



# Parliamentary Debates

(HANSARD)

FORTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT  
FIRST SESSION  
2022

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A

Tuesday, 24 May 2022



# Legislative Assembly

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## ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A

The meeting commenced at 9.00 am.

### Division 1: Parliament, \$68 489 000 —

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Mrs M.H. Roberts, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly.

Ms K. Robinson, Clerk of the Legislative Assembly.

Mr R. Hunter, Executive Manager, Parliamentary Services Department.

Ms P. Traegde, Deputy Executive Manager, Parliamentary Services Department.

Ms B. Corey, Director, Parliamentary Information and Education, Parliamentary Services Department.

Ms E. Ozich, Chief Finance Officer.

[Witnesses introduced.]

**The CHAIR:** Welcome everybody as we get into estimates for 2022. Before we start, I have a statement that I need to read.

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A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 3 June 2022. If a minister suggests that a matter should be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system.

We are dealing with division 1, Parliament. Do we have any questions? I give the call to the member for Roe.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 43, volume 1, of the *Budget statements*. The first point refers to a new ICT platform to facilitate secure remote work. My question is to the Speaker: are you considering ways to make this a permanent ability or is this something the Procedure and Privileges Committee could further investigate in relation to whether it will be a permanent arrangement in years to come?

**The SPEAKER:** Thanks, member, for that question. Yes, it has been part of our response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and we have been reasonably pleased with the way it has worked. Under our standing orders and the standing orders of Parliaments right round Australia and most Westminster Parliaments, members have to be present to vote or to be counted as having attended. There is no real proposal to change the standing orders there. In terms of the Parliament, it is my general view that members should be present when they can be. There have been plenty of occasions in the past in which people have had serious illnesses or matters come up and they are given a leave of absence, which is provided under standing orders. I do not foresee the remote facility being used for purposes other than COVID for the time being. That is always something open to the Procedure and Privileges Committee to discuss. I would also keep my mind open to what the commonwealth and other state legislatures are doing. It is good we have proven up the capacity. No-one would have predicted COVID-19 a few years ago. Who knows what the future actually holds.

There might be circumstances in the future that make it appropriate for a Parliament to make greater use of ICT, but as a general rule, with 59 members, it is certainly not something that should be optional so that people can choose to participate remotely or in person. Parliament is largely about attending in person. There may be cases or circumstances that arise in the future when that may be appropriate. Certainly, for the time being, we are still dramatically affected by COVID. I understand that ministers have parliamentary secretaries filling in for them today. We did contemplate whether a minister could participate in estimates remotely, for example. If they did, they would not have their advisers with them; therefore, their advisers would be in Parliament and the minister would be remote, which would be complicated. Again, our standing orders restrict that because the minister, effectively, forms part of the quorum, so the standing orders would need to be amended and so forth. That is why we will see

over the next couple of days some parliamentary secretaries filling in for ministers or other ministers filling in for ministers. Likewise, I think, generally, because the government has the capacity to do so if it has COVID-affected members, government members are substituting with other members of the estimates committees.

The opposition, I realise, has fewer people and limited numbers and it is on that basis and subject to ongoing AV capacity—this is really about our broadcast staff and whether they have COVID or not; at the moment the AV team is clear to do it—I have approved some limited times, which I think total about six and a half hours for Dr Honey, the member for Cottesloe and Leader of the Liberal Party, to participate remotely in the estimates process. If the opposition had more numbers, I would say somebody could potentially fill in, but in the circumstance, given we have the capacity, and we are by and large not utilising the ICT for government members, I have the capacity to allow the Leader of the Liberal Party to do that.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Madam Speaker, pursuant to that, once we hopefully get through the COVID scenario, could you foresee the situation—I take on board your comments that you prefer to have people here in person—say, the member for Kimberley, for argument's sake, in two years' time coming into the house on a remote basis?

**The SPEAKER:** Our standing orders require people to attend in person. Parliament sits a limited number of weeks per year. We sit fewer weeks than we do not, and then we sit three days in that week. I think it is part of a member's obligation to attend Parliament and to participate in Parliament in person. If it is just as a convenience because a member does not want to participate in everything, and just wants to have a cameo appearance and give a 90-second statements and a one-off grievance because they do not feel like coming down to Parliament that week, I do not think that would measure up; it is not something I would be inclined to approve as Speaker. Future Speakers and Parliaments could make other choices, but I very firmly believe that our standing orders have it right. I do not think it is an unreasonable expectation for people to attend Parliament on the limited number of sitting days that we actually have. I would have to look—maybe Rob has them to hand—but it is about 66 days or fewer this year. I do not think it is an onerous obligation. Members really are obliged to be here every day for Parliament, not to just participate remotely in the couple of bits that feature a particular member or they just want to raise something for their constituents and not participate further. I see being in Parliament as a very big part of any elected member's responsibility.

[9.10 am]

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** As a final further question on that subject: Has a cybersecurity audit been taken of our network? How many cyber attacks have occurred since the last budget? Were any of them a major concern?

**The SPEAKER:** This is something that the Parliamentary Services Department and the Parliament takes very seriously. We are very alert to those threats. I might hand over to Mr Hunter to comment on some of what has occurred there, as is appropriate. Mr Hunter will know what we can disclose and what we cannot.

**Mr R. Hunter:** In relation to cybersecurity, we have taken extra steps in the last 12 months because we have had cyber attacks previously. The last one was two weeks before the last state election. It was a known predator, if you like, in our systems; it had been there before. In liaison with the Australian Cyber Security Centre we were able to identify what that hacker was up to and we put some things in place, including making an application for funding for cybersecurity protection, which we were fortunate to get. That meant we were able to appoint a cybersecurity officer, who started about three and a half months ago. In addition, we established a SIEM, which is basically security information and event management, which is an analysis of our system that tells us when people are doing things they should not be doing such as dropping files, executing files or maybe just sniffing our network. That is in place to give us the analytics, as well as the memorandum of understanding we have with the Australian Cyber Security Centre. In addition, the cybersecurity expert we have employed has their nose to the wheel identifying the areas we should be guarding and making sure that our current technologies are patched appropriately et cetera. All those things are in place. There has been no attack other than the attack two weeks before the election in March last year.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Does Mr Hunter have any concerns that any information was compromised or the like from the particular attack he referred to?

**The SPEAKER:** I think on all fronts we are confident that our systems have not been compromised, but we are always alert to that threat. If Mr Hunter would like to add something, he is welcome to.

**Mr R. Hunter:** There is no evidence to say that any information was harvested or anything was leaked. Essentially, we identified that somebody has been watching. The Australian Cyber Security Centre has confirmed that it is not aware that any information has gone out, and that is our belief as well.

**The SPEAKER:** I might add that the threat and what has occurred is very much in line with what has occurred at other Parliaments and government institutions right around Australia.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to the service summary table for the Legislative Assembly on page 37 of budget paper No 2. The total cost of services seems to be quite stagnant. Is the Speaker confident that that amount of money will be sufficient going forward, given that inflation will presumably affect the cost of wages et cetera? How can there not be some slight rise in that total cost of services?

**The CHAIR:** Madam Speaker, that question was asking for an opinion, but if you feel confident, you can answer it however you like.

**The SPEAKER:** I will make a couple of points. Obviously, the last year or two have been very different, and I think that is notable in several parts of the budget for the Legislative Assembly under division 1. COVID certainly has had an impact, and it certainly has had an impact on travel by keeping people at home. It has also had an impact on extra expenditure in response to COVID. I was just discussing with the Clerk that the table on page 37 that the member referred to is largely the cost per member. To get a better idea of what is happening with our finances going forward, page 36 gives a clearer picture. I am not sure whether the member wants to look at that. I might ask the Clerk whether she wants to add something.

**Ms K. Robinson:** One of the things that is not showing in the forward years, but which will be added each year, is the significant drop from having carriage of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in previous years. We were given a grant of approximately \$101 000 per annum to feed through into the CPA, but that stopped last year because the administration of the CPA is now handled by the Legislative Council. That amount has dropped away for that time, but it will come back to us after the next election when we will see an increase in funding for that.

Each year we have been fortunate to receive the streamlined budget process incentive funding. In previous years, that has been one per cent of our budget, but this year it is two per cent. We are seeing an increase of approximately \$123 000 added to our budget in 2022–23. Obviously, we cannot predict how much we will get in the forward years, but that will probably come through as well.

Also, we cannot predict how much the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal increases for members will be. If we are not able to afford any increases caused by a SAT determination, we can apply for supplementary funding. In the previous election year there was a significant amount for the resettlement allowances that came through because we had an unexpected increase in members leaving at the last election, which increased our funding. We saw that spike last financial year. That was also divided between the last financial year and this financial year because some members were able to take part of that resettlement allowance in this financial year. We are seeing those sorts of effects, but we cannot predict those types of funding changes in the future.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Is service 3, “Salaries and Allowances Act 1975”, all taken up with members’ payments and salaries, or does it also include certain parliamentary officers? What is actually included in that amount?

**The SPEAKER:** That includes the Clerk’s and the Deputy Clerk’s salaries in addition to what the member mentioned.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** As well as all the members?

**The SPEAKER:** Yes.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Looking at service 1, “Support the Operations of the Legislative Assembly”, I note that the Legislative Council separates the committees from the operations of the chamber. Why is that approach not taken in the Assembly?

**The SPEAKER:** I will ask the Clerk to respond to that.

**Ms K. Robinson:** Each year we allocate a nominal sum for printing, advertising and those sorts of costs for committees based on the previous expenditure. We do not allocate a specific amount for them because they have their normal operating costs, but if they have any additional requirements—for example, for travel, consultants or advertising—it has to come through the Speaker and get especially approved. We cannot predict what the committees will do, but we have an unallocated amount of money that we can use for them, particularly if they wish to travel; we need to have a significant amount for that. It is up to the Speaker to approve any additional funding on top of their normal operating expenditure.

[9.20 am]

**The SPEAKER:** It probably originally arose out of the different systems that were run in each house that we did not use to have—the standing committee policy. The select committees were established on a more ad hoc basis whereas the Legislative Council, I think, has had a more consistent approach over many decades of having standing committees. Previously, the only standing committees for the Assembly were the public accounts and procedures and privileges committees under earlier names. That is probably the history of why it has been recorded in that way. The view of the Clerk and others has been that this has suited our purposes because although select committees are not getting approval for particular activities or travel, in some years the standing committees, because of their particular inquiries, have significantly higher costs and in other years they will have much lower costs, particularly when they do not travel or ask for money for publications and other things. We have been pretty satisfied with the way that the system has operated, not that we have had a lot of requests in the last couple of years for expenditure. Committee expenditure has been well down. The Clerk would like to add something.

**Ms K. Robinson:** Each year, a committee presents its annual report in about September, which includes a little breakdown of its costs over the year.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Can I ask for some clarity on whether we are allowed to ask questions on the Legislative Council in this place?

**The CHAIR:** No.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Can that be asked only by members of the Council in their estimates?

**The SPEAKER:** That is right.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** That is fine. I have nothing more on that particular line.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** For further clarity, I refer to the line item on the Legislative Council budget that goes from \$19 000 in 2022–23 to \$50 000 in 2023–24. That is not —

**The SPEAKER:** Can I get some clarification from the Chair? It would appear that that is asking about the Legislative Council so I am not sure that we can answer that.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** That is fine. At the bottom line, the grand total for the budget year is \$68 489 million. Over these forward estimates, there does not appear to be any real increase at all. Considering that there have been no committee trips or the like over the last two years, should we not foresee a potential increase in total expenses for the out years?

**The SPEAKER:** I suppose a few things are to be taken into account. There has been some additional expenditure for COVID. The money that has been saved, for example, from a lack of travel, has been spent on a variety of items that are effectively one-offs; they are not ongoing costs for the Parliament. For example, the opportunity was taken to completely refurbish the Legislative Assembly Office and that is now refurbished. It has meant that we have been able to do what otherwise might have been regarded as maintenance or something else and that money has been allocated. A number of small projects like that have been done because we have had the funds to do it. Similarly, the ICT and technology we have provided in this chamber has been a cost. In terms of the maintenance budget, we were fortunate enough to win an increase of \$500 000 per year. That has enabled, for example, the air conditioning to be fixed on this middle level right along the eastern corridor and running from south to north. I think the total cost of doing that was about \$1 million. In some of those offices the air conditioning had not worked for three or four years. That additional money has meant that we have been able to do those things. The air conditioning works required a major entry into the roof space and so forth, so the opportunity was taken to completely paint and refurbish those offices, as any member who has been in those offices will see. We have been running an ongoing program of recarpeting sections of the building and so those offices all got repainted, recarpeted and fresh air conditioning. Rather than put the tired, old furniture back into those freshly renovated offices—all the furniture was pretty old and in a pretty shabby condition, as it is in many offices throughout this building—the opportunity was taken to put new furniture in all those offices. With that money this year, for example, I am expecting that we will start to rectify the air conditioning on the ground floor entrance level and that a similar refurbishment program will happen there.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I have just a short further question. As far as committee travel and the like goes, does Madam Speaker see that coming back to what it may have been prior to the COVID situation, including interstate and overseas committee travel et cetera?

**The SPEAKER:** Yes, I do, and I believe that we will have the capacity to deal with that. If we do not spend our budget, one of the dangers is that the budget will be reduced. We have been very prudent in getting the appropriate approvals and spending our full budget allocation rather than potentially giving money back because of the reduced travel and so forth. That budget is still there, as it always was, for people to be able to travel when it is appropriate to do so.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I want to follow up on the question around the asset investment program. The Speaker mentioned that there were some plans to do some further matters of air conditioning —

**The CHAIR:** Do you have a particular page number?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Sorry, I refer to page 45 and the asset investment program. The budget in 2022–23 is \$1.5 million, including \$500 000 in furniture and \$1 million in asset refurbishment and replacement. Is this the program that the Speaker mentioned and that paid for the office refurb on the east wing on the first floor?

**The SPEAKER:** Yes.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Is there an outline of a plan going forward that is available to view so that we can see where the money is intended to be spent over the forward estimates, or is that still being worked through?

[9.30 am]

**The SPEAKER:** Yes, it is otherwise known as Mr Hunter's wish list. In Building Services, for example, I can run through some of those projects that have occurred and are ongoing. The Legislative Assembly's papers office had refit works totalling \$280 000. That is a complete project. There have also been costs for the Legislative Assembly

and Legislative Council turnstiles. Members will have seen enhanced security, particularly at the south entrance, from our perspective. We have that capacity there. We have also had bike lockers installed. In the delivery dock a hostile vehicle mitigation barrier has been installed. There is a new footpath adjacent to the northern entry barrier. The stage 6 air conditioning works will be ongoing. Another project is the sealed car park over the tennis courts. At this stage, I understand that the only money that has been spent is in design. We are awaiting some approval from the City of Perth to provide that extra sealing over the tennis courts. As I have mentioned, there are ongoing upgrades to the air conditioning. We have had our clock system synchronised, which has a further stage to go. We have completed bus embayment and construction works that members might have noticed on Harvest Terrace. There has also been other refit and expansion works throughout the building.

There are some items that sound a bit boring, like the main plant room electrical surge protector. One that might interest members would be improved lighting in the car parks. Money has already been allocated for electric vehicle chargers and there is a belief that that will need to be expanded in the future. That is another key thing. We have also completed, as I think the member is aware, the lighting on what I think is called the fountain eastern facade, out the front of the building. Various lighting systems have been tried so that we can light the building in different colours for different causes and the like. The colours apparently get a bit washed out on the main building, but we can very effectively light what was previously the fountain area. A lot of other minor items are obviously on our agenda, anything from upgrading gym equipment to hot water pumps. The costs for IT include a program of works that includes things such as upgrading the wireless network and Webex. There is a whole range of IT things that are obviously ongoing.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I have a completely different question that is difficult to phrase for any particular area, but I am referring to “Relationship to Government Goals” on page 43. It is not a line item; it is a description in the Parliamentary Services section of the budget. It states —

The Department provides apolitical ancillary services to Members of Parliament ...

In doing so, it implies that it is there to support members of Parliament. I want to raise an issue of concern because of changes to the work health and safety legislation. A circular was sent to members of Parliament from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet that outlines that persons conducting a business or undertaking—PCBUs, who are responsible for conditions of work health and safety—can be the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, a member of Parliament and the Presiding Officers. Has any work been undertaken to assist members in carrying out their responsibilities, first of all, clarifying whether, indeed, they are persons conducting a business or undertaking; and, if they are, has any work been done to support members, and also the Presiding Officers, in addressing their responsibilities under the new work health and safety regime?

**The SPEAKER:** I am not actually sure what line item the member is referring to here. Is he just referring to a DPC policy or correspondence?

**The CHAIR:** Listening to the question, there is not a particular line item, but it is a question about a service that is provided possibly under the “Relationship to Government Goals” section.

**The SPEAKER:** There is no funding provided for what the member’s question pertains to.

**The CHAIR:** It is a good question, but this possibly is not the right place for it.

**The SPEAKER:** Budget estimates probably is not the right place.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I would suggest that there are references to service provision for the support of members. If we go back to the changes that happened under the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal, this department did some work in assisting members in working through their responsibilities on reporting under that new regime. Here we have a similar situation. There is precedent. Will there be any work in that area?

**The CHAIR:** Member, I will say that it is not a relevant question, but it is a question you could probably put on notice.

**The SPEAKER:** Or more appropriately direct it to the Department of the Premier and Cabinet.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I have written to the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, but it is this department that is making the statement that members of Parliament are PCBUs. That is actually putting a very onerous situation upon members who do not have direct control of their working conditions in their offices, and also on Madam Speaker, as a Presiding Officer. I think Parliament needs to provide support for members in working through that situation. I will make that statement, leave it at that and I will be writing to the Presiding Officers further about it.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to the income statement on page 46 and the top line item “Employee benefits”, which is effectively static over the forward estimates. I would have thought that there would be some sort of wages growth over that period, given the economic circumstances. Does Madam Speaker have any comments on that?

**The SPEAKER:** I understand the member is looking at page 46, “Cost of services”, “Expenses” and the line item “Employee benefits”. There is not a lot of variation there, but the election period meant that our costs were down

for a time. There were effectively three FTE vacancies, and also less overtime and so forth was taken during that prolonged period when Parliament was not sitting between the end of one year and the calling of the election. That is one of the variation factors. We have one increase in an FTE for a cybersecurity position, a decision that was taken because of the need for it. I am quite confident that we have the appropriate expenditure. If, for example, employees were to get a wage rise, government would take that into account and provide that by way of our budget in future years.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I am sure those sitting around Madam Speaker would love to see a little more of an increase in the forward estimates.

**The SPEAKER:** Those sitting closest to me already have!

[9.40 am]

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Regardless of that, I see in the forward estimates that the number of FTE basically stays at around 109 per annum. Given, hopefully, the COVID scenario is flattening out, does the department foresee any need to increase its staff arrangements over the next few years?

**The SPEAKER:** I think we have about the right number of staff. I do not see any particular need for an increase. Obviously, we needed to have someone in cybersecurity. Another example is with the changes to the electorate allowance system. There was extra demand on us there. We sought some additional funding for part of an FTE, and an additional 0.4 FTE was allocated to us so that we could assist members with the new reporting requirements to do with the electorate allowance. I am quite confident we have the staff that we need. Sometimes roles change, but we have a good team here. Short of having a major expansion, for example, in the number of members of Parliament, we do not expect an increase. If we were to go from 59 MPs to some larger number of MPs, there would potentially be a case for more staff to support those MPs, but given our role has not changed and the number of MPs has not changed, I do not foresee any immediate need to increase staffing levels.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to page 45 and the parliamentary services asset investment program, with total funding of \$1.5 million going forward to 2025–26. What impact will the building arrangements for new accommodation have on the budget going forward and when will we expect to see some investment in either assets or fit-out costs? I do not see any of that reflected in either the asset investment program or under cost of services on the next page. There do not seem to be any changes. I understand that the building will be occupied by the next election, roughly in 2024–25—no. Perhaps the Speaker could give us an outline of that project and whether it should actually be mentioned in the forward estimates.

**The SPEAKER:** I can give a breakdown of the asset refurbishment replacement program in the 2021–22 budget information. There was \$1.361 million for Parliament House air conditioning; \$720 000 for information and communications technology, including virtual desktop infrastructure, VMware host services, IT security appliances, Cisco Webex, and endpoints Oracle phase 2 and wireless network upgrades; \$257 000 for the finance management information system; \$96 000 for other, including catering equipment and Edith Cowan centenary artworks; \$91 000 for Parliament House grounds, including the bus bay, car parks, ceiling lighting, footpaths and bike lockers; \$89 000 for Parliament House lease premises, building works, office refits and repairs and maintenance; \$87 000 for the Parliament House chambers audio upgrade, hybrid Parliament and synchronised clock system; \$86 000 for security including the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council turnstiles, delivery dock barriers et cetera; and \$45 000 for the Parliament House conservation plan.

I think the conservation plan is the really relevant thing there because, as I mentioned, we got an extra \$500 000 for what is referred to as a comprehensive conservation program for the building and grounds of Parliament. That is spent on major restoration works, including stonework, windows, carpet, timber work, door replacements, roof repairs, and gas, hydraulic, fire and electrical system upgrades, plus grounds maintenance and landscaping. The asset refurbishment and replacement program has funding of \$1.5 million and that is used for all major maintenance system and replacement for building refurbishments and improvements. I think the member is referring to the potential for some major works at some point in the future, but that is not in our budget.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I understood that arrangements have been entered into to shift offices to the new building being constructed and I thought it may have fallen within the time frame of the forward estimates, in which case should it not be shown in the forward estimates?

**The SPEAKER:** My understanding is the building across the road will be completed in July next year and that it has not effectively been a cost to Parliament. I think it has come out of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet's budget.

**The CHAIR:** Are there any further questions?

**The SPEAKER:** To further clarify, that will be a phenomenal asset to Parliament. There will be new committee offices for both the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council and we will have staff allocated over there, so that will be a major benefit to us.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

**Division 2: Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations, \$10 502 000 —**

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Mrs M.H. Roberts, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly.

Mr C. Field, Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations.

Mrs M. White, Deputy Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations.

Ms R. Poole, Senior Assistant Ombudsman, Strategic Planning, Projects and International Relations.

Mr K. Heritage, Principal Project Officer.

[Witnesses introduced.]

**The CHAIR:** The estimates committees will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point. Consideration is restricted to items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must relate to a page number, item or amount related to the current division, and members should preface their questions with these details. Some divisions are the responsibility of more than one minister. Ministers shall only be examined in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 3 June 2022. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system.

I give the call to the member for Roe.

[9.50 am]

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Just in the short time that we have, I refer to page 101 of budget paper No 3. There is a statement on the expenditure of \$1.6 million, which has been approved over 2021–22 through to 2025–26 to undertake the legislative monitoring functions under the criminal law act. Will that \$1.6 million be enough to undertake those functions under the unlawful consorting and identified organisation insignia legislation?

**The SPEAKER:** Whilst this is not directly a question about division 2, I understand that the member is referring to an item in budget paper No 3. I will ask Mr Field whether he would like to respond to the member's question.

**Mr C. Field:** I am indebted to you, Madam Speaker, to the chair and to the member for that excellent question. Can I say that the amount that has been apportioned to my office in relation to the cost of monitoring the particular functions to which the member refers is, in our view, absolutely adequate to undertake that function. It has been based on our previous experience in monitoring these sorts of functions undertaken by, in this case, the police, and in other cases other organisations in which we have a monitoring and inspecting function, and a reporting function as well, including a reporting function that can be reasonably wide, not just on matters that have been undertaken, but also on their impact upon certain groups in the community. We spent considerable time internally discussing those matters. We certainly received unambiguous support for the amount that we put forward, and I believe the amount that we put forward will be adequate and appropriate to undertake that function.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Okay; thank you.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** There is reference in the table at the top of page 53 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, to the FTE increase from 70 to 82 in 2022–23. Is that the necessary increase to handle the reportable conduct scheme; and, if so, is that enough to provide the necessary staff to undertake the obligations under that program?

**The SPEAKER:** I will ask Mr Field to respond, please.

**Mr C. Field:** I thank the shadow minister so much for that question; I think it is an excellent question always to ascertain whether we have adequate and appropriate funding for the functions we undertake. I can assure the member that we are absolutely confident that both the number of FTEs for reportable conduct, which is the bulk of the FTE allocation there, and the number of FTEs for consorting, which was part of my previous answer to the previous honourable member's question, are the right numbers to be able to execute those functions to the satisfaction of the Parliament. Of course, reportable conduct has to pass the Parliament, but I can say that in relation to those functions, I am absolutely confident that that is the right number of FTEs.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer now to the paragraphs on page 51 under "Significant Issues Impacting the Agency". In the first paragraph there is mention of the commissioner's role in reviewing the deaths of children in circumstances of family and domestic violence. Do the child deaths that are reviewed relate only to family violence or are they deaths of any nature? What does the commissioner's office review when it undertakes such inquiries, and how many circumstances would be reviewed in a year, usually?

**Mr C. Field:** That is a very good question. We have a legislative function to review all child deaths that occur in this state. When we talk about numbers, of course, I do not want to make a trite reference to a number; these are the tragic deaths of children. The number of tragic deaths will vary from year to year. In relation to child deaths,

that is a separate function. There is an additional function, which is a function to review all deaths that occur from family and domestic violence. That is predominantly women, as the honourable member would expect, but it is also in relation to children. We will be reviewing both when it comes to child deaths—one in relation to the child death function itself, and the second in relation to family and domestic violence reviews. Children might die in either of those circumstances. For example, a child might die in the early infant years, a sudden infant death syndrome death, but at the same time there might be a child who very tragically dies—all deaths are tragic—in the context of violence in the home. They are all studied by my office in relation to that review function. Secondly, we undertake major own-motion investigations in relation to those matters and we table those in Parliament. A number of members will be aware of those. We have done a number of investigations about ways to reduce child deaths. For example, youth suicide has been a major focus of my office, and doing major investigations in that area about recommendations to reduce deaths.

**The SPEAKER:** Just for further clarity, the commissioner is reviewing all reviews of child deaths, as opposed to all child deaths. There would be children who perhaps have passed away from an illness in a hospital or the like that the commissioner would not be doing a review of.

**Mr C. Field:** That is an excellent point. When we first commenced this jurisdiction, it was in relation to all child deaths that otherwise met the criteria for legislation in relation to reviewable functions, and the Speaker, as the then minister, would have understood those matters very well; I would have briefed her on our investigations. We have had some additional functions requested by the government in relation to reviewing deaths in any circumstances. That was asked of us because there were concerns about a cohort of deaths that were effectively slipping through the cracks in terms of their analysis. We are now able to investigate and review all deaths of children that occur in this state, including in medical misadventure matters. But I still say that the principal focus could not be more right: the principal focus of the child death review function is those children who were, for example, known to the Department of Communities in the two years before their death. They are the reviewable deaths that we normally would be talking about.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

[10.00 am]

**Division 15: Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development — Services 1 to 7, Regional Development, \$622 103 000 —**

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Mr M. McGowan, Premier representing the Minister for Regional Development.

Mr T. Hill, Acting Director General.

Mr C. Binning, Acting Deputy Director General, Primary Industries Development.

Mr L. O’Connell, Acting Deputy Director General, Industry and Economic Development.

Ms M. Taylor, Chief Finance Officer.

Ms M. Sauley, Acting Managing Director.

Mr P. Gregson, Manager, Funds Management and Reporting.

Mr R. Cossart, Chief Executive Officer, Wheatbelt Development Commission.

Mr C. Thurley, Chief of Staff, Minister for Regional Development.

[Witnesses introduced.]

**The CHAIR:** This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point. Consideration is restricted to items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must relate to a page number, item or amount related to the current division, and members should preface their questions with these details. Some divisions are the responsibility of more than one minister. Ministers shall only be examined in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 3 June 2022. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system.

I give the call to the Leader of the Opposition.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Premier, I refer to “Delivery of Services” on page 218 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. There is \$240 million appropriated in this financial year and that decreases across the forward estimates to \$183 million. Could the Premier please explain why there seems to be a cut in the funding that has been appropriated to deliver services for the department?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** As the member would be aware, a range of projects are time limited and expire, if you like. Therefore, naturally, the budget declines over time, even though, in reality, it is often backfilled with new projects. We might find next year that it is backfilled with other projects. I will give a few examples. In this year's budget, there is the response to tropical cyclone Seroja. Obviously, that will decline over time as the response is rolled out. There is the COVID response, which we are hopeful will decline over time, and a range of others. I will let Mr Hill explain what they are.

**Mr T. Hill:** We have a number of projects, as the Premier indicated, around COVID that will run out during the year. We have royalties for regions projects, where there is carryover. They will carry forward and there will be new RforR projects. There is a range of those activities. That is why the budget looks like it is heading in that direction. Let me quickly run through this. As a result of the capability review, the actual consolidated account appropriation has been flatlined over the forward estimates. That is held flat over the forward estimates, and then we will have movement in our RforR and our externals that come in and out of the organisation. That is why that appears that way.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Is any of that related to an increase or decrease in staffing? Obviously, there are probably project staff in there. Is there a reduction in FTEs for the department as a significant movement?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I will let Mr Hill expand on that. This happens every year. Set projects are specific. As I said, there is COVID and Seroja. There is some money for the Mira Mar landslide. There are a range of those sorts of things. Once the projects are completed, they will decline. I assume the vast majority of it is for specific capital works projects, but I will ask Mr Hill to comment more fully.

