

**Division 40: Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions — Services 1 and 3 to 10, Environment, \$356 885 000 —**

Ms L.L. Baker, Chair.

Mr R.R. Whitby, Parliamentary Secretary representing the Minister for Environment.

Mr M. Webb, Director General.

Mr P. Dans, Deputy Director General.

Mrs A.J. Klenke, Chief Finance Officer.

Dr M. Byrne, Executive Director, Biodiversity and Conservation Science.

Mrs M. Marsh, Executive Director, Corporate and Business Services.

Dr F. Stanley, Executive Director, Conservation and Ecosystem Management.

Ms W. Attenborough, Executive Director, Zoological Parks Authority.

Mr A. Barrett, Executive Director, Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority.

Mr D. Forster, Principal Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

**The CHAIR:** This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. It is the intention of the Chair 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 estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The parliamentary secretary may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the parliamentary secretary to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the parliamentary secretary's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by Friday, 31 May 2019. I caution members that if the parliamentary secretary asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

The member for Moore.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to page 588 and significant issues impacting the agency, specifically the additional \$22 million over four years to support the continuation of the department's enhanced prescribed burning program. The program initially was called the enhanced program because it was perceived that there was a need to catch up with prescribed burning targets, which had fallen away in the past. The program has been going for a number of years and there is funding for another four years. Do we still believe that this is a catch-up program or is it the new norm and we will need to undertake this level of prescribed burning from now on, not just for a particular period?

[3.40 pm]

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** It is an important question because, as the member will well know, we have had some disastrous fires in recent years that have claimed not only property but also lives, so it is an issue. It is also an issue because of our changing climate, which is resulting in a drier, more combustible environment. The target that we hope to achieve each year is 200 000 hectares of area where we reduce the fuel load. This has been a long-term target, as I understand it, with the previous government also, but we have not always met that target. I understand that the current financial year figure is about 152 000 hectares to date. The goal is to maintain 45 per cent of Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions-managed lands in the south west with a fuel age of less than six years. That is the target. As the member will be aware, the south west is a built-up community with many small towns that are at risk from fire; we have already seen disastrous examples of that. It is an ongoing commitment and target and we think it is a very important one to have. I presume that answers the member's question.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The \$22 million has, as I understand it, been provided from the royalties for regions program. The rationale for it being given over four years indicates that it is there for a specific purpose, and that is to catch up. My question really is: is it in fact now just the core business of the department to undertake this level of activity every year? If we look at the number of years it has been running at the instigation of the enhanced prescribed burning program, we would now need to go back over that country again if we are going to maintain the target of

having it burnt every six years. Is it really time to just fund this out of consolidated revenue, on the basis that it is in fact business as normal for the department?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Thank you, member. This figure is what I would describe as a catch-up over four years, because it is in addition to a regular budget allocation of \$11 million for prescribed burning in the south west. That \$11 million is the recurrent funding for prescribed burning. I guess there was a concern after recent years, when we had not reached those desired targets, that we needed to lift our game and do better if we were to achieve the targets we wanted to, to reduce the age of the fuel load. I refer to Mr Peter Dans to elaborate on that.

**Mr P. Dans:** The program started in 2015–16 and in that year we achieved about 154 000 hectares, as the parliamentary secretary said. In the current financial year, which is the fourth and final year of that initial funding round, we are sitting at about 153 000 hectares as of this morning. We aim to get about 200 000 hectares a year, because if we maintain that consistently, we will get to the optimal state we want to be in, which is for about 45 per cent of the lands that the department manages in the south west to have a fuel age of less than six years. Just to correct the member, we do not aim to burn every area of land that we manage every six years, but we aim to have 45 per cent of it, geographically dispersed across the landscape, with a fuel age of less than six years. As of 30 June 2018, we were at 43 per cent, so we have done a reasonable job of catching up. But there will be some large areas that will drop off and will become six years old following the big bushfires of 2014–15 at Northcliffe and Lower Hotham. The fuel load on approximately 190 000 hectares there will turn six in a year or so, so it is going to take a sustained effort to get it back and keep it back at around that level of 45 per cent with a fuel age of less than six years.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I refer to the \$20 million increase. I am looking at page 587 of budget paper No 2, volume 2. If we go to the service summary table on page 592 and to line item 9, “Prescribed Burning and Fire Management”, it shows that the actual amount spent on that in 2017–18 was \$53 248 000. The estimated actual for this year is approximately \$49 million, which is a \$4 million reduction. Is that the correct item, which includes the prescribed burns?

**The CHAIR:** Do you have the reference, parliamentary secretary?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Yes, we are on page 592. I notice that the line item also talks about fire management, so other services may be costed into that, but I will refer to Peter Dans to explain that.

