

Hon Paul Llewellyn; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Nigel Hallett; Hon Bruce Donaldson; Hon Barry House; Hon Wendy Duncan

Division 66: Environment and Conservation, \$238 549 000 —

Hon Ken Travers, Deputy Chairman.

Hon Sally Talbot, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment; Climate Change.

Mr K. McNamara, Director General.

Mr R. Atkins, Director, Environmental Regulation.

Dr J.C. Byrne, Director, Corporate Services.

Mr J. Sharp, Deputy Director General, Parks and Conservation.

Mr S. Waller, Director, Office of Climate Change.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: On behalf of the Legislative Council Estimates and Financial Operations Committee, I welcome you to this evening's hearing. Before we begin, I must ask you to take either the oath or affirmation.

[Witnesses took the oath or affirmation.]

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: This hearing is being held in public, although there is discretion available to the committee to hear evidence in private either of its own motion or at the witnesses' request. If for some reason you wish to make a confidential statement during today's proceedings, you should request that the evidence be taken in closed session before answering the question.

Government agencies and departments have an important role and duty in assisting Parliament to scrutinise the budget papers on behalf of the people of Western Australia. The committee values that assistance.

Members are asked to sit to my left towards the front of the chamber where practicable so that witnesses will not have to turn their head to the back of the chamber when answering questions. It will greatly assist Hansard if when referring to the *Budget Statements* volumes or the consolidated account estimates, members give the page number, item, program, amount and so on in preface to their questions.

If supplementary information is to be provided, I ask for the parliamentary secretary's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the committee's clerk within five working days of receipt of the questions. An example of the required Hansard style for the documents has been provided to the parliamentary secretary's advisers. The committee reminds agency representatives to respond to questions in a succinct manner and to limit the extent of personal observations.

At this time I ask all the witnesses whether they have read, understood and completed the "Information for Witnesses" form and also whether they fully understood the meaning and effect of the provisions of that document.

[8.10 pm]

The Witnesses: Yes.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I note for the benefit of Hansard that all the witnesses indicated yes to that question. I now move to questions. Hon Paul Llewellyn.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: I have a series of questions, and I will start from the front end of the document. With regard to the significant issues and trends on pages 1059 and 1060, I want to get an indication of some specific issues. The last dot point on page 1060 states that there is a continuing reduction in reliance on landfill through recycling. I am curious to know how that accords with the figures printed on page 1063, which show a decrease in recycling rates from 33.4 per cent in 2006-07 to about 24 per cent in 2007-08. It does not seem to me that there is a good agreement between those two statements.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Could Hon Paul Llewellyn please give us the second reference again? He is referring to page 1060 and —

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: Page 1060 is the first reference, and the last dot point states that there is a continuing reduction in the reliance on landfill through recycling. Then on page 1063 there are figures showing a decrease in recycling rates from 33.4 per cent in 2006-07 to about 24 per cent in 2007-08. It just does not seem to gel that those two things could be working in the same direction. I am now referring to the table on page 1063, which shows that the percentage of waste in the metropolitan area diverted from landfill through recycling is going down—there is a downward trend from 33 to 24 per cent. How does the department get that going down?

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Hon SALLY TALBOT: I will refer this question to Mr Robert Atkins for his comments.

Mr R. Atkins: Indeed, those figures do go down. We are undergoing a resource and economic boom in which, invariably, the amounts of waste generated are increasing. That is masking any efforts in recycling and resource recovery. The amount of effort going into resource recovery and diversion from landfill through alternative waste treatment systems and resource recovery is increasing, but those figures are likely to be masked by the fact that the overall amount of waste being generated during these times can be increasing. These figures, of course, occur only over two years, and we really need to look at longer trends to see what is happening.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I might also point out to the honourable member that a good proportion of the activity associated with the boom is in construction, and construction does tend to generate waste.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: Yes. Again on page 1060, I was interested in the “Management of Native Vegetation Clearing” line item. The table on that page shows that in 2008-09 and projected forward there is an estimate of \$1.4 million to manage native vegetation clearing. Is this additional to previous funding for that item? What was the previous funding, and why is that flatlining at a time when we are having a boom and there are more pressures on for land clearing and so on?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: There has been some recalibration of that amount. I will ask the director general, Keiran McNamara, to answer the member’s question in some detail.

