

We are migrating to Outlook, but that is another subject. An enormous amount is being done to put the building blocks in place. That is the first and most important point I would make. In this budget \$1.7 million is provided in capital funding to upgrade communications. That is the critical first step. Parliament's Strategic Plan 2012-2015 specifies as a strategic objective its commitment to increasing the involvement and awareness of

New South Wales citizens about Parliament and the parliamentary process. A website, which was launched in 2011—

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I am very aware of the website. Can I interrupt you for a minute? The question is very specific. Are there plans to allow third party organisations access to the publicly generated data so they can repackage it and citizens can develop their own applications, websites and monitoring systems to hold us to account?

The PRESIDENT: I am sorry I cannot talk about all the other wonderful things we are doing in the social media, but I will skip a few paragraphs further down the answer. The Parliament is looking right now, based on the suggestions that have come from a number of members—and also you in your adjournment speech, which we noted with interest—at the copyright and conditions of use in relation to its publications with a view to making *Hansard*, House papers and other publications more accessible to the public.

We expect we will be making some announcements on the information in the near future. Parliamentary departments are advising me it is important that Parliament maintains control of its publications and the methods by which the information is made accessible to the public. Nevertheless, the parliamentary departments would be happy to hear from members on any ideas they have to enhance access to information on Parliament and the activities of members, including your suggestion.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I appreciate that. I have to say that is the same answer that was given three years ago when I last asked about it. Are we going to proceed very far with this? I wait with bated breath to see further developments.

The PRESIDENT: I had forgotten that, but I note with interest my predecessor obviously had the same concerns expressed to her.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: It may not have been Meredith.

The PRESIDENT: I was thinking of a predecessor closer.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: This question might be for Mr Blunt. Information has been made available via the Commonwealth Parliament, and OpenAustralia has a very good system. I encourage everyone to look at it in relation to how they can track what is happening; people are alerted when their local member gets up to speak so that they can follow what their member is saying. Clearly, the Commonwealth Parliament has found its way—although I understand it might have gone kicking and screaming—to allow this to happen. I am not sure what is different in the New South Wales Parliament, other than a desire to keep control of the information.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: I have some questions in relation to the new vehicular security arrangements at the back of Parliament House. I understand that as a result of the new gatehouse being located outside—a principle I strongly support—it has been necessary to have additional security staff because of the problems people have had in swiping their access cards to get in and out. I would like comments on that, as well as comments on a global figure for the cost of those security arrangements and why the little outside gatehouse is coated in copper, which seems slightly extravagant?

The PRESIDENT: You have asked a whole lot of questions there. We will try to deal with them one at a time. We might come to the issue of security guards when the Executive Manager supplements my answer, if there is a need to supplement it. Let us start with the cost aspect of your question. Traffic management works were a step that Parliament has taken to ensure a safe and secure working environment for Parliament House and its inhabitants. Obviously, the traffic management upgrade was necessary to address the particular risks raised in the 2006 ASIO report, which I am sure would have been drawn to your attention while you were President. I think under your predecessor in November 2009, or would that have been you—I cannot remember?

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: I cannot either. Time flies.

The PRESIDENT: It does. A business case was submitted as part of the capital budget submission to upgrade the glazing of the windows at the back, the loading dock, the mailroom and traffic management. The work currently being done out the back is the last stage of that project that was approved at that time. The total cost of all the work has been \$4.1 million, but most of that was stage one, which was the glazing project. For the

traffic management project, which includes the loading dock and the mailroom upgrade, the mailroom and the loading dock is \$488,000, the traffic management aspect of it is \$831,000. But, of course, the major components of that are the vehicle and pedestrian gates, which is \$353,234 of that section. Obviously, the main purpose of the gates is to have appropriate vehicle crash-resistant capability and adequate stand-off distance against intrusion into the building. It also improves the whole issue of security screening of vehicles.

Since your particular interest is traffic management, I will not go through all of the benefits of the rest of the project in respect to the new mailroom but, obviously, given that it is now at proper standards developed post-9/11, it is important for all of us. The traffic management system has been the source of some comment by members. I might deal with the cladding issue first. It is not possible to give the actual cost of the traffic box because it was part of the costing of the whole of the mailroom project. Basically, the choice of the material was because of the heritage precinct we occupy, in particular the State Library. The project architect selected the material to be sympathetic to the surrounding environment and to ensure that it would withstand exposure for many years, requiring minimal maintenance.

The particular material chosen was not the most expensive at all. There has been some talk about the cost. In fact, it was cheaper than several options that could have been considered. The fact that it was copper was largely because of considerations in the City of Sydney Council development approval and what the council would and would not accept in that particular precinct. I dare say that you probably recall the Parliament's difficulty with the City of Sydney over the bollards at the back of Parliament House.

