

Division 16: Primary Industries and Regional Development — Services 6 and 7, Fisheries, \$157 255 000 —

Ms J.M. Freeman, Chair.

Mr P.C. Tinley, Minister for Fisheries.

Mr R. Addis, Director General.

Ms H.G. Brayford, Deputy Director General, Sustainability and Biosecurity.

Mr T. Fraser, Chief of Staff, Minister for Fisheries.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available tomorrow. The Chair will ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. If an adviser needs to answer from the lectern, will they please state their name prior to their answer. The estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall only be examined in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, and I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information will be provided. I will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by Friday, 30 October 2020. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge that through the online questions system.

Question, member for Vasse?

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 225 of budget paper No 2, under "Other COVID-19" and line item "Fishing Stimulus Package". Will the minister provide a list of all the initiatives that are being funded from this program, including the location of each project?

Mr P.C. TINLEY: Can the member say again that line that she is referring to?

Ms L. METTAM: I am referring to the "Fishing Stimulus Package—Artificial Reefs, Recreational Fishing Promotion and Restocking" on page 225.

Mr P.C. TINLEY: The allocation for the budget estimate is \$1.25 million. Am I in the right space there?

Ms L. METTAM: Yes.

Mr P.C. TINLEY: And there is \$8.75 million in the out years. We recognise the impacts that COVID-19 had on the recreational fishing sector, particularly when we went into the phase 1 and phase 2 restrictions of people's movements. As we did with the commercial sector, we wanted to make sure we support the recreational sector coming through that, once we removed some of the restrictions to ensure they had some initiatives, so we developed a \$6 million support package for that sector. It coming to the member's question, it included the new fish stocking programs; the development of new and expanded recreational fishing activities; and fishing competitions and targeted tourism campaigns to display the great fishing spots regional Western Australia. They were funded on a fifty-fifty basis with the Recreational Fishing Initiatives Fund, RFIF, and some new money from the government. We obviously worked with Recfishwest to ensure that we were hitting the mark that we needed to. There are three core breakdowns the member might be interested in: the recreational fishing promotion was about \$375 000 in 2020–21; fish restocking programs was \$375 000 per annum in the 2020–21 to 2022–23 out years; and three additional artificial reefs, or \$500 000 per annum between 2020–21 to 2022–23. One has already been committed to Albany, the member might remember. The other two are yet to be confirmed, but we are working with Recfishwest on determining appropriate locations throughout the Western Australian regions. They are the sorts of things that we have undertaken, and they are the sorts of programs that Recfishwest has been working with us to make sure the recreational sector is out there and doing its thing.

Ms L. METTAM: The only location at this point in time for the selection of these initiatives is Albany?

Mr P.C. TINLEY: For the reefs?

Ms L. METTAM: For the program—the fishing stimulus package. I was just asking what are the locations for each of the projects that are involved in this project?

Mr P.C. TINLEY: They are not all yet confirmed obviously through all those years, because we are obviously working on a seasonal basis with Recfishwest about areas. There is stuff in Albany, for example, on the great salmon fishing competition they do down there. None of that changes. I might just pass to the deputy director general to give the member a little more info.

Ms H.G. Brayford: Thank you, minister. In terms of the artificial reefs, the current work is looking at a shallow water reef off Albany, as the minister said, and then two additional regional reefs. They are yet to be determined. That will be undertaken in consultation with Recfishwest and also the local community. In terms of the restocking, the focus on that is looking at stocking species such as the yellowtail kingfish to support the north metropolitan reef that is in place. The snapper guardian is an extension of the snapper guardians project, which was run previously, and also barramundi into Lake Kununurra. They are probably the three key areas at this stage that Recfishwest is working with us on.

Ms L. METTAM: In relation to the snapper guardian program, I imagine that is the snapper guardians program at Cockburn Sound?

Mr P.C. TINLEY: Yes.

Ms L. METTAM: Further to that particular program, I note the comments made by Recfishwest in light of the outer harbour announcement. What assurance can the minister give that that particular project will not be catastrophic for the population or the fish stocks in Cockburn Sound? Is the minister satisfied that the investment in recreational fishing and the investment that the department has undertaken will be able to mitigate against the risks associated with the proposed development, but also be able to address what are the outstanding degradation issues in Cockburn Sound?

