

Chairman; Mr Fran Logan; Dr Steve Thomas; Mr Tom Stephens; Mrs Carol Martin; Mr Shane Hill; Mr Gary Snook; Mr John Castrilli; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Terry Redman

Division 56: Fisheries, \$37 239 000 -

Mrs J. Hughes, Chairman.

Mr F.M. Logan, Minister for Energy representing the Minister for Fisheries.

Mr P.J. Millington, Chief Executive Officer.

Ms P.R. Burrows, Manager, Strategic Planning and Policy.

Mr G. Cridland, Registrar.

Dr W.J. Fletcher, Director, Fisheries Research.

Mr B. Mezzatesta, Director, Corporate Services.

Mr G. Paust, Acting Director, Fisheries Management Services.

The CHAIRMAN: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard staff. The daily proof *Hansard* will be published at 9.00 am tomorrow.

The estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. This is the prime focus of the committee. While there is scope for members to examine many matters, questions need to be clearly related to a page number, item, program, or amount within the volumes. For example, members are free to pursue performance indicators that are included in the budget statements while there remains a clear link between the questions and the estimates. It is the intention of the Chairman to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. For the purpose of following up the provision of this information, I ask the minister to clearly indicate to the committee which supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the committee clerk by 8 June 2007, so that members may read it before the report and third reading stages. If the supplementary information cannot be provided within that time, written advice is required of the day by which the information will be made available. Details in relation to supplementary information have been provided to both members and advisers and, accordingly, I ask the minister to cooperate with those requirements.

I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice with the Clerk's office. Only supplementary information that the minister agrees to provide will be sought by 8 June 2007.

It will also greatly assist Hansard if when referring to the program statements volumes or the consolidated account estimates, members give the page number, item, program, amount in preface to their question.

The CHAIRMAN: The member for Capel.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I apologise. Can the member for Capel and Madam Chair do me a favour, please? I am not the Minister for Fisheries, but I am the responsible minister for the purposes of the lower house. Can I just read a short statement from the minister?

The CHAIRMAN: Sure.

[8.10 pm]

Mr F.M. LOGAN: This is an introductory note to the budget on behalf of Hon Jon Ford, the Minister for Fisheries. The government provision of a total of \$37.239 million for the Department of Fisheries in the budget demonstrates the government's ongoing commitment to conserving the Western Australian marine environment and ensuring the sustainability of the state's fisheries. Funding of \$2.302 million was provided for management of the commercial line fishery or wetline sector in 2006-07. A further \$5.298 million has now been provided in 2007-08 to manage the state's wetline sector and implement the outcomes of the recent review of this fishery. This funding commitment recognises that the fishing pressure from the commercial and recreational fishers targeting inch or finfish stocks is increasing. Recreational fishing boat numbers are also growing rapidly. There is an urgent need to manage these fish stocks to ensure that the harvest is equitably shared and there is no risk to stock sustainability. The Minister for Fisheries, Hon Jon Ford, MLC, has advised me that he expects to announce a decision in response to the recent review of the wetline sector in the next few weeks. The department

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is recognised as a world leader in sustainably managing fish stocks. The other funding in this budget will allow the department to maintain its leadership role and ensure equitable access to the state's fish resources.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: Being from Cockburn, I am sure that the minister has some fishing history in Cockburn Sound, one would hope, for a number of species and for the herring off Swanbourne Beach! I refer the minister to the last dot point under "Major Achievements For 2006-07" and to the fourth dot point under "Major Initiatives For 2007-08" on page 1017. The department released for public comment the draft "Integrated Fisheries Management - Allocation Report" for abalone. What is the latest indication of stock level for green lip and brown lip abalone off the coast of Western Australia? I recognise that the minister will have to pass on this question to one of the advisers. Has there been any decline in the number of green lip or brown lip abalone stock over the past decade?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Good question. I ask Dr Fletcher to answer on my behalf.

Dr W. Fletcher: I refer the house to the department's "State of the Fisheries Report". That is an annual report on the status of all our major stocks, including the green lip and brown lip stocks. A table in the report shows that the number of green lip and brown lip stocks has increased and decreased within various parameters over the past 10 or so years. The recruitment process for abalone is reasonably local. In some areas the stocks can be going okay, in others they can go down and in others still they can go up. It is hard to give a pronouncement for the whole area. Most of our stock assessments are based on small zones. We then make sure that each of the catches that come out of those zones is appropriate.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: There must have been some empirical evidence for why the bag limit would be reduced from 10 abalone per boat to five.

Dr W. Fletcher: That is a slightly different question. I will pass that back to the minister.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: That is not necessarily a research question; it is a policy question.

Mr P. Millington: The member is talking about a sharing issue, which determines the amount people can take, given the available catch. The issue with green lip and brown lip abalone is twofold. They were the subject of a public discussion process in 2003, which led to the current bag and size limits. That public discussion paper flagged two issues, from memory. The first is that the number of recreational fishers in particular is increasing. The second is that it is reasonable to look at what is a fair average catch for an individual on a day. The commercial size of abalone is a certain size and produces a flesh weight of somewhere between 400 and 600 grams. Using that measure, we determined a reasonable amount of abalone that a family can take. The general consensus of the submissions was that it was reasonable to reduce the bag limit from 10 to five. A possession limit was also put in place. The thrust of those provisions is all about sharing. The commercial sector is controlled by a quota, which has not varied much in the past two decades. There is a controlled commercial fishery and a potentially increasing number of recreational fishers. As a result of the discussion process it was agreed that it was best to put a limit on the further take of the recreational sector.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: The season of the take also has been adjusted and reduced in some areas. Is the advertising of the altered bag limits adequate? I stand to be condemned when I admit that I had a recreational licence and have dived off Esperance. I have seen areas stripped completely bare of abalone off the Esperance coast because someone has stripped the undersized abalone and has taken a massive amount more than the legal limit. When people get a licence, which I have done, they receive a brochure that states the bag limits and the seasons. Does that still occur? Is the advertisement of the bag limits and seasons adequate? Therefore, is ignorance of the seasons and the bag limits a reasonable excuse for people who flout those regulations?

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Would that not be a point of order? Is that not asking the advisers for a legal opinion?

The CHAIRMAN: I do not believe that it is a point of order and it will be up to the minister to decide whether to respond.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I can speak from personal knowledge because I have a full fishing licence myself. When I renewed my licence this year, I got a brochure with it.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: It is a very good brochure and the department should be commended for it.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: The brochure sets out the new bag limits. If my memory serves me correctly, the department advertised the new bag limits quite widely in the newspapers and other forums, including on its website.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: I congratulate the department because I think its work is excellent. I have never managed to get my bag limit in all the years that I have had a recreational fishers licence.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: The member just does not know where to go.