Mr K. McNamara: The clearing controls under the Environmental Protection Act came into effect in 2004, and were significant new controls that required a lot of effort to communicate well to industry, to local governments and to stakeholders. They were more demanding, if one likes, than the previous controls under the Soil and Land Conservation Act. There was an initial budget allocation, I believe, in the order of \$1.1 million, but in recognition of the considerable workload involved in the start-up phase, additional funding was provided on a finite basis. That additional funding that was provided several years ago on a finite basis has now been reviewed and is \$1.4 million per annum, bringing the total expenditure on the function to about \$2.5 million per annum ongoing. Therefore, there was some additional funding in the initial start-up period.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: Can the department deal with the issue that this budgetary allocation has flatlined in the context of inflation, which means that the real price of doing this is increasing at a time when the real value of the allocation is decreasing? What assumptions have been made about the regulatory load over time, assuming that the budgetary allocation has flatlined?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Again, I will ask Mr McNamara to respond to the member’s question.

Mr K. McNamara: The figure is \$1.4 million per annum for each of the out years, as has been pointed out. However, it is normal practice for an adjustment to be made to the department’s budget each year on a global basis to account for the cost of inflation and also for salary increases. Therefore, there is some adjustment built in on an annual basis, regardless of what individual line items show. In addition to that, we have been through the initial period of the legislation. We have driven down the time lines and the backlogs of outstanding applications over the past year and a half or so. I am confident that the resourcing is adequate for the projected amount of activity, but that is something that is looked at every budget year.

[Hon Sheila Mills took the chair.]

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: I am still looking at the significant trends on page 1060, and I am looking at the line item “Environmental Responsibilities—Inspection and Compliance Monitoring”. Why does the figure stay the same for the next four years for inspection and compliance monitoring, when in fact we know that there has been a significant ramping up of government approvals for projects and so on? One would have thought that, for that reason, compliance costs would increase.

[8.20 pm]

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Again, I will ask Mr McNamara to respond to the member’s question.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: It cannot be the same answer, though, about the flatlining, because this is a significant issue.

Mr K. McNamara: In part it is, of course, the same answer, because the element of annual review and adjustment for a proportion of salary increases and cost increases does come into play. In addition, it is important not to look at that \$1.32 million in isolation. That increase in funding was a specific response to the Esperance lead contamination issue last year, and it will provide for about an extra 10 staff specifically for compliance monitoring purposes. This matter needs to be looked at in a broader context, however, because in addition to that particular increase, there has been an increase over last year’s budget and this year’s budget through a phasing in

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of extra industry licensing fees. That increase will yield, over those two budget years, in excess of \$4 million in additional capacity for the department to undertake its industry regulation functions. That \$1.32 million therefore needs to be considered alongside that improvement in capacity, and also alongside the improvement in capacity for the approvals processes. The total picture adds up to a significantly improved capacity in the field.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: Is the parliamentary secretary satisfied that that allocation of funding is adequate to meet the compliance and monitoring requirements, and also the increased rate of environmental approvals and so on?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I will ask Mr McNamara to continue his answer.

Mr K. McNamara: These matters are, of course, always challenging. This is a very large state. Our environmental protection and conservation needs across this state are very large, and our economic growth is extremely strong. However, I am confident that we have seen very significant improvements in capacity under the last budget and this budget in those areas. When we couple that with the restructuring of the way we do our environmental regulation, with a stronger central technical capacity and better staff training, and also with things like the environmental impact assessment review that is being conducted by the EPA to refine processes and make improvements inside processes, I am confident also that we are in a markedly better situation than we were in 12 or 18 months ago. I am confident also that we have sufficient capacity over the year ahead. We will review the situation each year.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: So even though every other department is getting an increase in its budget, and the economy is running faster, this department is confident that it can make cost savings and still deliver the service? I think that what Mr McNamara is saying, in summary, is that this department, out of all the departments, can somehow make significant cost savings, offsetting inflation, and offsetting its increased task of environmental regulation. This department deserves a medal! We will give it one! We will give these guys a wage increase! However, that is not in the budget. I think these guys are going to take a wage cut!