Mr P.C. TINLEY: The member is speaking about two sort of separate things, if you like. The first is how we are assisting the recreational fishing sector to get back to doing what it does and supporting a significant contributor economically and certainly socially to the community. I will park that. The Westport Taskforce was established to identify the most viable options from which it would take forward and do the additional studies. Obviously, the environmental impacts of those options that were taken forward is part of it. The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development generally, but specifically the fisheries science people, are there to help design the science and make a meaningful contribution to the understanding of the impacts of any of those chosen options on various fish stocks. Clearly, the pink snapper is material to that. We have put \$29 million towards the researching arrangements all in. We have committed \$21.4 million over the four years to develop a comprehensive understanding of the potential environmental impacts of the preferred option for a port development in Cockburn Sound. This includes \$4.31 million for research specifically on the potential impacts on the key recreational and commercial fish species. DPIRD, my agency, will be managing that research assisting in its design, of course, and be conducting some of it itself. It will retain oversight of all Fisheries projects and be responsible for delivery of project outcomes in liaison with stakeholders and collaborators. We are at the front edge of the expenditure of that sort of commitment to ensure that we completely understand a whole range of things, not just at the biomass of pink snapper, for example—there is the crabs, the seagrasses, and intersecting issues of flows—dealing with the issue, hopefully once and for all, around the perceived impacts of the causeway. There is a role for the commonwealth here as well, given it is a commonwealth structure, and its inflows and outflows for the sound.

Ms L. METTAM: In light of that and the investigation into Cockburn Sound, does the minister feel confident that the state will be able to mitigate against any further degradation of that area as a region of high fishing value?

[2.50 pm]

Mr P.C. TINLEY: The state recognises the compatibility of uses and potential conflict of uses for Cockburn Sound. I remind members, though, not only are we looking at the impacts of a chosen option for a port, we are also talking about redressing 80 years of industrial use. The heavy industrial area of the place called Western Australia continues to be in the Cockburn Sound. We need to make sure we understand all of that. What I am confident and very happy to commit to is the fact that we have some of the best people looking at this across government and outside government, from the best science. I am confident we have enough allocation of resources to ensure that we are answering the questions.

One of the biggest challenges here is making sure we get the question right, rather than jump to a conclusion. There is no better than some good hard research, and applied research, because there has been a lot done in that sound anyway, that will be reviewed and poured into it as well.

Mr M. HUGHES: Just on the topic of recreational fishing, and in light of the increased internal tourism as a result of COVID, is there an increase of that activity resulting in pressure on the recreational fishing industry as such, in terms of the stock?

The CHAIR: I am not sure whether this is a further question, member or Kalamunda, but I will allow it. It was about the sound.

Mr M. HUGHES: I want to talk about recreational fishing.

Mr P.C. TINLEY: Sorry, can the member just expand on that question?

Mr M. HUGHES: I am interested to know whether there is an increase in pressure on recreational fishing as a result of the increase in internal tourism, and if there is, what measure is the government taking to address that impact?

Mr P.C. TINLEY: The answer to that is that we are not yet sure. Where it presents itself is when we do the under the harbour strategy and we do the surveys of the impacted fish, with people recording and reporting bag limits and catches and so on, that will soon tell us. We do know that people did not go fishing during those first period. That had an obvious impact, and then when they could go fishing, we do not know whether they went in greater numbers or whether there was a catch up. We do not think so, but we are in a bit of a lag getting the information through and consolidating it.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: Going back to that point on page 225, under “Other COVID-19” and line item “Fishing Stimulus Package” and on the question of artificial reefs, I am wondering whether the department is exploring the role that artificial reefs could play in helping with the issue of coastal erosion and looking at joint funding more artificial reefs by working with councils and other parts of the state government?

Mr P.C. TINLEY: I might let the DDG have a crack at that one.

Ms H.G. Brayford: I am not aware of any specific research in terms of coastal development and artificial reefs. Most of our research is looking at the actual impact of the artificial reef in terms of the movement of fish and the attraction of fish onto that site. I am not aware of any specific thing in relation to the coastal development aspect.

Mr P.C. TINLEY: I might just make a general comment that places like Busselton and all Geographe have all those breakwaters and so on. It is just the way the geometry works. The further we move away from the coast, the bigger a structure has to be to influence the protection aspects it would have on the coast. Artificial reefs, by their nature, are not big structures necessarily and they have to go further out from shore to be present in the depths they need to be to be useful for fish life, as the DDG said. I just wanted to make that observation. It would be a low prospective sort of research target to say that artificial reefs of themselves could contribute, unless they are a near-shore sort of arrangement, like an abalone habitat or something like that; that would be the only one. I am speculating now, which is very dangerous in estimates.

Mr M. HUGHES: I refer to page 237, aquaculture funding by the WA recovery plan. Can the minister explain why the McGowan government has funded \$3.49 million of aquaculture initiatives under the WA recovery plan?