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Dr S.C. THOMAS: Perhaps the Kimberley is different. I have never quite reached the bag limit, and I do not have time for it these days.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: It is not an objective; it is a limit!

Dr S.C. THOMAS: I have been very careful about that. Given that the department is generally very good at advertising what it does and that the brochure and the licensing system is also very good, are the penalties sufficient? Shark Bay is a prime example. People at Shark Bay have taken freezers full of fish on a constant basis.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: They are all from the wheatbelt; the member should talk to his colleagues!

Dr S.C. THOMAS: I am not pointing my finger at people from the wheatbelt as opposed to anyone else. People from the wheatbelt might be highly offended by the suggestion that they are greater thieves of fish than anyone else! Are the penalties adequate for people who take more than the legal limit, who take undersized fish or who take fish out of season? Is the penalty significant enough to prevent people from doing exactly what is being done in a number of places? I can provide examples of people who have taken more abalone than they are entitled to take or who have taken undersized abalone or who have taken abalone out of season.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I will defer to Peter. As a policy issue, if I were the minister, I would receive advice from the Department of Fisheries.

Mr P. Millington: The penalties are in two forms. The first is the penalty that a magistrate may exact for an offence, which is a discretionary penalty with an upper limit and a lower limit, and sometimes it is whatever the magistrate determines. Obviously a magistrate uses his discretion to take into account the severity of the offence and the circumstances in question.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: I can give the member an example of someone who took 20 abalone and was fined \$700. Is that a significant enough penalty to make an impact on that person's behaviour?

[8.20 pm]

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I ask Mr Millington to refer to some of the penalties that were recently handed out. I remind Mr Millington of the two or three people who were caught in the marine sanctuary near Rockingham taking fish stocks.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: That was a commercial case.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: No, they were not commercial fishermen. They were taking abalone and other fish out of the marine area out of season and over the bag limit. They received a significant fine. A commercial case was recently concluded, for which a significant fine was also handed down.

Mr P. Millington: Perhaps if I could refer to the second part of the penalties, which is the interesting part. The act mandates a 10-times commercial penalty, whereby the 10-times commercial penalty is exacted either by weight or number depending on the circumstances. The schedules to the act determine what the commercial value will be to which the 10-times multiplication applies. A person could theoretically be fined \$700, but the mandatory penalty might be in the order of thousands of dollars. In that circumstance, the magistrate has no discretion and must apply the mandatory penalty.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: If somebody took seven greenlip abalone over the limit and out of season, what sort of penalty might he expect?

Mr P. Millington: I cannot answer that question in particular. I just know that it would be more than \$1 000. If the member would like some additional information on how the multiples work -

Dr S.C. THOMAS: I think we will find out in a bit.

Mr S.R. HILL: I refer the minister to the second dot point on page 1015 on the state wetline issue, which is a key issue in my electorate. Can the minister provide an update on the progress of the review and tell us whether an announcement is expected soon from the Minister for Fisheries?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I refer the question to Mr Millington.

Mr P. Millington: The wetline review has been a relatively long and drawn-out process. It started with two ministerial advisory panels, one to determine the management plan and the other to determine the access criteria once the management plan had been determined. The initial views of those two panels went out for public comment, as a result of which the minister formed a preliminary view of what the management settings should be. Earlier this year he released his penultimate views on what those management settings would be and invited further comment. That process closed some six weeks ago. I have been in discussion with the minister on what the final position will be. The minister informs me that he will be in a position to make an announcement on the

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management arrangements that he has determined for what is called the wetline sector, which is the fin fish sector of this state, for the Gascoyne and south west regions within the next few weeks.

Mr S.R. HILL: And the mid-west area?

Mr P. Millington: The two areas in question essentially start from the southern boundary of the Ningaloo Marine Park and extend down to Cape Leeuwin, with a dividing area at about the Kalbarri cliffs for the Gascoyne area. The rest is considered the western zone.

Mr S.R. HILL: Is it the intention of the minister to write directly to all the fishermen involved?

Mr P. Millington: The minister intends to inform all 1 500 members of the commercial fishing sector of his final decision either directly himself or indirectly through a departmental letter from me, because the entitlements of all those fishermen will be affected by his decision.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: In terms of the line items in the budget, the appropriation has increased to deal with that issue; that is, if the wetline review means that compensation needs to be paid as a result of the purchase of those licences, money has been allocated to the budget of the Department of Fisheries to deal with that issue.

Mr G. SNOOK: I will continue with the theme started by the member for Geraldton. I have several questions that I would like to pose. I will follow on with the theme of the impact of this decision on a number of fishermen who have fallen through the gaps, so to speak, in terms of the minister's 1997 benchmark line, with there being a period both post and pre that date. The advisory panel recommended that the necessary level for eligibility for unit allocation be 1 000 tonnes in either sector. Why did the minister not take that committee's advice of 1 000 tonnes and instead applied his own level of 2 000 tonnes?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Not being fully conversant with that issue, I will pass the question to Mr Millington.

Mr P. Millington: I cannot speak for the minister, obviously, but I will first make a correction; it is 2 000 kilograms not 2 000 tonnes.

Mr G. SNOOK: I beg your pardon. It has been a long day.

Mr P. Millington: I would love for it to be 2 000 tonnes.

Mr G. SNOOK: No, the industry would be long gone by now if it were.

Mr P. Millington: As a general comment on the way the allocation has worked, there is a very long tail. It is like most things in life; the majority of the catch is taken by a very small percentage of people. There will always have to be a cut-off point. It is where that cut-off point is made on that very long tail that is the question. Making the cut-off 2 000 kilograms instead of 1 000 kilograms affected some people. The other factor that really affected people was whether both a pre-1997 benchmark, which was the advertised benchmark date, and a post-1997 date should be taken into account, or just a pre-1997 date or just a post-1997 date. The major issues on which the minister received public comments in the last round focused not so much on 1 000 kilograms versus 2 000 kilograms but on whether both a pre-1997 and post-1997 benchmark should be taken into account, or whether just one or the other. Anyone who commenced fishing around 1997 has fished for almost 10 years after the benchmark date. Many people said that they had made a considerable investment for the past 10 years and were now dependent on it, and that if it were all to be pre-1997, they would be out of business. Those who started fishing before 1997 say that they have a 20-year history and that the minister is now giving it to the Johnny-come-latelies. The difficulty for the minister has been in determining the balance between the pre and post benchmark date, and what ratio it should be if it is both pre and post-1997. That was the point that excited most comment in the last round, rather than the issue of 1 000 kilograms versus 2 000 kilograms. The key issue and point that the minister made, which I think was in the explanatory notes in the last round, was that wherever he put the line between 1 000 kilograms and 2 000 kilograms, it would disadvantage somebody. He made the determination that he would prefer to make a smaller number of people dependent on it. An amount of 1 000 kilograms of fish is relatively small in a commercial sense.