**Mr T. Hill:** Moving forward, a number of new projects are in the budget. An example of that is the project around the Western Australian agricultural collaboration. That ag collaboration is new money that will bring \$25 million from the state over three years. We look to have that matched by the universities and CSIRO, which will take it to \$50 million, and then we will work hard to double that money with research and development funding corporations, to which our growers pay levies. The view is that not enough is coming back to WA. We will be able to leverage that up. A few FTEs will be coming into the department over that period of three years. If we look at our current FTE, with a static consolidated account and increasing external funds, we would expect, as has occurred in the last couple of years, our number of people to increase.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I will expand on that. If we turn to page 231, under "Employee benefits", members will find that it has grown over the last couple of years and that it will be relatively stable over coming years; in fact, it grows this year and it grows next year. In terms of employee benefits, or remuneration, it will actually grow this year and next year. It is just a natural thing that new things come on over time as existing projects expire, as the member would understand.

[10.10 am]

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** On page 232 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, under details of controlled grants and subsidies there is a list of election commitments. I refer to the small commitments program. Could we have a list of the projects that are contained within that? It seems to run out.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I am sorry; whereabouts on page 232 is the small commitments program?

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** It is under the heading "Election Commitments" and there is a whole list of them. It is down at the bottom. There is \$2 million allocated in this financial year. I am just wondering whether we could have the full list that has been allocated to that line item as supplementary information.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Yes, sure. I will get to that. Obviously, during the election campaign, as all political parties do, we made a range of commitments. We collated those and are delivering them, as people would hope that we would. I might just get some advice on those commitments. By way of supplementary information, we can provide a list of the small commitments program, which was \$13 379 000 in the 2021–22 budget. It is \$2 million in the coming budget. That is rolling out the things we committed to in the election campaign 14 months or so ago. On top of that, all the other commitments are already detailed there. By way of supplementary information, I am happy to provide a list of the small commitments.

**The CHAIR:** Can you just say that once again for clarity?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** With reference to page 232 and the fourth line from the bottom, a full list of the small commitments program will be provided by way of supplementary information.

[*Supplementary Information No A1.*]

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I have a further question on that. The 2021–22 budget was about \$13 million; the actual spend was around \$11 million. Am I to take it that the \$2 million that is carried over into this financial year is an underspend from last year? Were some projects not delivered?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** That would be the carryover. I think that in last year's budget, we put all the commitments in at a cost of \$13.379 million. Of that, the amount that has been expensed—I think that is the term—is \$11.379 million,

so there is \$2 million remaining. I think most people would understand that in the environment of an extremely heated economy, getting all projects delivered in that time frame is not easy, so some of them roll over into this year's budget.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Can I make the assumption that, given that the government commissioned the Langoulant inquiry and one of the recommendations from that was that there should be business cases for the expenditure of royalties for regions, all those small commitments had a business case attached to them?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** No, because the business case requirement was for commitments over \$1 million. By definition, the small commitments are less than that.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** The program is for commitments less than \$1 million; thank you.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 219 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, about halfway down the page, "Great Southern Development Commission Mira Mar Landslide". That was a one-off payment. Considering the challenges with that landslide scenario, no-one seems to be trying to take responsibility. Can the Premier foresee further funding being provided to ensure the safety of the community and those householders around that area?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** There is \$250 000 provided for the Great Southern Development Commission to engage an independent geotechnical advisory firm to carry out a detailed geotechnical investigation and aerial site survey of the Mira Mar landslide area. This is in accordance with recommendations made by CMW Geosciences in its independent geotechnical report into the Mira Mar landslide. I do not think any further decisions have been made at this point in time, but there have been significant safety steps taken, which I will invite the acting director general, Mr O'Connell, to comment on.

**Mr L. O'Connell:** I have no further information other than what the Premier has said. It is under consideration for further support.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The main thing is that I think we have advised everyone to leave their homes if they are in any danger, and there has been an extensive program around that, so we are doing our best to deal with what is, in effect, an act of God.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** There appears to be some sort of Mexican stand-off between the Water Corporation, the state government and the City of Albany, and basically the home owners who were attempting to make their properties safe have been told they are not allowed to do anything, as well.

**The CHAIR:** Is there a question there, member for Roe?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** The question is: does the state government foresee that it will provide any solutions for those home owners on the downhill?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** From memory, I think there are three homes. We are obviously working with the people and the council. We are hopeful we will have further announcements shortly, but I do not think it has been resolved yet. Obviously, we have to work out whether we can get insurers to pay and all those sorts of things, so we are currently working through those issues.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Out of general curiosity, why is the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development involved in this and not the Department of Fire and Emergency Services as an emergency response? Has DPIRD taken the lead on the government response to this, as opposed to the Department of Fire and Emergency Services; and, if so, is that where funding will be taken from?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Yes, I think that is right, and that is because the Great Southern Development Commission is there on the spot with significant staffing and local connections, so I think it has taken responsibility for an across-government response. It is one of those things. I have not actually seen it, but it is obviously a very unusual situation.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** It is pretty dramatic.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I have never heard of this before in Western Australia, but there it is. There is a landslide. The most important thing for me is that no-one gets hurt. That is what the minister and I have been talking about—to make sure that no-one gets hurt. If there is a catastrophic event at any point in time, I have been given every assurance that all the appropriate steps have been taken for the people involved.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Does the government contemplate that it may need to provide funding to assist with the relocation of those residents who are unable to recover through insurance or any other means? They are significant properties. Having spoken with the council—I am sure the member for Roe has as well—my understanding is that they are stuck in limbo at the moment and are paying rent and mortgages on houses that no longer exist. They are not allowed to return home. Is there an end date for these discussions?

[10.20 am]

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** As I said to the member for Roe, I think we are working through the issues. These things are never easy. We do not want to absolve insurers of responsibility by the state just saying that it will step in, because

then they will not take responsibility. Like with all these natural events or disasters—it is not a disaster yet, but a potential natural disaster—we want to make sure that we help people, protect the state and make sure that whoever is actually responsible, particularly an insurer, is held to account.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I refer to page 229 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. Under “New Works” is a line item titled “Provision for Future Royalties for Regions Projects”. It is about \$73 million across the forward estimates, and it increases significantly into the out years. When we get to 2025–26, there is \$28 million. Could the Premier give me an understanding of what this line item is and what it will do?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Are we talking about the line item “Provision for Future Royalties for Regions Projects”, which is three-quarters of the way down page 229?

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Yes, that is correct.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The provision for the royalties for regions program is \$5 million for Albany ring-road, \$50 million for Manuwarra Red Dog Highway stage 4, and \$18.4 million for other future regional road projects. The \$5.4 million in 2022–23 reflects funding of \$3 million for Albany ring-road and \$2.4 million for Manuwarra Red Dog Highway stage 4.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Why are they listed under future royalties for regions projects if they are actually allocated to projects? Why are they not line itemed into the budget like every other royalties for regions project?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The advice I have is that we are waiting for federal funding announcements. Therefore, it is sitting there as sort of a global figure awaiting announcements from the federal government.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Are the projects that the Premier listed the only projects across those forward estimates or is the Premier able to provide, by supplementary information or today, a full list of how that \$73 million is anticipated to be spent?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I am advised that the amount of money I just outlined to the Leader of the Opposition adds up to \$73 million, which is the total amount there.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** To clarify, will the projects that the Premier just listed use the entirety of the \$73 million?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I will take the Leader of the Opposition through it. Albany ring-road is \$5 million, Manuwarra Red Dog Highway stage 4 is \$50 million, and other future regional road projects is \$18.4 million, so that is \$73.4 million.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Is there any specificity around the funding for the other future regional road projects?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Other? Where is “other”?

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** It was the last line that the Premier read out.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The \$18.4 million. The department is working through the priorities. Obviously, there is a massive spend but it is seeking to see whether we can match it with commonwealth money to reduce the impact on the state. The great thing about the commonwealth is that it funds these things generally to the tune of 80–20. For a relatively small investment, we get a massive return from the commonwealth. I am hopeful that that will continue, although you would have to say that we have done pretty well so far.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 229 of budget paper No 3. The fourth line item is the “Country Age Pension Fuel Card”. Basically, the figure is exactly the same right through the out years, at \$30.5 million. Can the Premier confirm that the government is not looking at any CPI increase or the like, considering the increased price of fuel and cost of living?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I cannot see it, I am sorry. I am not sure what the member is talking about.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** It is budget paper No 3.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Okay; sorry.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I am referring to the fourth line on page 229.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** By coincidence, it was the same page number. As the member knows, the budget provides a benefit to country pensioners on a fixed income who rely on private transport to access social services. The scheme provides eligible pensioners with a fuel card of a set value to purchase fuel. The current value of the card is set at \$575 per annum. Apparently, 57 000 cards have been issued. The program continues. The expectation is that it will remain as is. It is something that we could consider in future budgets, but that is the expectation at this point in time.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Is the Premier confirming that there will be no alteration to that figure over the forward estimates?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** That is not actually what I said. We are dealing with this year’s budget. The forward estimates are there. It is something that we can consider in future years, but we have not considered it at this point in time. We are hopeful that the price of fuel will go down, to be honest. There is a spike caused by Vladimir Putin. Perhaps once that issue resolves, the price of fuel will go down. It is something we can consider in the future. There are a lot of pressures on the state budget in many, many ways. I think the scheme itself is the most generous of its type in Australia. I am not sure that every state has this. There might be one other state that has it.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** New South Wales.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Does New South Wales have it? Then New South Wales is the only state.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I think so.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I do not think every state has this. Combined with the two free trips, I think Western Australia has the most generous schemes of its type for regional pensioners of anywhere in Australia.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I am on page 219 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. I refer to the top line item on that page, which is under “New Initiatives”. At the risk of asking a Dorothy Dixier, this is about the paid escape for international working holidaymakers. I think I heard the Deputy Premier talking about it this morning on the radio. It is targeting backpackers, I assume, to come to Western Australia and work in areas that are suffering from significant labour shortages. Could the Premier tell us where this is being advertised? Which markets are we targeting? It is the paid escape for international working holidaymakers.

[10.30 am]

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** That is a good question. The Reconnect WA package, which we announced in December, includes an expansion of the regional travel and accommodation support scheme, RTAS, which supports workers who travel more than 100 kilometres to undertake eligible work in regional WA. From 3 March 2022, the scheme was expanded to include hospitality and tourism workers. It provides a \$40 a night accommodation allowance for up to 12 weeks and a one-off travel allowance of up to \$500 depending on the destination region. An amount of \$7.5 million is provided across the 2022–23 and 2023–24 financial years. It is designed to get people out there, and that is a good thing.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** What do people have to do to qualify for that funding?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I will ask someone else who knows the exact details.

**Mr C. Binning:** My understanding is that they need to travel more than 100 kilometres, and I think, but will need to confirm, work for more than two weeks. To date, with the new round, we have had 410 applications, of which 180 have been approved, 155 are pending and 73 have been declined.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** It is an international working holidaymaker program, so I assume that if people have come here from overseas, they have travelled more than 100 kilometres. I do not quite understand the criteria.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** It is from Perth, I think.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Okay, so they have to be based in Perth?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** It is a 100-kilometre ring around the city from the Perth GPO. I assume that if people have travelled more than 100 kilometres from the GPO and are living out there, not commuting—although some people could actually commute for 100 kilometres—they would be eligible for the program.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** In order for a person to be eligible, they have to live there and work for a minimum of two weeks?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I can get the member a copy of the guidelines. I assume they are public—on a website or something. We will try to get that to the member this morning. That is quite reasonable when we think about it. If people who are not Australian citizens will suddenly be given money by the Western Australian taxpayers to live in the regions, that is a good thing.

**The CHAIR:** Just for clarity, that is not being provided as supplementary information; the Premier will provide the details later?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Yes. If we can get that printed, we will give it to the member.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Does any of that funding include advertising into target markets? How is it being communicated internationally, or is it literally being advertised to people who are already in Australia?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** It is run by the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation, so I do not have the details of how it is promoted. I assume it is an online bespoke advertising campaign to people. The member might recall that it was quite a topical issue in 2020 because of the demand for labour; we had a limited number of people here and could not get in more from overseas. We have obviously kept the program in place so that we can continue to support regional tourism, agriculture and hospitality operators. The member asked about the advertising. It is not being run by this agency, sorry. The member can ask that question of the particular agency.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** So that I am clear, the funding in this budget is just for the amount that goes to the recipient, so I can ask that question of JTISI, which is the agency that is advertising or administering this program?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** This amount is for the program and the funding for the individuals. The advertising campaign is being run by the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation. My experience of backpackers, foreign students and so forth is that if free money is available, they will find out about it very quickly. The availability of some free money is very well known in the hostels and cheap hotels or share houses they might stay in, or whatever.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Premier, I understand, having been a backpacker at one stage in Europe, that people do find ways to figure that out when they are actually in the country. My question is whether we are targeting overseas markets to let people know that we have this package to welcome international workers back to WA. There is a limited number of backpackers in Western Australia at the moment. That is part of the problem. Are we looking a bit further beyond the Perth metropolitan area for people who are willing to work in the regions, because I have been told that some of these people made a significant amount of money over the summer holidays and do not need to work at the moment and are quite happy to enjoy themselves?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Is there a question?

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Is the program targeting people outside the borders of Western Australia, that is, in overseas markets, or is that a question that I will need to ask JTSI?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The answer is yes. When we announced this, we announced as well that there would be promotional campaigns in the United Kingdom, Europe, Japan and South Korea featuring flight offers provided by Qantas and other airlines, incentives, and working holidaymaker packages. We also have the national Paid Escape campaign, which seeks to encourage interstate working holidaymakers to visit WA for a unique west coast experience. That may well involve working in a bar in Karratha, or even on a banana farm in Carnarvon, which no doubt would be a unique Western Australian experience.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** It sure would be! They are welcome to it!

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** No doubt they will go and do that and they will talk about it for the rest of their lives!

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Character building, Premier.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 229 of budget paper No 3 and the second initiative in that column, community resource centres. I note an increase of \$200 000 a year for that initiative. How many CRCs currently exist, and are there plans to create more CRCs? What will this \$200 000 provide?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** While we are working out the exact answer to the question, there are 101 community resource centres across smaller towns and regional communities. They played an important role during COVID-19 in assisting communities to adhere to the guidelines, and in helping to provide hundreds of thousands of rapid antigen tests and masks to communities. A new CRC will open in Roebourne in July 2022.

The advice I have is the budget has increased, and \$2 million in total has been added into the forward estimates. When it is indexed, an additional \$2 million in funding is added to the network.

[10.40 am]

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Premier, I understand the number of CRCs will remain static.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** There is another one in Roebourne.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Last year, the Leader of the Opposition asked the Premier about a Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development community resources survey. Now that the survey has been completed, what were the outcomes of the survey?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I will invite Mr Hill to comment and maybe hand to his staff.

**Mr T. Hill:** Liam, could you comment on the CRC review, please?

**Mr L. O'Connell:** Thank you for the question. In 2021, it is true DPIRD undertook a community resource centre engagement survey and a customer survey, and it was independently undertaken by Painted Dog Research. Over 3 000 CRC customers and over 500 CRC stakeholders provided responses. Satisfaction was very strong and the average score was nine out of 10, in terms of being extremely satisfied. Stakeholders particularly saw the CRCs filling a key gap in regional communities and being a central community hub. There was very positive feedback, which was taken onboard with the CRC program.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I have a further question in relation to community resource centres. Premier, could you outline, if a community wants a community resource centre, how they might go about doing that? The Premier mentioned that Roebourne has a CRC. Other small communities might decide that service would benefit them, not having a government presence in their community. Is there a process that makes it clear to communities that might like to pursue that or is it simply an ad hoc situation?

**Mr T. Hill:** I will pass to Mr O'Connell, who is looking after this. I understand there is an application process and then a process in which the applications are assessed. In fact, for the Roebourne centre, Trish Barron, the acting chief executive officer of the Pilbara Development Commission, sat on the assessment process, and we assessed whether they met the guidelines. I do not have the full detail of that with me, but it is quite a rigorous process. I was thankfully present when people at the Roebourne CRC heard they were successful in getting the CRC. As you know, Roebourne has been a challenging community for the state, and the capacity and high quality of people who were joining together to build that impact in the community and provide those extra services was evident. Even

though it is short way from places like Karratha, those local services were very important for them and they put up a very good application. We can certainly provide the details of the application process. Again, it is pretty thorough and they need to meet some conditions. It is not just a handout. It was great to be in Roebourne when that was announced and the people heard that.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** You were going to hand to someone else.

**Mr T. Hill:** I was going to hand to Liam.

**Mr L. O'Connell:** The process looks at broader regional representation, and the Pilbara was slightly under-represented, which was the reason there was an agreement to progress with an expression of interest. Further details on the criteria and assessment could be provided, I am sure, after today.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Can I assume that the first port of call for a community is to go through the development commission in their area if they are interested in pursuing the creation of a community resource centre?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Yes. When you think about it though, 101 across the state is quite a lot. It is quite some coverage. What is the proportion in the wheatbelt?

**Mr T. Hill:** I do not know the proportion, but I think this was the fourth one in the Pilbara, so it is very small representation in the Pilbara, but much higher in the wheatbelt.

**Mr R. Cossart:** There are 41 CRCs across the wheatbelt.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** That is quite a lot.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** There are 37 communities in my electorate, Premier, and not many of them have access to government services.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I am not looking to get into an argument.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I think you started it, Premier, just quietly.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** This is just like that episode of *Monty Python*, “No, I didn't!”

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I am on budget paper No 2, volume 1, page 235. Under “State of Financial Position (Controlled)”, I am looking at restricted cash. Under current and non-current assets, there is a line item in each of “Restricted cash”. As an introduction to this, I note report 10 of the Auditor General handed down in November last year. In the overview of that report the Auditor General noted that a number of entities—not just DPIRD, but it was one—with serious deficiencies requiring a qualified opinion on their financial statements, controls and key performance indicators and that across government it increased last year from seven to 17 in the year she was discussing with 31 separate qualification matters. Many of those qualifications related to deficiencies in payroll and procurement, information and security. Five entities received three or more qualifications, and DPIRD was one of those entities. I am looking at restricted cash and I note a combined amount of \$83 million in current and non-current assets and those comments of the Auditor General about deficiencies in controls over restricted cash, which included weaknesses in their cash monitoring system that resulted in restricted cash being used inappropriately throughout the year to fund shortfalls in operational cash. Can the Premier explain why this has come about and why the Auditor General had cause to make these qualifications in her audit?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I will let Mr Hill comment in a moment, but the advice I have is that there is no evidence to suggest risks associated with the audit findings will materialise. DPIRD’s core business systems program is necessary to address the financial audit findings. I will hand over to Mr Hill to add comments.

**Mr T. Hill:** The fundamental challenge for DPIRD has been bringing together its core systems, and as a result there have been some audit findings. I will pass to our CFO for a more detailed answer in a minute. There is some really good news. We have just launched our one HR hub which brings together all of our organisation into a single HR hub, where people can book their leave and do all those great things.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Five years later.

**Mr T. Hill:** We have delivered that just recently and it has come together very well. The general feedback from the staff has been very positive. We have also delivered our one record system and we are planning to roll out our one finance system once we have bedded down the one HR hub, but for the specific question, member, I ask Mandy Taylor to respond.

**Ms M. Taylor:** In regard to the qualification on our cash, I first point out that there are no discrepancies with the balance of the overall cash; the discrepancy is between the two categories, restricted and non-restricted. Mr Hill is correct in saying that we have had some challenges around our finance system. We are currently running three different finance systems and, therefore, we are consolidating our information into spreadsheets. For this qualification, the error was within a spreadsheet that we were using to monitor our cash. We have identified the discrepancies with the Office of the Auditor General and we are working very closely with it to resolve the issues and to make sure that the OAG is comfortable with the evidence we now have that those balances are correct.

[10.50 am]

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Is the finding of, and the note in, the Auditor General's report that says restricted cash was being used inappropriately to fund shortfalls in operational cash not true?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I will ask Ms Taylor to say a few words.

**Ms M. Taylor:** As at the end of the year, the balances were all correct and tallied up and we are comfortable that we were not using restricted cash at the end of the year. There may have been opportunities throughout the year that we dipped into restricted cash, but it was soon replenished.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Premier, that has been noted as a serious concern by the Auditor General and we have just been advised that throughout the year that has in fact happened. How has this happened? How have funds been used to fund shortfalls in operational cash? Are there not appropriate mechanisms in place to prevent that from occurring? It does not sound like a very efficient way of managing a department.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I will ask Ms Taylor to answer that question.

**Ms M. Taylor:** We have obviously identified that we have some issues with the spreadsheet model. When we implement our new finance system, we will be implementing cash modules, or cash ledgers, so that the error will not occur in the future. The new system will be able to manage it way more efficiently than it currently does. Merging the information from three different systems into one has been very problematic for us. We are also working very closely with the Auditor General and we will get some independent auditors in to make sure that the way we have implemented it and that the balances we are carrying through are correct.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** After this was drawn to the department's attention, Premier, was an analysis done of how many times this may have occurred, whereby restricted cash was being used inappropriately to fund shortfalls in operational cash?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I will invite Ms Taylor to answer the question.

**Ms M. Taylor:** No. There was no investigation done. We are just moving forward and working through and making sure that we have the correct balances now. We have a work plan set with the Office of the Auditor General and it is happy with the approach we are taking to resolve those imbalances.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** When the Auditor General goes back and has a look at it and does another report, will there be a clean bill of health on that front?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I invite Mr Hill to comment.

**Mr T. Hill:** Member, I do not think we can predict what the Auditor General will find. The Auditor General will find what the Auditor General will find. We are working very hard as a team and with the Auditor General to work towards significant progress. Of course, our ultimate objective would be to achieve a clean response. However, as I have noted, we have landed our HR hub projects. We have a functional HR system across the organisation and a functional records system. The team is working incredibly hard in a difficult situation with COVID—a significant number of people have been out—to land our one finance system, once we have bedded in the HR system.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Further to that statement, Premier, the acting director general has just advised that after five years since the Labor Party came to power and the machinery-of-government changes were implemented, the department now has a single HR hub and, I assume, is embedding the records system. It has taken that long for the department to create that system. When will the finance system be completed?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I will hand to the acting director general in a moment, but I can say that bringing the IT systems together seems to me to always be time consuming and difficult. It does not matter whether it is the private sector or the public sector; it seems to be a long process. I do not pretend to understand how they do it, but it always seems to be a very time-consuming process. I will hand over to the director general to comment further.

**Mr T. Hill:** Thanks, Premier. It is a time-consuming process and we have a limited market. It is very difficult in the current market to get IT professionals. The team has been working very hard with our providers to get the right people on deck to enable us to deliver this. Premier, could we throw to Mr Binning for some detail?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I invite Mr Binning to say a few words.

**Mr C. Binning:** The new finance system is the construction of a full new financial management system for the agency. The legacy systems from the three agencies were found not to be fit for function and to be antiquated. The construction of that new finance system is bringing it in line to be contemporary and cloud based, so it is a significant transformation of our business systems. The design and construction of that system is substantially complete, and it will be commissioned over the remainder of this calendar year.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** How much has the creation of a new finance system, a new records system and a new HR system cost the department? Is it a line item somewhere? Can the Premier point to me in the budget how much has been spent on merging these three departments?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I will ask Mr Binning to comment, but just so that the Leader of the Opposition understands, what happens across government is that systems have to be replaced periodically. That is why we set up the digital fund in last year's budget with \$500 million and we have added \$400 million to it this year. It is not necessarily related to amalgamating agencies; it is just that systems become old, clunky, unfit for purpose, unable to be repaired, tenuous and so forth over time. That is why last year and this year we combined nearly \$1 billion to spend on this across government. These things are not about winning votes or changing people's minds to vote for us; it is just about making sure that we have updated IT systems. Every major organisation, whether it is a major business, a government or a not-for-profit organisation has to do this periodically. The amalgamation of the agencies makes sense and I doubt whether a future government would undo it. Making sure there is a new IT system is part of what agencies do over time. I will ask Mr Binning to comment further.

**Mr C. Binning:** The total funding for the program across the three systems—HR, records and the new financial system—is \$24.8 million.

**Mrs R.M.J. CLARKE:** I refer to the record investment on regional infrastructure under the heading “Investing in Regional Western Australia” and the subheading “Highlights” on page 215 of the *Economic and fiscal outlook*—budget paper No 3—where it states that this budget includes a record \$12 billion investment in regional infrastructure over the forward estimates. Can the Premier outline some of the more significant items included in this \$12 billion?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I will just find budget paper No 3. I keep going to budget paper No 2!

The \$12 billion in regional infrastructure is about diversifying the economy, creating jobs and supporting new and emerging industries. It is up \$2.9 billion from last year's state budget and includes \$263 million in regional election commitments. Some of the new funding initiatives include \$5.6 billion towards improving regional road infrastructure, enhancing road safety, reducing travel times and increasing freight efficiency; \$500 million to seal the Tanami Road; \$1.25 million for the Bunbury Outer Ring Road; and \$275 million for the Great Northern Highway Bindoon bypass. They are all jointly funded with the commonwealth government, which is great, but they were all brought to book in our budget.

We are providing \$350 million to establish the new remote communities fund, which is totally made up of WA money. That will provide water, electricity and housing in remote Aboriginal communities, which is important. There is \$332 million for a major upgrade to Geraldton port, which is important for removing the bottlenecks there. That is great and I would like to thank the member for Geraldton for all her work on that. We are providing \$78.1 million for the construction of seawalls, bund or retaining walls and the construction of a causeway at Lumsden Point in Port Hedland. An additional \$49.4 million will deliver the staged development of the Geraldton Health Campus bringing its total funding to \$122.7 million. Again, the member for Geraldton is kicking goals in Geraldton. We will provide \$48.6 million to improve mobile and internet coverage across the regions and \$349 million for refurbishments and upgrades to regional primary and secondary schools. They are some very significant infrastructure projects. The Bunbury Outer Ring Road is a massive road project. I think it is the biggest regional infrastructure project ever carried out by the state. Hopefully that improves the quality of life and efficiency of traffic movement there. The member might recall that when we built Forrest Highway, as it is now called, it made a world of difference to people heading to the southern part of the state. As part of the Bunbury Outer Ring Road project, we duelled Bussell Highway. As anyone would know, that road was dangerous, so duelling that road has been a remarkable commitment. These sorts of road projects basically save the lives of people who would otherwise have been grievously injured or killed. It could happen to any one of us—we will never know—but improving these roads has saved a great many lives.

[11.00 am]

**Mrs R.M.J. CLARKE:** Thank you for the Pinjarra heavy haulage deviation.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The Pinjarra deviation is in the budget somewhere. It is a significant project designed to remove the trucks out of the heart of Pinjarra. I thank the member for her advocacy on that. The total cost of that project will be \$250 million. It is a big project. I hope that the people of Pinjarra will be happy with that and I thank the member for her advocacy.

[Mr D.A.E. Scaife took the chair.]

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 220 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. The eighth paragraph refers to accommodation and the management of the department's systems and assets and network of staff. It states —

Metro-based staff have been relocated to new facilities in Perth ... with installation of temporary laboratory facilities on the Kensington site now finalised.

It states that those laboratories are temporary facilities. What is their time frame? Do they have a 10-year or a 20-year time frame?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I will say a few words and then hand over to Mr Hill. The accommodation and management of the department's systems and assets in support of the substantial network of staff across the state is a priority. Metropolitan-based staff have been relocated to new facilities in the city, with the installation of temporary laboratory

facilities on the Kensington site now finalised. A project definition plan for a new long-term facility is being prepared to support research and development activities and critical biosecurity functions for the state. In response to the member's direct question, I will ask Mr Hill to comment.

**Mr T. Hill:** New facilities have been developed as temporary facilities at the old South Perth site. The member would be aware member that the South Perth site has been there for a very long time. I started my career on the South Perth site, which makes me quite old—but we will not go there. The site was in need of a lot of work with issues around danger et cetera. That was sorted but we needed new temporary labs so the money was allocated. The money was allocated for both the labs and some really new high-tech equipment, which is fantastic. The labs are very close to commissioning. I will say a few things about the labs.

There has been a strong investment in science and innovation capacity. The member joined me at the opening of the new Katanning sheep-feed facility recently. Those new facilities invigorate our staff and they bring people together. The great thing about the temporary labs is that we have been able to bring together scientists who have not worked in the labs together. In South Perth, they were all in these little boxes. Now we have designed these flow-through labs with new facilities and we have this very invigorated group of scientists, which excites me because that is my background. Those labs are very close to opening and being commissioned. They will be there until we land a new site for a permanent facility for our broader laboratory facilities. At the moment, those are our critical labs, if you like, around the capacity to assess pests and insects and use new DNA technology, which they showed me. I do not understand how it works, member, but it is a pretty flash kit. We intend to be in those temporary labs for as short a period of time as we can and we are moving towards it. I might ask Mr Binning to add more detail.

**Mr C. Binning:** The specific question was about the time frame for the temporary facility. The new temporary facility will have a life span of at least 10 years. Other critical functions are still in the existing buildings on site and funding is also being used to stabilise those functions, but there remains a genuine urgency in the next five to seven years to move offsite—otherwise further very significant investment would be required. When the business case was done for the new facilities, one of the options looked at was a remediation of the existing buildings and site at South Perth. That was found to be more costly and not a viable option.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** My understanding is that a 10-year lease has been signed for office space for the other staff, if you like. Can the Premier confirm that?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I will let Mr Binning say a few words.

**Mr C. Binning:** That is managed through the Department of Finance and, yes, a 10-year lease has been secured over 1 Nash Street and the four floors in that building. That is managed by the Department of Finance as part of the overall pool of office accommodation.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** The final sentence in paragraph 8 states —

A project definition plan for a new long-term facility is being prepared to support research and development activities and critical biosecurity functions for the State.