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I think Mr McNamara has answered that point. He has referred in both this and the previous answer to the fact that these line items are reviewable in the context of the annual budget. I think we have responded to that question.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: I refer to page 1060. The third dot point on that page, which comes under the heading "Significant Issues and Trends" on page 1059, states —

The Department is increasingly expected to be a 'good neighbour' to pastoralists, farmers and others, including protecting the community from wildfires.

I cannot find in the *Budget Statements* any specific funding for that item. Does the department have sufficient funds to control wildfires on pastoral leases and crown land? Also, what is the department's policy on this matter, because in the past it has been noted that the department has not been a good co-tenant with farmers on adjacent land.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I thank Hon Nigel Hallett for raising that point. Hon Nigel Hallett would be aware that there has been a significant boost in funding for DEC's fire management capacity, with an extra \$4.713 million of funding per annum ongoing. I will now outline what those extra funds will be used for. An amount of \$1.139 million will be provided to fund investment in technology and equipment to produce a more satisfactory outcome to protect the people involved in fighting wildfires and keep the fire fighters safe. An amount of \$1.814 million will be provided to improve fire preparedness on unallocated crown land and unmanaged reserves. An amount of \$1.7 million will be provided to fund an extra 20 experienced people from the south coast to the mid-west. That will give the member some idea of the increased capacity and resources that are going into the area of fire management. I will now pass over to Mr McNamara for some i-dotting and t-crossing on that matter.

Mr K. McNamara: There is no line item for fire management expenditure in the budget. That is because the reason that we hold land is covered by the services of nature conservation, parks and visitor services, and sustainable forest management. We provide fire management and wildfire response for those purposes. Therefore, the budget is spread across those purposes. The budget expenditure on fire management, exclusive of wildfire response, is in the vicinity of \$25 million a year. The \$4.7 million extra in this budget is additional to that \$25 million. We are committed to being a good neighbour. I think we have been for a long time a good neighbour in the south west in terms of fire management. We were given very extensive extra responsibilities in 2003 to look after fire preparedness on unallocated crown land throughout the state. That adds up to an area larger than New South Wales. This budget will enable us to improve our capacity on that unallocated crown land

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on a statewide basis. This is another area in which the job is very large. However, we are confident that with the strategic use of that money, we are making substantial improvements in important areas of the state; for example, the unallocated crown land around Ravensthorpe.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: I refer to page 1080. One of the items under the heading “Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies” is cane toad grants. There is a one-off amount in the estimates for 2007-08 of \$890 000, but no ongoing amount. Does that mean that the department has managed to get the cane toads under control this year, or has the department put up the white flag and said that it cannot do anything more about them?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I am sure the day will come when the minister or the parliamentary secretary will sit here and talk about the fact that we have beaten the cane toad problem! However, I do remember reporting last year in this estimates sitting that cane toads are quite extraordinarily reproductive. I will hand over to Mr McNamara for a more detailed answer. However, I can say that in 2007-08, the cane toad grants were distributed as follows: \$240 000 to Kimberley Toad Busters, \$150 000 to Stop the Toad Foundation and \$500 000 to the Western Australian Institute for Medical Research for its cane toad genome research. The member will also be aware that a study is being undertaken into the introduction of lung worms. We are working very closely with Kimberley Toad Busters in particular to ensure that if and when that program is shown to be scientifically sustainable, it is introduced in a way that does not have any unexpected side effects, particularly on local frog populations. With that I will hand over to Mr McNamara for a more detailed response.

[8.30 pm]

Mr K. McNamara: Western Australia is the only jurisdiction that has ever tried to do something about cane toads before they have arrived. The last report I received was that they are still on the Northern Territory side of the border but are moving westwards. We have a core allocation of around \$900 000 per annum to fund the basic work of seeking to protect the state against cane toads. The amounts the parliamentary secretary mentioned a moment ago are grants that have been made in addition to that allocation. A series of grants have been given over the years to the two community groups Stop The Toad Foundation and Kimberley Toad Busters. There have been contributions to research. There is a major investment in understanding the biodiversity of the islands off the Kimberley so that we can understand the role they will play in conserving native wildlife when cane toads spread through the Kimberley. In total, the state has invested more than \$12 million since commencing this program in late 2004. We are also looking to work with the commonwealth government under the new Caring for our Country program, under which the federal government has committed \$2 million to the cane toad fight.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: Although it is not shown for the years to come—that is, 2008-09 or 2009-10—can the parliamentary secretary provide a guarantee that there will be sufficient funding to continue the program?