[8.30 pm]

Mr G. SNOOK: I do not assume that the minister would know the background to this issue, but I make the point that, in effect, this has created a situation in which a number of fishermen are very dependent on their capacity to catch enough fish in that species range to stay viable. Of those that fished long before 1997 on a basis of taking a variety of species, some netted mullet while others fished in deep water for jewfish, snapper etc. It waxed and waned and there was a variation. The point I make is that there will be some genuine cases. I heard the minister mention compensation but I did not pick up whether there is a commitment to compensate those genuine fishermen who will be severely penalised. Probably like the member for Geraldton, I have had fishermen coming to me and begging me to listen because they are in dire straits. They are not lobster fishermen

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who really do not need to go wet fishing - I used to be one, but I never used to catch a lot of wet fish. I had a view that they are in a different category and probably should be able to just catch the bag limit of recreational fishers. That is a personal view. There are genuine wet fishermen who depend entirely on that for their occupation. This will result in a number of them being disenfranchised from their livelihood and their investment. Will the minister give a commitment to take that message back to the Minister for Fisheries on behalf of those fishermen? There are serious cases. I understand the complexity of the issue, as Mr Millington explained. I am fully familiar with that. These fishermen do not want dollars, they want to be able to keep fishing. That is important. If we want Western Australian-caught fresh fish on our tables and in our fish shops, we need to be very careful that we do not rapidly create a situation where we will be dependent on imported fish. I ask the minister to carry a message back to the Minister for Fisheries to give serious consideration to genuinely compensate, not necessarily in dollars but in units available, those who fall into the category of being totally dependent on fishing for their livelihood. There are not many of them. The department will be able to identify them and quantify them.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I will certainly take the message back to the minister. Most of the key people in the Department of Fisheries are sitting all around me and they have heard exactly what the member has had to say and will obviously also raise that with the minister himself. The member should bear in mind why the wetline review is being done: it is because of the pressure on existing fish stocks. It is a question of having fish to catch, regardless of whether those doing so are small fishermen or large fishermen. The view coming out of the review is that basically we have to scale back on the number of commercial fishing licences in order to have a sustainable fishing stock, otherwise we will not have anything. In terms of compensation, I indicated that the minister is aware of what will come out of this and has sought and has been successful in gaining increased funding for his budget to be able to deal with compensation claims that may arise. I think the compensation claims - Mr Millington will be able to correct me - will probably be based on the history of those fishermen's wetline catch and their being able to prove that they will be disadvantaged by removal of their licences.

Mr G. SNOOK: The minister has touched a nerve. I am remaining very calm. My message is, and I think the departmental officers on the other side understand, that we could close down every commercial wet fisherman tomorrow and the industry will still decline.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: That sounds like an old commercial fisherman blaming the recreational fishers.

Mr G. SNOOK: I am not. I take the minister back to the opening comments that he read from the Minister for Fisheries. This is not a blame game; this is the reality if we are to sustain our finfish stocks and demersal fish stocks in this state. There is a necessity - and it was the right move - to reduce commercial fishermen's capacity to take finfish. Many of them are not used and could possibly be used. That is fine. However, the first dot point on page 1011 refers to a holistic and integrated approach to fisheries management. In that case, bearing in mind the minister's comments about the wetline review, why did the minister not take the integrated holistic approach to management of wet fishing in Western Australia, including the recreational sector? I know it is in here and it will follow, but I put it to members that perhaps the Minister for Fisheries - I will not blame the department - broke the first golden rule of fisheries management in selecting the commercial sector for a holistic and integrated approach to fisheries management of demersal fisheries.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I would contest that. I think if the member casts his mind back he will recall that in the previous year the change to the fishing rules and the bag limit for recreational fishing came into effect. I am not the Minister for Fisheries but even I remember that and, as the member will know, that brought an outcry from both sides of this chamber because it reduced the take and the bag limit for recreational fishing. That was the first move: the recreational fishers were first and now we have moved on to the commercial fishing. I would not agree with the member on that point. The first move was against recreational fishing, as it should be given the number of boats that are going onto the water. I am not denying the point the member made that as those recreational boat numbers increase, greater and greater pressure is being put on fish stocks. The statistics show that, but I point out that the Minister for Fisheries at the time, Hon Kim Chance, introduced the new bag limits, and that caused an outcry, as the member will remember, from certain quarters.

Mr G. SNOOK: Courage will be needed on both sides in this matter. I approach this from a very balanced point of view. I will have as many colleagues to convince on my side about the political frailties and dangers of moving down this path. I challenge everybody in this chamber from all sides of politics. I was a fisherman for 30-odd years. If we do not have a fair dinkum balanced approach to this so that the recreational fishermen of the future and the kids can enjoy catching a jewfish, we had better collectively get our act together here. It is not politics and I am not making cheap shots. I am all the way with anybody who wants to have that type of approach. It is a very serious issue.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Mr Millington will probably be able to give a short overview of the pressure on fish stocks.

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Mr P. Millington: In relation to pressure on fish stocks, one has only to look at demography. In the past 10 years the population of the state has gone from, I think, 1.74 million to 2.1 million people. The number of fishing boats, from memory, was about 52,000, but I think the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure said today as part of another announcement that the number of boats is now 85,000, so the number has increased by a third in 10 years. The size of the boats has increased significantly as has the investment in them. Almost everybody has a hand-held global positioning system and a colour echo sounder so they can locate the bottom in the first place, and if it is a good fishing ground they can put the location into the GPS and know where to come back to. All of those things are putting immense pressure on the fishing stocks. As more boat ramps and marinas are built to meet community demand, old sanctuary areas that were limited by the radius of the recreational fishing boats are diminishing along our coast. Some of those matters probably reinforce the views the member already holds about the pressures on the stocks.

Mr G. SNOOK: I commend the minister for his approach. He will get my support and I will endeavour to convince my colleagues.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I thought it was appropriate that Mr Millington go on the record because that is exactly what is happening out there on the waters.