How is that project definition plan progressing and does the department foresee a totally new site with all the office space and research facilities at the new greenfields site?

**Mr T. Hill:** The question is about the project definition plan and how it is progressing. We have a task force that includes people from the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, the Department of Finance and some architects. That task force has been working on the new development and principally focusing on our science and lab facilities because our other staff are in the regions and some staff are still in central city accommodation. The facility that we are working through at the moment is encouraging our staff to think about how we can increase the flow, improve the technology and make it a world-class facility. I would hope that the project definition plan will be completed, as the first step, within six to eight weeks, but we cannot predict the exact timing because it will depend on architects and finance and everyone bringing it together. It is quite a complex piece of work. We have what are called physical containment level 2 labs. They are very high-tech labs. At the moment, everyone has their own coolroom and we need to get people to think about sharing a central facility just to make the whole place more functional, modern and efficient. We are going hard at it. In fact, we have two workshops this week alone, so it is coming together reasonably quickly and there is a high priority in the department to deliver it. We are looking at a number of sites and are in negotiations and talking to people around those sites. We are looking for enough to potentially co-locate with some of the industry organisations. We are discussing co-locations with the Australian Export Grains Innovation Centre and InterGrain. We can also get synergies between our own people and people working on critical industry projects such as grain breeding and grain market development.

[11.10 am]

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I will have Mr Binning make a few comments.

**Mr C. Binning:** The project definition plan is reaching its final stage. It is on schedule and is currently scheduled to be completed in late July or early August. As Terry Hill outlined, there is the potential for some small slippage

in that delivery; we need to get it right. We are really pleased with progress and the support that we received from the Department of Finance. Our objective is to establish contemporary state-of-the-art research facilities for our staff for the next 30 to 50 years.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Given the comments about the project definition plan and the like, would the Premier anticipate, with co-location potentially with industry players and whatever, that in years to come it appears that the South Perth site would be disposed of or no longer part of the package?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** No decisions have been made and it has not been funded in the budget, but these are matters that we will consider. I will hand over to Mr Binning to further comment.

**Mr C. Binning:** As the Premier indicated, no financial decision has been made. Development WA has an active interest in the South Perth site and we are working through a process with it. Once a final site is selected, the future of the South Perth site will be determined.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I refer to page 231 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, under the income statement. I want to go back to the Auditor General's report, specifically talking about payroll controls at the line item "Employee benefits". The Auditor General identified significant weaknesses in the payroll controls that had been implemented by the department. In her words —

These weaknesses could result in salary errors such as overpayments or payments to individuals who are not entitled to receive payment. Consequently, controls to prevent invalid and inaccurate payroll payments were inadequate.

Could the Premier advise what weaknesses the Auditor General identified and whether they have been rectified; and, if not, what work is being done to rectify this weakness? Presumably, it is not ideal to be underpaying or overpaying individuals in the department.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** As I said before, there is no evidence to suggest risks associated with the audit findings will materialise. The upgrading of the IT systems is necessary to address the issues involved. That is one of the reasons that we are spending \$24 million to upgrade the IT systems. As I said before, over time we need to invest in IT systems, whether we bring agencies together or otherwise. That is what is currently occurring. I invite Mr Binning to add a few words.

**Mr C. Binning:** The Leader of the Opposition asked what some of the specific weaknesses were essentially in bringing three different HR systems together. The flow between employees and their managers in verifying time and pay et cetera was not as functional as it needed to be. We have worked very closely with our internal audit team and have verified that to the best of our ability there has been no material breach. We have worked through that with the Auditor General. The new HR hub will have a completely contemporary payroll certification system as part of it. We are confident that from the next financial year, we should have those systems in place and they will be robust.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Can I just clarify, we were talking about the HR system and there was mention of the record system and the finance system. Are they all the same thing? Is that one project? Is that the \$24 million that the Premier is talking about, or are they separate projects?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I invite Mr Binning to comment.

**Mr C. Binning:** The \$24 million relates to the three projects, which are part of an overarching program. Each of those three systems must be able to talk to one another and be integrated. As a simple example, we pay people through our payroll system. That HR system then needs to feed data into the finance system so that the costs are appropriately allocated. The system is contemporary, fit for purpose and integrated.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Were the errors that the Auditor General raised in the annual report previously raised with the department? Has this been a recurring issue?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I will ask Mr Binning to comment.

**Mr C. Binning:** The Auditor General has been concerned about the integration of our different systems for some period; they are not new issues. There has been a very clear understanding that the solution to that lies in the implementation of those new core business systems. I am now very comfortable that the HR system has been delivered and the finance system is on track to be delivered over the remainder of this year. We have also worked very carefully with both our internal audit team and the auditor to ensure that none of those risks materialised.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** The delivery of this program then has obviously been integral to averting risk from a government perspective. Five years in, has it been a lack of funding or a lack of clarity in the department structure? Has it been a lack of being able to access people to do the work? Why has it taken five years? This seems to me quite a fundamental issue if there are machinery-of-government changes. Even if the government is upgrading systems, it is fundamental to run an efficient department to have access to these types of services. Why has it taken five years?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Mr Binning.

**Mr C. Binning:** There are a number of things, but I would argue that five years is not out of the scope of what is unusual to do a digital transformation. The reality was that when the department was formed, the existing systems were found not to be fit for function. In designing the new systems, the decision was to fully contemporise, which involves a transition to a cloud-based environment. The final thing that proved very challenging for IT projects across the board in the WA market is lack of skills and a lack of people. There have been some headwinds in securing the resources that are capable of implementation, but the program is now, as I said, in the final stage of execution and deployment. It is not unusual that large transformative IT projects of this kind take time, and it is not unusual that they experience some headwinds.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** If we, as an opposition, asked for or FOI-ed the subjects of the meetings between the director general and the minister, would we find this project listed on the agenda? Has it been a priority for the minister to deliver it and has it been discussed at the weekly briefings that the minister has held as a result of being the minister for the past five years?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I am not the minister, so I do not know the direct answer to that. If the Leader of the Opposition wants to put in FOI requests or questions on notice, that is a matter for her.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** The director general would have been part of those meetings.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I am not going to go into questions about who said what at a meeting.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** No, I am asking whether it is listed as a priority. If a minister is meeting with their director general on a weekly basis, there is an agreed agenda. Would we find this project as one of those priority areas as a part of the minister meeting with the department?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I do not see how that is relevant to the budget item. I am not going to ask for comments.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** It is \$25 million worth of taxpayer dollars.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The Leader of the Opposition can keep arguing with me. If she wants to do a FOI or whatever, that is up to her.

[11.20 am]

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 230 of budget paper No 3 and the sixth line item “Regional Economic Development Grants”. The estimated actual was \$11.6 million for 2021–22 and \$5 million was budgeted for the out years. Why has that figure been reduced?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The answer to that question is that there has been no reduction. The department runs rounds of funding and sometimes there is more in one year than in another. It is a sort of bumpy program, if you like. The scheme invests in community-driven projects across regional Western Australia, especially those focused on the diversification of the economy. The total program is \$45.8 million over eight years, which is a little more than \$5 million per annum. The first four rounds of the scheme funded 277 projects in agriculture, mining, manufacturing, infrastructure, construction, tourism and professional skills. The Minister for Regional Development recently announced the round 4 projects and applications for round 5 will open soon. In the wheatbelt, 33 projects funded across the first four rounds helped to create 395 jobs. A company called Living Farm will get \$200 000 to establish its head office and operations centre in York. Modular home builder Evoke Living Homes will receive \$200 000 for construction of a new purpose-built undercover manufacturing facility in Northam. In the midwest, \$2.8 million will go to 25 projects, creating 135 jobs. Fenix-Newhaul will receive \$250 000 towards a world-leading truck driving simulator in the midwest. This technology will reduce the time frame for learners to become confident in road train driving, which is important. There are a range of projects like that across regional WA.

Essentially, the answer to the member’s question is that obviously the estimated actual in 2021–22 brought to book a range of funding rounds, so the amount of money has not been reduced.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Can the Premier outline the system’s processes? Who is administering those grants? Is it done by the development commissions or the like? Are business cases attached to every project?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** No. The grants are \$200 000 or so and are way under the business case threshold. I will let the acting director general explain the process.

**Mr T. Hill:** The commissions have worked very closely with the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development on the regional economic development grants. DPIRD holds the central systems, if you like, for the grant processes. The regional economic development grants are administered by each of the commissions, and in another life I look after one of those. The commissions have a budget but they have the opportunity each year to overspend by 30 per cent or underspend the budget depending on the quality of projects. The commissions will go out to a call at roughly the same time. The call comes in and then there is quite a rigorous process of assessment. People have to fill in the guidelines, which are not insignificant, to access the funding and have proven to be quite robust. People seem comfortable using the guidelines because we are regularly oversubscribed. It is a popular program. I am sure the member would be aware that the commissions have a chair and a board. The chair and the board then work through the projects and make recommendations. When someone is successful in getting a project

grant, they sign an agreement that the commissions manage on the ground but the agreement sits with DPIRD central and DPIRD staff manage more broadly the overall grant program. It is very much delivering regional programs through regional development commissions focused on regional people. As the Premier said, it has been a very successful program. It is very well received and we are regularly oversubscribed.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I have a further question. I have noticed a pattern has developed in the regional development grants, with individual businesses and individuals granted funding rather than not-for-profits, community groups and the like. I guess it is fairly unusual for individuals or individual businesses to be given those moneys. Does the Premier have any comments on that?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I do not understand the question. What is the member asking?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Generally, these sorts of economic development grants are granted to community groups, not-for-profits and the like. In the case of these regional economic development grants, there are companies or individual businesses that have been granted the funds rather than community groups.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** They are economic development grants. That is what they are. They are designed to attract a new business or allow an existing business to expand with what is essentially a bit of seed funding that helps make up the overall cost of doing something innovative. I outlined a few of them in Toodyay, Northam and the midwest. They are for things that would not otherwise happen. The program is designed to leverage a small grant to get a bigger outcome. It does not happen in the city. We do not have this approach in the city. It is designed to get more businesses into the regions. As I said, we analysed it and worked out that hundreds and hundreds of jobs in various towns have come about because of this approach. It is not orthodox economics, if you like, but when we want to get jobs into a certain town or make sure a community remains viable and has a long-term future, these are the sorts of things we can do. I do not think this program is designed to give money to not-for-profits or community groups; it is for economic development grants to diversify the local economy.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Is it possible to get a breakdown of the projects that have not been successful and the amount of funding that applicants have requested versus the amount granted?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** We can give the member a list of the successful ones but I am not particularly keen to give him a list of the unsuccessful ones because that might breach confidences and release business ideas that people might seek to fund through a bank loan or some other grant somewhere. I do not want to compromise people's business ideas. I could give the member a list of the ones that involved the expenditure of public money.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I am happy with that.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** We will provide by way of supplementary information the businesses that received grants under round 4 of the regional economic development grants program.

*[Supplementary Information No A2.]*

[11.30 am]

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Premier, the director general mentioned that each round has been oversubscribed, and I can imagine that that is the case. Could we have, by way of supplementary information, how much each round has been oversubscribed?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Yes, no doubt they would be oversubscribed, because governments giving money generally results in oversubscription—not always, but generally. It is done on a regional basis, region by region, and there are nine regions, so for round 4 I am happy to provide the member, by way of supplementary information, the amount that was requested versus the amount that was provided. Bear in mind that people might come in and ask for \$10 million because they want to set up a shoe factory in some town somewhere; it does not necessarily mean that the government should provide that. In fact, the government should not. There is a stringent selection process to make sure that public money is used wisely.

**The CHAIR:** Just to clarify, the Premier has offered to provide, by way of supplementary information, the amount requested versus the amount allocated for each of the applications in round 4.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** That is right, but not a list of the projects that were unsuccessful, because I do not want to breach any confidence.

*[Supplementary Information No A3.]*

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Across the program, have there been any recipients that have been unable to acquit the grant according to the funding agreement? I am assuming that there is a time frame for acquittals. If so, can the Premier provide us with a list of the projects or businesses that have had to return funds to government?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I am a bit reluctant. A business might receive a grant and then have to acquit it and as they go along, there may have been a family breakdown or crisis, or someone else gave them the money, or something or other. I am a bit reluctant to release information that might cause a business some grief. I am just trying to work out how to provide information that will not individually name a business that might not want its situation named, particularly if it did not actually get any public money. If they got public money but then returned it, again, I am

a bit reluctant to name them, because I do not want someone whose circumstances are unfortunate to be outed in the Parliament. Sometimes people get a grant and then they get cancer or something, so they cannot deliver. I do not want them to be exposed, if the member knows what I mean.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Perhaps I can help. Maybe the Premier could just tell me the number of instances in which that has occurred and the value of the funds.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Yes, by way of supplementary information, the number of times that a grant was allocated but not delivered, the number of businesses that that happened with, and the total value of that for round 4. That is the latest round in this budget for last year.

**The CHAIR:** This is the number of times that a grant has been allocated and then not successfully delivered in round 4 of the regional economic development grants.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Without naming the individual businesses. The global amount, but not the individual amounts, because the individual amounts might allow someone to track who it was.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Could I just clarify: has the time period for round 4 finished?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Yes.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Have they had to acquit it?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** It has been awarded.

**The CHAIR:** Just one moment, Leader of the Opposition. I am just going to allocate the number for that supplementary information.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** He will not be able to answer it. The funding round has not been completed; it has not got to the end of the grant acquittal period, so it is of no use to me.

**The CHAIR:** My task as the chair is to allocate a supplementary information number to the supplementary information that the Premier is willing to provide, and that is what I am doing.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** It is not what I am asking.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** We will have to look at round 3 to correctly identify the issues, so it is for round 3.

**The CHAIR:** We are providing the total number of times that a grant has been allocated but not delivered under round 3 of the regional economic development grants.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I do not want that to be interpreted somehow as the government not delivering because milestones were not reached or the business itself did not decide to proceed.

**The CHAIR:** The total number of times grants were returned under round 3 of the regional economic development grants program due to the business not being able to deliver or milestones not having been reached.

*[Supplementary Information No A4.]*

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I have one more question in relation to regional economic development grants, specific to one that the Wheatbelt Development Commission received a request for, the Bruce Rock supermarket. Is it possible to get an update on the consideration the government is giving to trying to find additional funds for that particular project, if it is giving any consideration to that?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I will let Mr Cossart answer. He might know more details about the Bruce Rock supermarket.

**Mr R. Cossart:** The Bruce Rock supermarket has submitted a number of funding applications to meet the funding shortfall. It has also gone out to tender to return the full value of that costing. Those tenders closed last Friday, and I am scheduled to meet with the Shire of Bruce Rock this Friday to discuss where those tenders came in, what the current costings are and what some strategies might be with regard to the cost shortfall.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Has there been consideration given to whether there are returned funds or surplus in that regional economic development scheme? In all programs, there are funds that sort of slosh around at the bottom that could be allocated to a project. It was not allocated the full amount it asked for. I understand that not every project gets the allocation it wants, but there were some mitigating circumstances with Bruce Rock, given that its only supermarket burnt down and the community was impacted by bushfires the following year. The people of Bruce Rock have a fair bit on their plate and it would be good to know that the government is supportive of their endeavours, given the circumstances.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I do not want to pre-empt the process, because then I would be criticised for saying, "Yes, I'm deciding where this money goes outside the process."

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** No criticism from me, Premier!

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I know the director of the Wheatbelt Development Commission has heard that, and I will make sure the minister's office is apprised of what the Leader of the Opposition has had to say about it. I did not realise that the Bruce Rock supermarket had burnt down. I do not know where people are getting their groceries from at the moment.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** The shire has had to set up a temporary one, and it has been like that for 12 months, so they have been struggling a fair bit, through COVID et cetera.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** They would be. Where is the nearest supermarket?

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Merredin.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** What is the exact distance?

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** It is about an hour's round trip for them, so it is not ideal, and the chemist and other businesses are impacted, because if people have to leave town, obviously they are doing their shopping elsewhere. It is in the town hall, so the shire is essentially running the supermarket.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** It sounds very worthy, and I am sure they will take all these issues into account.

[11.40 am]

**Ms L. DALTON:** I refer to page 219 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. Under "Spending Changes" is the line item "Western Australian Regional Connectivity Program Round 2 and Program Costs". Can the Premier outline how the government is supporting enhanced digital connectivity across regional Western Australia?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I thank the member for Geraldton for the question. Obviously, telecommunications is a commonwealth government responsibility but the state does step in to assist, and has done for some time. We know that with the biggest state in the world, regional connectivity, by definition, will always be challenging. The pandemic highlighted our reliance on digital connectivity. If we do not have proper connectivity, it hurts regional businesses, it is difficult for farmers to compete and it puts additional pressure on farmers. I have seen some of the ways that digital technology can assist in farming, which is really quite remarkable. We stepped in to assist. We are continuing to invest in this budget with an additional \$48.6 million through the WA regional digital connectivity program. This investment will see mobile phone coverage expanded and higher grade flexible broadband services delivered to regional communities and businesses across the state. The program is targeting co-investment from the commonwealth and the private sector for a range of projects valued at \$145 million. We try to leverage as much as we can. The funding will advance solutions to bridge the digital divide in the regions, such as new mobile base stations and fixed wireless infrastructure, and upgrade the capacity of existing telecommunications assets plus trial new technologies. The solutions will benefit regional communities and businesses. So far, the program has invested \$10.9 million in 14 projects under round 2 of the commonwealth's regional connectivity program, leveraging an additional \$25.3 million of commonwealth and industry funding. This \$48.6 million is a big additional investment. I thank the member for the question.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I refer to page 227 of budget paper No 3, and the line item "Primary Health Centres Demonstration Program". I raise this on behalf of the member for Moore, whose question relates to the Mullewa health centre redevelopment project. The Premier wrote to the member about this project 12 months ago. In the letter that was received in June last year, the Premier advised the member for Moore that the program scope had changed from what was originally going to be delivered, saying that extra scope had been added, yet no funding was added to that project across the forward estimates. I think that line item is Dongara and Mullewa. The challenge is that we have seen cost escalations across every other project. The scope has changed. The additional scope has been welcomed by the community but there is no additional funding. Can we have some clarity on where the Mullewa health centre redevelopment project or the Mullewa community hospital project is up to and when it is likely to be delivered and completed?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I do not recall the details of the letter I sent to the member for Moore.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I imagine the Premier writes a lot of letters.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** He is very different from the other member for Moore.

A tender for the Dongara health centre redevelopment was awarded to Devlyn Australia Pty Ltd in July 2021. The health centre will remain functioning during the redevelopment. Practical completion is expected in 2023, which is good for Dongara.

In terms of Mullewa, I do not know where that is at. I ask either the Leader of the Opposition or one of her members to ask the Department of Health because I think it is a health department funding issue.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I am fairly sure that royalties for regions funds are being used for part of the redevelopment of the Mullewa community hospital. I am advised that some of the funding for that project is in that section of the budget, as has been done in this government and the previous one. If it is not under that line item, I am happy to be directed to where it is.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Apparently, some money has been provided by royalties for regions but only the Department of Health will know the current status. None of us know the status. I do not know when health estimates are on. It is a fairly straightforward question for the Minister for Health, I would have thought.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 230 of budget paper No 3 and "Regional Police Incentives". Does this recurring line item relate to the \$2.5 million in each of the out years' royalties for regions funding that is targeting those regional communities under Operation Regional Shield?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** No. Operation Regional Shield is about providing additional overtime, in particular, for communities, particularly over summer, to deal with some additional pressing issues or antisocial behaviour. That is what that program is about. It has worked very well, as it has in the city.

The regional incentive scheme provides police officers with inducements to undertake regional service in hard-to-fill locations. It provides attraction payments to officers at the time of transfer to defined regional locations. Retention payments are paid following three and a half years' service at specified locations to encourage officers to serve beyond their minimum tenure. It helps to attract police officers to some hard-to-staff locations. A total of 318 officers have received a regional incentive payment when transferring to one of the eligible locations. Nineteen officers have received a payment for exceeding three and a half years in their current location. There has been an increase in applications for vacant positions in regional areas for officers eligible for the attraction payment. In addition, the government's growth program for police has increased the number of full-time employees in regional locations. Sixty-four per cent are in locations eligible for the attraction payment. That is what that scheme is used for.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Will part of that money be used to supplement Government Regional Officers' Housing for those police officers or is it just an incentive program to basically encourage officers who have served over three and a half years into the regions?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** No. As I said to the member before, this program is for attraction and retention payments for individual police officers in hard-to-staff locations. A big subsidy is already provided for GROH. As I recall, housing in some locations is provided free of charge.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I have a final question. Is this part of the program about which the Commissioner of Police wrote to all police officers around the state urging them to move to country areas?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I do not think so. This program has been in place for some years. I know the commissioner is very keen for officers to serve in the regions. I think it is good for police officers, teachers, nurses, doctors or whomever it might be to experience living in the country for a while. It is often the best experience of people's lives. The police commissioner did a good thing by encouraging that. This program relating to the attraction and retention payments has been in place for some years.

[11.50 am]

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I refer to page 233 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, about two-thirds of the way down the page, "Regional Workers Incentives—Price Index Funding". I see \$175 000 in this financial year. It is not very much. There is a gap in 2023–24 and then again there is \$175 000 in 2024–25. Can the Premier explain what the funding is for and why there is a gap next year? It does not seem to be a huge amount.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The regional workers incentive scheme provides for an improved district allowance for eligible public sector employees located in regional Western Australia. The district allowance is paid to eligible regional public sector employees as compensation for the disadvantages of cost of living, climate and isolation generally associated with working in the regions. The calculation of the district allowance includes the use of the regional price index, which is calculated every two years. Price index funding for the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development is \$175 000 in 2021–22, 2022–23 and 2023–24. This is apparently recalculated every two years. It is a fairly modest scheme by the looks of things. This is the indexing for the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development. It is not the whole amount for every agency; it is just for this department.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Is the regional workers incentive price index funding for all regional workers paid from royalties for regions or from the department's budget? It always used to be.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** It is paid from royalties for regions. The total regional workers incentive allowance payment across government for every agency in this financial year is \$23.3 million, and that is fairly standard across the forward estimates.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to budget paper No 3, page 231, halfway down the page, the rail future fund. There is an allocation of \$3.3 million this year and \$15.1 million next year. Last year, the Premier revealed in estimates that the rail future fund was not for all rail in WA; it is just for the *Australind* railcar replacement project. Is it still anticipated that the RforR component of the \$56 million for the *Australind* line will be only \$18.3 million over the next few years?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** That is what the budget appears to show—rail future fund, \$18.3 million. That includes the *Australind* railcar replacement component, the Cookernup and North Dandalup train stations, and completion of the Yarloop train station. But I think the total cost of the new railcars for the *Australind* line is significantly more than that. That comes out of the Department of Transport's budget.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** There will obviously be a new express train along the *Australind* line. Can the Premier confirm when that service will actually begin?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** It is a Transport issue. My memory is saying 2024, but, obviously, building new diesel railcars is time consuming and we want to do it in Western Australia. The old ones are quaint and are due for replacement.

The contractor is Alstom. They are due to be built in the Midland factory that we built. The cars are due for completion in 2023–24. Most of the design documents have been approved. It will increase patronage on the *Australind*; improve safety, amenity and disability access; and support tourism and increase visitation to the south west. It is a pretty good project. When it all starts operating, it will be very exciting.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Does the Premier have any anticipation of what might happen with the older rolling stock from the *Australind* line?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I am open to suggestions. I do not know whether there will be many buyers for them. I do not know whether the member has travelled on them. They are not state of the art. I think they were brought into service in 1986 or so, which puts them at about 35 years old. A lot of repairs had to be done because rust was found in the buggies and in the floors. I am open to suggestions.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** The great southern tourist train association!

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Is that in Albany?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** That is right.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Using which line?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** The great southern line.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** That is not operational, though.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** It is aspirational.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** It is aspirational—okay. That is something I am sure we can look at.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Watch this space!

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I refer to page 227 of budget paper No 3 and royalties for regions expenditure. About seven lines down that list is Meekatharra Hospital. It looks like the cash flow is very heavily weighted towards the out years. Can we assume that the Meekatharra Hospital redevelopment will be completed in 2025–26, and what is the allocation for this financial year being used for?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I have been advised by Health that \$49 million has been provided for the Meekatharra Hospital, of which \$15.6 million is through RforR. That is for the new build health service, acute care, emergency services, mental health care, community aged care and other primary care. The project has commenced and the consulting team at the WA Country Health Service is being assembled about now. We are hoping for completion in 2024. I do not want to be too definitive about that because I have found that the heavy construction market and the complexity of these types of projects sometimes makes it difficult. That is the aim, but I will not be definitive on it.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I am very happy to take completion in 2024–25, but quite a considerable amount of the cash flow of this item goes out to 2025–26.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** That is a good point. Perhaps the cash flow is the most up-to-date way of considering this, so it may well be that it will finish in 2025 or 2026. We would like to do these things more quickly, but they do take time. I cannot be definitive. The advice was 2024, but the member has correctly identified the issue that a lot of the spend is in 2025–26.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

*Meeting suspended from 12.00 to 1.00 pm*

**Division 3: Department of the Premier and Cabinet — Services 1 to 3 and 6, Premier; Federal–State Relations, \$150 900 000 —**

Mr D.A.E. Scaife, Chair.

Mr M. McGowan, Premier.

Ms E. Roper, Director General.

Ms A. Pickrell, Deputy Director General, Intergovernmental Relations and COVID-19.

Mr C. Clark, Deputy Director General, Infrastructure, Economy and the Environment.

Ms F. Hunt, Deputy Director General, Aboriginal Engagement and Community Policy.

Mr G. Italiano, Government Chief Information Officer, Office of Digital Government.

Mr A. Brender-A-Brandis, Chief Finance Officer.

Ms E. Fells, Acting Executive Director, State Services.

[Witnesses introduced.]

**The CHAIR:** The estimates committees will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point. Consideration is restricted to items for which a vote of money is

proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must relate to a page number, item or amount related to the current division, and members should preface their questions with these details. Some divisions are the responsibility of more than one minister. Ministers shall only be examined in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The Premier may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the Premier to clearly indicate what information he agrees to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 3 June 2022. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system.

Are there any questions? I give the call to the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to page 102 of budget paper No 3. Underneath the heading “COVID-19 Response” is the item “COVID-19 Coordination and Communications”. Given there was no allocation for this unit beyond 2022–23 in the last budget, what has led to the extension of this funding, particularly to 2025–26?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Just on a point of clarification, I want some advice about budget paper No 3. I always thought that questions could be asked under budget paper No 2 in this division on the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, rather than budget paper No 3. I just need to understand that, because I do not think I have budget paper No 3 here as part of my notes. I thought the standing orders indicated that it had to actually be part of the division.

**The CHAIR:** Just give me one second. While I am waiting for the Clerk to give us some advice, are there any other questions that members would like to ask?

**Ms L. METTAM:** I can ask the question in relation to budget paper No 2.

**The CHAIR:** Sure; if the member would like to give that reference, that would be helpful.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to the spending changes on page 64 of budget paper No 2 and the line item “COVID-19 Coordination and Communications”. I am asking about the extension of funding for communications for the COVID-19 response.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** There is funding for coordination and communications under spending changes. There is funding for continued policy coordination, management and communication of the COVID-19 pandemic response in Western Australia. An amount of \$31.69 million has been provided until 2025–26 to support the ongoing management of COVID-19. This includes \$6.1 million for full-time employees in 2022–23, \$6.3 million for full-time employees in 2023–24, and \$3.9 million—a significant reduction in FTE—for communications in 2024–25 to 2025–26.

The reason for that, as I have said many times, is that COVID-19 obviously continues to cause uncertainty and we need to continue our communications functions. One of the big successes of the last two years has been the communications that have advised people what to do and about doing the right thing. Some of the communications work includes providing responses to issues of concern, including variants of concern, the management of the impacts of long COVID and ongoing vaccination requirements. It also includes policy coordination and strategic engagement on across-government policy and implementation issues and strategies, including strategies to live with and manage COVID in the community. It involves ensuring that pandemic preparedness and response is built into all government policies and strategies; scoping economic recovery packages; researching, facilitating, communicating and reinforcing long-term behaviour change; protecting vulnerable cohorts in the health system; leading stakeholder engagement with the commonwealth government and other states and territories on emerging COVID-19 issues and responses; monitoring the state’s legislative frameworks to make sure that they remain appropriate; coordinating communications efforts across government to support WA’s approach to living with COVID; and providing a whole-of-government communication service, including on the wa.gov.au site, Facebook, Twitter and those sorts of things. It is providing all those services across government to make sure that we continue to promote campaigns like the Build a Life in WA campaign, which attracts interstate and international workers to Western Australia. That campaign is being managed by the COVID-19 communications team in conjunction with teams from the Department of Training and Workforce Development and the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation. The team also has an ongoing stakeholder engagement function across the public sector, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, industry, community services and the like—it is all those sorts of things.

