

STONE HITS OUT AT MINISTER'S CRITICISM

The mayor of Wodonga, Cr Stone, yesterday hit out strongly at the Minister for Youth, Sport and Recreation, Mr Dixon, for what he described as "ill-founded criticism".

But the mayor admitted that some of Mr Dixon's criticism during his Wodonga visit on Wednesday was constructive.

Cr Stone said a council officer ought to have been asked to accompany Mr Dixon on his fact-finding mission, when he would have been told of the council's involvement in development of sporting facilities.

He further stated that an urgent letter to the Minister telling him of the council's plan to develop the swimming pool area into a summer recreation centre had not been answered.

Cr Stone said he was amazed that a Minister would come to Wodonga to examine sporting facilities without seeking to have a council officer accompany him.

"The officer would have been in a position to answer the Minister's questions first hand and save him the trouble of trying to find the answers per medium of a statement he made to the press," Cr Stone said.

It was unlike the approach of other Victorian Government ministers who had visited Wodonga to obtain knowledge of aspects of future develop-

ment which affected their departments.

He considered it strange that Mr Dixon expected a special meeting of the council would have been called to discuss guidelines, yet had failed to advise the council officially of his intention to visit the city.

Cr Stone said had he been officially advised of Mr Dixon's intended visit, he would have been happy to convene a special meeting to discuss the guidelines with him.

He said: "I acknowledge that some of the criticism is constructive, but some is also well-founded."

On August 25, 1972, the council had made application to the Minister for Local Government for funds for improved filtration and lighting at the Wodonga swimming pool, Cr Stone said.

When the council became aware that the Department of Youth, Recreation and Sport was to assume responsibility for such projects, a letter was sent to Mr Dixon on July 17 this year.

The letter had emphasised the urgency of the pool proposal, as the council wished to develop it into a summer recreation area.

"No answer to either letter has been received, and no grant has yet been approved," Cr Stone said.

He said the Minister may not be aware that the Wodonga council had already spent \$80,000 on Wodonga Sports Park, and had received a mere \$3000 in subsidy.

Operating expenses for sporting facilities this year already amounted to \$31,567, and \$9660 had been received in grants.

Last year operating expenses were \$32,222, and grants \$7730.

Cr Stone said that Mr Dixon's remarks about the Wodonga Sports Park pavilion were quite unfair, as facilities were primarily designed for use by netball and tennis players.

A close examination of the pavilion would reveal that the largest part was a hall, where organisations run social functions and hold meetings.

DIXON PRAISES WANGARATTA

Wangaratta was a city of inspiration, the Minister for Youth, Sport and Recreation, Mr Dixon, said tonight.

Mr Dixon, who was speaking at a civic reception, said he had seen a city which was trying to take care of itself.

"Wangaratta is a city where the people are trying to communicate so that their city can improve.

"To me it is something of an inspiration, something one can speak of in glowing terms as one goes to other places," he said.

Mr Dixon had earlier been taken on a bus tour of Wangaratta's sporting and community facilities.

He was accompanied by city councillors and staff and representatives of the various sporting and community organisations.

Mr Dixon said it would

be completely untenable for his ministry to say that because a place was helping itself, it would not need government aid.

He said the facilities he had seen were very good and the facilities planned and at present under construction, would make Wangaratta even better.

"We will be making our contribution," he said.