[8.40 pm]

Mr G. SNOOK: The minister does not have to tell me; I saw it.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: I refer to the fourth dot point on page 1012, which refers to foreign fishing incursions in the north of the state. Given that border security is a commonwealth government responsibility, what is meant by developing a program with the commonwealth government to look at protecting fish stock? I am curious because I understand that it is a commonwealth government responsibility under the Constitution, and it seems that the state government has ended up holding the baby again.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I take the member back to last year and to a front page headline in *The West Australian* about the incursion of foreign fishermen into the member's neck of the woods and the north coast, particularly by Indonesian fishermen who were coming down in greater numbers to basically raid the fishery for trochus shells, sea slugs and other delicacies that are sold on the north Asian market. The numbers seemed to be increasing every week, if we believe *The West Australian*. Minister Jon Ford called on the federal government on numerous occasions to take up its responsibility for patrolling that north coast. The failure of the commonwealth government to carry out its duties to protect Western Australian and Australian resources reached crisis point. It ended up with the dismissal of Minister Macdonald, the former federal minister, by the Prime Minister because, I would say, of his incompetence in handling that crisis and his inability to coordinate any defence of Australia's resources, even though the Western Australian minister was more than willing to work with him and was encouraging him to carry out certain actions to protect Australia's northern fish stocks. Ultimately, he was replaced, and the new minister as well as the federal Ministers for Defence and Foreign Affairs have been working with Western Australia. Royal Australian Navy vessels as well as patrol boats have been put in place across northern Australia, particularly out of Darwin. I think patrol boats have been allocated to Karratha, but I am not sure whether they are involved in that area of protection. They regularly go in and out of Broome. That move, along with the increased effort that has been put in place by the Department of Fisheries, has led to a decrease in foreign fishermen off the Western Australian shore. The Department of Fisheries has advised me that there was an increase in the price of fuel in Indonesia, because the subsidy was removed. Therefore, the cost of taking the boats from the islands to deep water off the north coast of Western Australia has assisted in the decrease of foreign fishermen coming into Western Australian waters. Also, the boats that have been detained have been brought to shore and burned rather than turned back. These factors have resulted in a 90 per cent drop off in incursions by foreign fishermen into Western Australian waters.

One of the great outcomes was the negotiations between the minister and the Department of Fisheries with the Bardi people at One Arm Point for the establishment of the marine ranger program. At the height of the crisis the people at One Arm Point were saying that a program needed to be implemented because their own stocks had literally been raided. The Indonesian fishing boats were just on the reef off One Arm Point stealing the Bardi people's stocks.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: I have footage of them being on the actual land. They were hidden in the mangrove.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: It is outrageous that at that stage nothing was done about it. That is why the Bardi people called on the minister and the department to set up the ranger program of which they are part to protect their fish stocks. That program is very successful. Three people work the one boat that is available on a regular basis. Since November, they have carried out 54 patrols in the area and have worked very successfully and to the satisfaction of the Department of Fisheries. Their efforts, along with the federal government's eventual efforts

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and other factors - the rising fuel costs in Indonesia and the burning of the boats - have resulted in the reduction of foreign fishermen.

The CHAIRMAN: We have four divisions to go through and there are a number of members with questions. I remind members to keep questions and answers short so that all the questions that need to be asked can be asked.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: I refer again to the constitutional responsibility of the federal government in regard to, firstly, the protection of industries that are based on Australian soil and, secondly, to border security in terms of quarantine and other issues that affect my electorate. If we had someone come on shore with an animal suffering from foot and mouth disease, we would have all sorts of problems. Given the issues I have raised, will the Minister for Fisheries make further approaches to the federal government about its constitutional responsibility to protect our borders and industries?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I am advised that the Department of Fisheries has been part of a senior officials working group comprising state, territory and commonwealth government officers and that it is tasked with developing a framework for a cooperative approach towards foreign fishing compliance. It can be achieved by all those territory and commonwealth jurisdictions. The Western Australian government is working closely with the commonwealth to ensure that there is an effective and practical solution to the incursions by foreign fishermen. The minister has been calling on the commonwealth for increased penalties. I do not know whether there has been any response to that. Certainly, the minister has asked for the forfeiture of those vessels. Some of what we have asked for has occurred. As I indicated, boats have been burned. Other forms of penalties should be imposed to ensure that the message gets through to both the Indonesian government and the fishermen that it is not appropriate behaviour.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: Will the federal government contribute any more to the program involving the Bardi people? The boat they have is inadequate because only three people, including the fisheries supervisory officer, can be on it at any one time when it is out on patrol. A bigger boat, more training and more people are required. There is a skilled pool of labour there. Will the federal government actually start paying the rent instead of bludging off the state government? It is as simple as that.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I do not think it will, but we will keep complaining.

[8.50 pm]

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: I refer to page 1015, the top line, "Total Cost of Service". The 2007-08 budget estimate is \$33.6 million. The reason for the variation is described as funding for fisheries adjustment in 2006-07 and 2007-08. There was some discussion earlier about compensation. Is it linked to that? Can the minister elaborate on what that means?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I defer to Mr Mezzatesta.

Mr B. Mezzatesta: The numbers that the member is looking at reflect the allocation that the minister was able to win in seeking funding for compensation for the wetline review. There has been an increase between the 2006-07 budget and the 2006-07 estimated actual, because we thought we would have had some of those things in place by 30 June. However, the timing has not quite been right, so most of those things will now occur in 2007-08.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: If it is for compensation, to reduce the fish stocks, how is that compensation calculated?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I defer to Mr Millington.

Mr P. Millington: The Fisheries Adjustment Schemes Act 1987 is the vehicle for most of these considerations. Historically, the committee of advice to the minister on the schemes under that act determines whether there is a market for these licences. Often there is a market. For instance, there is a market for rock lobster pots. For straight fishing boat licences, there is also a market. Therefore, the committee of advice has historically taken into account the tradable value of the basic entitlement. It has usually also taken into account either the fishing history of the class of boat that it is dealing with, or the individual circumstances of the fisher involved. The approach that it takes usually depends upon the fishery. It then applies a net present value analysis to that fishery - as the government would do if it wanted to buy a corner store for a road widening, or something like that - and it tries to make a reasonable offer to the person affected using those criteria. I cannot second-guess what the committee of advice in this circumstance would do. My guess is that it would take a similar line.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: In my area there are some shark fishermen. Will they be covered by this as well?

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Mr P. Millington: To the extent that it will affect their line fishing entitlement, along with the entitlement of a range of other people who have done line fishing on the side, yes, they will be covered. If they have just been fishing full time for shark using nets, they will not necessarily be affected by the wetline review.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: So, their compensation will be calculated under the 1987 act, if it is wetline, on the basis that the minister mentioned earlier. What recourse will those fishers have if they are not happy with that calculation?