[1.10 pm]

The response to COVID rolls on. I recall that one of the criticisms of the opposition back in 2020 was that we were not spending enough on communications, so we are making sure that we provide that very comprehensive effort. As I said, the communications effort is one of the unsung success stories of the last two years, because people have been very compliant and understanding and have been doing the right thing. A lot of this will continue in the time ahead to ensure that we are in the right position to protect Western Australians and their jobs.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Can the Premier provide a breakdown of how many FTEs are attached to this commitment?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** In 2022–23, it is 42 full-time employees, with 26 in communications and 16 in coordination. In 2023–24, it is 42 full-time employees, with 26 in communications and 16 in coordination. In 2024–25 and 2025–26, it is 12 FTEs, so the number in COVID communications activities will come down.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Are the 26 communications FTEs to which the Premier referred embedded within the Department of the Premier and Cabinet or within the Department of Health?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The unit is in the Department of the Premier and Cabinet in Dumas House. I visited there once. There is a range of staff there—externalists and communications people—working on those sorts of campaigns. As I said, we set them up initially in the basement of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. It was a much bigger team during 2020 and it was highly successful. The number has come down a lot since those extreme days.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Does the Premier have a breakdown of what part of this funding is dedicated to advertising?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** It is \$6.1 million for staff, including 26 for communications and 16 for coordination; \$250 000 for consultancy services; and \$8.62 million for communications activities, which I expect is for actual campaigns.

**Ms L. METTAM:** As the Premier said, the communications message is very important. What approvals process do the communications from this unit have to go through? Do they have to be considered and approved by the Chief Health Officer, for example, or the Minister for Health or director general of Health? What is the relationship there?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Health messages are confirmed by the Chief Health Officer and any such campaigns are done in conjunction with Health.

**Ms L. METTAM:** At the start of my question, I touched on the extension of funding. What has informed this? Was modelling done by the Chief Health Officer? Why are we seeing the extension of this funding going forward? Was it just the Premier's decision? What has informed the extension of the coordination and communications funding?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** It has been extraordinarily successful. As I have said repeatedly to the member in the house, we have had the best health and economic outcomes in the world. That is partly because of this commitment. It is also important to retain the resource while we are still in this uncertain environment. We live in a very competitive state when it comes to retaining quality personnel; therefore, this funding certainty will allow us to keep the resource for whatever might occur.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Further to that, how much of the advertising and communications effort is dedicated to trying to attract the health workers required, or is that not part of this communications plan?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The Build a Life in WA campaign is about attracting staff, and that is worked on by these people. That allows us to seek to attract staff from interstate and potentially overseas. As the member knows, I am going overseas shortly to do some of that work. I understand that that campaign is coordinated by some of the people who work in this unit. The funding of that campaign is out of this bucket of money. There might be other campaigns run by Health to attract nurses, doctors, physios or whatever, and that would be worked on by the people in this unit, with some funding from Health for the actual communications campaign and ad buy and so forth.

**Ms L. METTAM:** The Premier said that he will be going overseas shortly as part of promoting or trying to attract health workers to WA. Is that what the Premier is referring to?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** It is not really related to this, but that is part of what I will be doing while overseas, yes.

**Ms L. METTAM:** The Premier mentioned consultancy fees of \$250 000. Is any of that money, or, indeed, any of the other funding within this coordination and communications line item, being used for polling?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The department does not undertake polling. It conducts research and surveys as part of planning and evaluation of communications activities, as does any business. The research as part of the campaign and communications activity development allows the communications team to fully understand the target audience and how best to communicate with it. It develops insight-based communications with research, meaning stronger communications campaigns that are more likely to spark positive behaviour change. Evaluation surveys are undertaken at the conclusion of a campaign to allow the communications team to understand how the campaign performed. It does campaign evaluations, for instance of the Roll Up for WA campaign; it has undertaken vaccine hesitancy research; and it does workforce recruitment campaigns. It also does research to inform messaging and the creative approach, because what we think might work to attract a nurse out of Melbourne might not be what actually works. That is why we do research into these things. That is not unusual in an advertising campaign. It seems like a pretty modest sum of money for what we are trying to achieve. I repeat that no polling is done as part of that.

**The CHAIR:** Before we move on to a new question, I want to go back to the point of clarification that the Premier raised. I have been advised by the Clerk that questions on budget paper No 3 are acceptable, provided they refer to a particular page and line item in budget paper No 2. I think the Premier mentioned that possibly budget paper No 3 was not in the briefing pack; therefore, it might assist at least with the quick conduct of things if members could also make reference to those line items where they appear in budget paper No 2.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to page 64 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the COVID-19 vaccination campaigns. Why will the funding for vaccination campaigns cease in 2022–23, given that the Premier obviously wants to achieve a third-dose rate of much higher than 80 per cent?

[1.20 pm]

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** This year we received a one-off allocation to support the vaccination campaign, because it was so extraordinarily important over the last financial year. I am just trying to place where we are. The vaccine rollout has largely been over the last calendar year. It was a massive effort. We are now at 99 per cent or thereabouts for first and second doses; and our third rate is 81.3 per cent, which I suspect will climb today. Western Australia's rates are Australia and world leading. If we need to do communications around that, I suspect we will. As I said earlier, we have allocated \$8.62 million for communications campaigns, so if we need to do more about vaccines into specific target audiences, that is what we will do. Certain groups—for instance, older people—are very heavily third dosed; some younger people not so much, and some parts of the state not so much, but 81.3 per cent is pretty high. If we need to do more, we will, but the last year has been a pretty amazing period for rolling out vaccines. That is what the money was for.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Just to clarify, if the Premier did want to reach and if he were challenged in reaching a target much higher than 80 per cent for the third dose, would he utilise the allocation for coordination and communications?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** They can or they might want to work with us on another campaign. They have communications money as well. It could be one of those. If you think about it, out of 300, we are at 99 first, 99 second and 81.3 third, so we are at 279 out of 300 at this point in time; we have very high vaccination rates by world standards. Whether we need to do more, particularly broad campaigns, when such a small group is left out of the three doses, may not be the appropriate thing to do. We had very targeted initiatives targeting groups of people to get them vaccinated. As I said, the younger cohorts, the 20-somethings and 30-somethings, have not been as heavily vaccinated as the older community. We then have the fourth dose. We do not know what the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee will recommend on the fourth. Currently people over 65 and people who are immunocompromised are eligible for the fourth dose. Now the federal election is over, we are awaiting further advice from the AHPPC, the national body, on what more needs to be done on the fourth dose. I do not expect there will be any more mandates around that, but there may be a dropping of the age for eligibility for the fourth dose, which may require a campaign at some point as well.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to page 64 under “Covid-19 Response”, and the quarantine project. Can the Premier explain exactly what that \$1.369 million was spent on and why there is no funding going forward? Further to that, could the Premier confirm whether he anticipates quarantine will be required after 2022?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** In overall terms, it is an interesting project. Obviously, the commonwealth decided to do this quite late in the piece, when you think about it, and then it put an unrealistic time frame on construction. I think I might have said that I doubted it would be finished by March. They were hoping to have it open and being used in the lead-up to the federal election. They are building that facility from scratch out in Bullsbrook. The member might recall they were looking at a few other sites before they selected Bullsbrook. Multiplex, the builder, by all accounts, has done a very good job. The federal government came up with an amazing name, the Centre for National Resilience. I have to give credit to their people in Canberra for coming up with that one! The Centre for National Resilience is under construction. Our component at this point is \$1.369 million for the project team working with the commonwealth. We provided in-kind support as well from various agencies—Health, Treasury, Finance, and the State Solicitor's Office—and there were subject matter experts including financial advisers. The commonwealth is managing the construction. It is now 500 beds, but was originally 1 000 beds. The facility will be owned by the commonwealth and operated by the state, as long as required to respond to the pandemic.

The commonwealth originally intended construction to be completed by March this year. That date was very ambitious. I remember having a public argument with Hon Simon Birmingham. He said it was absolutely going to be done. Just on the basis of my experience with the construction market, I think I said I really doubted it, which turned out to be right. It is not due for completion until late June, early July. Sometime in July, there will be some sort of commissioning and operational process. What to do with it is the \$64 million question. I think it cost the commonwealth in the vicinity of \$200 million. What to do with it now we are not quarantining people anymore is an interesting question. I said all the way through, I want to work with the commonwealth, and having something there may be of great benefit at some point in time. There may be some use we can put it to outside a pandemic or a disaster. We have not quite landed on what that will be yet. We are seeking feedback from people as to what it can be used for. It is not in the heart of the city, so it cannot be used for backpackers or something like that. It is out in Bullsbrook near RAAF Base Pearce, so we are trying to think what else can be done with it. The decision to build it was not ours, but we worked cooperatively with the commonwealth and will continue to do so. We will work out the staffing arrangement and the longevity of our involvement and announce that shortly.

**Ms L. METTAM:** In the short term, does the Premier anticipate it will be operational once it is open or could it be the case that it is not even required once the project is complete and once it is open?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I do not think it is required for people to quarantine, unless there is another variant—or monkeypox! I do not know. I had not even heard of monkeypox before Friday, so who knows? That is not to say we should not get the systems up, get it furnished and make sure it operates effectively, should it be needed. As

the member knows, every Christmas we have disasters like fires and cyclones. Perhaps there will be a use there at points during the year. Maybe there is a use for the commonwealth in terms of the people it deports each year. We will do our bit for a limited period, I suspect, to make sure it is operationalised and will work. Its long-term future has not been resolved as yet. I do not want to pour lots of money into an operating facility that has no-one in it. Initially at least, it is important to make sure it is capable of being operated. I expect that we will do our bit for a limited time to make sure that it is operational and that it will work. The long-term future of it, though, has not been resolved as yet. I do not want to pour a lot of money into an operating facility that has no-one in it. It is important to make sure that it is capable of being operated, and that is what we will do, at least initially.

It was a very late decision to build it. At the time I wondered why the commonwealth was doing it, but we did not know how long the pandemic would last. As the member will recall, eight city hotels were full. That is the bit that is lost to history. Thousands of people were working in eight quarantine hotels in the heart of the city, as was occurring in New South Wales and other states, although not so much in Victoria. It was a remarkable logistical effort and I would like to thank all those people. This facility was to take the load off all those hotels, but now we do not have anyone quarantining in any of the hotels. It is an interesting conundrum, but the good thing is that the state did not pay for it—the commonwealth paid for it—and it is there should we need it for anything in the future.

[1.30 pm]

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I have a question about the operational budget. Where will that funding come from? The Premier talked about getting ready to press go if it was needed and that a decision would be made about whether it would receive ongoing funding. Where will that funding come from? Is there provision for it somewhere in the budget?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Yes, it is under the Department of Health. When we take over the facility, we will make sure that it is properly furnished and is operational. Even though people might not be quarantined there, we will have to make sure that the systems work, should people arrive. It will have a minimum number of staff for a limited time and at the end of that period we will seek some use for it. As I said, it might be a facility for the commonwealth to use. I know that the commonwealth is deporting people with criminal records or who overstay their visas or what have you all the time, so the commonwealth government might want to use it for those purposes. It certainly would be a much more affordable option than what the commonwealth government does on Christmas Island. Maybe there is a use for it in that sense, but that is really a matter for the commonwealth.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Am I right in saying that the commonwealth government will maintain responsibility for it, or will it hand over the facility to the state? Who has responsibility for maintaining it?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The commonwealth government owns it and has responsibility for it, but we will operate it while the pandemic is still alive, if you like, but that will be for a limited time. If there is no further need for a pandemic response, it might be used in response to a disaster or as a facility for people who are going to be deported. We will work with the commonwealth on that. Throughout this time, I have not tried to score political points on it. Obviously, we did not know how long the pandemic would last, so the commonwealth decided to build it. If the pandemic went on for five years, everyone would be grateful, but it turns out that the requirement to quarantine has now expired and we will have this facility. We will be responsible for the facility's operation for a limited time. It will be very minimally staffed, because it does not have anyone in it, but we must furnish it and make sure that all the systems work, so that will take a while. As I said, it is a \$250 million investment. It is a massive spend. With 500 beds, I expect that it is quite big, although I have not visited it. The commonwealth is doing some of the water remediation in the area, which is great; that is the PFAS issue. A lot of that is being done as part of this work. In overall terms, Western Australia is better off, but I do not want a long-term, ongoing drain on the budget for something that does not have anyone in it. We will do our bit initially and see where it ends.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I am still referring to the spending changes on page 64 of the *Budget statements*. I note what appears to be a new line item for the Intergovernmental Relations Directorate and that the expenditure is to meet the current and future federal–state relations obligations, including national cabinet. What exactly will the \$5 million over four years be expended on?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** It would be fair to say there has been a significant increase, by a multiple amount, in the area of intergovernmental relations over the last two years. Shortly, I will speak to the former Prime Minister. I think we had maybe 60 or 70 national cabinet meetings with agenda papers, and sometimes they were held on a twice-weekly basis. Ordinarily, we would have had four Council of Australian Governments meetings over that time. With 60 or 70 national cabinet meetings versus four COAG meetings, we can see the increased tempo. That was a massive increase in the workload. There were 67 meetings over two years, and sometimes they went for three or four hours. Members can see how intense the whole thing was. That required additional support to resource the Intergovernmental Relations Directorate. The Intergovernmental Relations Directorate leads to the development of advice in support of the Premier's participation in national cabinet meetings; it provides advice to support ministerial engagement; and it coordinates and manages collaboration within the state and liaises with other jurisdictions on a range of policy, funding and reporting matters. The Council for the Australian Federation, which is all the states and territories, has also increased its activity levels. The Intergovernmental Relations Directorate manages arrangements with the Australian government for Western Australia to provide services to the Indian Ocean territories and it

provides advice to the Premier, ministers and senior officials on matters of state security and emergency management. It does a range of things, and it will continue to do them. The Intergovernmental Relations Directorate negotiates with the national cabinet on things like housing, homelessness, national skills reform and the implementation of the automatic mutual recognition scheme, which we passed through Parliament recently; it engages with the Council for the Australian Federation, as I said; and it leads the Department of the Premier and Cabinet in its involvement in royal commissions.

As members know, the commonwealth government has had four or five royal commissions, so the Intergovernmental Relations Directorate provides our important input into those. It also tackles national inquiries and coordinates WA's responses to them; it coordinates other commonwealth–state funding arrangements; it coordinates international relations, particularly the coordination of aid to other countries—we have done a little bit of aid work; and our relations with visiting delegations and so forth, I would expect. That group has done a lot of work.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I thank the Premier. How many FTE will make up this directorate, and what information will be obtained and maintained by the directorate within the Department of the Premier and Cabinet?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Before this funding there were eight FTE working in the area. This funding will provide for another eight FTE, taking it to a total of 16 FTE. As I said to the member, there has been a 15-fold increase in activity between the commonwealth and the states. Ordinarily over a two-year period there would be four COAG meetings, but there have been 67 national cabinet meetings over that time. As the member can see, the workload has increased significantly.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I can understand why the workload and the number of meetings would increase during a pandemic and when those important intergovernmental decisions are made in national cabinet, but how does the Premier justify doubling the size of this directorate within the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and dedicating such a line item for this purpose, given that we are now coming out of the pandemic?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I expect that the national cabinet will continue and that it will meet far more regularly than COAG did, and I expect that the new Prime Minister will ensure that occurs. I still think there will be a significant increase in the workload. The national cabinet cops a lot of criticism from some in the Sydney media bubble, but I think it was an inspired decision and that it works well. I know we do not always agree and there are fights and whatever, but I think it has worked incredibly well. Having that forum and having the support to make sure that the forum works effectively is a sensible thing to do. Sometimes we were having three or four meetings a week, and sometimes it was once every two or three weeks. I do not know; it may well go to once a month depending on the issues. I suspect that the national cabinet will broaden its role beyond the pandemic, and that is probably a good thing. I found that meetings of the Council of Australian Governments under Prime Minister Turnbull and one under Prime Minister Morrison were just a waste of time. They involved setpiece decisions that were always lined up beforehand and the main thing was the grab a person gave to the media on their way into the meeting. Other than that, those meetings involved tedious and boring policy papers. Things were always sent off to some sort of committee of bureaucrats and no real decisions were ever made. National cabinet actually makes real decisions in a timely way, and that is a good thing. I did not know we could do that before such a time as national cabinet came along. I just thought that COAG was the way things happened, and it turned out it was not. Hopefully, the decision-making capacity, the flexibility and the quick movement of national cabinet will continue even outside of the extreme nature of the pandemic.

[1.40 pm]

**Ms L. METTAM:** The size of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet is to be doubled to 16 FTEs. What will be the make-up of those roles and what proportion of those roles will be dedicated to communications, for example?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I misunderstood the member before, so I will explain it briefly. During the pandemic an extra eight people were brought on. We currently have 16 people working there. This line item just reflects it in the budget. We had eight people working who could not keep up with the work because of the urgency and the demand, so in 2020 an additional eight people were brought on to take the number of staff to 16. The budget was not adjusted to account for that. The budget is now being adjusted to account for that. These eight people are not new; they were already there, and they were brought on quickly without the budget being adjusted. At that point in time, it was a Treasurer's delegated authority decision to employ those people—probably under the former Treasurer—and now the budget basically catches up with that earlier decision. The 16 people are working on all those things that I mentioned to the member before. I do not know what the specific policy role is for each individual, but I will take the member through the list of responsibilities again. The department and its staff are involved in national cabinet support; key funding agreement negotiations such as for national skills reform, housing and homelessness, and the National Disability Insurance Scheme; the implementation of the automatic mutual recognition scheme; the state's engagement with the Council for the Australian Federation, which is made up of the other states and has increased its activity, mind you; the four federal royal commissions; and responding to a broad range of strategic opportunities on national security and with federal elections. We put a lot of effort into getting support out of the commonwealth government prior to the federal election. The member might recall that in that budget we got \$2.5 billion of road funding alone—that was pretty good. Those staff were involved in all that work and certainly

helped me with some of the meetings that I had with some federal ministers to secure that money. They are also involved in the national security arrangements that Western Australia is involved with, national inquiries and some of our international relations issues.

I will just repeat again that we do not have eight new people coming on. This just reflects the fact that we put on an additional eight people in 2020 and it brings to book the additional people who are working in this area.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to page 64 of budget paper No 2 and the Perth Casino Royal Commission. Have the recommendations from the final report been implemented yet?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The commission delivered its report on 4 March and it was tabled on 24 March. It contains a range of recommendations. The department is coordinating its detailed consideration. We are working towards several immediate reforms, including the appointment of an independent monitor and an independent chair for the Gaming and Wagering Commission. We have already implemented several governance, cultural and regulatory reforms, including the appointment of a dedicated executive director for the racing, gaming and liquor division, additional resources for the Gaming and Wagering Commission and an updated conflict-of-interest policy. We have tabled the response, we have endorsed the recommendations of the report broadly—we may not have endorsed one of them; I cannot quite recall—and we are progressing with the recommendations. We do not just get a royal commission report and within six weeks expect all the recommendations to be implemented; some of it requires legislation. We have a big legislative agenda. Some of the legislative changes have a high priority to be drafted and, hopefully, will be introduced as soon as possible.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I refer to page 64 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the significant issues impacting the agency. The Auditor General handed down a report that was published on 9 May. In it she made an observation that there would be a benefit from having a systemic and impartial examination of the response to the pandemic by both state and federal governments and its impact on the Western Australian community. We have been through the peak of the pandemic now and we are starting to transition. Would the government consider an examination to see whether learnings can be taken from the response over the last two years; and, if so, when might we learn more about that?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Sorry; which line item was the leader talking about?

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I was referring to significant issues impacting the agency and the COVID-19 response and recovery. The Premier just explained that the Department of the Premier and Cabinet played a major role in managing and advising him in his response to the pandemic. I am simply making the observation that the Auditor General in her most recent report said that there would be a benefit in doing an independent review of the way in which COVID has been managed. She has certainly not said that things needed to be picked apart, but, for future responses, it would be of benefit, particularly to help frame deliberations around any future allocation of resources, the use of emergency powers and a cost–benefit analysis. I presume that a lot of this, as the Premier has explained numerous times in this house, has been done under extraordinary duress, particularly during the beginning months. At some point after an emergency of this type, outside the peak of the pandemic, it would make sense to go back and look at that. Does the Premier have a response to that and is it something that he is contemplating?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The pandemic has been the biggest public event in my lifetime. It makes sense to have some sort of analysis of what the country and the states did—did we do well, what could we improve and so forth—without it being a witch-hunt.

There is a recommendation from a Senate committee, which came down maybe three or four weeks ago, to do a national royal commission into it. If the commonwealth wanted to do that, I would not have any objection. I think we can be proud of a lot of things. If the commonwealth wanted to do that, that would be fine. I am a bit concerned about the state doing something in addition to that. It might overlap, so if the commonwealth decides to do that, we would have to consider whether we should do something at the state level because I would not want to be duplicating that. I think I answered a question on the state doing one. I am not at all averse to there being some sort of inquiry or review, or what have you, but I do not think it should happen until this thing is over, because we are still at 12 000 cases today with 300 people in hospital, 10 people in ICU, and, sadly, reporting, I think, six deaths from COVID in recent weeks. Launching an inquiry while the pandemic is still going does not seem to me to be sensible. Once it is widely accepted to be broadly over, pending what the commonwealth does, I am not averse to some sort of review. Regarding who does it and how it is done, I am happy to seek advice at that point in time. As I said, I do not feel at all embarrassed or have any sense that anything could have been done very differently from what we did. I am more than happy for some inquiry to look into these matters and see whether there are learnings for other states, other countries or for the future.

[1.50 pm]

**The CHAIR:** I think these questions are maybe a little far off the item the Leader of the Opposition is referring to, but the Premier has obviously indulged the question, and I am happy to allow it so long as the Premier is willing to indulge the question.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Thank you, chair; I will take your guidance on that.

Again, I know that the opposition has asked for that, but the Auditor General also made that recommendation. The Premier indicated that there would be no objection when the pandemic is over. How does the Premier determine that? What are the parameters of when the pandemic is considered over? Is it at the end of the state of emergency powers? Is it when we transition across to the Public Health Act? I see South Australia has done that; it is managing the pandemic through its Public Health Act now. Is there some thought being given to how that will be determined?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I do not think there is any science on that. We might still have community cases at some point, even though we do not have the existing state of emergency. I do not have an exact answer. I would not have thought that any such inquiry, if there was to be one, would be before next year. As I said, if the commonwealth appoints a royal commission, doing a state inquiry might not be necessary or wise. We would have to take into account whether we did something or how we did it. I do not know whether we would have a parliamentary committee, an independent inquiry or a respected person in the community look at everything. I do not actually know at this point. Normally, inquiries are done when there is a perception that something went wrong. I do not believe that people in the state broadly, apart from some people who scream and yell at polling booths, would think that the state did badly.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to page 72 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. Underneath “Cost of Services” is the line item “Employee benefits”. I note that the FTE for the department increases from 769 in 2020–21 to 856 in 2022–23, which represents an 11 per cent increase in staff. However, employee benefits fall from \$113 million to \$106 million in 2025–26. Can the Premier offer some explanation about the increase in FTE but this decrease going forward overall?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I request Ms Roper provides an answer.

**Ms E. Roper:** I refer it to our chief finance officer, André Brender-A-Brandis.

**Mr A. Brender-A-Brandis:** From the 2021–22 budget year’s 880 FTE, there has been an increase in that one year of two FTE with regard to executive government services. These are primarily for ministerial officers and oversight of parliamentary electorate office staff. In parliamentary support in that year there was a reduction of eight FTE, primarily with respect to the recalibration of the FTE overhead that was provided to parliamentary support. There was a reduction of 13 FTE in the whole-of-government service, primarily regarding State Law Publisher, some unfilled positions within the department and the timing for filling FTE positions. Aboriginal engagement had a minor reduction of two FTE year on year. That was mainly with respect to Aboriginal cultural heritage legislation. Information and communications technology had a significant increase that was predominantly with regard to cybersecurity testing capability and accelerating citizen-centric digital services. The movement from 2021–22 through to 2022–23 saw a further increase of FTE for executive government services. This was a reduction of four FTE for that year. Again, that was a realignment of ministerial officers and oversight of PEOs. For parliamentary support, there was one FTE movement, which was a marginal adjustment to overhead FTE allocations across the service. The whole-of-government service saw a 22 FTE net movement for ongoing COVID coordination initiatives and additional resourcing for overhead FTE allocated to this service. Aboriginal affairs saw a slight reduction of three FTE, again for the cultural heritage bill and the Aboriginal Cultural Centre planning. The significant move that takes us up to the out turn FTE for 2022–23 is again for information and communications technology, with a 27 FTE increase. This is for the cybersecurity testing capability, including security operations centre positions, the whole-of-government data linkage and analytics, and the invoicing projects that have been taken on. That is the movement by service across those two years.

[2.00 pm]

**Ms L. METTAM:** On that movement and the general increase in staff, why are we seeing a drop in employee benefits over that period?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I will ask Mr Brender-A-Brandis to respond.

**Mr A. Brender-A-Brandis:** For clarification, it is the \$113.3 million in the 2022–23 budget year versus the \$26.7 million in the 2025–26 out year. Is that correct?

**Ms L. METTAM:** Yes.

**Mr A. Brender-A-Brandis:** Currently, analysis across the different categories and budget adjustments has not been performed between the four years. The allocation for 2025–26 is at this point only a budget estimate. The composition of the mix of FTE employed within the department and some of the projects being undertaken would comprise some of that adjustment, but we do not have exact analysis on that.

[Ms A.E. Kent took the chair.]

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I refer to page 64 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, significant issues impacting the agency and the COVID-19 recovery and response. I am looking for a little bit of guidance on whether the Department of the Premier and Cabinet had any role in the ordering of RATs or whether that was undertaken through the Department of Finance or the Department of Health?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Finance and Health had the responsibility for ordering the RATs but it was at the request of the State Emergency Management Committee of which I am a member.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I seek some guidance on whether I can ask questions about RATs under this division. Did the Premier or the Department of the Premier and Cabinet have a role?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** It is not funded here. It is funded out of the Departments of Health and Finance. Health ordered the vast majority and Finance ordered some as well. At the time we ordered them, the Leader of the Opposition will recall it was pretty dire and we got a lot. The good thing is that we do not have a shortage of RATs. Other states had shortages of RATs and had terrible problems in November, December, January and February just gone. We avoided all that because we had enough RATs. We continue to use and distribute them and they are important to all, getting people into the workplace and making sure people know whether or not they are positive.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** For the benefit of Hansard and anyone reading this in future years, we ordered rapid antigen tests, not rodents!

On the number and type of RATs purchased, the Premier might have seen in recent media that there have been some questions around the effectiveness of the lollipop-style tests. Was there any role played by or assessment done within the Department of the Premier and Cabinet on the most appropriate tests to order or did that again come through the emergency management team and the Chief Health Officer?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Obviously the emergency management team and I did not make the decisions on the type of rapid antigen tests selected or purchased. That decision was made by the Department of Health based upon the advice of the Therapeutic Goods Administration, which is the national body that approves these things. All the rapid antigen tests ordered were approved by the commonwealth authority. That is the basis on which they were purchased. I used one of the lollipop ones today; I thought it was quite effective.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** So that I can direct this to the appropriate place, if I have questions on the distribution and warehousing, do they go to Finance and Health?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Was that a question?

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Yes, it was, Premier. I was just asking whether the distribution, warehousing and warehousing costs, the expiry of any and the exposure levels that were appropriate were part of the decision made by Finance?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** It was Finance and Health. I have been to one of the warehouses. We were very, very keen to acquire a large number and the Department of Health in particular went all out to get them. We got a lot so we have warehouses. We have distributed many millions now and that will continue.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** I refer to page 64 of budget paper No 2 and the line item “ServiceWA Application Support Program” under the heading “Digital Capability Fund”. I understand ServiceWA was initially set up to respond to COVID-19 and included the G2GPass, the proof of vaccination certificate and the check-in system. Given we generally do not need to check in anymore, can the Premier provide an update on how the government intends to use the app in the future?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I thank the member for the question. The app was launched in January this year. It has had more than 1.2 million downloads—80 per cent of adults in Western Australia have done it. The app was launched to allow people to show their proof of vaccination, check in to venues with SafeWA and access the G2GPass for interstate travel all in one place. It has been an amazingly successful piece of technology. We led the country with how we managed COVID-19, but these requirements no longer exist except for specific venues like hospitals. In this budget we have allocated \$7.4 million from the digital capability fund to continue to support the app. As people’s lives have become more reliant on technology, we are exploring ways to deliver an increased number of services to the community in the digital world. We have seen other states move down this path. In the next day or two, we will add FuelWatch to the ServiceWA app. It is a very handy service that will allow people to find the cheapest fuel. It is a small step but it is very convenient, particularly when we have high fuel prices. We are looking at adding a digital Seniors Card SmartRider and emergency bushfire alerts. They are all being explored. In the long term, we could look at a digital driver’s licence, vehicle registration, getting and paying bills and paying fines and infringements. Migrating those services onto one app apparently is not easy technologically, but that work is being done. There is a lot of back-office infrastructure that is not as easy as it would seem that needs to be resolved in order to transition those services onto the app. I will ask Mr Italiano whether he wants to add to that.

**Mr G. Italiano:** To augment the Premier’s answer, we are working through that list of services presently. We are triaging those services into ones that can be adopted quite quickly because they are in a high state of readiness and others that will require greater investigation. Certainly, our intent is to have a regular addition of services to the app so that citizens keep receiving those values and options moving forward. That is our intent and certainly we hope over the course of the next year or so to have a large number of those services come online.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I have a further question on the digital capability fund. I note the line item “eInvoicing Pilot”.

**The CHAIR:** Is this a new question or does it relate to the last question?

**Ms L. METTAM:** It is under the same heading, “Digital Capability Fund”, and relates specifically to the line item “eInvoicing Pilot”. Noting the allocation for the feasibility study, has the contractor to build the e-system been identified and how will the pilot run?

[2.10 pm]

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** There is funding of \$725 000 to pilot a central e-invoicing platform, with three WA government agencies exploring the barriers and benefits of adopting e-invoicing in WA. Funding will be used by the department to procure an e-invoicing platform to appoint a project manager and things like that; develop a business case; and plan for whole-of-government implementation. The agencies are the Department of Justice and Main Roads, and a third agency is yet to be confirmed. The pilot will form larger scale implementation across WA government. E-invoicing is the digital exchange of invoices directly between the accounting systems of the buyer and supplier using a proven international standard that is highly automated and that the Australian Taxation Office estimates can deliver savings of up to 70 per cent of processing costs, compared with traditional paper or PDF invoices.