Mr P.C. TINLEY: One of the things we know that we need to do, as I said when talking about the Asian engagement portfolio, is be ready. We cannot be idle and waste our time when we are in this sort of hiatus that this global pandemic has basically created. We need to ensure that as we come out of this pandemic we have not wasted the time to ensure that the long turnover issues have got the momentum they need and be available to the market that they are relevant to in a timely way. The aquaculture initiative itself was under the \$5.5 billion plan WA recovery plan, the, with \$2.75 million of additional funding to fast track the construction and increase the Geraldton finfish nursery; \$700 000 for additional infrastructure for the Albany shellfish hatchery; half a million to provide additional infrastructure and resources to the department’s Hillarys research facility, where all the science is done to support studies into developing tropical black-lip rock oyster and other shellfish species; \$125 000 for the construction of five floating upweller systems, which support oyster spat grow out inside the water, thereby increasing capacity throughout the Albany shellfish nursery. FLUPSYs have a particular technique, because they have to rotate the oyster cages all the time and work with them. It allows them to mechanise that arrangement and automate it to a certain degree.

We have focused on those initiatives and are funded because they represent the shovel-ready stuff, the near-target sort of things that we can do during COVID. They also represent a modest direct arrangement and jobs during the construction phase, which is sort of a 12-month period, particularly with that finfish nursery. The long-term growth in WA aquaculture, though, is something that I made a singular focus of my short time in the Fisheries portfolio. It represents, at a mature state, potentially 6 000 direct jobs, then the second and third order effect of that. We have 12 500 kilometres of coastline in Western Australia, some of the most prospective, pristine environments to do the sort of aquaculture that we know the world is going to want post-COVID. Again, I go back to my point about food provenance and security. Western Australia is in a very unique position geographically by our time zone positioning into Asia and those growing markets, but also our isolation, if you like, that creates the sort of environmental arrangements that produce some of the best in the world.

My example is the Albany shellfish and Albany oyster arrangements. It will be nearly 1 000 hectares. At 1 000 hectares, it will be the largest shellfish production zone in Australia. Coffin Bay, much known for its brand, is only 125 hectares. It will give members a sense of the scale that is going on in Albany and the sort of direct jobs, and then the consequential second and third order impacts of that.

Mr Y. MUBARAKAI: Just an example, when the minister was talking about the Albany shellfish hatchery and the funding allocated for it, he talked about how it is going to be one of the largest hatcheries in Australia. In terms of job prospects, what is the minister’s estimated future in regards to this investment being made in the Albany shellfish hatchery?

Extract from *Hansard*

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B — Wednesday, 21 October 2020]

p314b-323a

Chair; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Peter Tinley; Mr Matthew Hughes; Mr Ian Blayney; Mr Chris Tallentire

Mr P.C. TINLEY: The Albany shellfish hatchery is really important because it provides the common-user infrastructure that was beyond the scope of any one commercial proponent to undertake themselves. There is too much risk in it. It is actually fairly modest—I do not have the exact numbers—just over \$2 million to establish the hatchery in relative terms, but we are reliably informed that there are about 2 000 jobs just from that alone for what it will do to allow not just spat into the Albany area but also right up the coast. They have been working on akoya and other species that will be used in other tropical zones right up the coast. It is a fundamental piece of aquaculture infrastructure no different than a port or any other piece.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 225, “Spending Changes”, line item “Extension of Shark-Management-Alert-in-Real-Time Drumline Trial”. Can the minister confirm the membership of the ministerial reference group on drum lines that was created in response to this trial?

[3.00 pm]

Mr P.C. TINLEY: Yes. The ministerial reference group encompasses representations from organisations more than individuals. It will not be any surprise to many here that they are Surf Life Saving WA, Conservation Council of Western Australia, Sea Shepherd, Surfing WA, the Shire of Augusta–Margaret River, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development and the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions. The DBCA sits there as an observer, just to keep them all informed.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the minister aware of any complaints from the community in relation to the members of this committee; and, if so, what is the nature of these complaints and is the Department of Fisheries or any agency of government investigating a matter?

Mr P.C. TINLEY: I am aware of some poor behaviour by one of the members, or several of the members, actually, around the whole shark mitigation team and this. There was a particular piece on social media by an individual. That happened 12 months ago and seems to have resurfaced at the moment for some reason. That matter was dealt with by the previous minister and the department on the recommendation of the department. I do not consider the matter to be relevant any more today.

Ms L. METTAM: When the minister says that the matter was dealt with by the previous minister, can he confirm that the individual involved in the particular incident, which I understand was of great offence to members of the Esperance community, has been stood down from that committee? Is that individual still on that committee, which is a ministerial reference group on drum lines?

Mr P.C. TINLEY: Yes, that member is still on the committee. As I say, it was dealt with, I felt appropriately, at the time. There were a lot of contributing issues to that particular comment. To look at it in isolation would be an injustice to the individual. He was counselled and he issued a full apology to the individuals involved. We have seen no repeat of that behaviour, so I am satisfied that they are appropriately represented and we have dealt with the matter.