When they were being installed the advice given to the Parliament was that we would need to consider something like copper or anodised bronze, which is basically the consistent cladding used throughout the building. Copper was significantly cheaper. What was extraordinarily regrettable was that the material should have been supplied with a pre-weathered finish as part of the specification, but the builder and the architect unilaterally decided to accept delivery of the non-weathered bright copper sheets, which, of course, drew considerable interest as we all recall.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: But they will go green over time, will they not?

The PRESIDENT: They have already weathered quite dramatically. In respect to the whole traffic management system, members are no different to anyone else in the community: they do not particularly like change. Frankly, I do not think that any of the traffic issues are insurmountable. Nevertheless, I regard a number of aspects as unsatisfactory. Parliament is in the process of documenting those aspects of the performance of the architect, the Building Services engineer and the building contractor in the design and construction of the traffic box and other elements of the car park entry. Where possible the Department of Parliamentary Services uses the New South Wales procurement government contract and prequalified consultants to undertake projects.

These vendors are used in an effort to minimise project risks, and achieve value for money and successful project outcomes. The Parliament used prequalified consultants and contractors for this project. These vendors were selected on the basis that they had demonstrated an ability to undertake work of a similar cost, nature and complexity. In the first instance, we will report back to the Department of Finance and Services for the performance of the contractors and recommend removal from the list of prequalified vendors. That is the nature of our concern.

At the very least, it is anticipated that this will adjust their overall contractor ranking for inclusion in future New South Wales public sector tenders. We are seeking also contractual advice on action that could be taken for the fundamental issues that we have with the traffic box design. Contractually, we must allow the contractor the opportunity to rectify any site-related issues. If they cannot do so within a reasonable time frame, then we have the authority to arrange the work and back charge the contractor. The Parliament will not make final contract payments until we have exhausted all our contractual and legal options. Sorry for the long response and sorry to the crossbench and Government members for eating into their time.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: It is very interesting.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Incredibly thrilling.

Mr STEFANIC: Could I add to that? There was one final part to the member's question.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Oh, there is more? Who would have thought?

Mr STEFANIC: Obviously because of the issues, the guards at the traffic box are there to assist members with entry and exit as part of a changed management process. It is being managed within the budget for special constables. There is no additional cost to the Parliament for that. Obviously, until all the operational issues—including access control—are sorted out, we wanted to minimise the already difficult impact on car park users.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Mr President, earlier you mentioned that \$1.7 million will be spent on the need to upgrade the Parliament's email, network, file and print services. I note, through some staff, that the current version of GroupWise is seven years old and on occasion very slow—slow enough to cause significant frustration to office staff. Can you explain which Outlook email system we will be moving towards—2003 or 2007?

The PRESIDENT: I think I will be able to do that. If the Executive Manager wants to add anything, please feel free. The project, first of all, is on track. It is due to be completed by the end of March 2013. The procurement effort has involved three separate tender processes: one for software licensing, one for services and a third is in the process for a remote access solution. The scope of the project includes replacement of Novell GroupWise with Microsoft Outlook, Novell eDirectory with Microsoft Active Directory and Windows XP with Windows 7. Beyond that I should advise that the relevant version is the 2010 version.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: Since technology can significantly change in a short period of time, are there long-term plans to upgrade parliamentary email and operating systems more frequently than the last system, which I am led to believe is three years old? Is \$1.7 million enough money for longer term plans given the fact that you mentioned 2012 to 2015?

The PRESIDENT: As always, this is a matter of what we can persuade Treasury to give us. The Speaker and I were grateful for the assistance of members in bringing the Treasurer to the point where he was prepared to give us the money, and I certainly acknowledge that. It is within that budgetary context that we get anything in this building, frankly. I am delighted that we have been able to do it now, but it is some time since there was an upgrade. The Executive Manager might be able to give more detail in that respect.

Mr STEFANIC: I acknowledge your concerns. There was for a long time very poor planning in respect of technology upgrades. We now have scheduled upgrades as part of our standard process. Obviously we are still catching up from the years of poor planning. What we are endeavouring to do is stay on current platforms as much as possible. As the President reflected, within the means we have available we put a substantial business case together for Treasury to allow us to upgrade not only the email platform but the active directory. The entire basis of our messaging system is being replaced. That is the common platform for most of the rest of the world and that is where we hope to stay.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: At the moment we have wireless internet in the Chamber and certain parliamentary rooms. Will the \$1.7 million include expansion of the current wireless network for greater coverage in the Parliament?

The PRESIDENT: No, I am afraid not. We have an estimate of the cost for doing the whole building. I would love to get funding for the whole building.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: What cost was that?

