

Chairman; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Terry Redman; Mr Tom Stephens; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Tony Simpson; Ms
Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Murray Cowper

Division 64: Agriculture and Food, \$176 085 000 —

Mr M.W. Sutherland, Chairman.

Mr D.T. Redman, Minister for Agriculture and Food.

Mr R. Delane, Director General.

Mr G. Wilson, Acting Assistant Director, Business Services.

Mr S.A. Mitchell, Chief of Staff, Office of the Minister for Agriculture and Food.

Mr S. Helm, Policy Officer, Office of the Minister for Agriculture and Food.

Mr I.D. Rotheram, Senior Policy Advisor, Forestry, Natural Resource Management, Office of the Minister for Agriculture and Food.

The CHAIRMAN: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard staff, and 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. Although 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 chairman's intention 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 Friday, 11 June 2010 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 Friday, 11 June 2010.

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

I now ask the minister to introduce his advisers to the committee.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIRMAN: Member for Collie–Preston.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I refer to the significant reduction in funding for land management under "Service Summary" on page 788 of the *Budget Statements*. What is the reason for the reduction in funding? What impact will that have on the staff? Which services will be cut in the metropolitan and regional offices? How many staff will be reduced and in which offices?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I take it that the member's first question regarding land management makes the distinction between the 2010–11 budget estimate of \$98 million —

Mr M.P. MURRAY: It has dropped down.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: It is \$98.3 million.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Which services will be cut because of the reduction in funding and how many jobs will be lost from the land management area? I understand that quite a few jobs will be lost, from reading other parts of the budget, because of the reduction in funding.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I make the general point that there has been an overall increase of some \$12 million in the budget for the Department of Agriculture and Food compared with last year. The net result has been an increase in the ag budget. Some of the reasons for that are outlined in the budget papers. The member is referring

Chairman; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Terry Redman; Mr Tom Stephens; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Tony Simpson; Ms
Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Murray Cowper

specifically to the land management segment. It is fairly complex and difficult to break up the agency around the member's question on land management, as distinct from all the other —

Mr M.P. MURRAY: If the minister can say that, how can it be budgeted that way? If it is very complex to break it up but the government has done that for the budget, why can the minister not break it down to that level?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I will ask the director general to respond specifically to the land management component. It is public knowledge that there will be some redundancies across the agency. There is no question about that and it is stated on the previous page of the forward estimates. The agency is going through, under my direction, a renewal process. The net result will be an anticipated drop in staff numbers of about 150 over the next couple of years. The change in direction to revitalise, modernise and to set some very strategic directions for the agency through either industry development plans or the shifting priorities for the agency, which I have previously highlighted to the member, does a couple of things. It gives us flexibility in resourcing and allows us to renew the skills set within the agency to respond to the industry's needs. I am not in a position to directly answer that question. The director general might specifically talk about the land management component, which the member is talking about, and the staff reduction in that component. I would have thought that that would be challenging.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: The issue is that people are concerned about their jobs. That is a real issue. They do not know where they are going. Which areas will suffer job losses and how many will there be?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: It is a voluntary redundancy program. No-one is being forced to lose his job or being forced to be made redundant as a product of me telling them that they will lose their job. It is a voluntary redundancy program. Offers will be made to the staff in areas that do not support the new directions of the agency through this modernisation process. Because the process is voluntary, the offer can be made but we do not know who will take it up and where they will come from. I do not know the answer to whether they will come from either the regional or metropolitan areas because we do not know who will take up the voluntary redundancy program.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: If all the people in the metropolitan area said that they wanted to be made redundant, the minister would say no to some of them. The minister must have targeted numbers in different areas. I find it difficult to believe that the minister says that he cannot define any of those areas. If all the people in Albany said that they were taking the redundancy, I assume that the minister would say that a couple of people would need to remain. Maybe he would not. Surely there are targeted figures for each independent group.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: The member is quite right. Targeted redundancies try to target areas that either are not a priority or are not a part of the modernisation process in terms of shifting the agency to where we want it to be. We offer redundancies to areas that do not have the skills set to match the new direction of the agency. Some people in that area might choose to not take up the redundancy. Again, although there is some understanding about where those voluntary redundancies will be targeted, the member's question was about where they will come from. The answer is that we do not know because it is a voluntary program and we do not know who will or will not take it up.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Are there targets for each area across the department? That is the question I want answered, so that people will have some idea.

[5.10 pm]

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I will ask the director general to make some comments. We do have some idea of the country-metropolitan split in terms of percentages. But, again, I highlight that we do not know where these people are going to come from, because we put redundancy in front of people as a voluntary option, and we do not know who is going to take it up.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: If no-one volunteers, the agency will stay as is?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: If no-one volunteers, we will have a challenge to meet our commitment of renewal within the agency.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Could the minister expand on the word "challenge"?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: We have some challenges in meeting our financial commitments and the harvesting that is happening right across government agencies. The Department of Agriculture and Food is not exempt from that. We genuinely want to centre the agency as an economic development agency and go through a modernisation process to respond to the needs of industry. That is a process that we are working through now. We have set directions. We have set priorities. We have set industry development plans in place to respond to that. Now we are being strategic about how we do that. The member is talking about the next step. I do not think the member would question anything I have talked about there.

Chairman; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Terry Redman; Mr Tom Stephens; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Tony Simpson; Ms
Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Murray Cowper

Mr M.P. MURRAY: We probably should leave that question at this stage, because the minister has not answered the first one. We have not had any indication of where those numbers are going to come from, which is the very basis of the question.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I will ask the director general to reflect on the detail that we do have.

Mr R. Delane: We have been working through a detailed priority setting process for some months now, dealing with financial issues in the department, some of which have accumulated over some years, and some of which are direct results of more recent budget decisions. As the minister has indicated, we have an operational target to reduce the organisation by around 150 positions so that it will be on a sound financial footing and will have the flexibility and responsiveness necessary to deliver on government and industry targets. The organisation operates on a project basis. There are several hundred projects. So that is the logical unit that we work to within directorates and programs. So it is not possible for me to go to the figures on page 788 and give the member the numbers within that particular breakdown. We report to Parliament on that basis, but that is not the way we manage the department.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I certainly do want to get that as supplementary information.

Mr R. Delane: At the end of the redundancy process, we could reconstruct it on that basis. What I can do now is give the member an indication—which we have given very openly to the staff and to their representatives—of how we have been working through a detailed priority setting process against a whole set of criteria. We have also been working with the managers concerned, with specialist input from economists and policy officers, against that set of criteria. That has then been brought to the executive table, it has been collated, and it has been sent back for further work. That has enabled us to come up with a targeted list of projects for termination, for reduction or for redirection. That then leads, of course, to the focus on the individuals. We have a large number of individuals who have done fantastic work to date but are now in projects that are a lower priority, or have done fantastic work to date and now we will need to change direction and we will need different skill sets. When we put all that together, we have about 150 positions that we will need to reduce the department by. For about 30 of those positions—the number is uncertain—there will be a change later in the year when we roll into shared services on 14 October, and about 20 have already gone, so we are dealing with about 100 employees right now. In broad terms, about 40 of those come from natural resource management and biosecurity. There would be a rough breakdown of about half in each of those areas. I do not have the exact breakdown. That would be the closest match that I can get to the figures that the member started with. We are working that through with staff now. We are communicating with more than 100 staff, because there are some projects that are targeted where, for example, the project might be reduced in half, and there are six people in that project who are doing exactly the same sort of work and have the same sorts of skill sets. We need to make the opportunity available to each of those employees for reassignment to other funded work in the department; for redeployment elsewhere in the public service—in which, for many of our scientific staff, there will be limited opportunity, because of their particular skill sets—or for voluntary severance. As the minister has highlighted, it is entirely voluntary. No-one will be leaving the department involuntarily.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: At this stage, I must add.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: These are voluntary redundancies. As I understand it, there is no mechanism for anything other than voluntary redundancies. This is about the agency modernising itself. I take it that the member is supportive of going through a process such as that, because it has not happened for a long, long time, and it is important that the agency deliver a service to industry. Primarily, the charter of the agency is not to employ people. It is to deliver a service to industry. We are setting it up to do exactly that.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: An amount of \$7 million has been identified in there.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Yes, for voluntary redundancies.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: There is no expenditure the following year.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: No expenditure the following year on what?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Is it intended in this 12-month period that that money will be totally expended to make sure that those people are gone?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Can the member say that again?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Is it intended that that \$7 million will be totally utilised to make sure that the minister gets his numbers, whether they are pushed out the door or whether it is voluntary—because, as I have said, there is no forward estimate if that is not achieved and more money is needed?