In April 2021, we joined the commonwealth government and other states in committing to accelerate the adoption of e-invoicing, with the object of shorter payment times to business suppliers. According to the ATO, Australian small businesses are owed \$26 billion in unpaid invoices at any one time. It brings efficiencies. The biggest benefits to businesses will be reduced payment times and improved business cash flows, especially in government purchasing transactions.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I refer to page 72 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the line “Aboriginal Engagement Unit Grants”. It looks like the grants fall from \$8.2 million this year to \$1.4 million in 2025–26. Could the Premier advise why the grants are reducing and provide any detail in relation to grant recipients and amounts for 2021–22?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I will let Mr Brender-A-Brandis respond.

**Mr A. Brender-A-Brandis:** Just to clarify, it is the reduction of grants for Aboriginal engagement that the Leader of the Opposition is referring to?

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Yes. It is the top line on the “Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies” table.

**Mr A. Brender-A-Brandis:** Is that on page 72?

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Yes.

**Mr A. Brender-A-Brandis:** Aboriginal grants reductions between 2021 and 2022—is that correct?

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Yes.

**Mr A. Brender-A-Brandis:** The reduction is primarily with respect to the Aboriginal Cultural Centre; the Mirning People Part B Indigenous land use agreement; the Bidyadanga ILUA; Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council—that is royalties for regions funding; Plan for Our Parks royalties for regions funding; Closing the Gap; the Dampier Peninsula project; and some minor ones with regard to reductions in the Gibson Desert Nature Reserve. They primarily make up the reduction of the Aboriginal engagement grants.

### **The appropriation was recommended.**

#### **Division 4: Public Sector Commission, \$27 982 000 —**

Mr D.A.E. Scaife, Chair.

Mr M. McGowan, Minister for Public Sector Management.

Ms S. O’Neill, Public Sector Commissioner.

Mr Y. Poule, Acting Manager, Corporate Services.

Mr D. Volaric, Executive Director, Integrity and Risk.

Mr L. Warner, Executive Director, Workforce Policy and Diversity.

Ms T. Milici, Executive Director, Data Analytics and Technology.

[Witnesses introduced.]

**The CHAIR:** The estimates committees will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point. Consideration is restricted to items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must relate to a page number, item or amount related to the current division, and members should preface their questions with these details. Some divisions are the responsibility of more than one minister. Ministers shall only be examined in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 3 June 2022. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system.

I give the call to the Leader of the Opposition.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I refer to page 78 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”. The fourth item refers to the commencement of the trial of the agency capability review program, with

the first three reviews nearing completion and another five planned in 2022–23. Can the Premier let me know which departments have been through the review program and what the further five reviews are that are planned for 2022–23?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The ones that have had reviews so far are the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions; the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation; and the Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety. We have not yet settled on the next three reviews. For the final two reviews, there are a number of factors to be taken into account as to which agencies will be selected, including demographics, department size, number of responsible ministers, regional and metropolitan presence, and government priorities. That work is yet to be done.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I thank the Premier. I got the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation and Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety; I missed the first one.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** It was the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** When will the five reviews that are planned for 2022–23 be finalised?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I do not know what they are yet; I will take advice from the Public Sector Commissioner as to which ones.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** When those reviews are completed, are those reports provided to the Premier or are they public documents? How are they dealt with?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** They come to me as the Minister for Public Sector Management via the Public Sector Commissioner, then they go to cabinet for consideration. We then decide what to do subsequent to that.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** How many FTE are there, how much does it cost and how long have those first three reviews taken to complete?

[2.20 pm]

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** It amounts to a total of \$2.26 million for the eight reviews over two financial years. A range of different reviewers were brought on board to do it.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** The last part of that answer was that a range of reviewers were brought on board. Are they internal or external to government?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The names I have so far are Professor Margaret Seares, AO, Ms Susan Hunt and Dr Michael Schaper.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Are they external to government?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Yes, but they all have some involvement.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** They have had experience in government but they are all external.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I have a further question on those reviews. How will they be communicated once they are complete?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** That will be a decision for cabinet. I do not want to make a decision on that now. I have not seen them yet. We will wait to see what comes forward.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Further to that and in relation to the reviews, when coming to government in 2017, the Premier talked about giving directors general KPIs on their performance. Is that happening? Is the Premier measuring the performance of the public sector in that respect?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I will ask the Public Sector Commissioner to explain what has occurred.

**Ms S. O'Neill:** We have gone about a process of strengthening the performance management arrangements for directors general. We have now built into the process what we would call third-party feedback from stakeholders and staff. That did not exist as part of the performance management process. We have built in performance management discussions with myself. There has been quite a strengthening of the arrangements. Also, a letter of expectation is outlined from the ministers for the directors general, and that is built into their performance agreement. In the performance agreement, there have always been expectations, examples of delivery, on their resource agreement. The outcome of the new agency capability reviews will go into the performance agreement as an expectation to deliver on those. As part of the commitment, the government made strengthening performance arrangements of directors general. That is the approach that we have taken so far.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Given the significant commitment made in recent times to the Health budget and the commitments to address the issues relating to emergency departments, is there likely to be any consideration around KPIs attached to ambulance ramping figures or bed block within our hospital system?

**The CHAIR:** Member, can you highlight which part of the budget papers you are referring to?

**Ms L. METTAM:** I am referring to paragraph 4 on page 78 of budget paper No 2 relating to the agency capability review program. I will perhaps put it a different way. Given the challenges that we are having across our health system, will consideration be given for the Department of Health to be part of the next review process?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I will ask the Public Sector Commissioner to comment on the role of the KPIs and how it might work.

**Ms S. O'Neill:** The KPIs need to be struck at a reasonably high level. As members can imagine, there could be hundreds of individual delivery items. A performance agreement for a director general will say they need to meet efficiency and effectiveness indicators, as outlined in the act—for example, the management principles of the act. There will be specific KPIs for Health and Education. Each one will be different. I do not want to suggest that they are operational line by line. I am not suggesting the matter that the member raised is insignificant, but each agreement will be different. It can be amended as time goes on. They will go to points of delivery of key services. That might form part of that KPI but not necessarily be itemised down to that individual level.

**Ms L. METTAM:** How were the five reviews selected? I note they will be carried out on the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, the Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety and the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation, which is three so far.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The Public Sector Commission put a recommendation to me in relation to the ones to be reviewed because it is a trial. The three were the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation and the Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety. They were selected based upon a range of factors, including demographics, department size, number of responsible ministers, regional and metropolitan presence, context such as department remit, and government priorities. They are all middle-sized agencies. The Public Sector Commissioner recommended them to me on the basis that they were regulation focused. The idea was that we start with them. The next five might be different. I will take advice on which ones to do.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Further to what the member for Vasse raised, the Premier mentioned that the three departments were middle-sized departments. Would there necessarily need to be increased funding for the commission to undertake a review of a department such as Health, which has 33 per cent of the state budget or something like that? Would it be possible to undertake that review or would some liberty be needed on the scope of that?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** We are planning on spending \$2.6 million on this trial program to see how it goes. The Public Sector Commissioner informs me that the eight reviews will be conducted within that \$2.6 million. I do not know what agencies will be reviewed. Maybe I can ask the Public Sector Commissioner to comment directly on the member's question.

**Ms S. O'Neill:** If I were to recommend a large agency to the Premier—for example, Health, Education, perhaps Justice, obviously, it would be a larger entity, so we may need to make some adjustments, allow a little more time, for example, for the lead reviewer or for the team. We have built that into our modelling because some of the agencies are a little smaller. We believe we will be able to balance the eight trial agencies inside the funding envelope that we have been provided by government.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I refer to page 78 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”. I refer to the second paragraph. It refers to work being done to develop or strengthen integrity frameworks and a self-assessment tool that is in development. Could the Premier explain what a self-assessment tool is and how it would be used?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I will let the Public Sector Commissioner explain it to the member.

**Ms S. O'Neill:** A couple of years ago we introduced the overall first *Integrity strategy for Western Australian public authorities 2020–2023*, which includes a range of strategies. One is the integrity framework maturity assessment tool. We have not published it yet; we are still developing and finalising that maturity tool. It has been developed to help agencies identify strengths and weaknesses in their current approaches to integrity. At the moment, in its draft stage, we are looking at perhaps four levels of maturity. It is drawn on our longstanding work in the commission, being formed by the CCC and a range of reviews that have occurred, particularly the work that we did in Communities. We are putting all that together to develop this maturity assessment tool so agencies will be able to assess themselves against that. I think there are about 13 factors. There are some descriptors at different levels of maturity. The whole point of that is so that they can assess for themselves where they are at on different aspects and plan for improvement.

I have been very clear with agencies about my expectation that they continuously plan to strengthen their integrity response. That maturity assessment tool will be finalised soon-ish. We are still in consultations. We want to build it from the ground up with the people who are involved. We have an integrity practitioners group. We will, obviously, consult with the Corruption and Crime Commission and others to make sure it is fit for purpose.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** When this is published, will the tool and its findings that are used by the departments be published? Will it be made public as something that can be scrutinised, for instance, in the Parliament? How is it anticipated to be utilised other than internally, or is that the purpose?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I will let the Public Sector Commissioner answer.

[2.30 pm]

**Ms S. O'Neill:** The tool itself will be widely available; there is no secret in that. We want to do that to ensure that agencies make good use of it for improvement. Each agency will undertake its own self-assessment at the appropriate time in its planning cycle and then use that to feed into its planning cycle. It is not a formal assessment; it is one of the tools that the agency would use. We have previously published a snapshot tool; following our work in Communities and Housing, we developed a financial health checklist for agencies to use; so we often try to build these tools for agencies to use. Agencies self-assess and build the results into their planning regimes, so it is not an assessment whereby they would be asked to publish that information. There is no suggestion of a requirement to publish the results of the self-assessment. Agencies will take them at different times.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Is it something that would be made public?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I think the Public Sector Commissioner answered that, but I will let her answer again.

**Ms S. O'Neill:** The tool itself would be made public. There has not been a mandate that each individual agency's self-assessment be made public. It is something we can give consideration to, but we would not want it to be seen as the only piece of information that would feed into the agency's integrity planning.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to page 78 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, the service summary. The total cost for oversight and reporting increases by \$500 000 through the out years and is expected to increase by more than \$1 million from the 2021–22 estimated actual. Is any of this funding related to the legislated workload? What is the reason for the increase in funding?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Which year, sorry?

**Ms L. METTAM:** I am referring to the budget for 2020–21, the increase in the budget this year and in 2022–23, and the increase in funding going forward. What accounts for that increase?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I will let the Public Sector Commissioner explain.

**Ms S. O'Neill:** The increase or the movement of funding so that we see that increase that I think the member is referring to between the estimated actual and the budget 2022–23 is an increase of \$727 000. It is largely due to the apportionment of increase in ICT costs of \$223 000 and some overheads of \$225 000. The member might also have noted from our spending changes table that we are using our streamlined funding of \$536 000 to undertake the WA public census, so the addition of that funding accounts for the change there between the two years.

**Ms L. METTAM:** At the end of 2020–21, the Auditor General tabled a report titled *Audit results report—Annual 2020–21 financial audits of state government entities*. Under the heading “Current status of Treasury's reform program”, there was reference to the drafting of the legislative element of the government trading enterprise governance framework. Is the increase that we see here going towards that effort? Does that have anything to do with the increase in the funding here?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I will let the Public Sector Commissioner explain.

**Ms S. O'Neill:** In our service summaries, if the member is referring to legislation, any advice we give is in relation to the Public Sector Management Act. I do not think that what the member is referring to is in any way related to our budget.

**Dr K. STRATTON:** I refer to page 79 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the issue of attracting and developing graduates. Under “Public Sector Leadership” it states —

This service develops and supports current and future leaders, and builds the capacity of the public sector workforce through the delivery of leadership and workforce development products, programs and training.

Is the Premier able to expand on what the Public Sector Commission is doing to attract and develop graduates across the public sector?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I thank the member for Nedlands for the question. The commission runs a specific program for graduates new to the public sector. It aims to give them an understanding of the business of government, current strategic matters and future developments in public policy and management. It is called the launch program. It includes workshops, site visits and networking opportunities with public sector leaders over 10 months. It is an important aspect of attracting young, bright people with university qualifications into the sector and retaining them. The commission is also working with public sector agencies to better coordinate graduate recruitment. A campaign called “A place of opportunity” began in February 2022 to help position the public sector as a career destination of choice for the state's best qualified university talent. This work has brought together 23 graduate and cadetship programs across the sector into one online directory on wa.gov.au. The campaign was developed with public sector agencies and markets the various programs under a single brand and in a coordinated way. This campaign is particularly important in the current tight labour market, in which there is great demand for the best graduates. The sector needs to be competitive and better positioned. I will ask the Public Sector Commissioner if she would like to add anything to this.

**Ms S. O'Neill:** It is the first time that the agencies have really put together their graduate approaches. We know that the private sector gets into universities very early on in the year, and I think historically we have approached graduates later than that. This new campaign, “A place of opportunity”, which was developed with new graduates in the public sector—they helped us to design it—will get into universities much earlier. It has been very well received by the universities themselves and by prospective graduates. We want to get the best graduates into the public sector. We need to get in early and show them not only the benefits for them from a career perspective, but also the value they can give back to the community. We are pretty excited about this program.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** We are nearly done on this; this is the last one. I refer to page 80 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, under oversight and reporting. The cost of service has gone up and the explanation in the notes is that it primarily reflects the additional resources to undertake the Western Australian public sector census. Can the Premier explain exactly what the public sector census is, and what the data is then used for?

[2.40 pm]

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** To inform workforce policy, we need the best available information about our 160 000 people. The data needs to be high quality, accessible, adaptable and fit for purpose, and therefore add value to what we do. The independent review of the Western Australian Public Sector Commission recommended a whole-of-sector employee census to enhance intelligence gathering to bolster the capability to inform better workforce strategies and gather data as part of our responsibilities. The review noted that with census-driven data, strategic workforce planning and forward projections and analysis over a broader time will be critical and important tools for the Public Sector Commission and the public sector going forward. The Public Sector Commission responded to the recommendation and committed to exploring a whole-of-sector employee census. Conducting a census allows the commission and the sector to gather new data and information on employees and complements other information, such as agency surveys. In response to the independent review, the commission ceased the employee perception survey, and in 2021 developed and piloted a public sector census to test a fit-for-purpose contemporary approach to collect information directly from employees. The pilot occurred between March and June 2021 and involved 17 agencies, representing 15 per cent of the workforce. The pilot achieved a response rate of 47.5 per cent. That was higher than the 2009–10 Public Sector Commission employee perception survey, the first year the commission was a standalone entity. Employees voluntarily provided information about their experiences and behaviours in the workplace. Aggregate reporting of results protected individuals’ privacy. Rather than read this all out, I will let the Public Sector Commissioner respond in a more interesting way.

**Ms S. O'Neill:** What we know about census and the reason that states approach census is that we find that we can get better information from employees when we ask it in a different way and when it comes perhaps from us rather than their own employer. One thing I want to point to as a success of this is that, particularly around diversity, interestingly, not everyone wants to respond to diversity questions in surveys, but we found that we had an excellent response that showed us that, for example, of the number of people with disabilities, many more were willing to respond to the census rather than to direct agency survey questions—we had an increase of 126 per cent in terms of people wanting to respond. We know it is important to ask questions of employees so that we can learn more about the shape of the sector and, in terms of workforce planning, plan better. We think the first pilot was really successful with the 17 agencies. Now we are going to use our streamlined funding, which is in our spending changes table, to take that across all public sector agencies and learn, I guess, what we can in terms of the whole sector. That is what our streamlined funding will be for. We will implement that in the next year across all agencies. It will be a trial of all agencies. We will see how it goes when it runs to scale and we will evaluate and then recommend one way or another, or options, to the government about whether it wants to continue with that census.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Is that data publicly available? Will it be published?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I am advised that it already is, but I will let the Public Sector Commissioner explain.

**Ms S. O'Neill:** We put on the web a series of summary outcomes from the census pilot that go to all the main questions. That is available on the government website. We had whole-of-sector information and then we ran workshops for each of the 17 entities. The beauty of this work and the way in which we have done it is that agencies can then ask further questions of their own data, and provide different insights and different reports. It is a vastly more contemporary way to gather, share, analyse and provide insights into a large piece of information for agencies for their planning.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to assistance and support on page 80, and note the 36 FTEs going forward. How many of these staff are working on machinery-of-government changes?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** There is no-one specifically working on that. If there is a requirement to assist an agency with anything, people are made available. There is no-one whose role that is.

**Ms L. METTAM:** What is the reporting structure for the 36 FTE?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I do not understand the question. What is the member asking me?

**Ms L. METTAM:** I am just asking who these 36 FTE report to. What is the reporting structure?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I assume the Public Sector Commission, but I will ask the Public Sector Commissioner to answer.

**Ms S. O'Neill:** The 36 FTE are not one group. Assistance and support in the commission is provided across different portfolios. There might be five of those 36 in the workforce policy area. Some of them might be in diversity, some might be in the leadership area. The construction of those tables—that service where we provide assistance and support—is across the whole agency. In terms of the line structure, they will be embedded in various divisions and, ultimately, those executive directors report to me.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

*Meeting suspended from 2.47 to 3.00 pm*

**Division 7: Salaries and Allowances Tribunal, \$1 037 000 —**

Ms A.E. Kent, Chair.

Mr M. McGowan, Minister for Public Sector Management.

Mr L. Cullen, Acting Executive Officer.

[Witness introduced.]

**The CHAIR:** The estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point. Consideration is restricted to items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must relate to a page number, item or amount related to the current division, and members should preface their questions with these details. Some divisions are the responsibility of more than one minister. Ministers shall only be examined in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 3 June 2022. If a minister suggests that a matter should be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system.

I give the call to the Leader of the Opposition.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I refer to budget paper No 2, volume 1, page 103. Under the table “Outcomes and Key Effectiveness Indicators” there is a note that sets out the anticipated determinations and reports prescribed in this line item, including restructures within the tribunal’s jurisdiction. Can the Premier explain what those restructures are?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. The number of determinations, which I think is what the member is referring to, may vary due to the number of appointments, machinery-of-government changes or positions included in the tribunal’s jurisdiction, and variations required to the main determination in relation to minor amendments related to changes to allowances or the rate of reimbursement. That is based upon agencies changing the mix of people who are subject to Salaries and Allowances Tribunal determinations.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I refer to page 105 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the subheading “Expenses” under “Cost of Services”. There seems to be a jump in expenses from 2020–21 to 2021–22. Can the Premier provide an explanation for that?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I think that was last year’s budget. In the first year that the member mentioned, the wage freeze for the senior levels of the public sector meant that the work of the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal was significantly reduced. Obviously, that is now changing because the four-year wage freeze has ended.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I refer also to the item “Other expenses”. Can the Premier provide detail on what these expenses are?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I think that might be for incidentals. That is \$9 000, is it not?

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** It is not much—not big bucks!

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I think that might be for things like paper and photocopy ink—incidental-type stuff. That would be my assessment.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Is it just for office administration?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** It is for paper, pens, photocopying—all that stuff.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Big stuff! Thank you.

I refer again to budget paper No 2, volume 1, page 102, and the item “Net amount appropriated to deliver services”. That amount is fairly static across the forward estimates. The Premier just said that there is likely to be an increase in the work that will be done by the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal. How does the Premier reconcile that? Will the same number of people be doing more?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** If the member looks at the earlier budgets, she will see that there was a total appropriation, but some of that went into what is called cash assets, which is the line at the bottom of that table. That is money

that was not spent because the tribunal did not have to do the analysis of work value and so forth. I suspect that the figure for cash assets is relatively high for an agency like this. The total appropriation remains static, but cash assets have grown over time, and that money is available if there is an increase in work.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I might need a bit of clarity on that, because the amount for cash assets across the forward estimates is static as well.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** It would have been lower before 2020–21.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Is the Premier saying it is comparative with the previous budget?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Yes, with earlier budgets. Obviously, there was a four-year period when there was limited work to be done because we had legislated to put in place a pay freeze in order to set the right example for the rest of the public sector, which worked spectacularly well. Prior to that, additional money had gone into cash assets. Now that we are out of the pay freeze, that money is available to do whatever work needs to be done. The money in that bottom line, cash assets, is available, in addition to the normal budget of the agency, to do whatever work needs to be done.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

[3.10 pm]

**Division 5: Governor’s Establishment, \$8 057 000 —**

Ms A.E. Kent, Chair.

Mr M. McGowan, Premier.

Mr S. Kennedy, Acting Official Secretary/Chief Executive Officer.

[Witness introduced.]

**The CHAIR:** The estimates committees will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point. Consideration is restricted to items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must relate to a page number, item or amount related to the current division, and members should preface their questions with these details. Some divisions are the responsibility of more than one minister. Ministers shall only be examined in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 3 June 2022. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system.

I give the call to the Leader of the Opposition.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I take the Premier to budget paper No 2, volume 1. On page 86, under the heading “Spending Changes” is “Government House Additional Security Contractors” with an allocation in this budget year of \$465 000 and nothing in the out years. Could the Premier provide an explanation for that cost? I presume that is in addition to normal security at Government House.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** As was publicly revealed, there was a break-in at Government House. A person went into the house at night and was discovered in one of the bedrooms by one of the Governor’s family members. That was quite a dramatic event. That resulted, in part, in additional security being put in place there. The second thing relates to the very regular major protests down there by some members of the anti-vax movement, which has resulted in increased security at Government House. It is not continuing because it is subject to review in the future; for example, when the protests die down, whether it is required will be subject to review.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I cannot see anywhere in these budget papers, but perhaps the Premier can point out where the cost of security is noted in general. We have an additional \$465 000 for this financial year. What is that in addition to? What is the normal expenditure?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** That is in the overarching ordinary budget of the Governor’s establishment, and I will let Mr Kennedy explain how that works, without compromising any security.

**Mr S. Kennedy:** The security at Government House is largely covered internally, so it is part of the normal staff structure, which has a security component. We have a number of rangers who provide 24 hours’ observation, if you like, of the site. That is covered in the general appropriation for salaries.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Was the additional \$465 000 a new contract or has someone been taken on?

**Mr S. Kennedy:** That amount is being used for an additional security person, effectively, to provide more than one person onsite for 24 hours. That additional amount covers the additional person.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Can the Premier advise whether a tender process was run to award the contract for those additional services?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The advice I have is that it was not an additional tender, but an extension of an existing arrangement. I am trying to remember the term, but there is a standing group of contractors; perhaps it was from that. It was obviously required quite quickly, because the break-in was quite a dramatic event, if you knew all the circumstances, which should not happen at Government House. As the member may or may not know, some of the protests around Government House have been quite extensive and regular. For some reason, the protesters seem to think the Governor should intervene, sack the government and change the policies of the government. That is what some of these people think and that is why there is extended security around Government House.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I understand it is a serious issue. I am just seeking details about the additional services. Was the contract extended to a current provider?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The advice I have is that it was an existing provider of some description and some sort of existing arrangement was extended. That is the advice I have.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to page 87 and note service 1, “Effective Support to the Governor”, and the shift in the number of full-time equivalent employees from 12 in 2020–21 through to 13, and then achieving 18 in 2021–22. I do not really understand the explanation there. Can I get clarity around why this number has changed? There does not seem to be any reason for it, given one would have expected fewer functions, events et cetera at Government House.

**Mr S. Kennedy:** Effectively, that represents a change between the two services. The member will see that the first service is effective support to the Governor and the second service is management of the Governor’s establishment. At some point in the last couple of years, staff and resources have been reallocated to better reflect the services provided by staff to suit those services. In that case, it has gone from 12, as the member said, to 13 and then to 18, but that is offset by a reduction in the staff allocated to the other service. Overall, there is not really a net increase; it is a reallocation between the two.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The best way of looking at it is the table at page 87 that shows effective support to the Governor has gone from 12 to 18 over time. But over the page under “Management of the Governor’s Establishment”, which is the property, it has gone from 25 down to 20.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Further on effective support to the Governor, is this the area that would normally provide for events and receptions at Government House?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** It is around the program of events, functions, celebrations and speeches. The Governor is extremely proactive and makes a lot of speeches and has a lot of events. I cannot remember the number of events I have been at with him in the last week, but he has unflagging energy for these sorts of things. The number of events held there is quite large. I remember there was one the other night to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the Perron Institute. I also remember a great one, earlier this year or maybe late last year, with all the police officers to celebrate the finding of little Cleo. The Governor is very proactive in holding these sorts of events, which is a good role and a good use of the facilities, particularly the Government House ballroom.

[3.20 pm]

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Would it be possible to provide a table or list of the events that were forced to cancel during the pandemic period of, say, the 2021–22 financial year?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I do not know exactly. Is the member asking for the events that were cancelled over two years?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Over the 2021–22 financial year.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Which events were cancelled over the current financial year?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Yes.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I do not know whether there are any protocols here. It is a very unusual question of a very unusual agency. I request that the member put that question on notice and I will find out whether there are issues with providing that information.

### **The appropriation was recommended.**

#### **Division 20: Infrastructure WA, \$5 246 000 —**

Ms A.E. Kent, Chair.

Mr M. McGowan, Premier.

Mr P. Helberg, Chief Executive Officer.

Mr A. Brender-A-Brandis, Chief Financial Officer.

[Witnesses introduced.]

**The CHAIR:** The estimates committees will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point. Consideration is restricted to items for which a vote of money is

proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must relate to a page number, item or amount related to the current division, and members should preface their questions with these details. Some divisions are the responsibility of more than one minister. Ministers shall only be examined in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the Premier to clearly indicate what information he agrees to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 3 June 2022. If the Premier suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system.

The member for Moore.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to the heading “Development, Monitoring and Reporting on Implementation of the State Infrastructure Strategy” under “Services and Key Efficiency Indicators” on page 291 of the *Budget statements*. The strategy was released on 21 July 2021. As the document says, it is currently being finalised following a period of public consultation, which, I understand, was completed in September last year. Can the Premier give me an understanding of why it will take until October this year, apparently, for the final strategy to be released?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I will let Mr Helberg explain the process.

**Mr P. Helberg:** Thank you, Premier and chair. As the member mentioned, the draft strategy was published on 21 July 2021 and we then undertook public consultation, which lasted for about eight weeks. We updated the document and finalised the strategy in January 2022 after collating and analysing the feedback that we received from the public following an extensive process of visiting all the regions. The document was submitted to the Premier at the end of January this year. Under our act, the Premier has 60 days to either accept the strategy in its final form or refer it back to Infrastructure WA for further consideration. The Premier exercised that option to refer it back to us for further consideration. That is currently where the strategy is at. We are in the process of updating the document with a view to handing it back to the Premier once it is finalised. Under the act, the Premier has to accept the strategy and table it in Parliament within 28 days of acceptance. I cannot give the member an exact date for that, obviously, but, at this stage, our target date is to finalise the document around July this year.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I note that Infrastructure WA has other things to do. It has assessments and the like in the budget. Can Mr Helberg explain to me when he thinks he will present the document to the Premier, because he has not actually outlined a potential date for that, other than we have been told it will be in October at some point?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** It will be July.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Will it go to the Premier in July?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The expectation is that it will be July.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Will the Premier then have one month?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** There will be 28 days from acceptance for me to table it in Parliament.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Then it would have to be tabled in August.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** If it is accepted on 1 July, it might be tabled in late July. The expectation is that the final strategy will be given to the Premier in July and within 28 days it will be tabled in Parliament, so it will most likely be in August.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The assessment of major infrastructure proposals on page 292 of the *Budget statements* reads —

Infrastructure WA assesses major infrastructure proposals with a capital cost of \$100 million or more ... and provides relevant advice to the Government to support informed investment decisions.

Is any of that advice to be made public; and, if so, where will it be provided?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Infrastructure WA assesses major infrastructure proposals. Under the act, it is required to assess major infrastructure proposals prior to an investment decision. This includes proposals with a capital cost of \$100 million or any proposal nominated by the Premier. The guidelines require agencies to comply with the strategic asset management framework. A summary of IWA’s assessment is required to be published within six months of the advice being provided to the Premier. Due to the commencement of the function on 1 January 2022, there was insufficient time to assess the majority of the major infrastructure proposals considered as part of the 2022–23 state budget process. IWA will work with government agencies to develop the final guidelines through late 2022. From 2023 onwards, the major infrastructure proposals assessment interim guidelines will also apply to programs.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I think that in the last year \$570 000 was provided in the budget for assessment procedures for infrastructure projects that have been assessed already. I note that in the budget this year there is an allocation of \$2.614 million to undertake those assessments. How many projects have already been assessed? Given that there is no actual cogent state infrastructure strategy, against what criteria is the Premier assessing them?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The project that has been assessed to date is the Geraldton port maximisation project. Funding of \$332 million for that was announced in the budget. The assessment made the following observations:

the business case and supporting information was of sufficient standard to support an investment decision; it presents a sound case for investment; the proposal will underpin broader economic benefits and business investment; and the project still has some risks, which need to be managed, including current tight construction market conditions. I can table the summary assessment report today and it will be made available on the Infrastructure WA website. That is it.

I will ask Mr Helberg to comment on the actual guidelines and what they were assessed against, but I will table this summary assessment report into the Geraldton port maximisation project, which is a \$332 million investment.

[3.30 pm]

**The CHAIR:** Premier, you can provide it for reference.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I will provide it for reference.