Mr K. McNamara: The \$900 000, which is embedded in the nature conservation service budget rather than as a line item, is ongoing. The government has put in extra money over several years when there has been a need to assist with research or the community groups.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: I just find it surprising that there is not ongoing funding under the budget.

Mr K. McNamara: The core allocation of \$900 000 is ongoing.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: There is an allocation of \$900 000 for 2008-09 and 2009-10.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: I refer to the line item “Proceeds from the Sale of Real Property” on page 1081 of the *Budget Statements*. What was the real property? Where was it? What was sold?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I will ask Dr John Byrne to comment on that.

Dr J.C. Byrne: We sell a variety of property each year that is surplus to conservation requirements. Sometimes it is land in towns—perhaps obsolete housing sites, for example. We generally get a fair amount of money from that, which we then apply for conservation purposes. I could give the member more details about that, but I do not have a list with me at the moment.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Would Hon Nigel Hallett like us to take that question on notice?

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: Yes.

[*Supplementary Information No II.*]

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: I refer to the “Major Achievements For 2007-08” on page 1068 and the implementation of the Perth air quality management plan for the wood heater buyback program. It was pleasing to see that regional Western Australia was included in that program this year, but at a reduced buyback amount of \$150. Why has that amount been cut from \$600 last year to \$150 this year? That reduction will not encourage people to change their wood heaters.

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Hon SALLY TALBOT: We might have to clarify a couple of details the member raised in his question. Hon Nigel Hallett would undoubtedly be aware that the 2008 program was launched on Wednesday last week and that the program for 2008 has been extended to Mandurah, which I take particular pleasure in noting.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: What I am saying is that the amount has dropped from \$600 per unit.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I am aware of the point the member is making. I just wanted to confirm some of the details of the 2008 program. The program will run until August 2008. The plan is to extend what proved to be a very successful program in 2007 in reducing the health effects associated with wood heaters. It is estimated that the health cost savings from the reduction in the number of wood heaters will be \$18 million a year in Perth alone. The objective in 2008 is to issue up to 2 000 rebates. The program is, of course, limited to one rebate per person, but that is quite a significant reduction. A later phase will extend the program to more regional areas. Announcements will be made progressively as we move through 2008. I do not have any details in front of me on the reduction in the amount of money that will be paid under this program, to which the member alluded in his question. We may have to take that on notice and come back to the member with that information.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: Last year the program operated only in the metropolitan area and people were paid \$600 per heater. The program has been extended to some regional areas this year but the refund has been reduced to \$150 per person.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I will have to ask that those details be provided at a later point. Nevertheless, I stress that the objective of the program obviously remains the same. I am sure we will be able to provide the details on how that decision was reached.

[*Supplementary Information No 12.*]

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: I will read from page 1060 of the *Budget Statements* to emphasise my point about flatlining. The fourth dot point states —

Staff recruitment and retention are challenges in a buoyant economy, as is the impact of rising costs of both materials and labour on the capacity to deliver projects and services, especially in remote areas.

I highlight that point in relation to the comment that was made about flatlining being okay, particularly in the regulatory area.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Would Hon Paul Llewellyn like me to respond to that point?

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: I have another point to make. The sixth dot point states —

New approvals and modifications to licenses for industrial premises are growing strongly, increasing the level of demand on the Department's emissions regulation function.

I cannot see how an environmental department can flatline at a time when everyone else is growing.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Was that the member's question?

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: No, I was making an observation for starters. I will keep going. I refer to the item on sustainable forest management on page 1061. The allocation in 2006-07 was \$46.232 million. The amount goes down to \$39.094 million in 2008-09. What services does the Department of Environment and Conservation provide to the Forest Products Commission for which the FPC reimburses the DEC? What is the estimated value of those services? Is the FPC up to date in its repayments to the DEC for those services? I have another couple of questions along those lines, but I will ask the parliamentary secretary to deal with those questions first.