Chairman; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Terry Redman; Mr Tom Stephens; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Tony Simpson; Ms
Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Murray Cowper

Mr D.T. REDMAN: The resources that have been appropriated to the agency from the consolidated fund are there for a voluntary redundancy program. We are working through that program as a process of renewal and modernisation in the agency. Because it is voluntary, by its very nature we do not know who is going to take it up and who is not. Therefore, it is a bit speculative to say whether that money is going to be spent or not.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I am sorry for going on about this, but the issue for these people is that if the numbers are not reached—there is \$7 million in the budget for that purpose—will it then become forced redundancies?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I have given no indication, and nor has the government, that there are going to be any forced redundancies. It is a voluntary redundancy program. It says so in the budget papers.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: The question is: if the minister does not achieve those numbers, will the agency then be forced? I ask that because the adviser's words were along the lines of "These are the minister's numbers".

Mr D.T. REDMAN: The answer is no. There is no intention to force redundancies. It is a voluntary redundancy program. It is a process of renewal. People are being dealt with in a very professional way. We are being strategic about what the agency is trying to achieve through a modernisation process. We are trying to set up the agency to better deliver a service to industry. That is our target.

Mr F.A. ALBAN: I refer to budget paper 2, volume 3, page 789, under the heading "Significant Issues Impacting the Agency". The first dot point makes reference to the department's plans to improve the profitability and competitiveness of the state's agriculture and food industries. Can the minister explain how this budget will help achieve that aim?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I thank the member for the question and for his interest. I am describing this budget in terms of agriculture as one of modernisation and renewal.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: I wonder if the questioner could tell us what he is referring to.

Mr F.A. ALBAN: Page 789, the first dot point.

The CHAIRMAN: I think we heard the second dot point.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Yes. The member did say the second dot point. He has now changed his dot points.

Mr F.A. ALBAN: No. I said the first dot point.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: No, he did not. He said the second dot point.

The CHAIRMAN: Anyway, we now know where it is.

Mr F.A. ALBAN: I said budget paper 2, volume 3, page 789, the first dot point. We can ask Hansard, can we not?

[5.20 pm]

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: I will get the tape for the member and the video replay, if necessary.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I will take the question. I am sure the member for Collie–Preston will recall responding to questions in this place last year during budget estimates when we talked about setting some priorities for the agency and working through a range of industry development plans to set directions to be strategic about the agency delivering something to the industry. I have already touched on part of that renewal process of meeting some of our financial commitments to Treasury as well as being responsive and flexible to industry's needs. Part of it is about the voluntary redundancies we have put up. That will achieve a couple of things. It will allow us to change the skills set to meet the needs of the agency and particularly the industry going forward, and being responsive to that. It also allows us to have a greater cash component to be flexible enough to respond to industry. It is not all about putting dollars into staff; it is also about putting dollars into research and a range of other areas and being responsive. If the agency is too laden with staff we will lose flexibility in responding to industry's needs, and that is also part of this renewal process. There is certainly a range of exciting projects that form part of this process. I am sure we will get the chance to talk about a number of them this evening. The export grains research centre at Murdoch University has a strong focus on grains and I am sure it will draw a lot of research and development fire and hopefully bring a bit of horsepower into that area in Western Australia. Likewise, the New Crops for New Climate Environments project, one of the new initiatives in this budget, responds on the technology front to ensure that Western Australia is well placed in the grains section, which is a significant contributor to agriculture and the economy in Western Australia. Other initiatives that I have already mentioned include the Bridging the Yield Gap project, which again responds to industry's needs.

The other point raised by the member for Collie–Preston—or it might have been a dorothy dixer from our side—was about the department's information management system. It is in the Dark Ages, quite frankly, and another of

Chairman; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Terry Redman; Mr Tom Stephens; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Tony Simpson; Ms
Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Murray Cowper

the significant projects in this budget is to modernise the system, to ensure that it actually responds to industry's needs and that we can use and manage information in such a way as to ensure that the agency is efficient and makes a difference to the sector.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Following on from the questions from the member for Collie–Preston, I ask the minister how he can shape the direction of —

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Is there a reference point?

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: The reference point is the first line of figures on page 787.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: The first line of figures?

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: “Item 103 Net amount appropriated to deliver services”. The minister said that he is looking at voluntary redundancies. If he cannot decide where in the agency those —

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Can I just ask what the member is referring to in the *Budget Statements*?

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I am following on from the member for Collie–Preston's questions.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Page 787, “Item 103”.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: The minister can also refer to the item “Land Management” on page 788. Either way, we are talking about the issue of voluntary redundancies and the budgetary impacts that they have. The minister wants to shape the direction of the agency, but he is leaving open to chance exactly where those voluntary redundancies will occur. How will he shape the activities of the agency if he does not know where those staff redundancies will come from?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: The response I gave to the member for Collie–Preston about where they are coming from is that we cannot be accurate about it until we have been through the process.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Exactly, so the minister cannot shape the direction of the agency.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: We cannot be clear on the geographical component of it, but we can be clear on a project basis. As the director general mentioned, there are hundreds of projects within the agency targeting and setting up new directions, and as part of being responsive to industry's needs and responding to what industry identifies high priorities should be, we need to shift resource. We are working through that process and yes, we can identify areas to which we can apply targeted redundancies on the basis that the skills that are there are not needed in the changed process, or that the budget is laden with full-time equivalent staff and does not have any cash flexibility. That is also a challenge. The three per cent efficiency dividend that has been applied to all agencies is something that the Labor Party put up going into the last election, so it is not something that is entirely foreign to the other side of politics. We have to respond to that, and when budgets are cut, the hardest part to cut is staff. There needs to be an incentive to do that. The voluntary redundancy program is an incentive to give us a cash component that we can respond to with new initiatives, either with new skills sets and/or cash components to respond to industry's needs. Yes, it is targeted, and yes, we are responding to what industry is putting to us as its priorities and where we need to apply our services to make a difference in the sector and in responding to ministerial priorities.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: The minister could have scenarios where voluntary redundancies mean that he has a shortage of staff in, say, the Geraldton office, working on a particular program, but he has an excess of staff in the Albany office. Will he be displacing people from one office to another and forcing staff to move, perhaps against their wishes?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: We will be dealing with all staff in a professional and courteous manner. That is how we tackle these sorts of issues.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: In my industry that is a common way of saying take it or leave it.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: No, it is a targeted voluntary redundancy. It is a voluntary process. If people choose to take it up, they can. We are targeting certain programs in response to the directions that we are taking. I do not think I can be any more clear about that. We do not know the take-up on that. Of course there will be internal adjustments and maybe even geographic adjustments, but again, we will not just tell someone that we are going to shift them from one place to another; there is a process that all agencies and directors-general work through in managing their staff complements.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: I refer to division 64. Scattered between page 787 and page 798 there are references to a wide variety of programs that are to be undertaken by the minister's agencies in 2010–11.

Chairman; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Terry Redman; Mr Tom Stephens; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Tony Simpson; Ms
Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Murray Cowper

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Can the member be more specific about the programs he is referring to? He has given us about five or six pages.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: That is correct, yes. The minister has a wonderful range of programs. Are there programs that the minister would like to have added to this list that do not appear in these pages?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: There are always programs that ministers, directors-general and agencies would like to run in response to industry's needs.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Would the minister like to identify any of them?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: No, I will not name them, but we are always chasing resources. The member would have been a minister at one stage; one can always use resources to add to the programs to deliver more to industry.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Did the minister seek any additional resources from Treasury for any programs that are not there?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: As the member can imagine, a budget for which there is a necessity to meet a three per cent efficiency dividend is not a strong environment for trying to pick up new programs. At the bottom of page 787, however, there are a number of new initiatives for which we have been successful in making a case to get resources in response to the modernisation and renewal process in the agency. Again, we are targeting areas that we believe will make a difference to the sector. We are making sure that we set up an agency that is efficient and effective in delivering a service to an industry that is worth a significant amount to the Western Australian economy.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Why is it, then, that on page 792 there is reference to funds that have been secured from the royalties for regions fund in 2010–11 for the state barrier fence? On page 791 there is an indication that there is \$300 000 in royalties for regions funds for community initiatives. Why are those two items alone funded by royalties for regions?

[5.30 pm]

Mr D.T. REDMAN: What two items, member for Pilbara? I think there is only one item.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: No, there are two here.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: There is one about the wild dogs issue.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Yes. For some reason or other, here at page 792 reference is made to the royalties for regions program for the state barrier fence for wild dogs. I do not know why it is in this portfolio when the rest of the program for the state barrier fence is in the APB funding. Is there some explanation why core funding for the Agriculture Protection Board is in the next section, but royalties for regions funding for the state barrier fence is in this section?

Mr R. Delane: The decision was made a long time ago, originally in 1995 and several times since, to roll the APB's operations, assets and ultimately all of its functions into the Department of Agriculture and Food. The department now manages all of the former APB assets, including all of the operational work for the state barrier fence, so it is entirely appropriate that any additional funding for the barrier fence appear in the department's budget.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Why in this budget paper are the royalties for regions funds referred to in division 64 and the Treasury's funds in division 65? Why have they been spread between two agencies?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: The royalties for regions funds, where they are resources that have been deployed to a project that goes to a particular agency, go through that agency.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Why is the state barrier fence being managed by two agencies, APB and the Department of Agriculture and Food?