Ms L. METTAM: Can I confirm that the investigation in relation to that matter is now closed and that individual is currently on the ministerial reference group?

Mr P.C. TINLEY: Yes, the former minister concluded that. I am satisfied with it.

Ms L. METTAM: Okay. I have a further question.

The CHAIR: A further question to this?

Ms L. METTAM: A further question to the extension of the shark management alert and real-time drum line trial.

The CHAIR: Yes.

Ms L. METTAM: What changes have been made in the second year of that trial in comparison with the first year; has the New South Wales government been engaged on this project; and to what extent has any advice been provided?

Mr P.C. TINLEY: I will answer the second part of the question first. No, the New South Wales government has not been involved.

Ms L. METTAM: Okay.

Mr P.C. TINLEY: Our scientists are aware of the nature and structure of their drum-line arrangements. In terms of what the member is asking about the variation between the first 12 months and the second 12 months, is she asking about the conduct of the trial?

Ms L. METTAM: I am asking about the bait and the configuration of the hooks. Is there any difference between the way that the two trials have been conducted?

Mr P.C. TINLEY: No. There has been some tweaking. We extended it on the advice of the Chief Scientist, Mr Peter Klinken, to ensure that we get a more elongated set of data. I might just let the DDG make a few more comments on it, if you like.

Ms H.G. Brayford: Thank you. My understanding is that the trial is being continued, in essence, as it was previously. The only thing that might change, depending on availability, is the choice of bait. My understanding is that there can be some issues around availability so there is often a shift between salmon and mullet. I understand the trial is largely proceeding as it was.

Ms L. METTAM: Are there additional target species as well? Is it true that tiger sharks are now included?

Mr P.C. TINLEY: Yes, that is right. The only real variation was that the number of tiger sharks we were capturing made a compelling argument to extend the tagging to them to understand their behaviours. Although they are not as active as whites in terms of attacking humans, they are known to be involved in attacks on humans, so we thought it was a good opportunity to understand shark behaviour, particularly in that species.

The CHAIR: Not on this?

Ms L. METTAM: Well, on shark mitigation.

The CHAIR: Yes, that is fine. You go.

Ms L. METTAM: I am referring to the shark mitigation strategies and initiatives. For 2020–21, there is \$100 000, and then \$4 million in the following year. Can I ask what these funds are for?

Mr P.C. TINLEY: There is a whole list of them. As the member knows, shark mitigation has been a significant effort undertaken by this government, some nearly \$37 million—\$36 million as it is listed there. More has been spent by this government on shark mitigation than by any other previous government in the history of this state. That is not a partisan comment; it is just a reality of what we see that needs to be made clear. We have been able to put these sorts of initiatives into a range of areas. We are always listening. As the member is aware, in her own community, there was the recent deployment of the VR 4 receivers into Bunker Bay following an attack there. On that point, we are now up to 34 deployed receivers, and we have also deployed, in selected areas, those light and sound towers or warning towers on the beach. That is not the only thing. The shark response unit itself has been established in the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development. There have been enclosures at Falcon Beach and I think we have also announced renovation of the Albany shark enclosure or the beach enclosures. The personal shark deterrents—the \$200 subsidy—has been extended. All the arrangements that go to put shark hazard mitigation initiatives into place generally have also a key feature. The beach emergency number signs have been hugely successful in their deployment. I think we are now up to about 1 000 across the state.

Ms H.G. Brayford: It is over 1 000.

Mr P.C. TINLEY: Community awareness campaigns are really important, as is the Shark Smart website and the mobile app, SharkSmart WA. The smart drum lines trial, of course, makes a large chunk of that. Although aerial surveillance has been an enduring feature of Western Australian beaches, we are very much refocusing some of the service delivery around shark mitigation. We are also assisting Surfing WA, which is a smaller group, in some of their education campaigns.

Ms L. METTAM: Does the Department of Fisheries own a VR 100? Does the department have VR 100 receivers; and, if so, was a VR 100 receiver deployed to determine whether there were any tagged sharks following the recent attack at Esperance?

Mr P.C. TINLEY: Yes, we do; and, no, we did not.

Ms L. METTAM: No, you did not?

The CHAIR: Further question on this, member for Vasse.

Ms L. METTAM: Can you please explain the government's commitment to the imminent threat policy? Is that a policy that has been abandoned by this government?

Mr P.C. TINLEY: No, not at all. There has been no change to the imminent threat policy, as drafted on departmental advice, and, I might add, by the other various stakeholders. For the benefit of the members, I might get the DDG to slide past those key features.