[8.40 pm]

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I will ask Keiran McNamara to respond first, and then hand over to Dr Byrne.

The ACTING CHAIRPERSON: Mr McNamara.

Mr K. McNamara: There was a fundamental change in the department's budget arrangements with the Forest Products Commission several years ago, whereby a significant part of the payments that the FPC used to make to it annually were instead changed to a budget appropriation to the department. This was to remove any potential for a conflict of interest in being both, one might say, dependent in part on the FPC for payments, and at the same time a regulator and a monitor of the FPC's operations on department-controlled land, state forest. I think there are still some payments from the FPC, predominantly in the area of corporate services, but Dr Byrne is better placed to elaborate on that.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: Will the adviser just tell me the estimated value of those services and the transactions? I understand that the adviser is saying that there is now an arm's-length separation.

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Dr J.C. Byrne: The Forest Products Commission pays about \$7 million to Treasury each year, and part of the Department of Environment and Conservation's appropriation includes the appropriation of that money back to DEC. This avoids any conflict of interest in paying the money directly. We are paid for some services by the Forest Products Commission. Significantly, we provide its corporate services and pay its staff—with the economies of scale of doing so until the Office of Shared Services is up and running. That is an annual value of about \$1.5 million for recoupable work of that kind. I can assure the member that officers of the Forest Products Commission are good payers!

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: That is very good. I have another question along the same lines: are there any services provided by the Department of Environment and Conservation to the Forest Products Commission for which the FPC does not pay, or are all payments on a fee-for-service basis?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Mr McNamara will respond to that question.

Mr K. McNamara: The only things that we do that could truly be regarded as services are the ones that Dr Byrne referred to, such as the corporate services that we provide —

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: Is that payment of wages and so on?

Mr K. McNamara: Yes. That is the case because the FPC was obviously previously part of the former Department of Conservation and Land Management, and a lot of those corporate services continue to be supplied from CALM—now DEC—post the separation of the FPC in 2000.

The other work we do under the sustainable forest management service is essentially the work that is required to look after the forest—to understand it, to study it, to measure it, to understand the yield modelling and to ensure that the standards of operation in the bush are compliant with the forest management plan.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: Is this the compliance?

Mr K. McNamara: That is paid for by the consolidated account to deal with that issue I referred to earlier of separating out any real or perceived conflict of interest in being dependent on the FPC.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: I will move away from the topic of the FPC for a minute and ask one more question about page 1072 of the *Budget Statements*. This question relates to the heading of “Coordinate the Response to Climate Change”. I refer to the budget allocation for the total cost of service to coordinate the response to climate change. The paragraph under the heading states that its purpose is —

To provide leadership in the development and implementation of strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adaptation initiatives to reduce the impact of climate change . . .

The total cost of service is stated to be \$15 million, but the table, under the heading of “Reason for Significant Variation”, also states that —

The allocation of funds for the first round of the Low Emissions Energy Development fund is to be expended in 2008-09.

Will the total cost of service use up the entirety of the low emissions energy development fund?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: The allocation to the LEED fund in 2008-09 is \$8.45 million. Does that answer the member's question?

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: I am looking at the total cost of service, which states —

The allocation of funds for the first round of the Low Emissions Energy Development fund . . .

Am I to believe that the other \$7 million or \$6 million—whatever is left over—is the entirety of the budget allocation for climate coordination and climate protection?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I understand what the member is asking. I will ask Mr McNamara to respond.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: Of the \$15 million allocated for climate change, money is being expended on technology development; this leaves the entire state budget allocation for climate change at about \$6 million or \$7 million—is that right?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Is the member asking what the difference between the \$15.2 million and the \$8.45 million will be spent on?

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: I am asking what the government will spend money on to make the claim that it is the leader in climate change —

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I will ask Mr McNamara to respond first, and then we will hand over to Mr Waller.