Mr R. Delane: Let me clarify: whilst the APB still has some regulatory responsibility in relation to the declaration of pests, the actual management of the state barrier fence and all of the APB's operations for some time now have been carried out by the Department of Agriculture and Food. I think that over some years now there has been some duplication in the parliamentary estimates process because of the survival of the APB. If the member goes back through the records, they will show that duplication because of the APB's oversight of the department's operations.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Further to that, the minister seems to be aware of royalties for regions funding only for that state barrier fence in his portfolio, but on page 797 on the fourth line, royalties for regions funds also fund some regional community services. What is that about?

Chairman; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Terry Redman; Mr Tom Stephens; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Tony Simpson; Ms
Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Murray Cowper

Mr D.T. REDMAN: The member is quite right.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Therefore, does that mean the minister was wrong earlier when he told the house there was only one lot?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: The budget papers reflect, as I understand, projects that are \$1 million and over and therefore there is another fund that is going to Wheatbelt men's health, which is not itemised as that in here. In fact, an announcement has not been made publicly yet. I am assuming that the community services referred to on page 797 relate to Wheatbelt men's health.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: It is given as footnote (b) at the bottom.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: The regional services fund, yes.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Is this the long way of saying that you were wrong earlier?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: If I said one, then the member is quite right because there are two. When the member referred to budget papers, I did not think that the budget papers reflected a second royalties for regions fund or project. It did, under a footnote for regional community services, which is a fund that is going to support and expand Wheatbelt men's health which has traditionally been run through the Department of Agriculture and Food and will, in fact, be funded from the department of ag up until the end of this current financial year, and royalties for regions will pick up that post this financial year and expand the program. It is a very successful program. I do not know if the member for Pilbara has met Julian Krieg, who has been one of the key players for that. That is what is funded, and it goes through the department of ag's budget. The other royalties for regions project was the response to the wild dog issue, both on upgrading the state barrier fence to being dog proof and filling up a couple of holes—the Yilgarn gap and the Esperance gap—and also employing another eight doggers to assist in reducing the numbers. I apologise to the member in terms of the number of royalties for regions projects in this budget. I believe there are two.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Further to that, minister, in the pre-election climate and in all the claims that have been made by the National Party in reference to the royalties for regions program and in the earlier hearings before the estimates committee, your colleague, the Leader of the National Party, has said that the royalties for regions program is to be additional funding over and above the normal expenditure of government. The minister has just indicated that one of the funding items is for a program that was previously inside the ag department's budget and now is to be picked up out of royalties for regions; and, secondly, the administration of state barrier fence, which is scattered between two budget items—this division and the next division—but part of that is now to be funded from the royalties for regions program. Which is the truth? Is it just simply that the government grabs projects willy-nilly and re-badges them with a royalties for regions label or is it, in fact, new and additional funds over and above the normal core services of government?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I will make a couple of points. The member is asking me to say whether this is over and above or whether it is a substitution for. In terms of Wheatbelt men's health, during the member's time in government that was end-dated in the department of ag; it came under the Rural Business Development Corporation, and in essence was a carry-over of funds, as I understand, from the drought relief and drought response issues.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: That was in the forward estimates, was it?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: If the member goes back to the budget papers, they will identify that that had an end-date. That has been a very successful project that we have sought through the royalties for regions funds to support beyond what the member's government committed to —

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: In the forward estimates?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: — in terms of supporting Wheatbelt men's health issues in regional Western Australia. I might also add that on top of that the program is going to be expanded to go beyond Wheatbelt men's health—in fact, to be expanded further across regional Western Australia, which again goes beyond what the last government committed to. I might add that on the second point the member raised about the state barrier fence, under his government's eight years that state barrier fence had two significant holes and his government did not give those communities any resources to be able either to match their funds to do it —

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: It is a normal responsibility of government, is it not?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: It is a commitment that this government gave to deal with the wild dog issue in the pastoral areas of Western Australia. As a member coming from pastoral areas, I am sure the member for Pilbara would be fully well versed on this issue and —

Chairman; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Terry Redman; Mr Tom Stephens; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Tony Simpson; Ms Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Murray Cowper

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Why just pick out these two items? Of all the things you have to do in your portfolio, why is it only these two initiatives?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: The question that the member for Pilbara asked is whether these resources are in addition to what the former government committed to, and the answer is yes. This government is responding to challenges, not only around mental health, but around the dire state of —

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: The state barrier fence is a normal responsibility of government.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: — the wild dog issue in regional Western Australia. The shadow Minister for Agriculture and Food has raised this on a number of occasions through the media. He is being very quiet here because he knows it was under-funded —

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: The minister has treated the royalties for regions fund as a magic pudding out of which he pulls funds for those things his party gives priority to. There are a whole range of things the minister has told the committee that he would like to do, but he has not asked for and that have not been funded.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I take it from the member's comment that he does not believe that mental health issues in —

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: I am trying to get to the truth —

Mr D.T. REDMAN: — regional Western Australia are significant enough to support and, clearly, the member does not believe that —

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: No, we are trying to —

Mr D.T. REDMAN: — dealing with the wild dog issue in pastoral areas of Western Australia is an important issue in prioritising state government investment.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: I refer the minister to the fourth dot point on page 789, which refers to the department progressing a whole-of-government natural resource plan. Could the minister outline how that plan is progressing?

[5.40 pm]

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Being from a rural area, I am sure the member will have a strong appreciation of what is important in the agricultural community and what we need to respond to when dealing with those challenges. Clearly, natural resource management is a critical issue. I might highlight right at the outset that a range of agencies make a contribution to natural resource management outcomes, not the least of which is the Department of Environment and Conservation and the Department of Water, and even local government in a very peripheral way makes a strong contribution in that segment. We have an opportunity, the Department of Agriculture and Food being the lead agency, to have specific NRM funds, which are highlighted in this budget, which we can deploy to try to leverage other resources and to leverage community natural resource management. A range of people out there are making huge contributions at a very local level. We can use the resources that we have in the state budget to leverage that. However, they are not big; they are always a little limiting. We can always spend more money on natural resource management. Hence, we have chosen to put together a plan in the form of a government strategy for managing and using Western Australia's land, water and ecosystems and to put that out for draft comment. That is out for comment now. I put it to the chairs of the regional NRM groups a couple of weeks ago, and I am looking for feedback from them before the end of June. It is our attempt to be targeted and strategic about where those investments are made, but taking every opportunity to leverage and be a catalyst for investment that might come from the farming community or just simply local communities in general and/or the range of regional groups that are out there that can make a contribution to natural resource management.

I have endeavoured to make the plan robust and succinct as a draft strategy. I have seen blocks of papers that thicken. I am sure the member has seen them as well, where document after document gives strategic directions, investment plans and a whole heap of analysis about where things should happen. I want something about this thick that gives a very clear indication of what we see as important and of this state government's priorities for those investments. That plan is set to do exactly that. It is out for comment. I am hoping to get that comment back soon so that it can be tweaked.

The CHAIRMAN: We have two divisions between 5.00 and 6.00 pm; one is division 64 and one is division 65. Members must decide whether they want to move onto the next division or keep going.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I have further questions to ask in this area and, as has happened in previous procedures, it is unfortunate for the divisions if they get pushed to the end, but they can be carried over the dinner break.

The CHAIRMAN: Yes.

Chairman; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Terry Redman; Mr Tom Stephens; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Tony Simpson; Ms
Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Murray Cowper

Mr D.T. REDMAN: If I may make a comment. I take it that divisions 64, 65 and 66 simply finish at 8.30 pm, which means that we can go beyond the break and that members could make the call on when they wanted to move onto those other divisions.

The CHAIRMAN: I misread it. Anyway, we will carry on. Next is the member for Gosnells.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Referring to page 789, under “Outcomes and Key Effectiveness Indicators”, some data is presented in percentage terms. I am seeking information on what those percentages refer to. It seems that some sort of survey has been conducted. I am particularly interested to know how the results from this set of indicators relate to expenditure in the department. For example, there is 52 per cent for “Land conservation management — tree/shrub planting”, which is a poor rating, but then when that is equated with land management in the forward estimates in the next financial year funding declines. How does the minister explain the background to these percentages and how does he justify, where there is a poor rating, not matching that with an increase in funding in a particular area?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I will respond just before I ask Graham Wilson to respond on how these figures are put together. The member is targeting the 52 per cent under the 2010–11 budget target. He is really asking the question of whether that is a drop in conjunction with a commensurate drop of resources in that section, whereas the estimated actual for 2009–10 is 51 per cent. I take it that the argument is around current budget resourcing not matching up to what those changes are. But I will ask Graham Wilson to talk about the compilation of those figures and how they are put together.

