

Speaking circuit 'cash waste'

EXCLUSIVE

■ Daniel Emerson

Taxpayers are forking out tens of thousands of dollars a year for bureaucrats to listen to their bosses and colleagues give speeches on WA's corporate speaking circuit.

Official documents show State Government agencies spend millions of dollars a year sending public servants to seminars, conferences and workshops including interstate and over-

seas events. Much of it is relevant professional development tapping in to emerging trends and training in the delivery of public services.

But the State Opposition has blown the whistle on hundreds of thousands of dollars in "needless" expenditure, labelling the number of catered working lunches "a luxury the State can no longer afford".

Concerns from the parliamentary documents covering June 2014 to February include:

- Public servants attending

events where Government speakers make up all or a significant part of the program.

- Multiple employees from the same agency — up to 30 officers — attending the same event.
- The sheer number of events attended. More than \$540,000 worth among the various transport agencies and 230 events costing about \$450,000 attended by the Water Corporation, which is shedding jobs.
- Public officers attending conferences that have little or nothing to do with their role.

One example included the Department of Treasury spending almost \$10,000 sending 50 staff to State of the State and Economic and Political outlook seminars featuring Premier Colin Barnett and Treasurer Mike Nahan.

Lotterywest spent \$12,650 sending 30 staff to watch motivational US business author Daniel Pink present to the Australian Institute of Management in March last year.

Department of Sport and Recreation spent \$400 sending two

staff to a "courage under fire" presentation by human rights lawyer and ex-military negotiator Rabia Siddique in June.

Labor's government accountability spokesman Ben Wyatt said the level of taxpayer-funded participation in the multimillion dollar corporate events industry was "out of control".

Premier Colin Barnett said conferences allowed public servants important interaction with members of the private and not-for-profit sectors but it had to be relevant.