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Mr K. McNamara: I will make two points: firstly, clearly there was a significant allocation of new funding for climate change in last year's budget, and the full effect of that is now flowing into things like the low emissions energy development fund. The funding of \$15 million in 2008-09 supports the existence and the activities of the Office of Climate Change, which is heavily involved in policy and program work on climate change both within the state and nationally. It supports the LEED fund and other initiatives like the Indian Ocean Climate Initiative—a partnership with the Bureau of Meteorology and the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation. Secondly, before Mr Waller elaborates, expenditure on climate change is embedded in the budgets and activities of many departments, such as the Department of Agriculture and Food, the Forest Products Commission, the Department of Fisheries, the Department for Planning and Infrastructure, and the Sustainable Energy Development Office. Those, and others, are actively engaged in climate change policy work and program work in their own portfolio areas.

The ACTING CHAIRPERSON: Mr Waller

Mr S. Waller: Mr McNamara has covered most of the major expenditure items in the climate change budget estimate. Some of those other initiatives, apart from the appropriation to the Office of Climate Change and to the Indian Ocean Climate Initiative, go to other departments. For example, the Department for Planning and Infrastructure receives moneys to carry out the Living Smart project.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: Is that from the department's budget?

Mr S. Waller: Yes, it flows through our budget. That program is beginning in Mandurah and Joondalup, and is a household-based program in which households undertake energy audits. These audits help householders take action to reduce their consumption of water and energy. Some of that money flows through the office, but is actually used by other departments to run climate change programs appropriate to their portfolios.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: I have a question specifically about that program: presumably the Department of Environment and Conservation initiates or promotes it?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I will clarify that question: is the member asking about the Act Now for the Future awareness campaigns?

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: I presume that is what the adviser was referring to—that is, the auditing of households. How much money has been spent on that program; how many households have been audited; what percentage of households in Western Australia does that represent; and what are the forward projections and costs for that?

[8.50 pm]

Hon SALLY TALBOT: For the record, I think the member is talking about the Living Smart program, which is the auditing program. I ask Mr Waller to respond in detail.

Mr S. Waller: This program is being administered by the Department for Planning and Infrastructure. The first part of the Living Smart program is a pilot program, in essence, and it is expected to reach about 10 000 households in Mandurah and Joondalup. The program is in its early stages. It is at the primary contact stage whereby householders are contacted by the department and provided with some preliminary information. The householders are then asked whether they want to be involved in the program and whether they want to receive further information. The program is still ongoing. I am afraid I cannot give the member final figures because that phase of the program is not yet complete. The response rates from individual households in both the districts have been very high. About 96 per cent of people in Mandurah have said that they would like further contact with the department and would like to proceed with some aspects of the program, including the audit.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: Effectively, it is not participation that is holding us back; is it the scale of the program. It is expected to reach 10 000 households out of a possible one million households in Western Australia. What is the forward projection regarding the auditing and rolling out of the initiatives through that program?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I understand the point of the member's question. However, I point out that the rollout of the Living Smart program is a pilot that is being run in two major areas—Joondalup and Mandurah. I can tell the member that the enthusiasm for it, at least in Mandurah, where I work, is enormous.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: That is precisely the point.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: It is popular in Joondalup too.

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Hon SALLY TALBOT: I am sure that is the case. The federal government has taken a new approach. It will roll out these kinds of programs and we will watch very carefully to see where and how we can interact with the commonwealth programs to build on the enthusiasm that undoubtedly and incontrovertibly exists.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: The question I asked was: what is the cost of the program to date and what are the forward projections? If it is successful and people want it, I want to know how much has been paid for it up to date in this budget allocation and what are the forward projections.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: The announcement has been fairly widely publicised. This is a world-first program for which we have allocated \$1.5 million.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: Is it a world first?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: It is an auditing and education program. It is a trial program that we have put \$1.5 million towards. We do not have the precise figures that the member wants.

The ACTING CHAIRPERSON: Perhaps the parliamentary secretary might want to take that question on notice.

[Supplementary Information No 13.]