The PRESIDENT: It is about \$800,000. If we cannot do the whole building we will concentrate on particular precincts and get as much as we can. Again, it is something where every time this is done it needs to be through the budget process.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: With due respect, do you think in the twenty-first century that Parliament should be totally covered with wireless internet? I know you are passionate about opening Parliament to the public and one would think that would be a symbiotic process.

The PRESIDENT: We are preparing the business case right now. Obviously, there is a strong case for the whole building being covered by wireless. Any number of workers in the private sector would be shocked at what we have available to us here in Parliament House.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I am shocked.

The PRESIDENT: This is something that has been asked for on a number of occasions. I think actually last year might have been the first occasion we asked for wireless throughout the whole building. We were unsuccessful with that request. Subsequently we have got Outlook and that is something. We are inching forward. The business case is being prepared. Let us hope that in the current very difficult budgetary context we may be able to do something.

The Hon. PAUL GREEN: I know you love public education, Mr President.

The PRESIDENT: Do you mind if I add one thing to the answer I just gave? We do anticipate that all the public areas of the building will go wireless within the next few months. We have found enough money in the budget to be able to do that.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Will that include this room?

The PRESIDENT: We think the Macquarie Room and the Jubilee Room will be covered. That is important for members during committee hearings like this, but also for the people sitting in the gallery at hearings and others in the Fountain Court.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Mr President, does the Parliament have an access and inclusion plan, some kind of plan for accessibility for staff and members?

The PRESIDENT: I will ask the Executive Manager to talk about this because it is important. Like so many things that we do we are captured by the precinct we work within and the funds we are given in terms of what can be done here. I note, for example, this room we are having the hearing in has doors to ensure that it is accessible by people in wheelchairs. Progressively various projects have been undertaken in the Parliament to ensure that it is accessible. It is a function of what funds we get but there is a plan. I will have the Executive Manager go into detail.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: What I am particularly interested in is accessible toilets for staff. In the Legislative Council there is at least one member of staff who is in a wheelchair and has to go down to the public toilet every time he wants to go to the toilet, which is not the best situation for him to be in.

Mr STEFANIC: We had an accessibility audit done some time ago and we are working towards implementing the recommendations. We are in the process of developing an accessibility policy. I guess the difficulty we have is the building was designed over 30 years ago when accessibility was not an important criteria. We are, however, dealing with the critical areas where we can. For example, in the last year we have acquired a ramp for use in the Strangers Dining Room for functions to assist in that regard.

We continue to seek funds for areas such as the Chambers. In the past we have made a submission to Treasury seeking disability access for the Chambers, but that funding was not forthcoming in the last year. We are actively pursuing projects to assist with accessibility. I note the member's concerns about ready staff access to toilets. Perhaps if I could take that on notice and prepare a more fulsome response?

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Mr President, the Parliament website currently states that Parliament has been working with the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water—which is clearly now the Office of Environment and Heritage [OEH]—to develop the New South Wales Parliament sustainability strategic action plan road map, a comprehensive action plan that will help set the strategic direction for reaching the Parliament's sustainability goals. What is the current status of this road map?

The PRESIDENT: An immense amount of good work has been done on that. I will ask the Executive Manager to go into some detail.

Mr STEFANIC: If I may, that deserves a more detailed response. Could I take that on notice?

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: You might need to take this on notice: The 2010-11 annual report does report on some of the sustainability program initiatives, but I was particularly interested to know whether there were any further initiatives being developed as well as what is here—for the future rather than the last four years?

Mr STEFANIC: There is an additional initiative we are currently looking at: improved waste recycling. Part of the project with the loading dock upgrade included the installation of what they call a leveller, which is a lifting device that assists waste containers to be lifted up and down from the dock to road level. Until now we have been limited in our ability to recycle bottles and plastics because most recycling vendors tend to use wheelie bins or larger bins that require that lifting device. Now that project is completed and we have that device we are exploring options to improve our waste recycling.

The PRESIDENT: There were occupational health and safety concerns prior to the introduction of that.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: My next question was about container recycling. You now have at least a system in place to enable the more efficient and safer collection of containers. Is it fair to say that Parliament is now looking at options for container and waste recycling within the waste recycling sector? Is that where you are up to?

Mr STEFANIC: Yes.

The Hon. CATE FAEHRMANN: Will that include individual offices having container recycling bins if Parliament goes down that path?