Ms H.G. Brayford: Thank you. The serious threat guidelines still provide for the setting of catch gear if the situation justifies that, but, in essence, it focuses on a range of public safety measures that can be considered—for example, the closure of beaches; land patrols; on-water patrols; the public notification system through the shark monitoring network and the associated Twitter feed; media and Shark Smart announcements; and aerial surveillance, which can also include drones. A range of public safety measures are used to mitigate against that risk.

[3.10 pm]

Ms L. METTAM: Does that actually include removing the shark that has been involved in the attack from the area?

Mr P.C. TINLEY: If the setting of gear is determined and only on the basis of the guidelines that the DDG has listed, if there is an ongoing and enduring persistent threat to the community, it absolutely will be removed. I have no problem whatsoever in getting the best possible advice about how we create a safe area from which the rescue and/or recovery operations can be undertaken. That is my primary concern—those people in the ocean, and making sure they are safe. There is absolutely nothing in the guidelines that prevents me from doing it.

Ms L. METTAM: Can I confirm that in response to the recent tragedy in Esperance, that that was the response of the Department of Fisheries—that is, to pursue and to eliminate an imminent threat in that area?

Mr P.C. TINLEY: The first thing that happened, as the member is probably aware through even just the public reporting, is that there were assets on the water within minutes, effectively—surf lifesaving, water police, and fisheries got there as well. That is the first response, which allows us to see whether the area is safe. From that, the DDG will take advice from people in the field and the incident commander down there, about what would happen next in relation to the setting of any gear, in accordance with the guidelines.

Ms L. METTAM: I am surprised that the VR 100 receiver was not deployed on that occasion. That would pick up whether there was a tagged shark in the area.

Mr P.C. TINLEY: I am not quite following the member's logic there. We have a VR 4 in the water in the search area that it is still active; it does not get turned off. Why does the member think that we would need another deployed asset? The VR 100 is not there necessarily to augment an existing receiver.

Ms L. METTAM: I am trying to understand to what extent did the fisheries officers pursue or try to pursue whether there was a tagged shark in the area. My understanding is that with the VR 100 receiver there would have been greater scope to have been able to identify whether that imminent threat was still there. I appreciate that not all sharks are obviously tagged.

Mr P.C. TINLEY: I might remind the member, though, that the attack on Andrew Sharpe that occurred was not from a tagged shark. It happened within 150 metres of the VR 4, which has a 450-metre radius.

Ms L. METTAM: Right.

Mr P.C. TINLEY: I am going to stop my answering there, because we are getting into matters of operational technical detail that I am not across. Again, the logic of why we would put another receiver in the water when we already have one there would not necessarily be a step that the agency would take in this particular case.

Ms L. METTAM: It would be in the vessel, but we will move on.

The CHAIR: Can I make an apology, Ms Brayford? The document that was given to us had the wrong spelling.

Mr P.C. TINLEY: Was it a parliamentary document, Chair?

The CHAIR: Whatever!

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: I refer to the sixth line item “Agriculture and Fisheries Biosecurity and Integrity” under “Service Summary” on page 228. There is a combined figure of \$83.884 million.

Mr P.C. TINLEY: Yes.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: With the line item “Agricultural and Fisheries Natural Resource Management”, it is a combined figure of \$73.371 million. Is it possible to have a split of those that relate to agriculture and those which relate to fisheries?

Mr P.C. TINLEY: I might defer to the DG firstly to get an overall assessment from him whether that is even possible.

Mr R. Addis: Thank you, minister. I think that inherent in those two services and the costs that are allocated towards them, we have essentially moved towards an integrated model across the department. Although there are still some dedicated fisheries-related activities and some dedicated agriculture-related activities, there are increasingly parts of both those services that can cover both bases. We are starting to integrate across the organisation. We see significant involvement from our staff who previously might have been seen as part of the regional development domain working on aquaculture industry development, which otherwise would be sitting in the fisheries domain. Likewise, we have our staff moving across compliance functions, across resource management functions, both at an operational level and at the management and science levels. It is not a simple matter to come up with a clear black and white answer to the question. We try to maximise the level of integration because we think that gives the best bang for our buck.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: Minister, within the department, is that kept track of through internal accounting? Does the department have some kind of an idea of how much of its budget is going into biosecurity in fisheries and how

much in agriculture, and, likewise, natural resource management in fisheries and agriculture? Is the government just now treating them as one indivisible industry?

Mr P.C. TINLEY: To answer the member's last bit first, no. There are discrete functions inside the agency that attend to the unique nature of each of those things that the member has just mentioned. The whole reason to have a MOG-ed agency is to ensure we get efficiencies across either service delivery or the cost curve. That is certainly something the agency has been working on. Do you want to add any more on that, Mr Addis?