Mr G. Wilson: Just to give some background on these measures, every year we conduct a survey of producers across the state. We ask a select number of questions about sustainable, good land management practices. Those questions relate to the type of work the agency is actually focused on at the time. Because the Auditor General requires us to have trend data over a period of many years, we do not have a lot of flexibility about asking questions on new practices and better practices. The 52 per cent that the member is referring to is considered a good measure, in a best practice sense, across Australia, because 52 per cent of those producers would be adopting those sorts of practices. But our funding would be focusing on some of the other ones where, for example, there are higher percentages, because we believe they are more meaningful to sustainable practices than some of those, such as water on sloping land. If we want to change the measures, we have to change them in the sense that we need a period of at least three years to show trend data. We have actually changed some of those measures to reflect some new, better practices, but we cannot report on those until we have trend data, which is a three-year time horizon. Those unfortunately are the restrictions by which we are bound by the Auditor General.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I thank the adviser for the information, but I am still concerned that there is a serious drop off in the rating for that land conservation and management item. In 2008–09 it was at 72 per cent. Now it seems that the department is happy for that to go down to 52 per cent. I again ask why we would be accepting that and how we can accept that the funding for that area should be dropping off as well?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: As I understand it, and I will get the director general to intervene if he thinks I am on the wrong path here, it is our assessment of where industry is at in its take-up of those land management practices. That includes where we think we can make a difference as an agency. If these were looked at as indicators, we could use them as a very broad brush approach to where we might respond when deploying resources. The attempt here is to have over a long term a bit of a longitudinal assessment of industry take-up and adoption of sustainable practices in a range of areas.

Mr R. Delane: If I may just add some comments. The Department of Agriculture and Food does not plant the trees. Landholders are planting the trees. We use this as a measure of where we believe we can influence a land management practice. Clearly, our influence will be only one of a large number, including seasonal and financial conditions that are prevailing for landholders. I think the member will appreciate that the economic conditions for many producers and landholders in Western Australia at the moment are not particularly favourable. That has a large influence on whether we think there will be an increase in the percentage of producers and landholders who are planting trees. It may be entirely appropriate for us to reduce resources applied to that area; so that we are actually efficiently applying them, we might apply them to another area at the time. This is our assessment of what we think will happen. We then appropriately target our projects regionally or in fact in total quantum.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I thank Mr Delane for that explanation. Perhaps I could ask and the answer could be provided by way of supplementary information: with the outcomes and key effectiveness indicators, there could be some direct equating of those figures and that survey data with the service summary at the bottom of page 788. Would it make sense to do that?

Chairman; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Terry Redman; Mr Tom Stephens; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Tony Simpson; Ms
Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Murray Cowper

Mr R. Delane: I think we can provide some information that showed the areas from which the projects and programs came together to make up the land management figures and those that we expect to directly contribute to those indicators.

[5.50 pm]

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Can the minister present supplementary information that will make that direct comparison possible?

Mr R. Delane: I believe we can, but I will just confirm with Mr Wilson that that is a practical thing for us to do.

Mr G. Wilson: Yes, we can. We used to do that many years ago in the budget papers when we had output measures. Unfortunately, the way that output measures were governed was that the total cost of the service had to be reflected in measures of output. We ended up with measures about how many publications we produced and how many training courses we had, which did not really mean a heck of a lot. We can provide additional information, but it is going to be around farmer forums, publications and those sorts of things. Whether there is a lot of meaning in it for the member is —

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I would not ask for anything as detailed as that. I simply ask that the numbers 1 to 5 be put against the programs that have been surveyed as indicated in the table at the bottom of page 788, so that the comparison is nice and clear.

Mr R. Delane: Certainly, member, we can provide some information that I think will be explanatory. I do not think it will be a beautifully engineered comparison, but I think it will be quite informative. What I do anticipate is that next year we will be able to do that a lot better. We have established a new project information system that will enable us to draw together that sort of information much more routinely and, hopefully, it will be routinely available other than just through the budget papers.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Is the member happy with that as supplementary information?

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Yes.

[*Supplementary Information No B20.*]

Mr G. Wilson: Just in reference to the member's question, all of those measures in outcome 1 relate to item 1, "Land Management", on page 788. Land management is related specifically to that outcome. The funds that are available for land management are reflected against those measures.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Where do I find the survey satisfaction figures for, say, market development?

Mr G. Wilson: We do not do surveys for market development.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: For production system solutions?

Mr G. Wilson: No. We have a different set of measures, which are reflected on the various pages of the budget papers. One of the outcomes on page 790 is an innovative and adaptive production sector, which is about profitability, and there are different measures under that outcome. The member will see the same thing for the competitive food and agricultural industries outcome. The one that I think the member is referring to with market development is the increased value of domestic and international trade; that relates to market development. These outcomes correlate to the services on that page.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Does the member still have a desire for supplementary information?

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Indeed; that will be very useful.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Can the member ask me exactly what he wants and then we can see whether we can do that?

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I would like by way of supplementary information the outcomes and key effectiveness indicators measured against the expenditure amounts within the land management budget. In the coming financial year, we have \$98.2 million. I would like to see where that money will be spent across each of these performance indicators. It seems like a reasonable way of seeing how effective the expenditure is.

Mr R. Delane: There will be some significant cross-referencing. I am not sure that it will all be able to be easily managed in a spreadsheet. We will provide an information set that I think will be quite informative and see whether that meets the member's needs.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: It will certainly be my endeavour to get a response to the member. I do not want to have hundreds of man-hours spent on doing something that either will not be worthwhile to the member or is a poor deployment of resources in the agency.

Chairman; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Terry Redman; Mr Tom Stephens; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Tony Simpson; Ms
Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Murray Cowper

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I think it is reasonable to see how \$98 million is being expended against each of those key performance indicators.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I refer to the third dot point on page 789. Given that the Premier has described the forward estimates as never-never land, thereby implying that the forward estimates are not worth two bob anymore—coming from the Premier, I am quite surprised by that—will the minister give an absolute commitment, so that it is in *Hansard*, that the \$21.5 million will be allocated to delivering the regional saleyards strategy and that the Katanning and Boyanup saleyards will be replaced and the Mt Barker facility —

Mr D.T. REDMAN: This is not on page 789, is it?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Yes, the third dot point on page 789. It refers to the Muchea saleyards.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: This is definitely page 789?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Yes.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: It looks as though I have the wrong page number.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: The minister does not have another set of false figures, does he?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: The member should know better than that! I have the wrong number at the top of the page. I understand what the member is talking about. We have in the budget papers a commitment for \$21.5 million, which was the Liberal Party commitment in the election campaign.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: As the forward estimates are no longer relevant according to the Premier, I am asking the minister for a personal commitment to the replacement of the Katanning and Boyanup saleyards and the upgrade of the Mt Barker facilities.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: There are two issues in the member's comment. The first is about forward estimates. I think the Premier made the distinction between the Treasury figures that went into the *Budget Statements* and what has been endorsed by the cabinet Economic and Expenditure Reform Committee. This is a figure of \$21.5 million. The answer in short is that I cannot give a commitment that all those funds will go to those saleyards. What I can give a commitment to, however, is that we will deliver on the regional saleyards strategy.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: That is quite different from the question that I am asking. I am asking for those communities to have some direction. The minister is now saying that that is not so; it could be any one under that strategy.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I am saying that I am committed to delivering the regional saleyards strategy for the agricultural industry in Western Australia, which strategy provides for a replacement for Katanning, a replacement for Boyanup and an upgrade to Mt Barker. I am committed to that. The member was in Parliament the other day when I responded to his question about where we are heading with the state saleyards strategy. A business case has been put to Treasury, and I think it is now back with us to make a decision on setting a direction for how we are going to deliver on that strategy. The member is asking me to commit \$21.5 million to something that I have not made a final decision on how we are going to deliver. The commitment I am giving—I would be happy if the member were to reinforce it through the media—is to deliver on the regional saleyards strategy for the farming community of Western Australia.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Again, the strategy is just a piece of paper. I am asking about the rollout.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: The member is asking me to commit to a number. I cannot commit to a number because I do not know how much it is going to cost.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: On that rollout, the red meat precinct group —

Mr D.T. REDMAN: The Red Meat Action Group?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: The red meat precinct group has been touted for in the back of Boyanup.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Is the member talking about an industry group?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Government funding has been given to that group to do up a plan. It has a very good plan and it has now rolled into another area. What I am asking is: will that group be considered in the overall plan for the saleyards precinct?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: If we are to locate a new set of saleyards in the south west, I think it would be smart for those saleyards to be co-located with other industries that are synergistic to it—that is, a potential site for an abattoir, a potential site for a tannery or potential sites for a range of industries that centre around the cattle industry.