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: I refer to page 1060 and a question Nigel Hallett asked about the good neighbour policy and the additional \$4.731 million to be allocated for fire management resources. The parliamentary secretary is well aware that when a fire breaks out and the local bush fire volunteers attend, there is an issue of whether they can go onto Department of Environment and Conservation land to suppress the fire. They must wait for an officer from the department to oversee the operation and there is some confusion at times about who directs traffic to help put out the fire. It is a constant complaint that we hear. Is the parliamentary secretary aware of that?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I ask Mr McNamara to respond.

Mr K. McNamara: The good neighbour policy is a deliberate strategy that was embarked upon jointly with the Western Australian Farmers Federation, predominantly, but also the Pastoralists and Graziers Association and the Western Australian Local Government Association to improve the understanding of those sorts of issues. The understandings and relationships about fire responses are very well understood in most of the south west of the state. Our capacity has gradually grown in the other areas of the state, particularly the mid-west and south coast in recent years. Local district fire plans are worked out in advance with local governments and are progressively being put in place to address the issues that the member raised. Certainly the mid-west coast and central west coast are areas where several years ago our capacity was not as nearly as strong as it is now. I am confident that those things are improving. It is important to have a structured response in place to fight fires. We experienced major wildfires in the previous summer in the Fitzgerald River National Park region in the south coast. That is a world-renowned area for its flora and has minimal dieback. It is important to fight those fires and to follow, for example, dieback hygiene rules. It is equally important to do that in the Mt Lesueur National Park, which is of interest to the member. There are environmental standards and reasons why the responses have to be structured and planned.

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: I refer to the \$4.713 million for additional fire management resource funding in this budget that is projected to continue through to 2011-12. How did the government arrive at the figure of \$4.713 million? What was the necessity to include that additional money, and why is it a constant figure?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: That is clearly a question for Mr McNamara.

Mr K. McNamara: I can advise the member that since about 2003 there have been a succession of increases in our fire budget. The budget was significantly increased following a fire in the Perth hills in 2005 and it had increased by degrees a couple of years before that. Of the \$25 million I referred to in response to an earlier question about our normal expenditure on fire management exclusive of our wildfire response, about \$10 million or \$11 million represents an increase in our budget over the past seven or so years. That is an additional increase and it is based on an analysis of our major needs and threats. The parliamentary secretary outlined the components of the \$4.7 million earlier, of which \$1.1 million is for improved equipment and satellite technology and communications technology to improve our response to wildfires and for the safety of firefighters. An extra \$1.8 million has been provided for unallocated crown land from the Kimberley to the south coast, which represents an area for which our fire preparedness capacity was underdeveloped across a very large area. The additional funding recognises that priority. A report of the Auditor General a couple of years ago into the fire capacity in this state and our response to fight fires drew attention to that issue. The Auditor General drew particular attention to a third component; that is, it is necessary to have an appropriate number of trained staff in

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order to have a well-developed wildfire threat analysis and response arrangement. The 20 extra positions for the mid-west through to the forest regions of the south coast will ensure that we will retain about 320 trained and competent conservation employees—our AWU workforce. In addition, we will have probably 400 or so salaried staff who are trained in incident management and all other aspects of wildfire response. We have bolstered that collective component by a further 20 to meet our critical number needs.

[9.00 pm]

The ACTING CHAIRPERSON: I point out once again that the order is: Hon Bruce Donaldson, Hon Nigel Hallett and Hon Barry House.

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: I might have to put some of these questions as questions without notice at some point, as we are running out of time.

The ACTING CHAIRPERSON: That might be helpful.

Hon BRUCE DONALDSON: I refer to the second dot point under “Major Initiatives For 2008-09” on page 1067 of the *Budget Statements*, which states —

Complete the nature-based tourism review.

I wonder whether the parliamentary secretary could provide us with a brief outline of that.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I will pass that question straight to Mr Jim Sharp.

Mr J. Sharp: That review is being undertaken in conjunction with the Western Australian Tourism Commission. We have completed the drafting and are working through the responses to the public consultation process. It will be finalised in the coming year.

The ACTING CHAIRPERSON: I have one more member to add: the order is now Hon Nigel Hallett, Hon Barry House and Hon Wendy Duncan.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: I refer to the tenth dot point under “Major Achievements For 2007-08” on page 1067, which states —

Progressed the nomination process for World Heritage listing of Ningaloo Marine Park and parts of the North West Cape.