Mr R. Addis: I think that is exactly right. There are definite resources that are exclusively fisheries-related and exclusively ag-related, but, increasingly, there are resources that are genuinely across the two functions or across the whole department. It gets less and less easy to differentiate in a black-and-white sense. I think the main way we keep track of effort around the different portfolios is that we take a risk-based approach to where we put our service effort and keep track of how well we are going in terms of issues such as resource management and stakeholder feedback. Some of the KPIs, particularly in the fisheries domain, are extremely high and at a sustained level, which gives us confidence that we have got our house well and truly in order. The "State of the Fisheries" report gives us very strong evidence to support that view. I think the new model gives us some flexibility and the benefit of crossing skills and strengths across the lines that otherwise we would not have had.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: Thinking of where the department is applying and spending fishermen's or growers'—the producers in agriculture—compulsorily acquired levies, does the minister think that the funding bodies might be a little bit concerned if it does not have a budgeting or an accounting mechanism to account for where all their levies have gone because some fees are in this grey area between the two industries and it cannot be exactly accounted for how much of compulsorily acquired levies are being applied to fisheries or to agriculture?

Mr P.C. TINLEY: I think I understand where the member is coming from in that particular context. He is talking about the revenue side of the agency. The revenue comes from multiple sources, not least of which the consolidated accounts being the largest one. The levies or licence fees I think the member is talking about are the statutory payments people have to make. I can see the point where it might be said that there is not necessarily a dark black line between the fee paid and the service given. That is why we have KPIs across the agency. The fee paid and the service given is very much how we look at that. As the DG said, having the flexibility to apply those resources to achieve outcomes across the agency would be a minor component of it. Do you want to add anything to that, Mr Addis?

[3.20 pm]

Mr R. Addis: Yes, thanks, minister. Just to paint the picture, I suppose, on the agriculture side there is a range of producer levies that are raised that tend not to be subject to the sort of concern I think the member is getting at. Those are probably the Agricultural Produce Commission levies. There is a very clear way of managing the expenditure around those. For the recognised biosecurity group levies that are matched by the state, again, there is a very clear way to manage the separation of those in the accounts. Obviously, we get grower-funded levies through the research and development corporations. Again, they are accounted for on a project-by-project basis. I think on the agriculture side, it is probably not subject to the sort of concern that the member is getting at.

On the fisheries side, we have the rec fishing licences and the commercial fisheries resource access levies. That is subject to special purpose account requirements. There is a section in the accounts that accounts for the income and expenditure. I am not sure, but maybe Ms Brayford might have a bit more detail to add to that.

The CHAIR: Through the minister, Ms Brayford.

Mr P.C. TINLEY: She is good to go.

Ms H.G. Brayford: Thank you. The DG has outlined that quite well. There are special purpose accounts. All the recreational fishing licence receipts go into the recreational fishing account. That money is expended in accordance with that account and the act. Similarly, the commercial licence fees go into what is called the fisheries research and development account. That also needs to be used in accordance with the account and the act.

The CHAIR: Further question.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: One final. Thank you, Madam Chair. I cannot find in the papers an actual figure for the number of employees in fisheries or in agriculture. I guess the minister is going to say the same thing; that is, if they are in a sort of blob in the middle, they do not apply to either agency. Down the track, is the government just going to give us one figure for employees in DPIRD that covers agriculture, fisheries and regional development? Will there not be a figure, if you like, of dedicated employees to each of those areas?

Mr P.C. TINLEY: In response to the member's question generally, there is only one agency. It is called DPIRD. As a result of that, it was a deliberate decision of government to ensure it had a focused approach to the areas that they are responsible for. It would be naive of me to say that I would accept the member's contention that there is going to be a blancmange of people just doing general stuff. That is not true and no organisational development would ever allow for that to occur. The DG could not lead that sort of arrangement. There have to be the discrete areas inside that

agency. The total is around 1 600 FTE. It is impossible to lead an organisation as a singular entity without a definition of what their functions are and how they undertake those functions. I go back to my point: how we measure effectiveness is really important in these sorts of areas; that is, what are the objectives of government and the agency in operationalising the priorities and policies of government and how are we measuring them? From there, the DG will allocate resources in order to meet government policy. It is as simple as that. There will always be discrete divisions and there will always be objectives and missions laid out for those discrete divisions so the DG can lead them and report on them.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Can the minister please update us on how the government has assisted the commercial fishing industry during COVID-19?