Chairman; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Terry Redman; Mr Tom Stephens; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Tony Simpson; Ms
Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Murray Cowper

Mr M.P. MURRAY: With all due respect, I think the minister has done huge damage to a saleyards with a tannery next to Boyanup, but that is another story. The commitment is that the minister will look at the red meat precinct along with the saleyards precinct?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I think the member and I are talking at cross-purposes. There is the Red Meat Action Group, which is an industry group that operates under its own steam. The agency is also doing work on precincts, and precincts go well beyond just the south west precinct. There is a whole range of challenges in industry processing precincts and food processing precincts in Western Australia, so that has a slightly broader brief. I think the member would understand that it would be smart to set up an environment that encourages investment in facilities that are synergistic to a set of saleyards.

Meeting suspended from 6.00 to 7.00 pm

The CHAIRMAN: I understand that we are on Agriculture and Food. We will start where we left off before the dinner break.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: My question relates to the sixth dot point on page 789, which refers to the Biosecurity and Agricultural Management Act 2007. This is a long-awaited act, delayed while some regulations are being completed. Can the minister give us a deadline for when these regulations will be completed so that this important legislation can come into effect?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Thank you for the question. The member is quite right. The easy part was passing the act, which went through Parliament in 2007. As the member will know, we still have an Agriculture Protection Board and a range of regulations that will take some time to implement. I cannot give a deadline for all the regulations. I will say that we are committed to getting the regulations that relate to industry funding schemes in place by the end of June. There are effectively three industry funding schemes that relate to grains, seeds and hay; cattle; and sheep and goats. They are the three that will be in place for industry if it chooses, so that it can raise resources and funds to enable it to respond to biosecurity matters. I am sure the member will be aware that the sheep and goat industry funding scheme will capture footrot. The grain seeds and hay industry funding schemes will capture the skeleton weed program, which currently comes under the Agriculture and Related Resources Protection Act 1976. No particular project comes under the cattle industry funding scheme that will roll into it but it will administer the cattle industry compensation fund for biosecurity purposes. That is the area to which we have given priority. Industry is very aware of that; in fact, we have reached the point of putting the necessary committees in place to support that time line.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: The absence of a deadline for this work is of concern. How much is that due to the fact that the minister cannot guarantee staffing to complete the important task of drafting these regulations?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: The member will be aware this act was passed in October 2007. When I came in as minister with the change of government in August 2008, very little work had been done in this area. We gave priority to the ones I have just highlighted. There is a lot of work to be done. I might get the director general to comment on the extent of that work and the detail that needs to be done in consultation with industry. It is something I want to get right. We have to ensure that industry is involved with it all the way along.

Mr R. Delane: This is not a question about the quantum of biosecurity staff; it is about having the right staff working through this complex task. It is fair to say that it has turned out to be more complex than most of us had hoped to make sure we get it right and that it works in a modern way for rapidly changing sectors. We need the right staff on board and to complete the consultation with industry. One of the things we have also learnt in this is that that cannot be rushed in sensitive areas. It is moving as fast as it can reasonably go. Like the minister, I cannot make a commitment about when that work will be completed, but we continue to be committed to moving it as fast as we can.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Who decides the legislative timelines of legislation that is so important for Western Australian agriculture; is it industry? I would have thought the minister should decide when that legislation will come into place. But the director general is saying that industry wants to shilly-shally on this.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: We are talking about regulations here, not the legislation.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Of course, yes. The act is not operational until the regulations come into effect.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: We have prioritised the regulations that relate to the industry funding scheme. The member might be aware that a transitional bill has been introduced into the lower house now to allow for the abolishment of the APB. Until some other components of the legislation are enacted, it remains there. There are inefficiencies with having that as well as a biosecurity council. We are therefore doing things to try to get a level of efficiency around that. Again, there is a heck of a lot of work to be done. The director general is quite right in saying that it is not something we want to get wrong; we want to work through those things with industry. Already from

Chairman; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Terry Redman; Mr Tom Stephens; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Tony Simpson; Ms
Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Murray Cowper

looking at the industry funding schemes component, a lot of work has been done with industry. Some industry concerns have even been raised through that, and changes have been made in accordance with that industry input. It is not something we want to rush. It is something we want to get right. But we are picking off the priorities.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I refer to the heading “New Works” on page 794. There is an allocation of \$30 million over three years for an international export grain centre. As an ex-baker of 16 years I know that grain is a very important part of making flour. I, along with the member for Collie–Preston, am very keen to hear about the new international export grain centre. Can the minister update the chamber on it?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I thank the member for the question. Yes, there are certainly capital works programs there. Some of those programs relate to initiatives highlighted in this budget. Resources have also been allocated in the forward estimates for some time, I might add. In fact, it was allocated under the previous government for the relocation of the Department of Agriculture and Food. The section the member for Darling Range highlighted is the international export grain centre, which is something we are very proud to be a part of. In essence, it is a centre at Murdoch University and is the state’s contribution to what will be a world-class hub of science, technology and innovation aimed at improving the productivity and value of the grain industry in Western Australia, which, as I am sure the member knows, makes a significant contribution to the economy. The member might also be aware that under the new national research and development framework, Western Australia is to be the lead agency for grains and wool. This facility will define Western Australia in the grains sector. It is hoped that some capital resources can be drawn, such as the GRDC, from some of the universities that might want to put in a capital component and have it as a facility worth not just \$30 million but \$40 million, \$50 million or \$60 million and to stake Western Australia’s claim, where it rightly should be, as a leader in grains research. It will also allow us to draw some horsepower to Western Australia from interstate and international scientists and to put in place the research and development necessary to ensure our grains industry remains competitive on the world stage. We are hoping to pretty soon make announcements around how we might attract that national and international investment from world-class researchers.

We have already had discussions with Murdoch, the Grains Research and Development Corporation and the University of Western Australia, which have all been very positive about this project. It is not new money; it is money that has been in the forward estimates. But it is money we are using in a strategic way to stake a claim around WA being a lead state in respect of grains research in Australia.

[7.10 pm]

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Is Western Australia the only state in Australia to do this type of stuff or are we leading the way? Do other states have something similar?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: The director general might like to make some comments about what some of the other states are doing. Western Australia has fallen behind, particularly in grains, in putting a stake in the ground to say that we are serious about grains research. Other states are involved in other fairly innovative projects with respect to industry funding, state government funding and university funding to get facilities that are state of the art and therefore attractive to international researchers. Rob Delane might like to comment on what is happening in other states, hence the need for us to invest in Western Australia. That is what we are doing. We think that will make a significant difference. Being the state that produces 40 per cent of Australia’s grain, we are rightly placed to do something about research.

Mr R. Delane: I will just add to that. Two things come together. The minister referred to the national research development extension framework. That is having quite a pervasive influence on the improved complementarity of the research development extension efforts of all state agencies and commonwealth agencies. Not surprisingly, Queensland’s main focus is on beef and sugarcane, Victoria’s is on dairy and Western Australia’s is on grains and sheep jointly with New South Wales. That is helping to change the landscape and improve cooperation but it ensures that right across this country we are making more efficient and effective use of the collective public and industry resources.

In terms of the infrastructure, in South Australia, the CSIRO, the South Australian department and others have been co-located at the University of Adelaide’s Waite campus for many years in perhaps the greatest concentration of research infrastructure. There have been some more recent investments there and institutions such as the Australian Centre for Plant Functional Genomics. It is a real agriculture and food research hub. In Victoria, on the campus of La Trobe University, from memory, in the order of \$350 million is being invested by the Victorian government, the university and others to build world-class integrated facilities for many agricultural activities. In Brisbane, on the old Boggo Road Gaol site, also of the order of \$300 million—I stand corrected on the numbers—a very major integrated facility involving the Queensland department, the University of Queensland and I think the CSIRO is being developed. The focus on Murdoch University is the Western

Chairman; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Terry Redman; Mr Tom Stephens; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Tony Simpson; Ms
Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Murray Cowper

Australian version of that. The government has chosen to support specific initiatives, with particular focus around grains because of the importance of grains in Western Australia and the great strength of grains R&D here in Perth between the department and particularly the University of Western Australia and Murdoch University. There is an opportunity to make this a world-class integrated hub of grain science and innovation.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I will just add to that. The member might also be aware that Murdoch University is the site for the WA State Agricultural Biotechnology Centre. That is complementary to grains research, and hence Murdoch is a very appropriate location.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I also have a question on research and new agriculture initiatives relating to page 787, following on from where we were. Will these research areas and changes to agriculture initiatives include GM crops, what crops are being targeted, where will the research facility be housed, will the facility be staffed by departmental staff and will they be permanent employees or contracted staff? Will the facility receive any additional funding outside the appropriation and from what source? By that I mean companies with a vested interest, I suppose.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Does the member's question relate to new agricultural initiatives?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: The minister can take it from anywhere. He can take it from research or he can go back to page 787 under "New Crops for New Climate Environments". There are probably about five areas I could put it under.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Is the member talking about new crops for new climate environments?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: The question could fit under that. I can shift it to another page, such as the page relating to research. Whatever page the minister wants it on, I will put it on.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: The member is talking about our investment in research and development and where it is going to go with respect to GM.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Yes.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: A couple of projects have been highlighted. New agricultural initiatives and resources are obviously added to that. I think the line item "New Crops for New Climate Environments" is probably the one that fits the question. That is a new project. What is on page 787 is a recurrent spend in that space. There is also a capital component. It is talking about building a climate management facility.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Like a simulator?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Yes, at both Katanning and Merredin, at a total capital cost of about \$3 million. There are a range of opportunities. I might add that, yes, there is potential for this facility to be used for further work in GM. Clearly, this government has staked the claim on the ground in terms of being prepared to look at GM as a technology that has a future in agriculture with decisions we have made around GM canola and GM cotton. No other crops have been approved by the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator and/or Food Standards Australia New Zealand but we genuinely believe—and I genuinely believe—and support the notion of some research work that ensures that Western Australia is at the forefront of any new developments, internationally and nationally, such that when and if new crops are able to come out and deal with frost or drought or an improved capacity to utilise nitrogen in difficult climatic environments, we have the technology to consider those as options for our farming community. Out of those facilities that we are talking about, there is no facility that might just be used for GM. There could be a range of trial work around grains, horticulture and pastures simply because it is a facility that is suited to research and development in that particular field.