**Mr P. Helberg:** Infrastructure WA developed interim guidelines that provide guidance to proponent agencies on how we will assess major proposals. Essentially, at this stage, it is being assessed in accordance with the Department of Treasury's strategic asset management framework, but we also give due consideration for Infrastructure Australia's assessment framework to make sure there is alignment in terms of the assessment itself. Once the strategy has been responded to by government to the extent that it has accepted those recommendations, we will add a further layer of assessment. We will test it against the final strategy's recommendations. We have opted to publish interim guidelines in the absence of this process around the strategy being finalised so that when it is finalised, we will publish updated guidelines, which will then provide the assessment against the strategy itself.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I think that the Premier mentioned there is a unit within Treasury that overlooks major projects. How does that interact with Infrastructure WA and its assessment?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I will let Mr Helberg explain.

**Mr P. Helberg:** The Department of Treasury has always had a role of assessing proposals for the purposes of informing government on investment decisions. That applies to all projects, not just major infrastructure proposals. I am not aware of a specific major proposals unit within the Department of Treasury, but to answer the member's question, we are constantly liaising with Treasury in terms of not only the assessment of major project proposals, but also the development of agency strategic asset plans to provide our feedback into that process and, over time, to help inform government investment decisions.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I have a question again on the assessments that have been undertaken. Has an assessment been done on any of the Metronet programs put forward; and, if so, which ones?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** No, because the investment decisions were made before this function in IWA came into effect.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I have one more question to follow up on that. Was the Bunbury Outer Ring Road project assessed by Infrastructure WA?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** No, for the same reason.

**Ms S.E. WINTON:** I refer to page 290 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. In the service summary table, the first line item reads "Development, Monitoring and Reporting on Implementation of the State Infrastructure Strategy". I know that the state infrastructure strategy is still being finalised and we saw a draft back in July, but are there recommendations in that draft strategy that the government has already progressed or adopted?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The strategy is being finalised. We will receive it shortly. The draft received in July last year was very useful. It included 88 recommendations. We have since delivered two budgets. We have already adopted and progressed many of the recommendations, some of which include planning and business case development for an additional desalination plant, and we announced \$1.4 billion for a third desal plant in 2021–22. We are addressing the loss of future fuel excise revenue by working on a fair and compatible regime for zero-emission vehicles. That is the distance-based road-user charge for zero and low-emission light vehicles commencing from 1 July 2027. New South Wales, Victoria and, I suspect, other states are doing the same.

We have improved Aboriginal housing outcomes by commencing the delivery of sustained investment in Aboriginal housing, including a \$350 remote communities fund, which we announced in the state budget. We are continuing to plan and develop a business case to deliver the Aboriginal cultural centre in Perth. We have committed \$50 million towards the centre and we are pleased that the new federal government has committed another \$50 million.

We are doing further strategic planning to complement Westport by identifying the future location of non-container trades currently based at the Fremantle inner harbour and looking into the feasibility of relocating livestock, motor vehicles and the like. We are implementing a structured approach to planning and consideration of public contributions for an expansion of the state's freight rail network, including the agricultural supply chain improvements. We have announced a joint \$200 million package with the commonwealth on that, which includes our \$22 million for four rail sidings at Moora, Brookton, Cranbrook and Broomehill; \$46 million for seven additional grain rail siding upgrades; \$60 million for the Midland line main line upgrades; and \$72 million for the progressive recommissioning of the Narrogin–Kulin rail line, which I think was one of the ones closed as part of the tier 3 closures.

We are also leveraging government land assets, providing financial incentives for social and affordable housing and investing in planning in new heavy rail infrastructure and high-capacity signals. As the member can see, that is a lot.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** A few minutes ago, the Premier read out a list of projects that have been assessed by Infrastructure WA. I believe that to be the list he just read out. Is that right?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** No, these were not assessed. These projects were recommended as part of the draft state infrastructure strategy, which was released in July last year. These were some of the recommendations contained within it and these are things that we have done. IWA assessed the Geraldton port project that we announced in the budget for \$332 million. I provided that paper a moment ago.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Was IWA's first assessment on the Geraldton port project?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Yes, and I provided the summary of that a moment ago.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Since the midyear review, the government has announced projects such as the Armadale line extension. Why was that not also subject to an assessment under Infrastructure WA?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** We announced that extension to Byford years ago.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** It was announced in the last couple of months.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I think the member is talking about some of the level crossing removals.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I am talking about when the Minister for Transport announced that there would be a shutdown of the line, that various sections of track would be elevated, that certain stations would be removed and that the Byford extension would be part of that program. That whole package was worth nearly \$2 billion. It was mooted in earlier documents but then substantially increased in scope when it was finally announced, yet it did not go through Infrastructure WA. I am wondering why.

[3.40 pm]

**The CHAIR:** Can you direct me to the actual line item?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** We are talking about the assessments of major projects.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The function of Infrastructure WA came into effect only this year. These things were endorsed prior to that. To explain, the Armadale line is 128 years old, or something like that. The extension to Byford was announced by the government before coming to office five and a half years or so ago. Some of the upgrades, including the level crossing removals, were part of the original plan—Denny Avenue and some of the ones through Victoria Park. Of course, the commonwealth was very interested in further level crossing removals, particularly through the Victoria Park and Cannington areas. We worked with the commonwealth to remove more level crossings. If the member goes to that area, he will see that we are now removing in total six or seven level crossings. All these things were decided before this function kicked in with IWA. With the commonwealth wanting to fund half or more of these projects, my view was that it was too good an opportunity to miss, so we grabbed it.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I have a further question, once again on major projects and the assessment. Westport was another project that did not fit under Infrastructure WA's umbrella in its initial decision, but what about some of the ancillary programs that might lie beyond that, like the development of further industrial land and infrastructure corridors to Westport? Will Infrastructure WA be making recommendations around those matters? I know, for instance, that in Kwinana there is a view that there should be another rail corridor along the Anketell Road route rather than using Spearwood. Is that something that Infrastructure WA would look at?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** If an investment decision has not already been made and the standalone project is more than \$100 million, I understand that, yes, under the law, it goes to Infrastructure WA. Remember that a lot of these decisions have already been made. That is what has happened. I know that area well; some of the road upgrades through there will happen and are probably pretty needed.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I move to a different part of this. When the assessment of a project is done, is there any ongoing monitoring of the project to ensure that it is delivered in a way that still reflects the cost-benefit analysis that the government undertook through Infrastructure WA?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I will let Mr Helberg explain.

**Mr P. Helberg:** Thank you, Premier. Under the act, we are responsible for conducting a post-project review whereby we will obviously look at how the project was delivered and whether it achieved the benefits it set out to do in the first place. In terms of timing, that would be well down the track for us, because we only started the process of assessing those major projects. Once they go through delivery and get handed over, that is when we will do that post-project review and assessment.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** When Infrastructure WA is assessing a project, does it take into account things such as the condition of the economy and the demand for construction, like the quite white-hot construction environment at the moment?

Might Infrastructure WA make recommendations about the timing of projects? I note the Premier's announcement of smoothing the projects a year or so ago. Is that something that Infrastructure WA might also recommend, regarding the timing of the development of these projects?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I will let Mr Helberg comment.

**Mr P. Helberg:** Absolutely. If the member refers to the Geraldton port expansion example, he will note that in our commentary we specifically highlighted the issue of market capacity and the risk around market capacity. As part of our assessment, we look at deliverability of a project as well, which includes things such as market capacity and significant risk that the project might face, and we make commentary as part of our assessment. That in itself would not necessarily constitute not supporting a particular proposal, but it will form part of our advice to government.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I refer to page 292 and the assessment of major infrastructure proposals, which does somewhat follow on from the conversation we have been having around the projects that the Premier listed earlier that are part of the draft infrastructure strategy. Will they be assessed? They are already announced and in the budget. Is there likely to be an assessment and advice to government on those projects?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** They would be assessed if an investment decision had not been made. The ones that were read through before were recommended as part of the draft infrastructure strategy we tabled last year. The additional desalination plant, the fuel excise arrangement for electric vehicles and the remote communities fund—all those ones I spoke about before—were recommended as part of the draft infrastructure strategy in July last year. I will let Mr Helberg give an example around the desalination plant we announced in last year's budget.

**Mr P. Helberg:** The desalination plant is one that the Water Corporation has already put on notice that we will need to assess. We have already engaged with Water Corporation and are getting an early insight into how that proposal is developing at the moment, with the view that we will do our assessment before it is considered by government for investment. That is just one example. Some of the other examples the Premier mentioned, like fuel excise, may or may not be assessed if they meet our criteria of \$100 million plus and in terms of the size of the project. In that case, it could be a policy decision and that would not necessarily qualify for an assessment. It all depends on whether it meets the criteria of our function kicking in, which is basically that an investment decision has not been made yet and the project or program is valued at \$100 million plus.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** The Premier mentioned the Narrogin–Kulin line as part of the tier 3 project. The funding that is in the budget and part of the strategy is only for investigations; it is not actually an investment decision. Can we assume, then, that once investigations are undertaken, this will be subject to Infrastructure WA assessing it if it meets the criteria?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** If it meets the criteria, under the law it will be required to go to IWA.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

[3.50 pm]

**Lotteries Commission —**

Ms A.E. Kent, Chair.

Mr M. McGowan, Premier.

Mr R. Addis, Chief Executive Officer.

Mr J. Hubble, General Manager, Corporate Services.

[Witnesses introduced.]

**The CHAIR:** This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. Questions must relate to the operations and budget of the off-budget authority. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point.

The Premier may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the Premier to clearly indicate what information he agrees to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 3 June 2022. If the Premier suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system.

I give the call to the Leader of the Opposition.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I refer for page 581 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and the \$1.5 million to implement a workplace strategy refresh at Lotterywest's head office in Subiaco. Could the Premier advise what "workplace strategy refresh" actually means?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** That is to implement Lotterywest's accommodation strategy, which is a plan to address Lotterywest's workplace needs for the physical, technology and people elements of the workplace. It is to expand

and refit existing office space at Station Street, Subiaco, for the co-location of staff currently housed in other accommodation. If it is not undertaken, Lotterywest will not be able to effectively and efficiently meet its day-to-day human resources needs.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to page 581 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, works in progress and the grant system enhancement program that looks like it has been undergoing work for a number of years. Could the Premier explain what that program is about?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Is that the \$1.068 million?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** It is \$1.468 million.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Is it the grant system renewal and enhancement program?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** That is two programs. One is listed under the other on the table.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** That is the replacement of the Lotterywest grant management system. The existing system has been used for over a decade. It is not contemporary or flexible and it is expensive to modify. The new system can combine Lotterywest and Healthway grant functions, and a new community impact hub will be used as part of that. If the grants management system is not upgraded, there is an increased risk of obsolescence, inefficiency and the inability to fully integrate Lotterywest and Healthway grant processes. If the community impact hub is not developed, the ability to determine the benefit of Lotterywest's granting will be affected.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Is the community impact hub a measuring system for the success of the grants or the process?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I will let Mr Addis explain.

**Mr R. Addis:** The community impact hub part of this program is essentially the showcase of what works in granting and a resource for not only Lotterywest grant staff, but also the granting community more broadly. It will include tools to help organisations to get better at focusing on the impact and measuring it.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Further to that, the Premier mentioned the integration of Lotterywest and Healthway, so will they both be on a common platform, with no difference between the two systems?

**Mr R. Addis:** Fundamentally, the new system is such that it can be customised to meet the different needs of different granting streams. That means Healthway will retain the flexibility to do what it needs to do, but ultimately it will be on the same platform.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I have a further question. Have there been any challenges or issues with the integration of those two platforms? They are two different organisations with two different purposes, so the grants and the process by which people access them and how they are processed are slightly different. Have there been challenges in doing the merger?

**Mr R. Addis:** Lots of work has gone into bringing Healthway and Lotterywest together administratively. They also retain their separate autonomous status as individual statutory entities. In terms of the granting process, until this point they have had two separate grant management IT programs to administer alongside each other. They have been progressively working to make their grant processes as consistent as possible and as consistent as makes sense, given they are different in nature to an extent. This new system, as I think I pointed to in the previous answer, will allow them to have a new, modern and pretty efficient and effective IT-based system that will improve the way that external grant proponents can engage with it. It will also provide the flexibility to customise to the needs of particular granting streams, including Healthway.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to grant system enhancement. Normally, we see in the budget documents the issues impacting the agency, but there is nothing in this particular year. In terms of the grants themselves, there was some refocusing of the grants towards a COVID response and supporting communities through that and then I think there was a bit of a catch-up phase supporting people who had missed out. Can the Premier explain roughly where Lotterywest is positioned at the moment? Is it back to business as normal with the same sorts of grants that were available pre-COVID or is it still doing that catch-up?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** We did that for a period during the height of the COVID pandemic when we did not know what was going to happen. I will let Mr Addis comment on the member's question.

**Mr R. Addis:** The COVID relief fund was established, as the Premier indicated, in response to that initial shock and uncertainty. I think in total \$159 million was committed to the COVID relief fund, which was very well received in the community and quite effective. From about the middle of last year, we have been transitioning out of that mode and back into granting as normal. I think it would be fair to say that there is some element of pent-up demand that we are working through, but, broadly speaking, we are on track to deliver the community granting program about \$105 million this financial year, which is pretty solid. I think the number of grants in the system is getting back to a fairly normal long-term level.

**The CHAIR:** That completes the examination of the Lotteries Commission.

*Meeting suspended from 3.57 to 4.30 pm*

**Division 14: Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation — Service 3, Defence Industry; Veterans Issues, \$105 033 000 —**

Mr D.A.E. Scaife, Chair.

Mr P. Papalia, Minister for Defence Industry; Veterans Issues.

Ms R. Brown, Director General.

Mr T. Idrus, Executive Director, Defence West.

Mr R. Sansalone, Chief Financial Officer.

Ms J. Garcia, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

**The CHAIR:** The estimates committees will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point. Consideration is restricted to items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must relate to a page number, item or amount related to the current division, and members should preface their questions with these details. Some divisions are the responsibility of more than one minister. Ministers shall only be examined in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 3 June 2022. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system.

I give the call to the member for North West Central.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** I refer to page 200 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, with regard to supporting veterans, paragraph 8, which states —

Defence West is also responsible for managing the Veterans Issues portfolio and supporting the veteran community, including the administration of the Anzac Day Trust.

Can the minister elaborate on the administration required and what issues the Anzac Day Trust deals with in terms of veterans' issues? Can the minister provide some more detail around that?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** The Anzac Day Trust is a statutory body under the Anzac Day Act 1960 and comes under the stewardship of the trustees. The Anzac Day Trust recommends to government initiatives suitable for funding that benefits Western Australian veterans. When we went to the last election, we committed to increase the funding that is allocated to the Anzac Day Trust. Basically, the way it works is that an amount of money goes into the trust every year and it is all distributed by the Anzac Day Trust trustees.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** Does the government select the trustees?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Yes, we appoint them. We have not removed anyone, but we recently added one. There is a small number of trustees. They are not remunerated; it is voluntary, but I am trying to get them remunerated. That is a change that we intend to make. It is on a voluntary basis. They work and commit time to it, but it is not a full-time position or anything of that nature. In the past, the amount of funds allocated was about \$300 000 per year. We committed to increasing that to \$1.3 million annually, and we have done that. The majority of that money—some \$1 million—is allocated to services in support of veterans who are living and require assistance.

There is a range of activities. One of the programs we have funded over a number of years is a collaboration between RSL WA and Working Spirit to deliver transition mentoring and support to veterans leaving the Defence Force, to attract them and their families to stay here in WA, and to find them work. That is one of the things that has been done. Legacy has also had a range of programs funded over a number of years out of that allocation to provide support to families of people who have died in service or as a consequence of their service. That also supports the operating costs of the Busselton camp, in the member for Vasse's electorate.

That is \$1 million allocated annually to those sort of activities, and then \$300 000 or thereabouts is given for commemorative purposes. The member might be aware of some of these. There is a couple of organisations that are at the moment working towards the delivery of a memorial to the Battle of Crete; former Governor Ken Michael is part of that. Another one is a plan to deliver a Korean War memorial with funding also from the South Korean government. It is things of that nature—nationally significant memorials, generally. Other than that, there are also some of the smaller commemorative grants. If, for example, an association is having its fiftieth or seventieth anniversary or something of that nature, they might apply for funds out of that \$300 000 as well.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** That is good to know. We have the HMAS *Sydney* memorial in Shark Bay.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Yes, they got funding out of that allocation—both the council one and the other one, as there were two events. Essentially, the annual \$1.3 million comes in and goes out. The recommendations are given to the minister as to the allocations of funds, and generally what they recommend is what happens.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I also refer to page 200 and a couple of items under “Defence Industries”. How is the funding for defence industries and the defence industry strategic plan allocated in the budget?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Essentially, Defence West is part of the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation. The Defence West budget is what we are talking about there. Its role is to advocate for the defence industry, and we have asked that it focuses on business development as a priority for that role now. In our first term of government, a lot of what it did was around trying to raise awareness of the defence industry in WA and getting on the national stage to ensure that our industry was seen to be an active player in the defence sector at a national level, and to raise awareness of some of the capabilities that are available in WA. We now really want it to focus on the delivery of business opportunities, predominantly for small to medium enterprises, but also the prime enterprises that are located here.

The budget for Defence West is essentially part of the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation budget. The director general funds its activities. I might get the director general to give the member some detail as to how much funding is allocated to Defence West activities. If the member has any questions as to how it is spent, we can let her know.

[4.40 pm]

**Ms R. Brown:** Funding allocated annually to Defence West is approximately \$4.5 million. The bulk is for the staffing costs within that team. There is \$3.7 million, increasing to approximately \$3.89 million in 2025–26. In addition to that, \$400 000 is allocated per annum for defence-ready initiatives and the defence and research teaming—DART—program. That is tailoring initiatives that support small to medium-sized enterprises and is very much focused on the requirements of Defence. In addition to that, \$250 000 is allocated per annum to support the defence expert advisory panel, which gives strategic support and advice to Defence West, me and the minister, and also continues to have a presence and voice in Canberra. In addition, funding has previously been allocated and delivered on through the WA recovery plan, particularly around further upgrades to the Australian Marine Complex in Henderson. In addition, funding is allocated to support the Defence Science Centre, which is a joint initiative between the state, the commonwealth and universities, which is approximately \$950 000 per annum. It distributes grants for science research-type projects identified by Defence, delivered jointly with industry and universities.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Minister, I am on page 200, volume 1, under the heading, “Supporting Veterans”. Feel free to tell me if it does not fit under this; I could not figure out where to lodge the question in the budget. We have been doing some work over the last few years with the Albany RSL and the City of Albany on the National Anzac Centre and the role of the commonwealth in taking over or providing additional funding so that the City of Albany is not, essentially, left managing what is actually a national and I think iconic facility and museum. Is that something this government has been taking an active industry role in trying to promote to the commonwealth? I am sad to say that we heard lots of the right noises from the previous government. We have a new government now. I would really like to be able to make sure that we can deliver on that. Is that something this state government is willing to advocate for?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I am aware of that advocacy. I think the aim was to get the Australian War Memorial to take ownership of the site —

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Yes, that is right.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** — and adopt responsibility for funding, the rotation of exhibits and the like, in the same way as it does in Canberra.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** It was also to make it free entry.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I am pretty sure that it is resisting that fairly determinedly. The Australian War Memorial is the organisation that any federal government is going to seek advice from and we are all aware that a lot of money has been spent there on enhancing the war memorial’s exhibits and changing what it does. I think it would be appropriate, but I cannot say that I have recently spoken directly to any minister about it. Now we have a new federal government, I will raise it as an issue when I find out who the minister is. I will point out that it is a national asset and was established with a federal government grant. I cannot guarantee that that will be its response. I do not know what its view is on that particular matter.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Thank you, minister. I would not anticipate that the minister would know its response at this stage; otherwise, as he said, it will be guided by the current thinking at the war memorial, which is resistant to it. My question is really whether the state will take up the issue because I think there is some real merit in it.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I am happy to raise it.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Thank you.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I will ask whether there might be some way of the federal government contributing. There is an interesting time coming up. Next year is the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Legacy WA, so there is potentially an interesting opportunity around that to raise the matter again.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Further to the anniversary next year, and —

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I have to be careful. I do not want to pre-empt anything. I had a meeting today with Matt Granger and Peter, the chair—the member knows them—but I do not want to pre-empt anything. There is going to be big, exciting and appropriate recognition of Legacy as an institution in Australia and the contribution it makes. A lot of it will be centred on some of the really important sites in Western Australia. I am just saying it is an opportunity for us to revisit this particular matter with the new federal government.

**Ms L. METTAM:** As the minister pointed out, one of those Legacy sites is in my electorate—the camp in Busselton. Can the minister elaborate more on anything that is anticipated or some of the planning work that is happening there?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** The member is aware of the state government’s increase in funding. One of the allocations the Anzac Day Trust made was essentially to cover the operating costs of Legacy’s camp in Busselton. The state government is doing really, in my view, what might possibly be suggested is a federal government responsibility, but, that aside, I think it is appropriate use of the money. It is a good contribution. I am trying to remember; I think it had to raise about \$125 000 every year just to cover the caretaker operating costs. That is a lot for a totally volunteer-run, in many respects, not-for-profit organisation. Legacy does a lot of good work out of there that the member is aware of. It has camps for kids who have lost parents, either in service or as a consequence of their service. It also has the partners of people whose lives have been lost. Legacy has now also opened the camp to more opportunities for affordable holidays for serving and retired veterans, which is great. It is doing a lot of good work out of there.

What it needs is some capital investment for new buildings. The buildings are being encroached upon by the ocean with the natural creep of the ocean every year, which means that some of its buildings are very vulnerable. Some have been flooded by high tides. Legacy has written proposals for a couple of things, including getting site 16, I think it is, to the north of its site allocated from the council. I have undertaken to investigate looking at the length of tenure around that site and the one that Legacy currently occupies and potentially ensuring that the council gives much greater certainty around the length of whatever the arrangement is—whether it is rent or some sort of peppercorn lease or whatever. There is crown land vested in the council that is rented to the operators. I have undertaken to work on that and sort out the tenure.

I guarantee the member that I will raise with the new government the need for capital investment in that property. I raised it with the previous government and I will raise it with this government. I think the federal government could make a good contribution. Children from all over the country go to that site for the camps, not just Western Australian children. Veterans issues is not really a state responsibility; it is more a federal government responsibility, so I think it would be appropriate. We have essentially given the commitment in perpetuity that we will continue to fund the operating costs. I think it is quite a reasonable thing that the commonwealth steps up and funds some of the capital works.

[4.50 pm]

**Ms L. METTAM:** Given that we have a bit of time, I go back to page 200 of budget paper No 2 and “Defence Industries” under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”. In promoting and facilitating the development of the defence industry here in Western Australia, what does the minister see as the critical next step? What is WA working towards?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Prior to the election, the member would have seen the announcement by the former Prime Minister that the then federal government committed to building a large vessel dry berth in Western Australia. That is a significant project. At the time of the announcement, it was worth \$4.3 billion. The department has been working with the Department of Defence and both ministers’ offices on that project for two years. The recent announcement of the AUKUS partnership will have an impact on that project. As the member heard, it was coupled with an announcement that we would abandon the submarine build, a project that was underway, and we would be building towards a nuclear submarine capability for Australia. That has implications for this project. The large vessel dry berth will have to accommodate whatever AUKUS brings, whether it is nuclear submarines or other allied vessels that might need to access our facilities. This facility will now have to be built in a way that accommodates whatever the AUKUS arrangement requires over time. That will be very significant. We hope to support our industry to become supportive of whatever AUKUS requires.

Beyond that, I will be actively continuing to campaign for a commitment from the new federal government for certainty around shipbuilding in Western Australia as a priority because that was never given. The previous government gave certainty to South Australia. It said there would be continuous shipbuilding, which means that as soon as one ship classed as a build is complete, building will commence on another one. Those industries involved in those shipbuilding activities know that they can attract, train and retain a workforce with the long-term prospect of knowing that they

will always have work. We do not have that in Western Australia. Over the last five years, the federal government has made announcements of builds but they do not continue beyond the current contract, so there is no commitment to continuous shipbuilding. I think that is essential.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Picking up on those comments, will the dry-dock facility help support future submarine contracts?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I cannot imagine that it would not. Does the member mean the build?

**Ms L. METTAM:** Yes.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I do not know about that. I cannot imagine that it would not support any AUKUS arrangement that we have. The British Royal Navy or the United States Navy may visit Western Australia as part of AUKUS. I imagine that our facilities, including that one, would be required to assist or support those visits as necessary. What AUKUS looks like is really a federal government matter. I do not know the extent of demands that will be made. I cannot imagine that the federal government will build that dry dock in a way that does not accommodate any future requirements. That would mean that it would potentially be a really big project. When we build nuclear submarines, they need to be serviced. Nuclear submarines are not normally taken above the high-water mark because the site needs to be capable of being flooded in the event of any issues. That means that the dry dock has to be designed in accordance with those criteria. The certification for nuclear submarines is a lot higher and the security around them is a lot more demanding. A lot of new obligations will be placed on that facility, if that is what the federal government wants.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I remember when the commitment was made at the time by the federal government, the minister questioned the cost allocation.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Yes, because at that time we were talking for two years about a large vessel dry berth and I did not think it would cost anywhere near that much. If it is going to be something bigger to meet the demands of AUKUS or future capability, which we were not aware of at that time, it might be more expensive.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I am spelling it out here, but the minister is anticipating that the scope of this project may well expand because of AUKUS and meet that funding commitment.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Yes, but I do not know to what extent. We were in caretaker mode when all that stuff was aired. It could take at least four years to build something like that.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** There is space there to do it.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** A lot of work is being done at the moment to carry out the studies that are necessary as a precursor to making a decision to go ahead and build. The federal government has not made that decision. A new government has come in. It will be confronted with the plan, which I am not privy to. A lot of studies are being done by our agencies at the moment with funding from the federal government to enable that build. But the government has to make a decision to go ahead with it once it gets all the information. I will ask the director general to respond further. She sits on the working group that they talk about.

**Ms R. Brown:** As the minister has outlined, there is a joint task force between the Department of Defence, the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation and other representatives from commonwealth and state agencies. That task force has overseen a number of studies to inform the commonwealth's thinking around a large vessel dry berth. The timing around what the commonwealth seeks to achieve is linked to the decommissioning of the New South Wales —

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** The 2026 Captain Cook dry dock.

**Ms R. Brown:** It is close to its 100-year life. It is planned to be decommissioned in 2026. The commonwealth's time frame and the decisions around scope and functionality are driven by that 2026 time frame.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** We were aware of the 2026 deadline for the Captain Cook dry dock. It is the only one in Australia that is capable of taking large vessels. It is in the middle of Sydney. It needs to go out of service to be maintained or have repairs, and that could be for as long as two years or more, until 2026. That does not mean that this one will be built by then, because it is a pretty big job.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** I have a further question relating to defence opportunities, particularly in the north west of WA, and the Gascoyne Gateway project in Exmouth, which I assume the minister would know about. Has there been any discussion around potential defence assets or opportunities for Defence to have a laydown area, service area or fuel depot that could service frigates or whatever in the north west of the gulf?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** The lead agency status for that project is with the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation. It assists; it is like a concierge service through delivery of a project.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** There has been talk about Defence.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** We are going to run out of time. If the member wants to ask any further specific questions about that project, he can put them on notice to me or something like that.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

[5.00 pm]

**Division 26: Western Australia Police Force, including Road Safety Commission, \$1 644 070 000 —**

Mr D.A.E. Scaife, Chair.

Mr P. Papalia, Minister for Police; Road Safety.

Mr C. Dawson, Commissioner of Police.

Mr C. Blanch, Deputy Commissioner.

Ms K. Whiteley, Acting Deputy Commissioner.

Mr F. Pasquale, Executive Director.

Ms S. Cardenia, Director of Finance.

Mr A. Warner, Commissioner, Road Safety Commission.

Mr P. Zappelli, Principal Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

**The CHAIR:** The estimates committees will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point. Consideration is restricted to items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must relate to a page number, item or amount related to the current division, and members should preface their questions with these details. Some divisions are the responsibility of more than one minister. Ministers shall only be examined in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 3 June 2022. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system.

We are dealing with division 26, Western Australia Police Force, including the Road Safety Commission, and I give the call to the member for Vasse.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to page 413 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, under expenses, and the total cost of services. I note the \$13 million decrease in spend for 2023–24. Why does this decrease occur after this year’s budget had an increase of \$44 million from last year?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Is the member asking about the \$13.5 million decrease in 2023–24 from this year’s budget?