Mr P.C. TINLEY: Maybe I can. COVID-19 created a significant challenge right across the economy of Western Australia. Everybody knows that. It also created a significant challenge for the commercial fishing industry. I have already alluded to or referenced that the lobster industry lost 95 per cent of its market virtually overnight. Just vicariously, in my housing portfolio, foot traffic through display villages dropped by 95 per cent overnight. These are the sorts of things that nobody anticipated. The industry was reeling, so the commercial fishing industry came to us through the Western Australian Fishing Industry Council. WAFIC was really helpful in articulating the issues that the industry was having by geographic area, species and business size. It is quite a dense area to address. They had an average annual output of about 22 500 tonnes of seafood products, which equates to about \$600 million worth of value to the economy. I think about \$500 million of that is lobster, just to give the member a sense of scale.

We moved as quickly as we could, once it settled down, to understand the impacts of it. The rock lobster industry is the one we worked with closely because of its market challenges. I should say at this point a lot of people have criticised the rock lobster industry for having a single market focus. It is not without strategic thinking. It deliberately went into the China market to ensure that they were getting the most economic value out of the product, which it did—in spades. In so doing, it accepted the potential risk of a single market focus and owned it as well. As we sit here today, through different government assistance, they are back in that single market, probably at similar volumes now as they were pre-COVID. It is not at the appropriate price that it would want to be getting, but it is still getting an economic price. I just wanted to put on the record that the rock lobster industry is sophisticated, engaged and very much aware of what it is doing.

We did a range of other things because other smaller fisheries had a real challenge as well. A lot of those that were singularly impacted were, by and large, made of small family-owned businesses. Things like licence fees were really important. They were going to be an impost for no return so there were licence fee waivers for all commercial, aquaculture, pearling and charter licences; and deferral of access fees for a 12-month period. That went on. An industry working group will be formed in 2021 that will review the impacts, so next year we will be forming that up to look at it. Boat pen fees, for example, were waived. Minister Saffioti was very good in coming to the table and waiving pen fees, which are quite significant for those larger vessels. We declared commercial fishing an essential service to keep people in work during the lockdowns. They never did not have the opportunity to go to sea and keep working. In the aquaculture space, we funded the expansion of the Albany shellfish hatchery, which I have already talked about, and the Geraldton finfish nursery.

We worked at a range of things. One of the most important things we do is we keep present to the markets to understand what is happening with consumer taste and in the distribution chains. We also work with the peak bodies—WAFIC and, where appropriate, Recfishwest. Marine Stewardship Council certification is very important to the provenance issue around food. We have some of the most well regarded fisheries in the world that are MSC certified. Those schedules had to continue. They are the sorts of support that the government has given to the commercial fishing industry.

Ms L. METTAM: The minister has talked about the pen fees. Have they not just been deferred and not frozen? My understanding is that what has not been paid this year will be paid next year, in addition to the existing pen fees.

Mr P.C. TINLEY: I cannot respond to that in the detail the member is asking for because that a matter for Minister Saffioti. The best advice I had was that they were waived.

Ms L. METTAM: I thought that was pretty unfair.

Mr P.C. TINLEY: If that is different, then I will correct the record.

Ms L. METTAM: Okay.

[3.30 pm]

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to marine park funding on page 225. First of all, what is the funding for; and when does the government plan to resolve the outstanding cases for compensation for commercial fishers who are impacted by the Ngari Capes Marine Park?

Mr P.C. TINLEY: The funding was \$750 000. It was provided to DPIRD's fisheries research and development account for compensation payment to the abalone managed fishery applicants. The compensation is unavoidable

under the Fishing and Related Industries Compensation (Marine Reserves) Act. The member is obviously aware of the issues in relation to how the FRICMR act is applied and the arrangements for it. It is accepted that the Ngari Capes Marine Park process has taken a little bit longer than expected. We have to do a full consultation around these sorts of things because we only get to compensate once, so we want to get it right. We really are committed to the idea of fair compensation. I have to satisfy myself that that fairness is met. To ensure a fair process we have an independently chaired committee of advice that formed and developed a clear set of compensation eligibility principles. Does the member want to be more specific about her question about Ngari?

Ms L. METTAM: I am just asking when the minister thinks the outstanding cases will be resolved; and whether the minister is committed to following the FRICMR act, which the minister pointed to? I could throw in another one, but I will leave it there.

Mr P.C. TINLEY: We are committed to the act. At law, I have to—we have to follow the processes. My concern here is making sure we are getting everything in the consideration at once, not as an applicant comes through. We want to be able to deal with the totality of the fishery so we get the actual outcome that we are looking at. I might defer if the member is happy with the DDG to give her further detail.

Ms H.G. Brayford: I can confirm that one of the key fisheries impacted by the Ngari Capes Marine Park is the abalone industry. I am pleased that we have moved into a formal offer process with the abalone licensees now. As the minister said, it has taken some time, it is a fairly complex piece of legislation and the marine park has taken some time to reach this point for the purpose of the compensation act. For the abalone fishers, those negotiations are now well advanced.