I might add that the early projects will be around new crops in crop adaptation in climate-challenged environments. I mentioned frost, drought, high temperatures, stress and water logging as being some early trends. It is very unlikely that there will be any new GM crops that we would look at in Western Australia, probably inside of a 10-year time frame.

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: Probably because Monsanto does not have anything to gain out of these.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I am sure that the member will get a chance to ask her questions soon. On the international scale, members are obviously aware that I went to the United States and Canada, and GM wheat was discussed over there by US Wheat Associates. They are not seeing anything coming on the market commercially inside of 10 years. If we genuinely believe that GM has a position to play in agriculture—even the member for Armadale has made comments through the media that says there is interest in this space; she might have had concerns around GM canola but certainly said that this is an area that maybe has potential in agriculture—we need to be open about how we might utilise that. We are putting a facility on the ground that has capacity to support our own research and development in the grains area but also has an opportunity for other research organisations,

Chairman; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Terry Redman; Mr Tom Stephens; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Tony Simpson; Ms
Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Murray Cowper

universities and even some from the private sector who might like to use the facility to do some early research. There are a range of seed producers and plant breeders who are essentially private sector groups. I would suggest that around the world the dominant seed breeders—if I am wrong, I will ask Rob to mention it—are in the private sector. Yes, there is support from the public purse in a lot of cases but the trend has been that the private sector is playing a growing role in research and development and plant breeding. We are setting up a facility to respond to that not only in the conventional manner but also potentially looking at GM opportunities that might well present crops for us that are suited to the challenging climatic environments that we are going to face if we are a supporter of climate change and also some of the challenging environments we have in the dryland wheatbelt of Western Australia around salinity and around getting better utilisation of nitrogen, one of the high cost inputs that we have, to ensure that we stay competitive.

[7.20 pm]

Mr M.P. MURRAY: If this research was undertaken in these facilities by an independent body, would the minister at least give the public some confidence that the research results would be made public for scrutiny, not as is the case in most of these facilities now?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Member, I do not think that a lot of the breeding research is done purely in government organisations or the public-purse organisations. A lot of it is done privately. These organisations present to the farming community after doing a range of trials of plants, seeds and so on that will hopefully perform better than the last ones did.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: As a public facility, surely the people who own it—the general public—should be able to look at those results.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I cannot see an issue with that. I cannot see how those organisations would not perhaps be up-front about research. Certainly, if public dollars go into something, the agency or government would have access to the intellectual property that related to that. However, I highlight that we have an organisation called InterGrain, which is nearly three-quarters owned by the department as a shareholder, and one-quarter owned by the Grains Research and Development Corporation. That produces 90 per cent, I think, of the wheat grown in Western Australia, and probably 80 per cent of the wheat grown across Australia, which means that that wheat is produced by an organisation that has an industry-government shareholding. There are probably three other main plant breeding companies in Australia, which have various ownership structures, of which a significant portion in some cases is in the private sector, that breed and produce plants. Now, because there is a royalty program and people can pay for the use of that, these companies are able to get a revenue stream from that, and they are working in that space. It is trending that way all around the world. Rob has been a bit closer to this than I have, and he could probably make some additional comments. However, we should not dismiss access to either universities or the private sector in collaborative arrangements whereby we can get a benefit or, indeed, access to germ plasm and technology that can make a plant-breeding regime that ensures that our farmers remain competitive.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I have a further question on the same issue. Having heard all that, I believe that the future of those research bodies as far as GM is concerned is really about being open and honest. I ask the minister: has he had a look at that movie, because I believe that is the way he is headed, and would he have any problems with education in the schools? For example, a DVD of that *Food, Inc.* movie could be shown in schools to educate people on the other side of the fence. The money is to be made available for education on both sides of the fence—not like the situation when I went to one of the trade shows where only the agriculture department was present. It was one-sided—in favour of GM.

The CHAIRMAN: Before the minister answers that question, whether or not the minister has seen a movie is obviously not relevant to this division. I just caution the minister that he can answer that question at his discretion.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I am happy to answer it now. This Liberal–National government believes that GM has a space to play in agriculture. I think the member would be tremendously short-sighted to not consider it as an option.

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: Why GM canola? Why is that the one that the minister —

The CHAIRMAN: The member for Armadale's name is on the list to ask her own question.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Does the member for Armadale support GM cotton?

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: I am prepared to consider it, but I am asking the minister why he supported GM canola and did not wait until he found something that would perhaps be incredibly useful in Western Australia,

Chairman; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Terry Redman; Mr Tom Stephens; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Tony Simpson; Ms
Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Murray Cowper

such as some drought-resistant gene to be inserted that did not benefit a pesticide company in the same extraordinary way that the minister has done with Monsanto?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I think the member's question is a little one dimensional, because what we are trying to benefit by making decisions about GM, and GM canola was the classic one, is the farming community of Western Australia. The main farming groups have consistently asked for access to technology that allows them to have crop rotations and to have farming systems that maintain a level of competitiveness. I think it is short-sighted to not consider those as genuine options. I think I have said publicly that I would probably prefer to have had a different crop from GM canola to sell the notion to the public. It would have been nice, as the member highlights, to have one that grows on saline soils, for example, but we should not dismiss the notion of setting ourselves up, such that we have the research and the capacity and are, indeed, tapped into that capacity. That could be in the private sector; it could be in the public sector or in universities internationally. We could be tapped into capacity that allows us to be competitive in that space. I think we are short-sighted if we do not do that. If we just rely on what we have in our place, it is this big; if we open ourselves up to look at other options, we add this amount to it in terms of access to germ plasm and access to technology to ensure that we are at the forefront in Western Australia.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Firstly, has the minister seen the movie; and, secondly, is there any money in the minister's budget—I could not find it there—so that the minister can use his influence, I suppose, on the issue of labelling? It is something that the community is crying out for. Then the consumers can make their choice, and it would take away a lot of the disappointments out there at the moment.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: No, I have not seen the movie.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: The minister should be the lead actor.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Two of my staff members who work in my ministerial office have seen the movie and had a talk to me about it.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: They probably said it was biased, did they? I am sure they would have.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: So I have had some comment and reflection about it.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: It is certainly an eye-opener.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I have not seen it, member. I understand the caution about where governments make the decisions and spend their dollars to try to make a difference, but I think if we look at trends internationally and what is happening, indeed, in Australia in terms of plant breeding and how it is organised and managed, we will see that there is private sector involvement, so indirectly, I suppose, industry is paying through the GRDC to have access to InterGrain, which is breeding 90 per cent of the crops that are grown in Western Australia.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Okay. What about labelling?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: The labelling review is happening federally. It is in the member's federal colleagues' space, which means that the member can have as much input to that as I can. I will just read a couple of comments. A national review of food labelling law and policy is presently being conducted by an independent panel of specialists at the request of the Council of Australian Governments and the ANZFRMC, which is the Australia and New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council. The review, which is due to report in December this year, will address difficulties consumers have in understanding the information on food labels, the cost to businesses and consumers in meeting labelling standards, a lack of consistent enforcement of labelling laws across jurisdictions, and accuracy and truth in labelling. I would imagine that that is right in the space of what the member is interested in. I believe we have an interagency group that is working. I think it covers health. I cannot remember the exact details. I can get the member the details around that.

The department chairs an interdepartmental committee that will report its findings in June this year on strengthening the labelling laws to identify GM and non-GM food products, and improve compliance to assist consumer choice through the relevant state and federal agencies. So we are having a look into that. Whether that will come up with a recommendation that we think is appropriate is another question, but the people who have jurisdiction are the federal colleagues of members opposite.