Mr P. Millington: For the purposes of the act, it is essentially almost a private treaty arrangement between the minister and the affected fisher. An offer is made. Often a counter offer is then made. Some bargaining may then take place before a final value is reached. Alternatively, the fisher can determine that the level of entitlement is not sufficient, and decide not to take it. To reiterate, the shark fishers will be entitled to an adjustment only for the wetline review part, on the basis of their wetline history. To my knowledge, most shark fishers who are full time do not engage in wetline fishing. The ones who will be caught are the ones who do a bit of wet lining and a bit of net fishing; and their entitlement for the line fishing will go down as a result. Last year, there was an adjustment package for a couple of the net fishers who are based in Bunbury. That was an act of grace payment by the minister for an adjustment to their shark fishing entitlement as a result of quite a severe cutback for the shark fishers in the south west about two years ago. That was made as an act of grace payment rather than under the act.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: So, the bottom line is that, after all the negotiations have been done, if an offer is made by the minister, it is a case of take it or leave it. There is no legal way in which the value can be determined. It is negotiated, and a figure is reached, and it is a case of take it or leave it; that is it.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: That is correct.

Mr G. SNOOK: I have a problem with what Mr Millington has said. The shark fishers who fish south of Perth and whose wetline entitlement is cut can zoom around to Cape Leeuwin and fish in the unmanaged south coast fishery. That causes the south coast fishermen significant grief, particularly because they are now banned from taking dusky or whiskerys in their catch. The minister can see what will happen. That may be done with all good intention. I am not knocking the direction that the department is taking. However, some of those shark fishers have large boats, so it is no problem for them to zoom around to Cape Leeuwin and along the south coast and cause a bit of grief to the Windy Harbour fishermen, for example. I have heard the term subsistence fishermen. They are lifestyle fishermen. However, they depend on that fishery for their livelihood. They are genuinely supplying people in the metropolitan area with fresh fish. They feel threatened by the management program. That causes some significant issues. It also grates a bit when those south coast Windy Harbour fishermen have to throw back the couple of dusky that they may catch on the odd occasion. Because they are not shark fishermen and fish only for wet fish, they cannot help but hook a dusky or a whiskery now and again. That used to help pay for the fuel for their trip backwards and forwards. The minister can see the problem. They feel aggrieved, because they think they are considered to be insignificant. It does not matter whether a person is a bus conductor or a member of Parliament, a person's job is pretty important when it is his livelihood and his choice, and he needs to put food on the table. That point needs to be followed through from the member for Bunbury's comments. What consideration has been given to that anomaly? The south coast fishery is not a managed fishery yet, as I understand it. However, that will happen. The other problem is that prior to putting in place a management regime, the department allowed two additional trawl fishermen from the Albany licensed area to come into that zone.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I defer to Mr Millington.

Mr P. Millington: That is certainly something we are aware of. The member might be aware that late last year, the minister closed access to line fishing in the Pilbara, for the very reason that there was a rush of fishermen to the Pilbara in anticipation of management arrangements being put into place in the Gascoyne. The minister is currently working through a longer term management process for the north coast. As a department, we are aware of the danger that the member is flagging. The issue from Black Point eastwards is probably less of a problem because of the limited number of harbours and the sheer logistics of, and knowledge about, operating on the south coast. The member is quite correct: the area of concern is the Cape Leeuwin corner between Black Point and Cape Leeuwin. We will certainly be keeping an eye on that, in anticipation that there may be some problems. If there are any problems, we will certainly be recommending to the minister that he take similar action to that taken in the Pilbara, which he showed he was willing to do. However, we would be reluctant to pre-empt a proper management process for the south coast if we can afford to proceed in a measured manner.

[9.00 pm]

Chairman; Mr Fran Logan; Dr Steve Thomas; Mr Tom Stephens; Mrs Carol Martin; Mr Shane Hill; Mr Gary Snook; Mr John Castrilli; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Terry Redman

Mr P. PAPALIA: My question relates to page 1021 under the heading “Capital Works Program”. In particular, I refer to the table and the heading “Works in Progress”, under which is the line item “Mandurah Marine Operations Centre”. Could the minister advise us of the progress of that particular project?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I thank the member for his question. I remind people that that is the new marine operations centre that is destined to house the Department of Fisheries, the water police, the Department of Environment and Conservation and the Department of Water. It is a very exciting project, with a total cost of \$9.41 million, as highlighted in the line item. The lead agency for the construction of that facility is the Department of Fisheries.

Mr B. Mezzatesta: We have all the drawings ready to go. The tender has gone out. It was in the newspaper this week. We expect a very prompt commencement of the construction of that facility.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Will it be built this year?

Mr B. Mezzatesta: I imagine it will commence within the next three to six months and it should be finished within 12 months after that.

Mr G. SNOOK: I draw the minister’s attention to the first dot point on page 1012 relating to aquaculture. Noting all the discussion and general agreeance that we have had here this evening that is generally pervading further out into the community regarding the pressure on wild fish stocks and what the future holds for the commercial and recreational sectors and noting the extreme pressures that have been brought to bear on wild fish stocks here in WA and elsewhere, what is the government doing to expand, assist and promote research and development of aquaculture in WA?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I thank the member for his question. A significant amount of effort has been put into aquaculture over the years. The aquaculture working group, chaired by Mr Mick Murray, carried out a review. There has been an aquaculture R&D audit, an opportunity identification project and a site identification and vesting project for the purposes of trying to find sites where approvals processes can be put in place prior to the establishment of any aquaculture operation, effectively like an industry park. All the various requirements covering planning, heritage and the environment are completed and sites are identified. All those issues have been addressed. Expressions of interest are then put out for people to establish aquaculture industries. That is one of the key objectives that the Department of Fisheries has been aiming at over the years because of the difficulty that aquaculture faces, particularly if it is ranch-style aquaculture or aquaculture in particular bays along the coast. When sites have been identified and nominated for development, there is an immediate outcry by environmentalists, other fisher people, boat users and the general public or local people who use that area opposing any aquaculture project. The objective taken by the Department of Fisheries is to identify the appropriate site, the quality of water and access and relationship to infrastructure and then try to undertake all the regulatory approvals processes before encouraging people to set up an aquaculture operation. That is one of the areas.

The department has been working on aquaculture research and development for many years with a whole species of marine life. A whole series of issues are associated with the future of aquaculture. They are no different now from what they were a few years ago. They primarily come down to the capital cost of establishment, along with raising the capital in the first place for what are usually very small operations, fuel costs, labour costs and material costs. There are issues associated with the return one gets on one’s investment, particularly if the operation involves fin-type fish as opposed to abalone, which command a higher price. They are the issues that aquaculture always faces, whether it is shore-based aquaculture or inland aquaculture, which is even more expensive. Mr Millington and I were talking about this earlier. I virtually asked Mr Millington the same question as the member about the future of aquaculture. Mr Millington indicates that possibly the future of aquaculture relates to the identification and approval of those parks, but also offshore, deepwater aquaculture in special pens is another way of overcoming environmental issues. Again, cost pressures are involved in undertaking those ventures. I will ask Mr Millington to add to that.