Mr P.C. TINLEY: Is the member more interested about the time frame?

Ms L. METTAM: No. Other commercial fishers are impacted by the Ngari Capes Marine Park. I should say that those that I have spoken to would very much like the government to take an approach that fits in with the FRICMR act. I am asking, on their behalf, when this matter is set to be resolved; and, also, how committed the government is to following the principles of the act.

Mr P.C. TINLEY: Not only do I have to follow the letter of the act, if you like, and its legal impositions, but I also feel duty-bound to ensure that I follow the spirit of the act. That is, if somebody has a commercial endeavour inside one of these marine parks and consequently a government came along and removed it through an act—a legal act, of course—they should be fairly compensated. I fully expect this committee and the agency to be able to gather up anybody who has a commercial licence or a fishing access arrangement into that park. They have to fall under the FRICMR act.

Ms L. METTAM: Just on the timing, is the government committed to resolving these outstanding matters of compensation before imposing additional restrictions on the industry with the introduction of other marine parks, such as Buccaneer Marine Park and the expanded Marmion Marine Park—in particular, the south coast marine parks?

Mr P.C. TINLEY: Well, the FRICMR act sits as an overarching piece of legislation that applies to any part of the fishery zones or where they are impacted. I do not look at them in totality; I look at them in isolation. The one we are up to is the Ngari Capes Marine Park. That will be resolved in accordance with the time line for the establishment of the marine park. Buccaneer and those other places will also be resolved in a similar fashion, relevant to their particular location and the fisheries there.

Ms L. METTAM: Could I get an indication of what the time frame might be? Are we expecting, perhaps, that those outstanding matters in relation to the Ngari Capes Marine Park will be resolved next year? Is there any indication of how long this process will take?

Mr P.C. TINLEY: We will let some advice get filtered through.

Ms H.G. Brayford: The scheme normally opens and then closes. It could be up to 12 months, for example, because that gives time for the processes, the offers, the acceptance and the relevant outcomes associated with that. In this case, from a departmental point of view, we are absolutely committed to finalising the Ngari Capes compensation process under FRICMR act as soon as possible. We have done a lot of work on the other fisheries after abalone and they are following quickly behind the abalone fishery. We are very committed to resolving these matters as soon as we possibly can and have been working closely with the fishing industry to do that.

Mr P.C. TINLEY: The member raised, I think, Ocean Reef marina, I think, as one of them?

Ms L. METTAM: I raised the Marmion Marine Park expansion.

Mr P.C. TINLEY: Yes. That does not fall under the FRICMR act.

Ms L. METTAM: Okay.

Mr P.C. TINLEY: That would fall under the voluntary fisheries adjustment scheme.

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B — Wednesday, 21 October 2020]

p314b-323a

Chair; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Peter Tinley; Mr Matthew Hughes; Mr Ian Blayney; Mr Chris Tallentire

Ms H.G. Brayford: Just to clarify, Ocean Reef marina is not a marine park. That, as the minister said, falls under the Fisheries Adjustment Scheme Act. Any extension of the Marmion Marine Park would fall under the FRICMR act if there are affected and eligible fishers. The compensation scheme is quite complex. It normally starts with what is called a relevant event, and that will dictate the timing that the compensation scheme can commence. Each of them will be different.

Ms L. METTAM: Okay. I just have a final question.

The CHAIR: Final questions.

Ms L. METTAM: The answer to my final question may well be provided as supplementary information. I refer to “Shark Aerial Surveillance” under “Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies” on page 241. What is the extent of the service provided under this arrangement? How many days a year does it operate; when does the service start; and what area does it cover?

Mr P.C. TINLEY: Shark aerial surveillance is budgeted at \$3.9 million. There has been a longstanding arrangement with Surf Life Saving WA. It provides three helicopters and one in reserve at all times. It costs roughly \$3.9 million a year, and it provides aerial surveillance across the metro beaches and further south. We do not have the relevant operational details in terms of dedicated hours and the seasonality of it. The member might want to put that question on notice.

Ms L. METTAM: Can we put it on notice?

The CHAIR: The member can put it notice.

Mr P.C. TINLEY: Yes, put it on notice.

Ms L. METTAM: As a supplementary? I did not think we could put questions on notice anymore.

The CHAIR: The member can put them on notice separately. The member can walk out of here and put a question on notice.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: The member can, but she will not get the answer back until the next Parliament.

Ms L. METTAM: Okay. That is all right.

The CHAIR: Minister, are we finished?

Mr P.C. TINLEY: All done.

The appropriation was recommended.

Meeting suspended from 3.40 to 3.50 pm