**Ms L. METTAM:** Yes.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Okay. This is the out years so the forecast of a reduction of funding is the result of \$22.2 million in COVID-response-related cost reduction based on the assumption that this year’s related expenses will return to pre-pandemic levels post–December 2022. There is \$12.7 million for the digital capability fund, which is the ICT transformation program; \$3 million for organised crime operations, which is from proceeds of crime; \$2 million for maintenance costs for helicopter replacement; and \$1.7 million one-off funding for Operation Regional Shield. They are elevated in this budget, and then taper down in the 2023–24 budget. All those things have increased at the moment, so they will taper. There is also an offset in additional funding for an increase in the 2023–24 budget for additional police officers through the 950 program. In that year, there will be another 200 officers. When we take into account the reductions over time as a consequence of things that we have elevated in this year’s budget, they will taper, then the additional funding for that year for 200 extra officers will result in an overall decrease of \$13.5 million. It is pretty elevated at the moment.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to page 413 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, the table “Spending Changes” and the heading “New Initiatives”, and specifically line item “Climate Action—Capability to Estimate and Report Emissions”. There is an allocation of about \$600 000 over the two years. I am wondering what this entails. Is it a role that is contracted out or is it work undertaken within WA police?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** On 30 November last year, the WA climate policy introduced new requirements for government agencies to prepare emissions reduction plans consistent with the government’s goal of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. The government has provided additional funding of \$570 000 from the climate action fund to the WA Police Force with the allocation of two climate risk FTE resources over the next two years to provide relevant data and the input required for determining the impact on the agency statewide. It is working towards a plan and providing information specific to the WA Police Force.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** I refer to page 413, under new initiatives, Operation Regional Shield. There is an allocation of \$833 000 for 2021–22 and \$1.667 million for 2022–23. I notice there is no further funding after the 2022–23 financial year. Could the minister indicate how much money has been spent to date, how many police officers that has covered, and where those police officers from Operation Regional Shield have been assigned?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** With respect to the first question about how much has been expended, that might be something we take on notice.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** That is understandable.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Yes, because right now there are a lot of demands on police, as the member would imagine, and because of the COVID furlough, it is pretty intense. I do not want to divert them from their task. But I will answer the member's other observations on the numbers.

Operation Regional Shield is not about specific numbers of police; it is about ensuring that there is funding and resources available to enable police to respond to an acute situation anywhere in the state in the regions—in this case regarding juvenile crime. It may be officers but it may not be. It might also be capability. It might be analysts or technology. It might be assets like aviation or air wing assets or even specialist police who might not normally be resident within an area. It might be additional officers for a period.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** Where have these resources been?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I might get Deputy Commissioner Col Blanch to give the member the running operations. I know that they are active in the Kimberley and the Pilbara, and they were active in the midwest region, but I am not sure whether they still are.

**Mr C. Blanch:** We have surged officers into Broome, Derby, Fitzroy Crossing, Halls Creek, Kununurra, Newman and South Hedland, and we have sent some inspectors for senior oversight into Karratha and the broader Kimberley district.

[5.10 pm]

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** Operation Regional Shield has not been deployed into places in the Gascoyne like Carnarvon. Is that correct?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** No, that is not correct. They have been there. I might defer to the deputy commissioner in a moment. They may not be there right now, but I am aware that they have been. I was recently in the Pilbara to announce a launch and there had been assets and officers deployed in the Gascoyne.

**Mr C. Blanch:** At the commencement of Operation Regional Shield, we did send officers into the Gascoyne. We also sent part of the 950 program allocation into the Gascoyne, including Carnarvon. I think we sent five up there. The ones I read out earlier are the latest surges throughout May and probably into next month, but certainly we had Gascoyne ones early.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** They go when it is acute. They are responding to it.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** I understand that; I just wanted a good understanding of where the assets are being deployed. Under Operation Regional Shield, has there been a drop in crime in the Kimberley region? When I say "Kimberley", I am referring specifically to Kununurra, Halls Creek, Fitzroy Crossing, Derby and Broome. By what percentage has the crime rate fallen in those towns, and also in all the other towns in the Pilbara, being Newman, Port Hedland, Karratha and Roebourne, and also Carnarvon? Has there been a drop in crime; and, if so, would the minister be able to provide information on that drop?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** There has been significant success in the Kimberley. I think it has been 11 weeks since it started. That is the latest I have—for 11 weeks after the commencement of the operation. Crime statistics have confirmed a more than 30 per cent reduction in burglaries and a more than 17 per cent reduction in the theft of motor vehicles. There have been massive additional patrol hours by police, with 1 500 additional computer-aided dispatch tasks attended. The interesting thing, particularly around Broome but also in other towns, is that often it is not just about arresting people; it is about taking children who are at risk to a safe place. That has been a key element of the response.

Regional Shield has identified large numbers of juveniles at risk. They have engaged with 989 children and conveyed 687 to either a safe place or a police station. The vast majority have gone to a safe place other than a police station. Safe places are considered to be a family home, an extended family home or another suitable home or facility, such as a police and community youth centre or other not-for-profits.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** Is the minister able to provide crime statistics from when Regional Shield occurred?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** No, because Regional Shield is still ongoing in that region.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** But even for that 11-week period?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** There was an immediate reduction. I remember seeing reports, on a weekly basis initially, that there had been an immediate impact. There was a significant reduction in some of the volume crime that had been taking place.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** The minister would be aware that the crime rate was so high that a reduction of 30 per cent could mean anything. That is why I want to be able to capture it.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I can tell the member for North West Central that I receive daily summaries of activity, for instance. There was a time that it was particularly acute in Broome, for example, with multiple vehicle thefts almost daily. They are not happening now. Occasionally, there will be a vehicle theft. They are not necessarily juveniles. Vehicle theft occurs across the state.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** What about Derby, Fitzroy Crossing and Halls Creek?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** It has been the same. The numbers are far lower since Operation Regional Shield commenced.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** I did start asking a question. The funding ends in 2022–23. Why is there no further funding after 2022–23?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** The member will recall that the Premier indicated in his statement at the start of the year that there would be a four-pronged response to juvenile crime in the regions. Policing is only one element of it.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** I understand that.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** It was the first, because our Western Australian police are excellent and they responded rapidly. They implemented their response almost immediately. The other three elements of that response are funded in this budget and will be commencing. The aim is to prevent the recurrence of behaviour and divert children who are potentially on the pathway towards being car thieves and offenders in the manner that we have been concerned about. There is the development of an on-country sentencing option; that is what they are calling it. In essence, it will be more like some sort of bail obligation. It will not be a sentence so much as an opportunity to accept a bail condition and comply with it. Rather than ending up being sentenced in the way that they might otherwise have been and sent to Banksia Hill Detention Centre, it will be an on-country activity that is funded and delivered by an Aboriginal community organisation. It is not in my portfolio. Another one is the rollout of Target 120 across the Kimberley, the Pilbara and further afield. That program has been demonstrated to be successful in the metropolitan area.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** Is that under the minister's portfolio?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** No; it is Communities. It is funded. It is additional funding to enable the rollout of Target 120 across major towns in the Kimberley and the Pilbara, and I believe Carnarvon as well. That is aimed at children who are a little bit short of being the ones we are most concerned about. They will engage with and wrap services and interventions around the family home, with a view to diverting those children and getting them back on the straight and narrow, and supporting the families so that the environment is more secure and those children do not stray.

Then there is a fourth element of the plan, with funding to be used for community-led initiatives. The hope is that they will become successful at what they do and impact on the pathway of the ones the police are dealing with, so that in a couple of years' time, we will see the benefit of those initiatives. It is not to say that Regional Shield will not be required then. We will revisit it as necessary.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** I want to make it quite clear that the police in Western Australia are at the pointy end of everything. Often they are the ones who can attract criticism because people have had enough. The minister was talking about all these other programs. What is the collaboration with the Department of Communities? That is the other issue that is impacting, as they are not there in support of the police by doing their job and working with those families and youth who are getting caught up in bad situations. Has there been stronger collaboration between the agencies with the rollout of Operation Regional Shield to make that work? That is where it falls down in my experience and from talking to police officers. They say to me, "We need other departments to lift their game to be able to do our job." Is that collaboration there?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I do not know whether I can address what the other agencies are doing under this portfolio.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** Is everyone working in the right direction?

[5.20 pm]

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** It is a cross-government response. Police raise reports with the appropriate agencies of children whom they deem at risk so that they are now visible to those other agencies, and in some cases they will deliver them to them. During the daytime, if children are on the street in Broome, for instance, when they should be in school, there is collaboration with the education department. I think it has a regional director allocated to ensure that truancy is dealt with, and the police bring that to the attention of the education department. Similarly, with children at risk, reports are raised with the appropriate agencies as part of the process.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** We hear a lot about major centres like Broome, which have regional managers. Where it falls down is in places like Derby, Fitzroy Crossing, Halls Creek, Kununurra and Carnarvon, because the regional managers, whether it be in housing or DCP, are based in Geraldton or Broome, because it is only a day trip away. That means that we get only outreach services, which is causing the problem, because no-one is living and breathing what is happening and understanding it.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** If the member is talking about other agencies, I really cannot make an observation about them. What I would say is that all those towns have schools, and there are relationships between the police and education

representatives in those locations. With regard to the police response, at the outset the member said that police are often the subject of criticism for not responding. I do not think that is true. My experience in recent times has been that everyone who has spoken to me has been at pains to say the police are doing a wonderful job. They are very specific about saying that the delivery of the service by police cannot be criticised. I have not heard anyone say otherwise. I would be concerned if I heard that, because that is my responsibility.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** Is the minister able to provide a breakdown of where the 950 police officers who are in the budget under “Ongoing Initiatives: 950 Police Officer Program” have gone to date?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Acting Deputy Commissioner Whiteley might be able to provide where they have been deployed to date.

**Ms K. Whiteley:** As of today’s date, we have deployed 570 of the 950 program. Out of the 570 program, 111 have been deployed to regional WA into locations in which it has been deemed they were required. They cover the midwest, Gascoyne, the south west and, of course, the Kimberley. The remainder have been deployed to appropriate positions allocated in the metropolitan area or to state crime as required.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** There are 500 or so new police officers out of that 950. How many police officers have left the force through retirement, having had enough, or getting another job? How many police officers have left in the same amount of time as those 500 new police officers have been recruited?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I will hand to the commissioner to respond, but I make the observation that the commitment of 950 is above attrition. Regardless of the number who depart, the commitment to grow the police force is above that number, so there is no net impact in the end.

**Mr C. Dawson:** In respect of retirements and resignations, and some dismissals, we are averaging about 30 FTE a month. It is slightly higher than it has been over the last several years, but that is not abnormal. The recruitment program, as has just been outlined, has seen the graduation of 570 officers in addition to our existing sworn strength, so it is over and above our normal attrition. Further, we have redeployed 450 officers out of Operation Tide since we have been drawing down our COVID response. That is over and above our previously authorised strength. In terms of attrition, we are at record low unemployment, as members will know. Although there has been a marginal increase this calendar year, which is not necessarily abnormal—I have seen this in my period in the executive through two previous boom cycles when we had slightly elevated numbers—our recruitment at this point is meeting that attrition. We are in fact 20 FTE over and above the 950 program at this point in time, and although there is pressure on our recruitment area, we have incoming recruit schools basically starting almost every month. We have one starting next month, and several starting in August. I cannot give the member the projected numbers, but I was briefed only today that although those numbers are under pressure, we expect that they will be filled. It has been forecast that because of the labour market, there will be increasing pressure on our recruitment area. That fact is not hidden.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** Given that the labour market is a market of great opportunity, which we also had back in 2007 when we had a boom and police officers were leaving to drive trucks and earning a lot more money without the pressure, is the housing situation in regional areas impacting on the ability to attract police officers into regional towns? There are still a lot of gaps in regional areas when it comes to police. Are reports about morale in the police force affecting recruitment and those police officers who want to stay in the job? Is that having an impact?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Can I say with respect to that last claim —

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** As reported in the media.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** It is a claim. Our police have done an extraordinary job over the last two years. They have confronted a challenge, a global pandemic the likes of which no-one on the planet has ever had to deal with before, at the same time as delivering world-class policing to our community. That is evidenced by some of the really high-profile cases, but also many other cases, that have been solved in an extraordinarily short time, such as the Mick Martin murder and the Cleo recovery. Those are just a few examples of the exceptional police service delivery that has occurred over the last couple of years. Undoubtedly, police are under pressure, and they have been working incredibly hard. With regard to claims about morale, personally, as police minister, I think they are doing an exceptional job. I regularly meet hundreds of police who do not appear to have low morale. Doubtless there are people who are suffering and doing it tough. I do not think that is at all having an impact on recruitment, and the member cannot claim it as having an impact on recruitment, because every month we graduate officers from the academy. It is extraordinary how frequently I go there for a graduation. The commissioner is addressing a new cohort every month. Despite the similarity to the challenges around the labour market that we had in 2007 and 2008, we are also in the midst of trying to grow the police force by the biggest number in a four-year period in history. We have had an additional challenge. It is not like that. It is not just replacing attrition; it is growing in excess of that at the same time. It is a challenging environment. I do not perceive that they are having any problem attracting people. It is just that this state has a 2.9 per cent unemployment rate, with the greatest participation rate in the country, and the constraint is how many people of the right calibre are out there.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** What about the housing situation, because that is really impacting?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I might get the commissioner to respond, but the member would be aware, with regard to the last question he asked about Operation Regional Shield, that the nature of the response is funded and supported as necessary. In terms of accommodation, when the member hears that we are down on numbers, they have this thing of authorised versus actual. That really frustrates me, because it is an accounting measure. We have to use some measure, but it is confusing. “Authorised” includes all manner of people who may not be there. They may be in transit to go there. They may have already departed, having been there, and are on their way to another job. They may be on leave. All these other categories are accommodated in “authorised” and the actual strength does not equal that. That is really frustrating. I have told the member many times that every region in the state has more FTE than when we came to office; and, in the case of some of the regions the member has referred to, it is a lot more. The numbers overall have increased.

[5.30 pm]

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** But solves crime.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** That is what we are talking about. We have just confronted something the likes of which no-one has seen. It is a thing. All around the world there has been a huge uplift in family and domestic violence and some of the other types of crimes have grown. Other crimes have diminished because of great policing more than the environment, I think—the volume crime that everyone hates like having their house burgled and the like. I might get the commissioner to respond to the member’s question about housing.

**Mr C. Dawson:** In respect of regional deployment, to add to what the minister outlined, the housing stock is impacted by a couple of things. We all know it is an overheated construction period at the moment. When I was deployed many years ago, the housing stock was entirely state-owned government employee housing, now it is split between the private market and the Government Regional Officers’ Housing arrangements. We have been able to fully house all of our regional deployed officers, except that we are waiting for a number of housing units. In the member’s own constituency, he will be aware that I have spoken to a very active mayor in Eddie Smith. Eddie has been very vigilant and strident in his advocacy there, for all the right reasons. We have houses, but we are waiting for a number of houses there, so we have engaged with the director general of the Department of Communities, who has undertaken to construct more housing, but we are also, to some degree, at the mercy of the private housing market. We have experienced that a number of private landlords have taken it upon themselves to no longer participate in the government stock housing because of escalating rent opportunities. That is another factor that impacts us.

The upshot is that we are waiting on further housing and working constructively with the Department of Housing on that. If they become available, we will deploy. We are presently deploying at least 50 additional officers through Operation Regional Shield and accommodating them in hotel and motel-type temporary accommodation, but for those permanently deployed officers, we are working actively with the Department of Housing to try to secure more housing stock.

**Ms L. METTAM:** In relation to the size of this problem, how many officers are we talking about and how many vacancies across the state, purely based on issues associated with housing or accommodation?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I do not believe I can quantify that. As I indicated earlier, when we talk about a vacancy, it is not a category, but there is authorised versus actual and that is what people view as being a vacancy. The difference is not just that an officer cannot be deployed because a house is not available; there is all manner of reasons. It is a very difficult thing to quantify at any one time; it changes daily. The authorised numbers generally stay the same until the commissioner authorises additional people, which he has done, to different regions. The actual number will vary all the time. It might be very high and then change overnight. That is not really a number that would be of value. I do not want to give a number for one day, because it will change the next day.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** With those 950 new police officers, will the minister consider additional police officers for Exmouth and Coral Bay, given that they can have somewhere in the order of 25 000 to 50 000 people?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Which line is the member referring to?

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** As I said, it is page 414, the top line.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** The member knows what I am going to say.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** The minister talks about stresses and strains on police morale. He is right in that there may be one person on sick leave or another on annual leave and suddenly there are four police officers and one car. When there are 25 000 people in the town at any one time, that imposes pressure on those police officers not only in that town, but also down the road in Coral Bay, where they are responsible for another 8 000 people. How does the minister expect a couple of police officers to be able to manage that situation? We hear a lot about all these new police officers and how WA police are better resourced with the number of police officers. Here is a situation that is pretty dire, especially during peak tourism season. The minister has often said that police officers come down, say, from Karratha. That is not the case. That has not happened over the last 12 months. Will the minister consider another couple of police officers, at least through an eight-month period, to cover the massive gaps that exist?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I do not think I have said they come down from Karratha, but, that aside, the member knows what I am going to say. The commissioner determines where police officers go. It is an operational matter.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** Keep going, you might tell the truth now!

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Are you suggesting the commissioner was not telling the truth at some stage? That is a pretty courageous call, member, which I absolutely refute and disagree with.

Where police officers go is entirely the province of the commissioner, because it is an operational matter. I will hand over to the commissioner.

**Mr C. Dawson:** In respect of deployment, yes, I have always reserved the right operationally to deploy officers where supply and demand is required. The situation outlined is, obviously, not unknown to us and to the member in respect of matters such as Coral Bay, which surges, as we both know, and the same applies in other locations such as Augusta, Busselton, Dunsborough et cetera. We have always adopted the approach to deploy additional officers with temporary accommodation. As a broad approach, I have resisted the FIFO–DIDO type of approach to policing. In fact, police were the only government agency living in Roebourne from a state perspective. I have actively kept police in locations such as Roebourne because we have to build trust with the community and it is much more difficult—not impossible, but much more difficult—to engender trust, understanding and rapport with local people without resident police officers. As a principle, that is my broad approach.

The example we have just been speaking about in the north of the state means an additional 50 or 60 officers and we have had to surge additional officers with temporary accommodation and rotate them where the surges in demand are. The approach we continue to take, particularly with known holiday hotspots, is to deploy officers during those peak times. We are constrained, of course, as it is based widely on the patronage of where people have gone and travelled. Again, without this being an excuse, I am sure members are aware that the last two years have been quite extraordinary in terms of intrastate tourism and accommodation. I am sure the member knows I am not exaggerating when I say that everything is booked out. That has been an additional pressure for our officers. I reserve the responsibility to deploy officers where we can secure the appropriate accommodation for both housing and a police station and we will deploy additional officers in surge areas with support vehicles and assets where that is required.

[5.40 pm]

**Ms L. METTAM:** I have a new but related question. I refer to the 950 police officer infrastructure program on page 422 of the *Budget statements* under the line item “Land and Buildings Infrastructure”. With the majority of spending occurring in 2023–24, where is the infrastructure currently needed? Can the minister outline what works will be undertaken as part of this program?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Sorry, the commissioner has pointed out that there are a few land and building infrastructure lines down the page. I will get the executive director, Mr Pasquale, to respond, because he can speak about it in detail.

**Mr F. Pasquale:** There are two main priorities in that investment. In total, \$32.3 million is spread over the period, as printed. Of that, \$1.9 million is for the expansion of the leased facilities in Kununurra. Our police presence in Kununurra both at the police station and across leased premises is full. There is obviously a need to increase the police presence there. Increasing that capacity in Kununurra will be done by creating a greater capacity in the Kununurra leased area so that we can put extra people in the Kununurra Police Station. Our biggest expense is for a district support facility in Broome to also cater for the increased capacity requirements in Broome. The funding for that is \$30.4 million, the majority of which is funded in 2023–24.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Excuse my ignorance, but is that to expand the police facilities? How does that work along with making Government Regional Officers’ Housing available?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** We do not do Government Regional Officers’ Housing; that is a different agency. This is for police facilities, but other significant projects are underway, although they are not necessarily under this line item. There are some really big builds. The completion of the Armadale Courthouse and Police Complex costs tens of millions—\$85.8 million—and is almost complete. A huge build is about to commence, or has commenced, in Fremantle. Those facilities are being built to accommodate this growth in advance. Those facilities will be built with more than the necessary capacity to accommodate those 950 additional police officers. Similarly, the Fremantle police complex will be built to accommodate future growth in police beyond those 950 police officers. In recent years, there has been a lot of expenditure around the state. Under the WA recovery plan, we provided money to upgrade a lot of our smaller, older police stations to accommodate more people and equipment, but predominantly equipment, because recently we have given every officer body armour. That requires storage at the location that was not designed into the buildings originally. There have been things like that and a lot of upgrades to some of the older sites around the state, including Dunsborough, which the member would be familiar with. That had a complete rebuild, almost. There are a lot of projects like that, including, for example, at Bridgetown. I am trying to remember the other ones that I have visited recently.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Is that an expansion or upgrade of the existing facilities?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** These big complexes are being built to accommodate the growth that will be realised as a result of the additional 950 police officers. I think the member was asking about Kununurra and Broome. That is on a smaller scale, but I might ask Mr Pasquale to give more of an indication of what is being done at those stations.

**Mr F. Pasquale:** The office accommodation area at Kununurra is being expanded. That will allow us to create greater capacity in Kununurra Police Station. The strategy is to create that capacity at Kununurra Police Station. The Broome facility is a new facility in addition to Broome Police Station.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** I refer to page 415 of the *Budget statements*. The sixth significant issue impacting the agency states —

The Western Australia Police Force remains dedicated to contributing to the wellbeing of Aboriginal people through increased engagement to improve relationships ...

It also states —

The Western Australia Police Force continues to proactively recruit Aboriginal police officers and staff ...

How is that progressing? Can the minister indicate how many Aboriginal police officers have been recruited over the last—I do not know how long?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I do not think I have that information here, but I can get that for the member. In the last 18 months, probably, the number has grown significantly. At every graduation, it will be between one and three. At the last two graduations I went to there were three Aboriginal officers, and there was one Aboriginal officer at the graduation before that. There have been a number. The commissioner initiated a number of entirely Aboriginal police cadet intakes over the last three years. The cadets program is not a school program; they are police cadets in a uniform at a police station. They get some training at the academy and are mentored. It is like “try before you buy” to become a police officer. They are also supported in a local police station. The hope is that if some of them determine that they want to go on with it, they can become a recruit and go into the police academy. That has been very successful. I cannot tell the member the number right now, but I will be able to get it for him. It is probably in my office. Can I take that as a supplementary?

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** Yes.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** The member should celebrate because I do not do this often!

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** I agree! I think the minister is the first one to do it today in the sessions that I have been at. It is unusual, coming from the minister.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I undertake to provide the member with supplementary information that will provide the number of Aboriginal recruits who have graduated from the academy in the last two years —

**Mr C. Dawson:** Four years, probably.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I think the commissioner’s campaign has probably been realised in the last two years because the cadet program had to run for a bit before we got a return, I think.

**The CHAIR:** Is the supplementary information the number of Aboriginal cadets who have graduated from the police academy in the previous two years?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Yes.

[*Supplementary Information No A5.*]

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** Does the minister have a target out of the 950 additional police officers?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** No. But obviously we would like the rate to be per capita. That would be an appropriate minimum. I think the police should look like the people they police, so that the more people in the community who are able to look at a police officer and say, “Yes, I’m represented amongst the people in uniform”, the better. That is true of not only Aboriginal people, but also culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** There are plenty of them.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I can tell the member that there has been a lot more recruiting by police of people from CALD communities in recent years under this commissioner.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** Absolutely. I agree with that.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** The commissioner has been extraordinary. In a lot of ways, that has enabled us to respond to the real challenge around recruiting, because there are demographics that we probably have not tapped into in the past. Possibly, they had not seen policing as a career of interest to them, but that has all changed. That is true in Aboriginal policing, too, I think. The return from the commissioner’s focus on that has been quite extraordinary, and it is visible; we see it at the graduations. We will get the numbers for the member.

[5.50 pm]

**Ms L. METTAM:** I have a couple of questions. I refer to the table on page 414 and ongoing initiatives. The minister has already touched on the Armadale courthouse and police complex and its operating costs. Can the minister clarify why the courthouse operating costs are included in the police budget?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I might get Mr Pasquale to respond to that as well.

**Mr F. Pasquale:** The Armadale courthouse and police complex is obviously a joint initiative. The Western Australia Police Force, in agreement with the Department of Justice, agreed to lead the project, but it has been done in a collaborative manner because it is a joint complex that consists of the police station, the district office and the court facilities. Rather than complicate it and try to deliver a joint project by segregating the budget into two different agencies, it is being delivered under the guise of police. We have a memorandum of understanding about the operating parameters and who will take responsibility for the general maintenance and upkeep of the building. This recognises that it is a new facility and the operating cost to support that new facility is what this budget allocation is about. The Department of Justice has also received specific funding for its particular requirements, but the upkeep, maintenance and running of the building will be with police. Police have been funded for that to ensure that, as the landlord, if you like, they provide the capability for the building to be maintained. But Justice has an allocation for any unique fit-out requirements specific to particular costs for the courthouse.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I do not know whether the member has seen it, but it is a pretty impressive facility. It has a shared custody centre that services not just the police district and station, but also the courts when holding people as necessary. There are five separate courtrooms. It has accommodation for 340 FTEs from police. I think that the number in that district at the moment is half of that, so there is a lot of opportunity for growth. The courthouse will also accommodate 20 FTEs from the Department of Justice. It is a pretty incredible project. Police own most of the building itself and they are very good at this sort of thing, so they will take on this responsibility.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** I refer to page 415 of budget paper No 2 and paragraph 7, which reads, in part, “The Western Australia Police Force continues to build relationships with young people”. This is about community youth centres such as the police and community youth centres and youth engagement police officers. How has the police force attracted youth engagement officers, who are absolutely critical when we talk about what is happening in the Kimberley, the Pilbara and Carnarvon? I know for a fact that Carnarvon has not had its youth engagement officers, which has played a major role in some of its problems. Is there a special recruitment process and how many —

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Yes. They have to be the right people.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** I understand that—do not get me wrong. I do not know how to frame this question. Are we pushing for more youth engagement police officers? Are they coming out of the pool that we have now or are they part of the police officers from the 950 program that the police force is trying to attract?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I might get the commissioner to respond to that.

**Mr C. Dawson:** Our youth engagement program was kickstarted about four years ago. We have dedicated youth policing and community engagement, which supplements those activities with not-for-profits such as the PCYC. We obviously work collaboratively with other government and non-government agencies. We have actively recruited within our ranks operationally credible officers to be youth policing officers. We do not want them to be officers who have purely a youth skill set, but they must have credible policing experience. I am not suggesting that previously they were not credible, but it is most important that they are not seen by their colleagues or the community to focus just on recidivist crime offenders. We want to get the kids who are at risk off a carousel of entering the justice system. They were once called “youth crime officers” and I felt that that was a wrong label because not all youth are criminals, and nor do we want them to become criminals. We have intentionally repositioned that as a youth and community engagement portfolio. We have been overwhelmed by the number of officers from police stations—detectives and others—who have come into that portfolio. They have really added an incredible diversity within that portfolio. Coupled with that, and tailored to the 950 program—the minister is providing supplementary information on this—I know that in the order of 11 per cent of our total recruitment program are culturally and linguistically diverse officers. One in 10 officers comes into the force with an ability to speak other languages. That gives us much better flexibility to work with particularly new Australian families. Officers with African or Asian heritage, or whatever it might be, will supplement those numbers, as indeed will our efforts to recruit Aboriginal police officers. That program is in fact recruiting above the roughly three per cent number, as the minister’s supplementary information will show.

In essence, this is not about blowing up balloons and playing games with kids. These officers are actively engaging in a way that is not purely designed for police. We work closely with education authorities and other government and non-government agencies and we have tailored it so that they do not just respond when a kid is unfortunately in and out of the Children’s Court. Often, sadly, it is too late for some of those very high-end offenders because they have already unfortunately got into a pattern of recidivist offending. We very much target that younger cohort before they get to the stage of high recidivism.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I might see whether Deputy Commissioner Blanch wants to add anything.

**Mr C. Blanch:** As part of the 950 program, we are going to allocate functional positions for more youth policing officers. Similar to what the commissioner said, it is mutually beneficial for both police officers and the youth to be exposed to different types of police officers. We actually want to rotate the officers and give them lots of time with the kids, because one day they might be dealing with critical incidents that involve those families or they might even be arresting those kids. But it is very healthy for those same officers to spend six to 12 months working as dedicated youth policing officers with those kids. That brings the entire policing workforce up to a sufficient level of skill and training in dealing with kids on a daily basis so that when they are back to their normal frontline role, they have a greater appreciation of the complex issues that many of these kids face in regional WA areas.

That approach is a bit of a change in our policy. We do not want to pigeonhole a police officer into being a youth police officer forever. That can cause other police to say that working with youth is a specialist area. We want to give all police officers that exposure and time with those kids so that they can better deal with their complex problems as frontline police.

**Ms L. METTAM:** How many of those youth officers are in the south west and how many are in Bunbury?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** If we do not have that information, we can get it. I know that there are some in the member's electorate because I have been to Busselton Police Station and, recently, some youth police officers were allocated to the member's district.

**Mr C. Dawson:** I will add to the response provided by Deputy Commissioner Blanch. From memory, Busselton Police Station has about three dedicated youth policing positions, but, again, we are intentionally rotating officers through that. Again, we do not want to typecast them and say, "You're the ones who are going to be dealing with youth; these others won't be." It then becomes normal practice. For the same reason, in other areas of the state, I do not want officers to be dedicated to Aboriginal policing issues so that the population, whether they be for liaison reasons, victims or offender-type activities, gravitate towards a particular number of officers at the station because they will think, "They're the ones who dedicate themselves to this type of activity." It is most important that we do not compartmentalise them and they all get an understanding and rotate their way through that. It gives them a much broader perspective. I know from my experience, and listening to other officers, that when they do get exposed to other activities, they say, "Well, actually, not all the kids are bad", because they are often only tasked in dealing with either victims or offenders, but they see the kids through a different lens. Also, the children themselves see the officers differently as opposed to, "Oh, they're the ones who charged me last time." That rapport can get built. It is an intentional strategy, and I think it is one that will be a success.