Mr P. Millington: I do not have much more to add except to say that we are hoping to get one of the world’s specialists on deepwater offshore aquaculture to come to Western Australia in the latter half of this year. He runs a very successful project out of the University of New Hampshire. We hope to get his advice on how we could do open ocean aquaculture on our high energy coast. We do not have these planning pressures further offshore whereas other people want the near-shore environment. There are many advantages to being in deeper water because of the issues of bottom turbulence and better dispersal of waste, if any, because there is often none, coming from an aquaculture venture. It is fair to say that any high value product such as abalone is likely to be on the littoral, in other words, the ocean shore interface, because of issues of theft and security. I suspect that there is a great future for finfish, in particular for human consumption, in these open ocean aquaculture systems.

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[Mr A.P. O’Gorman took the chair.]

Mr G. SNOOK: I liken aquaculture in today’s stage as probably like new land farming in the 1950s where probably the first trier goes broke, the second one comes in and tidies it up and nearly makes a go of it, the third one finally succeeds and the fourth one says, “Thanks very much, Dad,” sells the lot and goes to Perth. That is generally how it works in farming. I have a suspicion that that is where aquaculture is at now in this developmental stage. There are some exciting opportunities, particularly if a clever person comes and co-designs deep offshore aquaculture with energy production. How many of these aquaculture sites that the minister spoke of have been identified?

[9.10 pm]

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Mr Millington, is that as a result of the site identification project?

Mr P. Millington: The site identification project is in the scoping phase at the moment. The department has obviously had an interesting and chequered history in site identification. As a few of the members know, there were issues in Esperance, where we tried this approach some 10 years ago. We have learnt from that so we are trying to go through a scoping phase first to make sure we do it in an open and transparent manner so that people do not think we have a hidden agenda. We want to go through it in a measured sense, so we are spending a lot of time on design and some basic criteria before we start to engage the relevant communities. The minister mentioned some of them: whether there is an adjacent port, what the infrastructure is like in that port, the distance people have to travel from that port and the energy rating of the nearby coastline. We have a series of criteria for that. We have done some preliminary identification, but I would hate to put the project into a cleft stick by mentioning anything before the report has come out. I am more than happy to privately brief the member about some of the possibilities if he wants.

Mr G. SNOOK: I accept the answer, thank you.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: This is just a short contribution. I refer to the first dot point under “Major Initiatives For 2007-08” on page 1019 of the *Budget Statements*, which reads -

Complete a project to identify suitable sites to secure them for future industrial scale aquaculture development in the State.

Does the department administer what is called the “yabby line” down the Albany Highway?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Yes.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Has there been any recent discussion about the appropriateness of the yabby line, given that there are a number of potential aquaculture developments which may occur to the west of the line but which are presently precluded from doing so?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I will pass that question on to Mr Millington.

Mr P. Millington: Yes, like any line, there are always discussions about where it should be. The Albany Highway was chosen as a suitable line about 15 years ago. For those members who do not know, yabbies are introduced; they are endemic to eastern Australia but have been introduced into Western Australia. Unfortunately, they compete rather successfully with our native marron, gilgies etc. Yabbies have been mostly found in farm dams on the wheatbelt, and when we put in the line, most of the yabbies we could identify were to the east of the line. To stop the spread of what is a feral animal, we felt that it was appropriate that if a farming activity were to occur, it should be east of the line. Members may recall that in the late 1980s, there was significant distress in the rural communities, and yabbies were a useful line of money on the table for some farming families. We were quite happy to encourage yabby farming east of the yabby line. What is happening, of course, is what I call the “feral translocator”, which has now come forward and has been busily making sure that they artificially propagate them west of the yabby line. Therefore, we have a fait accompli in which these animals are west of the line and people want to develop them to the west. The aquaculture group is looking at that again to see whether we can shift the line. The trouble is that once we shift the line, in a decade or so, there will be a further push to move it further west, and we will, by government fiat, be encouraging the spread of a feral animal. That is the cleft stick we are caught in. It is an ongoing debate between the department and the aquaculture community. There is no right answer, I am afraid. We just have to adapt with the times. I am sorry that I cannot answer in more precise terms.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Are there any studies to assess just how far it has gone in recent times? Mr Millington is quite right; the yabbies are going to move whether a line exists or not. Is there some sort of assessment of where the front is?

Mr P. Millington: Perhaps I could pass the question on to Mr Paust, whose area this is, or was.

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Mr G. Paust: I do not think there has been a formal recent assessment of the spread of yabbies. However, I am aware that the yabbies have moved to the west of the yabby line. We have always been concerned, as I recollect was the Department of Environmental Protection when it existed, about the potential impact of the yabbies on the native species. More recently, we are concerned because we found thelohania in the yabbies, particularly to the north and east of the line. Thelohania is a disease of yabbies that causes white muscle disease, if my memory serves me correctly. We certainly do not want to see the animals move too far into the area. However, it is a conundrum because it is very difficult to eradicate those yabbies once they move into those areas. Therefore, in an attempt to protect marron stocks in particular, the strategy is to not encourage them to the west of the line, and to dissuade people from moving them further.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: I refer to the first dot point on page 1016 of the *Budget Statements*, which reads -

Commence a major research project into the sustainability of blue swimmer crabs on the West Coast.

That is under service 1, which is commercial fisheries and the same dot point is included on page 1017 as a major initiative for 2007-08 under service 2, which is recreational fisheries. Is the department commencing a major research project because there are some serious concerns about the sustainability of that fishery, or is it part of an ongoing overall strategic plan that the department has for the different species of fisheries? Can the minister tell me if there are major concerns, apart from the obvious?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I certainly know that in my area there is very strong concern about the future of blue swimmer crabs, particularly in Cockburn Sound. The blue swimmer crab fishery there has been closed indefinitely, because of concern about the decline of that particular species stock. I will defer to Dr Fletcher to discuss other areas of blue swimmer crabs.

Dr W. Fletcher: I guess that because of what is happening in Cockburn Sound, the project is a precautionary measure to look at what is happening in the other crab stocks to see if similar types of patterns are found, and whether they are affected in a different way or not at all. It is a precautionary measure rather than just waiting to see if something actually happens and then following up afterwards as a post-mortem. The short answer is that it is a precautionary assessment.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: Thanks for the answer. I just wanted to make sure that what is happening in Cockburn Sound is not replicated down the coast. I assume that because they are listed as initiatives under the recreational and commercial fisheries services that - in terms of the discussion we had previously about the balance between commercial and recreational fishing - there will be some fairly major consideration given to the equity basis for those two sectors. I assume that the intention is to do the study, but that if any action is to be taken after that, there would be due consideration given to the equity between the two sectors.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Yes, that is right. Hopefully there will not be, but should there be any indication that there is a similar type of pressure on other blue swimmer stocks, such as in Mandurah and Geographe Bay, obviously recommendations about the fishery would again be made. I do not know whether the action would be similar to that taken in Cockburn Sound, with a complete closure, but certainly there would be a reduction in take.