Mr STEFANIC: We have not yet explored to that level of detail. We have to look, within our ever-diminishing resources, at how we can manage the recycling process. I would see as a minimum that we would have at least some sort of receptacle on each floor to enable recycling of bottles and plastics. We would, as a minimum, look at the common areas. But I certainly note your concerns about recycling bins in offices. The concern would be that we have limited cleaning staff arrangements, and to service offices individually would require some effort.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Mr President, in your responses to a number of previous questions you have already touched on the migration from GroupWise to Microsoft Outlook. What further information can you provide to the Committee on the progress of this project?

The PRESIDENT: Most of the key pieces of information have been supplied. Obviously, members would be aware of the particular benefits that they will be able to obtain once we are in Outlook in terms of capacity to receive their parliamentary email directly on iPad or iPhone devices. I think those are the main elements. I will not take up any more time of the Committee.

The Hon. JOHN AJAKA: Mr President, could you indicate why the broadcast system was upgraded?

The PRESIDENT: The existing Chamber broadcasting system, which was installed in 2003, had several problems. It was incapable of high-definition broadcast, and it did not meet contemporary broadcast standards or the reasonable expectations of members, the public or the media. The system had also failed at critical times; and there was a real possibility that one or more of the system's operational components would fail. That was pointed out to Treasury in the business case. There were also shortcomings in the sound reinforcement system which adversely affected the audio broadcast of debate and the ability of the Hansard reporters to guarantee accurate transcriptions of proceedings. Obviously, the digital revolution has changed the expectation of end users, including members, media and the general public for the quality of footage and audio required.

At the end of 2010 funding was sought for the replacement of the Chamber broadcasting system. The request was successful, and Treasury provided funding of \$882,000 for the 2011-12 financial year to replace the whole of the Legislative Council Chamber broadcasting system, including cameras and robotic systems, camera control equipment, and software, the video and audio distribution system, installation of cabling to ITS and the Library, and the construction of a purpose-built joint facility for the control of the camera equipment. The Department of Parliamentary Services undertook the tender process and project management. A technical adviser provided assistance in providing the tender documents and in the tender evaluation process.

PA People was announced as the successful tenderer in January 2012, and the project commenced soon after. The work, as members will recall, was done over Easter and the system was implemented in May. There are now six high-definition digital cameras, providing for improved camera angles and better images for

recording and webcasting, although changes to the webstream image will not be apparent until later in the year because of some other technical issues that we have. Most of these issues will be resolved fairly quickly, with work continuing on testing and configuring of new streams over the internet, and testing of internet services dependent on the stream.

The video titling graphics have also been upgraded. Eight new speaker microphones have replaced the previous four microphones that hung from the ceiling. The additional microphones on the table form part of the Hansard and broadcast system. To assist visitors to the Chamber, two monitors have been installed in the lower public gallery. The text overlay on the monitors will assist the public in understanding what is being debated, who is speaking, and other key information. I will leave it there.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I note that we have only two minutes remaining. In that time, Mr President, could you provide the Committee with a brief update on the activities of the twinning project between this Parliament and the national parliaments of the Solomon Islands and Bougainville?

The PRESIDENT: Twinning is going exceedingly well. It has been a brilliant project. The initial funding provided by AusAID runs out in April 2013. We have sought an extension of funding to June 2015, and are quietly confident that we will succeed as we have been asked to lodge a detailed application beyond the initial application. As I am sure all members know, the twinning project is part of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's twinning program, which was established back in June 2007. New South Wales really has been the leading Parliament, but other parliaments are now starting to look at what we are doing and follow us.

In that respect, on the day following the Presiding Officers and Clerks Conference this year we had a conference on twinning to highlight the work that we do on twinning. I pay particular tribute to our twinning coordinator, Simon Johnston. Having observed him in the field, I know he does an outstanding job at creating relationships with the staff of the parliaments of Bougainville and the Solomon Islands. The excellent work being done will become quite clear when AusAID makes a decision about taking us to the next stage. So good is our work on twinning that it has probably been one of the reasons that AusAID is now looking at funding all of the other Australian State parliaments in terms of their activities with their twin parliaments in the Pacific.

Their approach will be slightly different to ours, but ours works well with the particular parliaments that we are linked with—Bougainville and the Solomon Islands—which have their own particular challenges. They are culturally very similar countries and they are both post-conflict parliaments. So our mission is slightly different to the others, but that is appropriate. Simon leads the team but many of the staff of the three parliamentary departments give of their time as well. I am sure they find it very interesting work; it is great for their professional development, and what we are doing for the people of Bougainville and the Solomon Islands is something that I think everyone associated with the New South Wales Parliament can be proud of.

ACTING-CHAIR: Thank you, Mr President, that is all the time we have. It is one o'clock and we should probably say, "To suit the convenience of honourable members ..." I thank you and your officers for coming along this afternoon. I remind you that answers to questions on notice should be provided within 21 days.

(The witnesses withdrew)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.