The fifth dot point under “Major Initiatives For 2008-09” on page 1068 states —

Complete the nomination process for World Heritage listing of Ningaloo Marine Park and parts of the North West Cape.

My first question is: where are the listings, so that we can see where the boundaries are? What are the tight areas that have been encompassed in both those regions?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I am happy to say that we now have a commonwealth government commitment as strong as the state government’s commitment to preparing the World Heritage nomination for Ningaloo and the North West Cape. We are intent on making the submission by February 2009. Last year the preferred boundary was adopted and the Minister for the Environment wrote to the commonwealth government indicating Western Australia’s strong commitment to the World Heritage listing. The commonwealth Minister for Environment, Heritage and the Arts, Peter Garrett, has responded positively and the commonwealth government is assessing the area for National Heritage listing as well as for World Heritage nomination. The commonwealth representatives came to Western Australia and met with stakeholders in the region last month. I want to open this response by reinforcing the government’s strong commitment to getting the listing through. I will now hand over to Mr McNamara for a more detailed response.

Mr K. McNamara: I believe the only detail I need to add is that an extensive consultative process was run by a committee appointed by the government several years ago and chaired by Doug Bathgate, a former Exmouth shire president. Since then the state government has released its preferred boundary to the community. I was with a previous Minister for the Environment in 2006 when the boundary preference was released to the community and the Shire of Exmouth. The preferred boundary was subsequently refined and has been released to the community and stakeholders. I believe there were meetings in Exmouth this week and last week to further discuss those matters with stakeholders. The commitment and objective is to finalise lodgement of the nomination with the World Heritage committee by the due date for the next round, which is 1 February 2009.

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Hon BARRY HOUSE: I will be brief. The good neighbour policy was mentioned; how is that going with regard to the wine grape industry in the south west, particularly in the Pemberton area? How many court actions involving compensation claims for smoke taint does the department face?

Mr K. McNamara: The answer to the second part of the question is three or four; it is certainly not a significantly larger figure than that. Those actions remain against the department and they will be defended because there is an obvious need to carry out prescribed burning to provide community protection and to achieve other objectives. There are particular challenges involved in timing our prescribed burning so as to minimise the risk of impact on grape growers, particularly during the maturation and harvest of grapes. However, there are limited windows of opportunity during the year, particularly in forests further south, during which conditions are dry enough to burn. We consult extensively with the wine industry. Together with the Department of Agriculture and Food, universities and the Wine Industry Association of WA, we fund and cooperate in studies of the impact of smoke on wine grapes. We have databases of grape-growing neighbours and near-neighbours to whom we send our forward plans for prescribed burns three years ahead of time, and we update those burn plans every six months. We hold discussions with local grape-growing groups and seek to do the best we can to minimise the impacts, but it is very difficult, within the mosaic of grape-growing and forest, to avoid having some impact.

Hon WENDY DUNCAN: I will endeavour to cut my question a bit shorter. The mission statement on page 1059 makes reference to working with the community to protect and value the environment. I ask the parliamentary secretary whether she is aware of community concerns in Esperance about the proposal to use hard structures to address erosion of the town's foreshore. Is the Department of Environment and Conservation working with the Department for Planning and Infrastructure to ensure that the current foreshore erosion problem is rectified in an environmentally responsible manner, preferably with sand bypassing rather than hard structures?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I thank Hon Wendy Duncan. I feel that the member's question would be better directed to and more thoroughly answered by the Department for Planning and Infrastructure. That department has responsibility for coastal engineering matters. It is not something that the Department of Environment and Conservation is particularly well placed to comment on. I ask the member to redirect the question in some form.

The ACTING CHAIRPERSON: I advise Hon Wendy Duncan that we have ongoing estimates committee meetings; if she checks with the clerk, she will find that there will be a hearing with the Department for Planning and Infrastructure at some time. If she puts the question forward, it can be dealt with at an ongoing estimates hearing.

I advise members that any unasked questions are to be made in legible writing and passed to the committee clerk. I thank the parliamentary secretary and staff for their attendance this evening.

Proceedings suspended from 9.08 to 9.11 pm

[9.10 pm]