[9.20 pm]

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: It might be that it is a unique location.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I do not go searching for crabs in Cockburn Sound but from the evidence I have heard from people who go to catch crabs in Cockburn Sound, there is none left. It can be understood why that fishery has been closed. I hope that that is not replicated in the two areas I have just talked about. If it is, obviously the Department of Fisheries will make recommendations to the minister, after full consultation. That is normally what happens and that is what occurred in the wetline review. The minister will then make a decision about it. I am sure the minister will take into consideration - I will ask Dr Fletcher - the balance between the commercial and the recreational stock catch.

Dr W. Fletcher: One of the critical elements that will be measured is another survey of the recreational catch in the Peel-Harvey area. Therefore, an assessment will need to be made of what level of catch is being taken by commercial and recreational fishers. We will then have the data to enable recommendations to be made and for the consultation to occur.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: That study will commence in 2007-08. When is it anticipated to be completed?

Dr W. Fletcher: Some elements of it will take a number of years and others will be known within the first year. We will start the recreational survey later this year when the crab season begins. Some elements will be monitored for a couple of years to see whether an occurrence in one year is replicated in other years. We will get some information quickly and some other information will be gathered over the next two or three years.

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Mr G. SNOOK: I refer to the third dot point on page 1012 of the *Budget Statements* which states that the department has developed successful collaboration arrangements with other agencies. I direct my question across the range of possible areas. In what range of areas has the department developed collaborative arrangements with various other departments? I am focusing on a matter that has been dear to my heart for 30-odd years - since I was first on the water. In those days, I would see pull into Jurien Bay, for example, four different agencies' vessels: the Australian Customs Service, the water police, the Department of Fisheries and the then Department of Transport. It was a good party that night, I can tell members!

Mr F.M. LOGAN: It was the Western Australian navy!

Mr G. SNOOK: It was. The Royal Australian Navy was the only boat missing. I direct my question across the range of areas - it is a genuine question - in which cost-saving arrangements are being developed and the functions are being made more efficient. The common element for water users, whether they are commercial fishers, recreational fishers or a range of other people who use the water, is water. Water users come under the control of a range of different agencies. How far down the track are we of having the ideal situation whereby one patrol boat is multiskilled and crewed by qualified people who can handle the range of roles of those four agencies, excluding the police? I refer in particular to water safety, licences, compliance, fisheries and other things. How far down the track are we with that?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I thank the member for the question. During the final period when I was a Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Fisheries, I know that the Department for Planning and Infrastructure was in close negotiations with the Department of Conservation and Land Management, as it was then known, with regard to bringing together like minds and sharing equipment and responsibilities across both jurisdictions. Mr Millington, how has that fared with regard to your relationship with those agencies?

Mr P. Millington: As a result of the machinery of government reforms some five years ago, the department assumed responsibility for marine safety in the metropolitan area other than the Swan River. About 19 full-time equivalents, plus their budget, were transferred from the Department for Planning and Infrastructure to deliver that service. Another part of the change was that the entire boat fleet from the Department for Planning and Infrastructure was transferred to the control of the Department of Fisheries. A considerable boat rationalisation took place. From memory, the total number of boats decreased from 90 to about 60 and the saving on capital was about \$3.5 million. The current arrangement in the regions is that the Department for Planning and Infrastructure officers are responsible for marine safety and now use the boats that are operated by the Department of Fisheries to undertake any task for which they are needed. Department for Planning and Infrastructure officers either crew the vessel themselves on a turnkey operation or they crew it with members of the Department of Fisheries. Although the Department of Fisheries is not directly responsible for marine safety in the regions, all the officers of the department are certified under the appropriate act. If they undertake a boat inspection, they will, as a matter of routine, conduct a basic safety check of life jackets, flares etc to ensure that there is only one contact.

We cooperate quite closely also with the police service. Obviously it retains its own three or four vessels because its mandate is not natural resource protection; it deals with crime on the water. However, there is considerable cooperation between the department and the police. We have a number of memoranda of understanding with the police regarding intelligence exchange and cross-training. We have recently undergone an extensive training program for essentially honorary fisheries officers, with members of other departments, most of whom are from the Department of Environment and Conservation. We help some 30 of them to police fisheries rules in marine parks. We have also undertaken a similar program for rangers employed by the Water Corporation. Members may have seen a recent announcement of people who were prosecuted for marron fishing in a water supply dam. That was done at the instigation of the relevant Water Corporation rangers. We cooperate with other federal agencies. We administer the fisheries for the Indian Ocean territory for the Department of Transport and Regional Services under a memorandum of understanding the state government has with the commonwealth. We are also employed to provide services for the commonwealth Department of the Environment and Water Resources for its own offshore marine parks because that department has no infrastructure to get to the areas of marine park that are commonwealth waters off our coast. Finally, would members believe, the department has the sole inspectors in Geraldton, other than the one or two in the museum, under the Historic Shipwrecks Act, who look after the estate that is represented by the *Batavia* wreck and the forts etc on the Abrolhos Islands. That is just a selection; I could go on for longer. I am trying to impress upon members that the department is a major service agency that survives only by collaboration. They are just some examples of what we do.

Mr G. SNOOK: I have always been an ardent supporter of the Department of Fisheries retaining its autonomy. Under previous governments of various colours there was always a threat that because the department was relatively small, it would be gobbled up by CALM as it was then known and other agencies. I am pleased that

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the Department of Fisheries is the lead agency. I am not talking about it getting bigger, but it is the lead agent. With regard to the building of new vessels, \$1.4 million has been allocated for the replacement of *The McLachlan*. Is there a cost-sharing arrangement or will that cost be fully carried by this agency?

[9.30 pm]

Mr B. Mezzatesta: Any allocation in our budget would be for a vessel that we would run and maintain. Where we provide services to any other organisation, particularly a commonwealth one, it would provide funding back to us.

Mr G. SNOOK: Is it the government's policy or plan to consider amalgamating service areas and resource management in the marine sector, of the range outlined by Mr Millington, into one agency?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: It is not an area with which I am absolutely au fait. I am obviously not the minister responsible for that area. In terms of the work that has already been outlined by Mr Millington, that came about as a result of government policy, to which Mr Millington has already referred. I am not too sure about the relationship between the Department of Environment and Conservation and the Department of Fisheries, which is a further rationalisation. I will defer to Mr Millington. I am sure that he has had those conversations.