[7.30 pm]

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: I refer to the first dot point on page 789. I am interested in the potential the minister foresees for production in terms of growth yield and total tonnage in the high rainfall environments of Western Australia. What does the minister think production can be got up to?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: We have been looking at a number of programs in response to industry's request. As the member for Geraldton is aware, a number of industry development plans were put in place, which was our

Chairman; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Terry Redman; Mr Tom Stephens; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Tony Simpson; Ms
Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Murray Cowper

attempt to engage industry. That was not to say what we think industry should have, but basically industry giving us input as to what industry thinks should be a priority in terms of where we put our research dollar and/or the resources that we deploy in the Department of Agriculture and Food.

One such project that I announced was the Bridging the Yield Gap project. I spoke to a number of farm groups around the state. The project was specifically targeted at grain yields in the high-rainfall areas—greater than 350 millimetres isohyet, from memory. Already in the more arid areas to the east of that, if we look at the actual rain that falls out of the sky, we are getting a very efficient conversion of the actual rainfall to grain yield. In those high-rainfall areas we are not. There is a fairly big gap between the potential yield we might consider to be getting from the rain that falls out of the sky and the actual yield we are getting. There is therefore an opportunity for not just research, but also getting a better understanding of why farmers are not taking up the technologies, knowledge and understanding that is already out there in order to get a better yield response from the rainfall that is there. So the project is around identifying those constraints. The department will partner with growers, consultants, researchers and other stakeholders in trying to identify that; then the investment we make will be highly targeted and will occur in the areas that could deliver the greatest potential. The investment will target the major constraints to yield, such as soil types and the slow adoption of those known technologies that are already there. I think it is an appropriate response to industry's call. If we have a certain amount of resource in the agency to deploy, we need to deploy it to get the best outcome—the best bang for our buck, if members want to put it in those terms—and this is an area from which we can get a big response.

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: I refer the minister to page 790 and the outcome desired for the increased value of domestic and international trade. The line item specifically states —

New market opportunities are developed or maintained for Western Australian agricultural produce: ...

The minister would be aware that the live sheep export industry is one that is a rather contentious and sensitive area. I think it was in 2006 after an incident with a shipment on the *Al Kuwait* that the animal welfare unit at the Department of Local Government was beefed up—if I can say that!—for a couple of years to oversee this industry. Is the minister concerned, now that that unit has gone back to basically skeletal staffing levels, that there is a risk to maintaining our live sheep exports? What mechanism for overseeing those exports does the Minister for Agriculture and Food have, as the minister responsible for maintaining Western Australia's international markets and being very alive to the sensitivity out there in the live export industry, now that we no longer have the capacity to monitor the performance, handling and loading of these live sheep in any realistic sense? Is the minister concerned that this will undermine the market?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Of course; it is always a concern. We need to maintain the highest of standards of animal welfare as far as industry is concerned, and in terms of maintaining Western Australia's links to key markets. We rely heavily on the live export market. It underpins a lot of the prices; the Middle East market particularly underpins a lot of our sheep prices, and of course the northern beef herd is largely live export, typically into Indonesia. The notion of whether animal welfare is important is a blind Freddy argument: of course it is; absolutely! We are doing everything we can to ensure that industry standards are high.

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: How are you doing that?

The CHAIRMAN: I will give the member other questions.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I also make the point that the Australian government, not the state government, has legislative responsibility for the live export industry and manages the Australian standards for the export of livestock.

In terms of state responsibility, animal welfare lies with the Minister for Local Government, not with the Minister for Agriculture and Food. But even in saying that I do not have direct legislative jurisdiction in that area, I highlight the importance of us maintaining the highest of standards and ensuring that all those engaged in the live export industry in particular maintain the highest of standards. This applies beyond that and into farmers to maintain the highest of standards of animal welfare on farming properties. But of course it is key to maintaining access to those particular markets. I believe we do have high standards. I believe we regularly endeavour to improve those standards. In fact some of the member's federal colleagues, who have a more direct relationship with the live sheep export trade and livestock handling standards, have been putting a lot of effort into ensuring that the standards are maintained on not just livestock that go onto boats in Western Australia and are then in shipment, but also how the livestock is handled when it comes off at destination ports to ensure that we maintain high standards for livestock going out of Western Australia.

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: I have a further question. How could these high standards possibly be maintained now that there is only one inspector in the entire state? We know that inspectors are now no longer going to the ports and supervising and/or reporting on the transportation to the port and loading of these sheep. How on earth

Chairman; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Terry Redman; Mr Tom Stephens; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Tony Simpson; Ms
Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Murray Cowper

could the minister maintain high standards? How on earth would he know that he is maintaining high standards if there is one officer for the entire state?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I come back to the point that animal welfare does not come under my jurisdiction.

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: No, but the minister has acknowledged that he has a responsibility —

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I will ask the director general to make a comment on his knowledge and understanding about compliance officers and the roles that various people play.

Mr R. Delane: As the minister pointed out earlier in his comments, the Australian government has regulatory responsibility for livestock exports, and welfare is associated with it, and the Animal Welfare Act in this state is regulated through the Department of Local Government. But there is also a broader system —

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: We are not talking about the act, I am sorry; we are talking about the people who are there.

The CHAIRMAN: I am sorry, the member cannot interject.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: With respect, member, the director general is —

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: To waffle on about acts!

Mr D.T. REDMAN: With respect, member, the director general is going to make comments on that.

Mr R. Delane: That department receives a range of assistance, including general inspectors who are endorsed to work for the Department of Agriculture and Food, and police officers located throughout the state.

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: But —

The CHAIRMAN: I ask the member for Armadale to just let the adviser finish.

Mr R. Delane: There is also significant cooperation between the industry, the Australian government—particularly the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service—the Department of Local Government and the Department of Mines and Petroleum to ensure that animal welfare issues at certain points that are created are addressed; that producers live up to their responsibilities to meet the fit-to-load guidelines; that animals that arrive in feedlots that have animal welfare compromised are appropriately dealt with; and that the system as a whole works.

The general approach in many areas of industry, including the agriculture and food sector, which includes live animals, is to take an assurance approach to ensure that those in the industry address the risk at all points and that they do not try to do it all by inspection, which would require a large number of inspectors and is not an efficient way that either the private sector or the public sector works. There is a systems approach and the welfare of the animals is essential to the industry, including to the exporters all the way through to the end point. That is how they make money. It is also a critical component of the work of a number of agencies, state agencies and of course the commonwealth.

[7.40 pm]

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: I do not know —

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Member, we are giving a fair bit of latitude here given that animal welfare is not —

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: It is very hard to see how the minister could claim that there is a high level of compliance when he does not have anyone who is able to go out and check compliance. It is a complete nonsense. The minister does not have anyone who can go out and ensure there is compliance—the minister just asserts compliance. It is like introducing a law against murder and saying, “No-one is going to murder anyone because we have introduced a law against it”!

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Member, in terms of live export I highlight that every shipment that goes out has to meet Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service standards.

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: Who supervises this? Who supervises them going into the food lots?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: It comes under the federal government. If the member is successful, she might have a chance to talk to them about exactly that!

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: Trucking to the ports and loading are responsibilities under the Animal Welfare Act.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: In terms of transport, I guess animal welfare issues in Western Australia come under local government. It is actually not under my portfolio.

Chairman; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Terry Redman; Mr Tom Stephens; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Tony Simpson; Ms
Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Murray Cowper

The CHAIRMAN: That is right, minister. I am going to —

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: It does impact on the minister; he cannot —

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Of course it impacts on the agricultural industry. My opening remarks, when the member raised the question, related to the importance that I place on ensuring we maintain market access; and central to that are high animal welfare standards. I think we have given a fair bit of latitude to the member.

The CHAIRMAN: I have given a fair bit of latitude. I suggest the member's questions are best directed to the Minister for Local Government in his division.

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: It has to be directed to the minister. Some people in the industry have argued that this unit should be moved into the Department of Agriculture and Food. Has the minister been approached in relation to that?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: There has been no decision made to shift it into —

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: Sorry; has an approach been made?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: A number of people in the industry have mentioned that to me and probably would like to see it located in agriculture, as it is in most other states. The answer is yes, I have been approached about that. There has been no decision made to shift it into agriculture.