[6.00 pm]

**Ms L. METTAM:** Thank you for the response, commissioner and minister. Is the minister able to provide that information by way of supplementary in relation to the youth officers at Busselton Police Station?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I can, but based on listening to the commissioner's response, I would suggest that there are probably positions but not individuals specifically dedicated to those positions. I am aware that there are youth policing officer positions there, and we can get the number. Deputy Commissioner Blanch might be able to tell the member right now.

**Mr C. Blanch:** We will have those figures for today, but I think in the vein that we are trying to express our position on the policy to look after youth, mental health, family and domestic violence and Aboriginal affairs, we are holding the district superintendents to account on the issues that they may face in their district. We will surge the functional positions. If they have a greater youth crime problem, in the south west as an example, we will increase the functional number of positions for youth policing to rotate more officers in there. The stat of today, or the number of people performing the function of youth policing, may in fact increase in a month or two depending on the youth crime issues. It is very similar to the Regional Shield structure. We are going to surge in places with the functions and put more of those police into those areas, subject to the district issues themselves. Every Monday morning, we hold a senior executive meeting. We talk about the exact issues in each of these districts. If we see a change, that will be the issue for the district superintendent to increase the number of those functions. We can give the member that data as at today, but it may not be the same next week.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** It is a change in operational focus.

**The CHAIR:** Can I clarify: are we providing supplementary information?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** No. On reflection, listening to the answers, I do not think there is much point because it is a shift in the nature of the operational approach, which means that what in the past might have been a relevant number is not so much, because it is more fluid and the police are just adapting to the threat or the task as necessary. I do not know whether that would be worth anything to the member.

**Ms L. METTAM:** In relation to, for example, Busselton Police Station, would the allocation of those officers be coming from the south west district office? Is that why the minister is unable to provide the decision-making information?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** As I understand what the deputy commissioner said, it is more in the nature of how they are tasked at the moment. It is dependent upon the perceived challenge that is confronting a particular district or subdistrict; that will determine the mix of what is allocated. It will change. It may be that youth crime is down, juvenile crime is down, so police allocate other resources or other tasking to people.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to page 413 under “New Initiatives”, the line item “RTTA—2023 Total Solar Eclipse”. How is it different from the existing intersection program under road safety as identified by Main Roads?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I am not sure this is linked to the nature of the member’s question, but for the total solar eclipse approaching next year on 20 April, in anticipation of a significant number of out-of-state visitors, potentially from overseas, there is an allocation from the Road Safety Commission of \$850 000 from the road trauma trust account to promote road safety for visitors travelling to the event. That is what it is specifically for.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** On the Road Safety Commission itself, I refer to page 420, service 4, “Road Safety Commission”, which has the number of employees for the Road Safety Commission. I see that the number of employees is moving from 42 FTE to 52 FTE this year. Is there an explanation about why that is occurring?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I will ask Commissioner Warner to respond.

**Mr A. Warner:** A number of factors are involved in that. One of them relates to an ongoing project for the infringement management reform program, which is a temporary increase in deployment. Referencing the total solar eclipse, we have budgeted for a temporary increase in employment to manage the program of promoting road safety to the visitors to that region. There is another temporary project around a safety camera trial that has a staffing element as well as an operational element. As well as that, we have made a decision to insource some of our education and campaign functions that we have traditionally outsourced. We have rebalanced some of the staffing around that. That adds up to the increase.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** On that same table, on page 420, the cost of services seems to have spiked in 2021–22 for the actual amount compared with the budget. That is \$28 935 000 as opposed to \$35 718 000, and then a fall to \$23 341 000 this year. What is the explanation for those variances and shifts over the period?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I will ask the commissioner to respond.

[6.10 pm]

**Mr A. Warner:** Yes. One of the complexities in the *Budget statements* is that the Road Safety Commission and road trauma trust account, which is a hypothecated account and functionally separate from the Western Australia Police Force, sit administratively within the accountability framework of the Western Australia Police Force. In the accounting of the budget, funding that comes out of the road trauma trust account and flows to Police for functions such as operating safety cameras, mobile cameras, issuing infringements, booze buses, drug breath testing and the like is not in that figure. The overall figure of the road trauma trust account needs to factor back in for this year the \$39 million that has gone to Police.

I can take the member through the overall picture for the road trauma trust account as a whole, because that might be helpful. In terms of expenditure in 2022–23, the planned expenditure is \$118 million. That is an increase of \$20 million over the estimated actual for the current financial year. Although there are ins and outs across the funding profile, the major drivers of that increase include an increase in funding to Main Roads WA to ramp up its metropolitan intersections program. In the early days of COVID, when there was the COVID stimulus, there was a lot of juggling of the Main Roads program. We agreed to go slow on that particular program to give the agency more capacity to be flexible in other elements of its program, so that is the payback on that program. There is also an increase in funding for Police to fund a new police helicopter. We funded the Department of Fire and Emergency Services emergency helicopter in the previous budget. This is a capital item there. And there is an increase in funding associated with the Road Safety Commission for the implementation phase of an infringement reform program, which has been going for a couple of years. That is the increase on the expenditure side. In terms of average expenditure over the last few years, it is above the average of about \$105 million.

The revenue over the past few years has been fairly stable. We anticipated and took precautions in terms of our budget figures for revenue in the early days of COVID, but it has not had the impact that we thought it would so we have increased the revenue estimates in the current budget back to what we think is a long-term trend, and that is reflected in the overall figures.

That is the global position. In terms of unallocated cash, we manage that through the Road Safety Council by keeping a prudential reserve, a float, of about \$10 million that covers some of the revenue and expenditure side risks. That has been negotiated with Treasury. It is our sort of “do not touch” amount to cover risks. Over the forward estimates on the current budget, there is an ability to allocate an additional \$21.4 million over the next four years. We do that on an annual basis. The Road Safety Council considers and tries to adjust to the way the world is turning. For example, we looked at the cost pressures in Main Roads and found those cost pressures still exist and we are funding out of the road trauma trust account an ongoing commitment for the state’s contribution to regional road safety, which has been a huge benefit to road safety outcomes in the regions. On the roads that we have treated, crash

reduction has been significant. Indian Ocean Drive, which was problematic some years ago, has had a significant crash reduction of close to 50 per cent and that is the same for the roads into Toodyay and into Collie, which have had the longest lead time.

There are some risks associated with technology. The infringement reform program, which I have spoken about, is basically a big shift in technology. We think that it is being managed well but we need to keep some room to adjust if things go south there. As I said, we need to have some capability and flexibility to fund new projects in upcoming budgets for which we have not yet received formal requests.

I will outline the overarching numbers and reflect them back to the figures on page 420 of the budget. The starting figure is \$118 million. That is the planned expenditure. If we deduct \$39 million, which is the Police component paid out of the road trauma trust account, we get the \$79 million, which is the highlighted budget figure for total cost of service. The rest of that goes out to various government and non-government agencies, and I can provide those details if required.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I would add to the Road Safety Commissioner's observations by saying that the regional road upgrade program, the road safety program, is far in excess of our road trauma trust account money and will have a dramatic impact on road safety. I think we are talking about \$870 million —

**Mr A. Warner:** There is \$837 million that has been committed so far.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** We are talking about 40 years' worth of road improvements in less than a decade, really. That should result in a step change in outcomes with serious and fatal crashes in the regions. The impact will be potentially as dramatic as the introduction of seatbelts and things of that nature. The agency hopes to achieve that sort of scale of change. That will be really impressive. Most of that program is with Main Roads; it is not ours but there is a contribution from the road trauma trust account. The road trauma trust account is not a bucket of money that sits unspent anymore; it all gets spent. As we heard, there is \$10 million in contingency funding, but the rest of it goes out annually.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I have a question that is almost further to the balance of the road trauma trust account we heard about from the commissioner and that the minister has just spoken about. By my reckoning, that is referred to on page 426 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, as the third line item "Restricted cash (RTTA)" under the heading "Current Assets". It shows a balance at the budget year. I am not sure whether that is for commencement or the end of the year.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** It is at the time of printing probably.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Is it at the time of printing?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Is that what it is? It is at the time of printing so it changes and it will continue.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** We heard that the agency likes to keep a float of about \$10 million in there; is that right?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** That is a Treasury-approved practice.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The \$20 million is planned to be expended throughout the year.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** No. It is \$10 million.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** But there was also mention of a \$20 million expenditure over three or four years; is that right?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** No. In four years' time on current projection there might be \$20 million unallocated.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** That is quite likely to remain the case?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** It is unlikely, actually. What will happen is that I imagine that would diminish as it gets closer because the agency will find reasons to average.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Not according to the forward estimates—but anyway.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** That is right. The forward estimates in four budgets' time is a long way away and there is a lot of activity between now and then.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** That is good. I have another question on what I assume is the road trauma trust account funding. I refer to page 425, the "Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies" table and the line item "Government Organisations" under the heading "Road Safety Initiatives". Can we get a breakdown, maybe as supplementary information, of what that \$48.781 million represents and where it is going?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Is the member looking at the line item "Government Organisations"?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Yes.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Does the member want to know why there is a difference and it is larger than the estimated actual for the previous year?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** No. I would like a breakdown of the road safety initiatives for government organisations and non-government organisations, which are roughly \$48 million and \$3 million.

[6.20 pm]

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I am just trying to add up whether this is it. I will get the commissioner to go through the list of grants and perhaps explain where that money has gone.

**Mr A. Warner:** The \$48 million that the member is referring to is grants to state government agencies that are not the Western Australia Police Force and not the Road Safety Commission. That includes Main Roads, which has in the current financial year \$39 million allocated to its programs. The Department of Transport has a bit over \$5 million allocated to it, and that is principally for the costs of administering traffic infringements, the payment of traffic infringements and the processing of demerit points. There is a little extra in there for a cycling reporting tool that it is still developing, which will be very valuable once we get it. It will be an online reporting tool for people to report cycling incidents. The Department of Education gets \$1.7 million, and that is for a school drug education and road safety awareness program that has been running for some time. Various entities within the Health portfolio, including the Department of Health, the East Metropolitan Health Service and the Mental Health Commission, get about \$2.6 million. That funding is for services such as the alcohol interlock treatment and assessment services provided by the Mental Health Commission as part of the alcohol interlock scheme. The East Metropolitan Health Service runs the State Trauma Registry, which is a very important data collection point for us, but it also runs a program around visiting the trauma wards as part of an education campaign to prevent people carrying out risky behaviours.

Then there are the non-government agencies that get money from the road trauma trust account. The Western Australian Local Government Association has a longstanding community engagement program called RoadWise, which is very effective; that is about \$1.9 million. There is also a little over \$1 million for Injury Matters, an organisation that has for some time provided road trauma support services to victims of road crashes. That has also been very successful. There is that, together with the \$39 million allocated to the Western Australia Police Force for the cost of providing traffic enforcement operations, and the \$27 million allocated to the Road Safety Commission for its traditional functions in terms of policy, research and governance, the education and campaign space, and the temporary projects that I listed earlier. That adds up to the \$118 million.

**Ms L. METTAM:** There was a reference to, I think, the P.A.R.T.Y. program. I understand that was put on pause during the COVID pandemic. Can the minister clarify what is happening with that program now? The commissioner referred to it just then. Can the minister explain the pause on that program and when it resumed?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I will ask the commissioner to answer.

**Mr A. Warner:** I will have to take that on notice to get the specific dates, but there was a pause, as the member said, because of restrictions on access to wards. It is very much a hands-on, visit-the-wards, see-it-first, confronting program, but it is back up and running. The funding for that has been budgeted to increase this financial year, so I expect it to be up and running. I will have to get that data.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** What was the member's question again?

**Ms L. METTAM:** I just wanted to confirm when the P.A.R.T.Y. program resumed after the pause.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I will take that as a supplementary question: on what date did the P.A.R.T.Y. program resume?

**The CHAIR:** The minister will provide the date when the P.A.R.T.Y. program resumed operation under the auspices of the Road Safety Commission.

[*Supplementary Information No A6.*]

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I have raised this with the minister on a number of occasions and I just pricked up my ears because one of the programs that is funded under non-government organisations is the support for trauma program, Injury Matters. I have raised with the minister the Heart Hub South West group in Collie, which is doing a regional-specific program. I wonder whether the minister could explain how it might be able to access non-government organisation funding? Is there an opportunity for it to do that?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Injury Matters is specifically for counselling people who have encountered trauma on the roads. It is a specialist body that delivers that counselling. For instance, the member will be familiar with the horrible crashes in Williams last year that impacted on families there, but the whole community was impacted on as a consequence of their knowledge of and close proximity to the family involved. Police also received counselling via that program. It is a specialist program, but Injury Matters is funded by the Road Safety Commission through the road trauma trust account. It makes recommendations to me, and things of that nature will be put to the Road Safety Commission, and whether it is funded is subject to its deliberations. There are a lot of programs of that nature, but Injury Matters is a very specific counselling service with experienced counsellors who deliver services to people who have encountered trauma on the road. It is not a preventive program or anything of that nature; it is actually a treatment and a response to an incident.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I thank the minister. Heart Hub is also a counselling service for those who have been impacted by road trauma. It is not preventive and it is not just a road safety awareness group. That is part of what it does, but a big proportion of what it is attempting to do is to meet with those who have been impacted by road trauma,

including family members and police. It has good support from the WA police district superintendent for the south west. The difference is that it is regionally based. One of the comments that has been made to me, particularly from someone who has been instrumental in organising Heart Hub who lost one of her own children, is that even travel to and from Perth by car is now traumatic, so having something based locally is useful, and that is what is offered. I guess I am putting it on the record that it is along similar lines to Injury Matters, but it is a regionally based organisation and there must be some opportunity for assistance.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I acknowledge that and I do not dispute that it is a worthy program, but Injury Matters actually goes to the site of the trauma; it does not have people come to it. It was deployed to Williams to deliver its program to people who had been impacted by those crashes. It goes to wherever it is required in the state. That aside, the Road Safety Commission receives proposals from all manner of different organisations and individuals, and that would be an appropriate pathway for Heart Hub to take. That does not mean that it will necessarily be endorsed or funded, but as I said earlier, the money in the road trauma trust account does not sit around; it is mostly spent, and a lot of it has been previously allocated. If possible, the commission would like to do more research funding to determine what initiatives might be undertaken for new innovation, technology or capabilities to reduce the road toll. It would like to have money for that. Unfortunately, a lot of what happens is that a number of programs continue to roll on with annual funding. There is an allocation to Main Roads to support regional roads improvements. There are a lot of other similar allocations prior to the annual deliberations about what else might be funded. It is the body. It is the one to approach because it makes recommendations for that fund and to us.

[6.30 pm]

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to page 416 and paragraph 15 under “Road Safety”. Reference is made about the results of the mobile safety camera trial. This is in relation to mobile phones, I assume, and compliance of mobile phones. My questions are: What is next? Are we looking at more permanent implementation?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** This trial is of road safety cameras. This is new technology. They have similar capabilities to those members have witnessed on the freeway, but they are traffic management cameras. That is why they were fitted and operated. These cameras are mobile and can do point-to-point speed calibration or monitoring. They can also identify whether people are using phones or not wearing seatbelts. They are a road safety camera. They have greater capabilities and they are mobile. The trial will be undertaken in the near future, commencing in July. It will be a short, sharp trial to demonstrate their capability and confirm they can do what we hope they will do. I think they are looking at running the trial within 200 kilometres of Perth. The cameras will provide a whole new opportunity for enforcement or deterrence in regions that have not really been subject to that sort of capability in the past. Nowhere has had that capability but not even that degree of effort because a lot of people on remote country roads have not really worried too much about the likelihood of being caught by a camera of this type.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Will there be infringements?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** There will not be during the trial.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Not during the trial. The trial starts in July —

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** We will socialise it. People will understand that it is underway. We have already done some media on this, announcing it. I hope and we anticipate that it will be a successful trial and then, in the event that we move towards using them operationally, we will have to adjust legislation because the current legislation talks about speed cameras alone, I think. It does not accommodate these other capabilities.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Does the minister anticipate, with the success of the trial, that the cameras may be implemented more permanently along the smart freeway, for example?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** The smart freeway cameras are different. In the event that the trial of the mobile ones is successful, they have a similar capability in what they detect with people breaking the law around the use of seatbelts, phones and speed. If we have to amend legislation to enable the use of the mobile cameras, it would make sense to look at the other cameras. I cannot say; they are not my portfolio. There would be a lot of consideration around whether those ones would be used. They are just traffic management cameras at the moment. We used images from them when we announced the trial but that was because they are cameras with similar capabilities.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Does the minister have any other thoughts on putting cameras in the Northbridge tunnel to prevent hooning in that area, as has been reported?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I might get the Commissioner of Police to answer that one.

**Mr C. Dawson:** The Northbridge tunnel, the member may know, is privately operated but we have negotiated with them for quite a number of years. We are actively enforcing hooning and excessive speed. It is not exclusively done by use with the existing cameras, although we will use them evidentially. As the minister already outlined, they were designed for traffic management purposes. Some of these reckless drivers are stupid enough to incriminate themselves by posting it on social media, so we use that as good evidence as well. We will use basically any tool we can to infringe and charge them.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Thank you. I think it is very dangerous that they would be using a mobile phone while driving. I have one final question for the Road Safety Commissioner on the Road Safety Commission's role for policy and research. I know that the government introduced fairly recently some new regulation around the use of electronic scooters and e-bikes et cetera, but there is a rapid escalation of quite powerful scooters, which are inevitably going to come in. I know that is a statement and I will perhaps get to a question. Is there a place for the Road Safety Commission to look a little bit wider than just regulation about how to bring in a safe system whereby pedestrians, ordinary bike riders, e-riders, e-scooter riders and cars can all get around together with a safer system?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** The observation to make is that that is exactly what the regulations do. Prior to the regulations being enacted, there was no regulation of that category of transport, but people were using them. The issue that the member referred to with high-powered e-scooters or e-rideables was totally unregulated. They were not lawful, but it was happening. It is now set out very clearly. There is a speed limit. There is a power limit. There are size limits. There are regulations on where they can be used. They can be used if a person is travelling under 10 kilometres an hour on a footpath but it is under 25 kilometres an hour on a suburban road that has a speed limit of 50 kilometres an hour. All those things are clear in the regulations and they were not prior to the regulations coming into force.

That did a couple of things. Firstly, it set the ground rules. It was a pretty lawless environment. Now, there is an opportunity to educate people and we are doing it and have been since prior to the regulations being enacted. It is a matter of continuing that process. A lot of people out there were using these things before and they were not doing it in a responsible fashion. Now they are breaking the law if they breach these regulations. It also enables business opportunities, as the member has witnessed in just about all his electorates, that were not available to people prior to that regulation. They could not get insurance when they did not have a regulated environment and now they have one. It is not like the use of high-powered e-scooters or tripping them out so they are faster, or whatever, is a new thing. That was happening before but now people are breaking the law if they are caught doing it. People not wearing helmets are breaking the law. Children under 16 years old should not be on those powerful e-scooters. There is another category of scooter that is okay for children, but the ones the member is referring to should not be used by children under 16 years of age. We have to continue the education effort because that has not necessarily penetrated. I can ask the commissioner to contribute as well. The regulation is based on anticipated national standards. At the road safety ministers meeting that the Minister for Transport attended, not me, they agreed some time ago on potential national standards so we could harmonise in advance. We have set our regulations at what the anticipated national standard will be.

[6.40 pm]

**Mr A. Warner:** I think there is an important distinction to be made between the risks from a road safety perspective in terms of the rideshare operators in the regional areas of Bunbury and Esperance and in the trial in the City of Stirling in Perth and the risk associated with privately owned devices. The rideshare operators are regulated and regulate through their mobile phone app so people cannot ride the devices at an unlawful speed. They may reach speeds of over 25 kilometres an hour if they are being ridden down a steep hill, freewheeling a bit, but it is regulated quite well. The biggest risk for rideshare operators is not wearing a helmet, and the police are on to that, certainly in Stirling.

Compared with the private sector market, most people are doing the right thing. We know that; we can see that. But a small minority of people, as the minister mentioned, actively share ways of how to get past the speed-limiting elements when they are sold so that they can go fast. Similar to the hoons through the Northbridge tunnel, some people are posting on social media extreme examples of passing cars in flowing traffic. We have had some active conversations with the police in state traffic around actively enforcing some of that. The risk that these riders face is that they are effectively unlicensed motor vehicles and under the current rules, those devices can be seized and the owners will not get them back.

**Ms L. METTAM:** How many infringements or seizures have been undertaken since the introduction of e-scooters?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I do not know. I know that they have been seized because I have seen some that have been seized. If I tell the member to ask a supplementary question about infringements, the officers will have a very short time frame in which they can search for that sort of detail. I know that the infringement management system is being upgraded, but it is not great at the moment. It is not necessarily an easy thing to get for the member. I would prefer that the member put that question on notice. It is not that I do not want to give the information to the member, but we are spending time and money and using resources to upgrade the infringement management system for a reason. That might be difficult. We will get the information for the member if she puts the question on notice.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Is there a place where data such as the number of infringements is published regularly? I would have thought that sort of information would be made available.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** No. We are in the process of transforming our infringement management system to a modern system—a digitised data management-type system that would potentially enable that sort of activity. The sooner that is done, the better we will be able to provide all sorts of information for the purposes of these guys trying to

predict where more activity should occur or where more measures to improve road safety might occur. That system would be beneficial. The member has identified what should be the case, but we have legacy systems. They are being improved right now. We are in the middle of a project to lift our capabilities and deliver a much better system. That sort of thing might be something that could be achieved but not right now, because we are talking about combinations of old systems that are very intensive in terms of extracting data.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Typewriters.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Maybe not. It was not that long ago when officers were writing out tickets. We now have an electronic infringement system that enables our traffic cops to scan a licence, fill out the data on an infringement form and do voice to text on the side of the road, which halves the time taken to give someone a ticket. It has removed all the problems that used to be associated with interpreting handwriting, which was not an insignificant challenge. That has transformed that part of the task. This other management system is more comprehensive than that, and that will be shifted into Transport.

**The CHAIR:** I draw members' attention to the time. We have about 15 minutes before this division has to be concluded. Are there any further questions on road safety? Are there any new questions?

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I refer to page 419 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and "Regional and Remote Policing Services". It is a general question relating to my electorate. I am happy to be corrected, but I feel like there is a very regular turnover of district superintendents.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** In Northam?

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Yes, in Northam. It would be interesting to know how often that role is changed.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I refer that question to the deputy commissioner. I am not sure but I am pretty certain that somebody got promoted. That has an impact. I will check. I know my nephew is still out there, so the member has not lost everybody!

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** That is no criticism of the person in the role. They are all very nice people!

**Mr C. Blanch:** I think the member was referring to the fact that a number of actors were in the role until the latest person, who is a substantive superintendent, was appointed. We have only had the two substantives, including the previous one, a couple of actors in the middle while we went through a promotional round, and now that one has been in there for probably a year now and he will see out his term. We normally do about three or four years in each period. There has not been a high turnover. It is just the acting in between while we replaced the last one.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** What is the term?

**Mr C. Blanch:** It is generally three to four years. They change subject to need and their own family circumstances.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** It is a sought after location.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** It is a great place to live, minister.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to page 417 of budget paper No 2 and "Outcomes and Key Effectiveness Indicators". The fourth indicator states —

Percentage of priority one and two incidents in the metropolitan area responded to within 12 minutes

Basically, how will the minister anticipate reaching the target of 80 per cent? The minister knows what I am asking for.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I am sure the member can probably guess why the target might not have been achieved. I will hand over to the deputy commissioner to give the member some reassurance about how things have changed.

**Mr C. Blanch:** The figure as of today is 79.5 per cent. At the start of this year and certainly with the return of the Operation Tide staff and additional recruits coming out of the school for the 950 program, combined with adjustment of rosters to give a greater 24/7 coverage of police on the front line, we have significantly improved our response times to critical incidents. I am pleased to say that it is tracking upwards. I suspect over the next month or two, we will be well over 80 per cent, which we have been reaching on multiple occasions over the last month.

[6.50 pm]

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I have a further question. I am assuming that those key performance indicators are for the metropolitan area. Can I confirm that they are not associated with regional policing? In terms of having to respond within a set time frame, is the best endeavours model used in regional policing, much like we have been talking about with the St John WA contract for ambulances?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Not really, because, in the regions, St John has a lot of volunteers. We do not have volunteer police.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I wish I had lots of volunteers in my patch, minister!

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** They do their job; they are professionals. They are not non-professionals. I will ask the deputy commissioner to comment.

**Mr C. Blanch:** In regional WA, we do not measure grades of service like we do in metro, purely because the tyranny of distance can blow out arrival times, but it is best endeavours. Obviously, within the metro district, we have a higher saturation of police stations and travel times, so we measure our grades of service only in metro areas.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I will get the deputy commissioner to add, but there is a huge amount of effort right now to employ technology and innovations around the use of technology and couple that with delivery of a lot of the similar sort of support that metro police get in the regions to improve all police outcomes. It may be that the deputy commissioner can give a bit of explanation on that. That will change how policing is delivered in the regions.

**Mr C. Blanch:** Thank you. Yes, we currently have a number of initiatives in place. The first is about communication itself. We are trialling satellite capability on some of our remote police cars. We have full use of our OneForce mobile phones, regardless of whether it is in a 4G or 5G location, so we can backhaul it through satellite. The WA Police Force has partnered with industry experts in the mining, oil and gas industry to give us capabilities that mining uses on a regular basis to support its remote capabilities. We will have live streaming body-worn video, live streaming dash cams and an enhanced drone project. We are working with the Civil Aviation Safety Authority on semi-autonomous drones to go up in the air to give police officers situational awareness, and also those who sit in the State Operations Command Centre live vision of the situation that they may be looking at. Although police officers in their human form will be attending in whatever time it takes to get there, soon we hope to have vision from aircraft or other sensors in the environment to have a look eyes-on so that better decisions can be made by attending police officers, regardless of where they are in the state.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** The communications thing is going to mean a significant uplift in the capability of, and support for, our regional police officers. Currently, like all of us when we are driving and go out of the phone range, they lose all the benefit that everybody else in the metro area gets from that digital policing, which gives them access to database, situational awareness, all sorts of intelligence support, and direct links to the State Operations Command Centre. If they can achieve that in the regions, it will change a lot of things.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I have a further question. If that dynamic changes, will the minister start talking about introducing those types of KPIs into the regions?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I do not know. These are state KPIs. They will always be tempered by the fact that we are so big and have remote localities with a sparse population over a third of the continent, so it is a big challenge, but I think that it will improve the support to the police officers on the ground to enable them to deliver a higher level of support for their communities. Who knows—it may be that if there were greater capability, we may have to apply a different measure. I do not know; I think it is something that these guys will have to recommend to people.

**Mr C. Blanch:** Although it is not a KPI that we measure in regional WA, as the executive, we certainly track attendance times in regional WA. There are so many different factors that may affect arrival time, particularly distance, but also many other factors such as numbers of police, which are far lower in regional WA than they are in metro just because of the very nature of distance. But we do track arrival times for critical incidents. That is a discussion that we have internally, again, every Monday with the executive. If that is a factor, we look at how we can alleviate that. It is managed internally; it is just not a KPI.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** I know that right now the police are in the midst of assessing the police air wing potential and planning for the future. Increasingly, all the time, there are new capabilities out there that might be acquired to support regional policing and a more rapid response, potentially via air.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to page 422 of budget paper No 2, volume 2. A question might have been asked about this before. I refer to two line items in particular. One is the sixth line item under land and buildings infrastructure, “Police Station Upgrade Program 2022–24”, and then further down, under “New works”, there is another police station upgrade program for 2024–28. I just want to ask on behalf of the people of Jurien Bay: is there any program for improvements to that particular brick box?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** That is very specific! I might ask Mr Pasquale to respond.

**Mr F. Pasquale:** With the current program, we typically try to plan one year in advance, and then the new works obviously picks up from where the first program that the member talked about leaves off. We have not programmed the works that far out. In terms of what we have programmed at the moment, to my knowledge, there is nothing for Jurien Bay that I can share this evening. That is not to say that it is not in the program and not considered.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I have a further question. While I have the ear of the Minister for Police and the Commissioner of Police for the next couple of weeks before he makes his departure, would it be appropriate to make a parting gesture and allocate some money towards that particular station? I am sure they would probably invite you up for a fishing expedition or something at some point.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** That is an attractive proposition!

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** While I am at it, I just put on the record from the electorate of Moore our thanks for your service, commissioner. We wish you all the very best in your future role.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Thank you, member. That is noted. In fact, the man sitting behind the commissioner is probably the most important with respect to infrastructure matters, anyway, or capital investment and that sort of thing. That is noted, and I am sure the commissioner would appreciate the opportunity to come and visit; regardless of whether he is able to sort it out in the next couple of weeks, I am sure that the local constabulary would welcome the new Governor to their site.

**The CHAIR:** A little bit on the note that was just struck, I want to make a short statement. A statement was made earlier by a member that may have been interpreted as an imputation that the Commissioner of Police had not been honest previously in his evidence. I have sought advice from the Clerk on that matter. The situation struck me as a little unusual, with the commissioner being both a very senior public servant and the incoming Governor. There is no standing order that applies, but the situation is also unusual because, generally speaking, we do not have advisers in the chamber. I want to take this opportunity to remind members to be careful with their choice of words. I am certain that the commissioner has been through much more rough and tumble than happens in this place and so does not need any protection, but I do expect that members treat all advisers with respect moving forward.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Chair, in fairness, I do not think he intended it to be serious. He was in jest.

**The CHAIR:** I think that is right, but I think, Minister for Police, you have made the point many times before that sarcasm and jokes do not show up very well in *Hansard*.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

*Committee adjourned at 6.59 pm*

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