Mr P. Millington: Again, as a result of government policy, I have a quarterly meeting with the chief executive officer of the Department of Environment and Conservation specifically to discuss mutual issues to do with the management of marine parks; the protection of protected, endangered and threatened marine species; and service delivery for compliance in marine parks. The dialogue is going extremely well. The cross-training is a result of those measures. The reason that the Department of Environment and Conservation still has its own boat fleet is essentially that its boats are of such a small scale. The returns to government from any further amalgamation are just not there, because that department's boats are normally in the five-metre range. If any serious logistical work needs to be undertaken by the Department of Environment and Conservation, in effect we become the uplifters and carriers of its officers. For instance, in Shark Bay, if Department of Environment and Conservation officers have to go to Dorre Island or somewhere like that, it is often a Department of Fisheries vessel that takes them there, supplies them and comes back again.

Mr G. SNOOK: Does the department receive an interagency offset credit for that or is it just a love job?

Mr P. Millington: It is just an expectation. As part of the additional funding provided to the department to undertake compliance work in the marine park, it is assumed that we will give that level of service.

The CHAIRMAN: Before I give the member for Stirling the call, I note that it is 9.30 pm. There is less than 30 minutes left. We still have divisions 57, 58 and 59 on the Kimberley, Pilbara and Gascoyne Development Commissions to deal with. I make members aware of that.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I refer to service 4, "Management and Conservation of Fish and Fish Habitat". Among other things, that section refers to different strategies and regulations to manage fish stocks. I am specifically interested in the recent decision to change the snapper size limit in Wilson Inlet. What was the basis for that decision, scientific or otherwise, and what level of consultation was undertaken with local fishers?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Who would like to answer that question? Dr Fletcher?

Mr P. Millington: Dr Fletcher can talk about the biology and then I can talk about the management.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: The bag limit applies across the board, does it not?

Mr P. Millington: The question was about the size limit.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I ask Dr Fletcher to talk about the biology involved.

Dr W. Fletcher: The size limit for snapper in Wilson Inlet was historically different. The trouble with snapper is that its biology is different in every location in which it lives. There are difficulties associated with setting general size limits that relate to when snapper reach sexual maturity and other elements based on local conditions. To be honest, I cannot remember the specific reason for the different size limit in Wilson Inlet. There are differences between areas. That was historically the case. I will pass the question back to Mr Millington to provide the rationale for that, because I do not have the details.

Mr P. Millington: I am unfortunately showing my age compared with my colleague behind me. The reason for the size limit of 28 centimetres was that that was a reasonable table size for snapper from Wilson Inlet, and they could start to be caught in the nets that were deployed at the time. It has never been a target species for the commercial fishermen there; it was often caught as part of the wider catch. If I can intrude into Dr Fletcher's territory, juvenile snapper come into Wilson's Inlet, the bar closes, they are trapped and they grow. If the bar does not break for a few years, they grow to quite a large size and are taken. They never reached 41 centimetres,

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which was generally accepted to be the size at which about 50 per cent of snapper became sexually mature. That deals with that side of the coin. As part of the south coast management review that I referred to earlier, there was considerable community pressure to increase the size from 28 centimetres to the statewide size of 41 centimetres. As members might guess, a 28-centimetre fish coming out of one area can cause some delicate compliance issues. For example, if those fish are sold at a fish shop somewhere else, questions could be asked about where it came from. It has never been a popular measure with our compliance people. As a result of that review, the minister at the time decided not to increase the size limit, even though there was overwhelming opinion to do so. However, as a result of additional approaches made to him by many people in the local community and by recreational anglers in the area, he determined to increase the size limit to 41 centimetres, which is the same size as everywhere else. The degree to which he consulted with commercial fishermen is not something of which I am aware, but they were certainly aware of the fact that there was overwhelming opinion that the size limit should go to 41 centimetres.

Mr G. SNOOK: I refer to the third dot point on page 1016. I have to ask a question about rock lobster. The future management of rock lobster is an issue that has obviously been around for a long time. The debate has concerned whether to continue with input controls in the industry or to change to a quota system. Has the Rock Lobster Industry Advisory Committee advised the minister of its preference to retain input controls or to move towards output controls such as quotas?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Given the technical nature of that question, I will pass it to Mr Millington.

Mr P. Millington: The Rock Lobster Industry Advisory Committee has certainly considered the matter. It took on board an industry referendum that was held by the peak industry body, which is the Western Rock Lobster Council. From memory, the result of the referendum was something like 80 per cent against going to a quota system. From memory, the advice from the committee has gone to the minister. As the member would appreciate, it being a ministerial advisory committee, I am not able to provide that advice. I understand that the minister is now forming his view. He certainly also received advice directly from the peak industry body on the results of the referendum. I have no doubt that he will make his views known soon. Even if he decides in favour of output controls, which I guess is not likely given industry sentiment, the earliest they would be in place would be some two seasons hence.

Mr G. SNOOK: Does the department have a position on this proposal?

Mr P. Millington: We have tried to distance ourselves from providing advice on what is preferable. For the past two years we have been trying to tell people what are the costs and benefits of each approach. Essentially, we are not talking about a biological or sustainability argument but an equity argument. Historically, especially from my position, I have preferred those equity arguments to take place among the affected people rather than me trying to make a determination that I would then recommend to the minister. There are pros and cons for both. We tried to put in place research measures almost a decade and a half ago, which means that if we flip quickly to an output or quota system, we will be in a position to provide sustainability advice to the minister. I think my colleague Dr Fletcher would be fairly confident that he can give good, sound advice if we ever want to go to a quota system.

[9.40 pm]

Mr G. SNOOK: What is the government's policy on management of the rock lobster industry in relation to this issue?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I would not be able to give the member an answer at all, unfortunately, because I am not the minister. The member can ask for that as supplementary information. I do not have that information in front of me.

Mr G. SNOOK: Is there a way I could obtain an answer?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Yes, by asking the minister himself, either by a question on notice or as supplementary information here today.

Mr G. SNOOK: Mr Chairman, is that a supplementary?

The CHAIRMAN: I do not think that is a supplementary. It would be better to put it on notice.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Put it as a question on notice. The member will get the information anyway. What is driving the minister and all governments, regardless of their colour, is sustainability of the fish stock. I do not know how it relates to the equity issue.

Mr G. SNOOK: I will be an interested observer from outside and not within the industry, which will perhaps be more comfortable.

Extract from *Hansard*

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Chairman; Mr Fran Logan; Dr Steve Thomas; Mr Tom Stephens; Mrs Carol Martin; Mr Shane Hill; Mr Gary Snook; Mr John Castrilli; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Terry Redman

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Does the member still have a rock lobster licence?

Mr G. SNOOK: No.

The CHAIRMAN: Members, I am conscious of the time. We still have three divisions to go through.

The appropriation was recommended.