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: I refer to page 787 of the *Budget Statements*. Basically, the government has budgeted \$50 million for expansion of natural resource management between 2010-11 and 2013-14. What plans does the government have to spend these funds?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: On the bottom of page 787 we see the state's natural resource management funds. I might take a second to explain it. The member will be aware that we allocated \$30 million as a one-off last year. There was nothing in last year's forward estimates as far as natural resource management was concerned. From the 2009-10 estimated actuals, \$15 million is coming out of that and going effectively into 2010-11. Of the \$20 million in 2010-11, there is a \$15 million carryover from last year and \$10 million of that relates to projects that have already been allocated, but of course that fund has not been drawn on. There is \$5 million of new money in that, along with \$5 million of new money allocated this year, making a total of \$10 million this year that can be allocated to natural resource management projects that have not as yet had any allocations made. I think, importantly, across the forward estimates \$10 million is allocated each year. As the minister, even I would like to see as much as possible put into natural resource management. I think the commitment we have here is, firstly, that there is natural resource management for these projects. We are able to capitalise as a catalyst for change, leveraging the goodwill that is out there with a range of small community groups that indeed contribute significantly to natural resource management outcomes. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, is our commitment over the forward estimates of \$10 million a year, which means we are able to plan ahead and we are able to have some vision about projects that might go over a number of years. That all makes a difference to this state. As I mentioned in answer to an earlier question around planning and state planning, I am waiting for feedback about that. That will help us make a judgement about exactly how we deploy this resource to meet the state's needs and priorities. There have previously been bilateral agreements between the commonwealth and state governments. That is far less the case now than it used to be as we move to the Caring for our Country fund. We have not had the same opportunities to double up with federal funds as maybe we have in the past. We still have the opportunity to put resources into a range of groups, both government and non-government, that can deliver an outcome that meets the state's needs and maintains a level of interest and support for local NRM work that volunteers have done for many years. Indeed, they are making a significant difference to NRM in our state.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: My question refers to mulesing practices. I refer to page 789. That page refers to best management practices for sustainable sheep and wheat farming, the focus on agronomy, land conservation and soil testing, and also the issue of animal husbandry. Can the minister indicate how much funding research has been put into finding alternatives to mulesing practices?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I will go through a couple of things in relation to the work being done on mulesing by the department and the government. Yes, it is a controversial issue. I am sure the member is well aware that a range of groups and individuals are very concerned about the practice of mulesing, and indeed maintaining the practice to deal with breech strike on merino sheep in particular. A decision was made some time ago to cease mulesing on all Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry properties. I think we have two main properties that carry sheep load. We do not undertake any mulesing practices ourselves. Work is being done through a five-year 2006-2010 Australian Wool Innovation Ltd-funded genetic selection project entitled "Breeding Breech Strike – Resistant Merino Sheep"; that is, sheep that do not have to be mulesed. I understand that the results are quite encouraging. That is occurring at the Katanning research station. The department ceased mulesing in 2008

Chairman; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Terry Redman; Mr Tom Stephens; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Tony Simpson; Ms
Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Murray Cowper

basically in support of the industry phase-out, and also to take a leadership role in respect to what will be considered to be sound practical advice to minimise flystrike.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Can the minister give us a dollar figure on how much is going into it?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: In 2009-10 consolidated funds of \$165 000, with external funds of \$224 000, making a total of \$389 000. In 2010-11 a total figure of \$230 000 has been allocated to try to deal with the mulesing issue and put research into alternative options.

Mr M.J. COWPER: I refer to page 787 of the *Budget Statements*. At the bottom of that page there is a line item headed "Upgrade of Information Management Systems". There is an amount there of \$656 000. I take it that relates to a new computer system; is that right? I note there has been some chat out there in the ether that something like \$39 million will be spent on computers. Can the minister clarify it for me, please?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I am pleased the member asked the question. It is a significant point. The department's information management systems are archaic. They have not had a significant upgrade, I am told, for 20 years. When we talk about IT, I look at the very fancy bit of IT the Chairman has in front of him, and compare it with where the agency is at—it is absolutely chalk and cheese. We have put \$39 million in total in capital and recurrent to deal with upgrading the department's information management system as a priority, to ensure that it is up to twenty-first century standard. It is centred on being efficient and ensuring that the data that scientists put in and the way communications and information is managed is such that we can deliver a better outcome to the farming community. It is interesting that there has not been an appropriation of that sort of significance for a long, long time. Presently, the system has a maze of different platforms and it is inefficient, expensive and unreliable. To deliver an outcome to the farming sector in Western Australia, we need to ensure that we have information management systems commensurate with those needs. I am certainly very pleased to announce that we are kicking the ball off in that regard, and we want to ensure that we land on a point whereby we can manage information in such a way that we can make a difference and put a dollar back into a farmer's pocket. It is not just about managing information; it is around communication and around ensuring efficiencies are in place to make a difference.

[7.50 pm]

Mr M.J. COWPER: I take it that contemporary modern farmers rely heavily on computer systems. Would having a department that is so antiquated not augur well for productivity?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Part of the modernisation process is not just around targeted research or targeted investments and where we deploy staff and resources; it is also around managing information. The systems we have now do not comply with the State Records Act, and, among other things, that is obviously an issue for us. This is about making sure that we are up to twenty-first century standards to deliver an outcome to an industry that is in twenty-first century Western Australia, and hopefully to make a difference. This investment is long overdue. I went into the department following that hailstorm we had through town and its main computer system had had to be shut down because of water leaking into that room where it was housed—quite frankly, it was all second rate. If members walk into the department, they are walking into a Third World facility.

I just talked about making a \$30 million investment to stake a claim around grains research in Western Australia. We need to do that sort of stuff to make a difference and to attract scientists and people who want to come and work in the sector. This is another investment that will hopefully make that difference.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Will the systems that the department will adopt be developed by consultants, or will the department buy a product off the shelf that will be able to meet the demand—given that there will obviously be some systems around the place that will service it quite well—as opposed to developing something locally?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I will ask Graham to make a comment on that.

Mr G. Wilson: Yes, we are extensively already using manufactured software off the shelf, as such. It is incredibly expensive to use consultants these days, as the member is aware. One issue is that the use of consultants is very expensive and the ability to get a workforce able to handle this is also very expensive because of competition in the marketplace. The software system we have is called iShare; it is the leading Microsoft-capable software and it is one of the types of software that most well-developed research and development organisations in the world access—those that have the funding available. This software is not just about information technology; it is about communication as well. It provides the ability, for example, for BlackBerry phones and personal digital assistants et cetera to access information, whether it be a researcher who needs to access it or whether it be a farmer who needs to access it. It is just-in-time information—when we need it, we can get it.

Chairman; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Terry Redman; Mr Tom Stephens; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Tony Simpson; Ms Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Murray Cowper

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I have a question related to the seventh dot point on page 789 of the *Budget Statements*, which states that the long-term competitiveness of the agricultural and food sectors will be enhanced by providing new entrants with agricultural training courses. Does that mean that agricultural schools such as Muresk Institute will be supported into the future?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: The Muresk campus does not come under my jurisdiction.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: But the minister could support it!

Mr D.T. REDMAN: We could support Muresk as an educational facility?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: The government is stating it wants agricultural training, and here is a chance. We have a facility that could be supported either through this budget, or get that rubber stamp out that reads “royalties for regions”.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I will make some comments. I do not believe the question comes under the jurisdiction of my portfolio.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: That is fine; we will call it that. That is fine; I will use that very well. I thank the minister very much!

Mr D.T. REDMAN: The member is quite sure about that yet he still asked the question—is that how it goes?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I thank the minister very much; he refuses to fund it.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I am concerned about the number of students and young people choosing to go into agriculture as an industry. I think the number is dropping off. If we look at the total number going through institutions in Western Australia, compared with what will probably be needed to support an industry that has a lot of growth potential—I have highlighted the significant growth potential that we have around technology improvements and systems improvements and so on—I am concerned that we will not have people coming through and being trained to support that growth. It is my broad goal to raise the profile of agriculture in order to encourage more people into tertiary training in agriculture to support the industry. That is an easy line to say, but it is a little bit harder to do, and we are certainly putting some work into how we might achieve that. My goal is to get into the lounge rooms of everyone in the city to highlight, firstly, the importance of agriculture to the economy in Western Australia; and, secondly, the opportunities it provides as a vocational pathway for someone who wants to choose to go into areas as broad as natural resource management and research and development. A whole range of science and disciplines sit around agriculture. If I can get into the lounge rooms of people in the city in Western Australia and encourage them to take that path because it genuinely has good opportunities, that is what I would like to achieve. Again, they are easy lines to say and a bit harder to achieve. The member is genuinely talking about not just Muresk; he is really talking about delivering personnel into the industry. I think that broader question needs to have government support.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: The minister is in a position to exert pressure and put funding out to make sure that this college stays open.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Member, I think the issue is broader than that. The issue is around people going into universities to study agriculture to go into the sector. The member is talking about one regionally located facility that certainly has our support. I would be very disappointed to see it close, as would a range of people in regional Western Australia; indeed the farming community has put its strong support behind Muresk.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Put the money up.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: It is important that we put government settings in place, whatever they be—be they the support of a facility at Muresk or whether they be the support of people to go through tertiary institution agriculture studies in the city. It is important that the outcome is that we have a flow-through of people going through tertiary studies in agriculture who will go into the industry, because we need that to ensure that Western Australia remains competitive. Everything else I have talked about tonight needs the horsepower coming in behind it to ensure that we can make a difference. Part of that is in training and tertiary education in agriculture.

The appropriation was recommended.