**Mr P. Dans:** The chief finance officer might be able to help me out here, but the reason that is there is that for the previous two financial years we have exceeded our allocated budget for prescribed burning. We have spent more than we have, so we have actually pulled forward expenditure from that first tranche of prescribed burning money, and in this current financial year we will be using some other funds—some other cash reserves in the department—that were not initially allocated in the budget papers for prescribed burning, to ensure we have sufficient funding to continue our program through to 30 June.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** There is a \$2 million increase going forward. I am struggling to see where the \$20 million manifests itself in that line item, because unless some other services are being significantly reduced, it looks to me like the department is simply spending the same amount of money as it has. I heard what Mr Dans said about bringing a bit forward, but if we go on the forward estimates, it, essentially, continues along a relatively flat line, and is still less than what was spent in 2017–18. I am struggling to understand the justification for the statement that there has been a \$20 million increase for prescribed burns, when in fact it looks in the budget as though it is really just business as usual, continuing along.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I thank the member and refer him to Amanda Klenke, the chief finance officer, to work out where those numbers sit.

**Mrs A.J. Klenke:** I can confirm what Mr Dans has indicated in that we had a successful earlier period of expenditure in the enhanced prescribed burn program. If I refer the member to page 592, he will see that the 2017–18 actual is at \$53 million, the 2018–19 budget is at \$47 million, and looking to the 2018–19 estimated actual, it is a slightly higher amount. The reason the member does not see the full \$5 million into 2019–20 is that the extra \$2.5 million that Mr Dans spoke about is not reflected in these numbers at this point in time, because we have just had approval to utilise our cash reserves to add into the enhanced prescribed burn program.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Is Ms Klenke saying that the 2019–20 budget is going to be \$53.5 million, or that the \$2.5 million took the \$47 million to \$49 million for the 2018–19 estimated actual?

[3.50 pm]

**Mrs A.J. Klenke:** The 2018–19 estimated actual will end up being an extra \$2.5 million. We have had the approval post-budget because we have been going well with our burn program. Because we spent more in the earlier years, we had only \$3.2 million left for this year, so we have had to call on our reserves to be able to continue to spend, but that was not reflected at budget time. We have only just had approval for that.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I think I understand that. If I take that as being correct, \$49 million plus \$2.5 million is \$51.5 million. The chief finance officer indicated to me that that is what will be spent because of the additional bushfire burning, but it still does not answer the question. Given that in 2017–18 the total spend on fire management was \$53 million, we get back \$1.5 million or less of that in the forward estimates. I am still struggling to understand how there can be a claim of \$5 million additional every year, when, in fact, in 2017–18, more was spent on bushfire management. We saw this in another area also: there is a claim of additional money going into something, but as far as I can see from looking at the budget, and I am happy to be educated, it is just continuing what has been spent in the past, recognising that there was a bit of toing and froing between a couple of years.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I am more than happy to refer to Mr Dans to elaborate. The proof of what we are doing can be seen in the amount of fuel load that is reduced every year. There has been a dramatic change in the past couple of years in what we have achieved with our targets for prescribed burns. We were not doing that well a few years ago; we are doing much better now. I am happy to go through the details of the line items and the numbers. However, if we do not do what we are achieving, which is a marked increase in prescribed burns, the cost is far more devastating, whether it is lives or dollars, if there is a damaging fire. We both agree that this is really important work. We can quibble about the numbers and we will explain them as best we can, but this agency is doing a fantastic job. It is working very hard. It is not always easy to schedule prescribed burns, but increasingly this agency is getting better and better at doing that to minimise the impact on the community around it. We will never know the pay-off, the reward and the return on investment because we will avoid devastating fires in the future that can cause hundreds of millions of dollars of damage to the economy and infrastructure, and cost lives. We need to remember that this agency is doing a really good job in this regard. We lifted the performance in prescribed burning. I refer to Mr Dans to better provide the member detail of the numbers he seeks.

**Mr P. Dans:** The initial program that was conceived under the former government commenced in 2015–16 with a \$3.5 million allocation. In the subsequent years, 2016–17, 2017–18 and 2018–19, the allocation was \$5.5 million a year, giving a total of \$20 million. The past couple of years shown in the *Budget Statements* include that \$5.5 million. In the budget the government has just brought down, there was an additional \$22 million, which is \$5.5 million over each of the four years across the forward estimates. The figure presented across the forward estimates is similar to the current year's figure because it is the same—an additional \$5.5 million allocated per financial year.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I have heard what Mr Dans has said. Equally I have heard that it was simply a continuation of what was done before. There is no additional expenditure based on what was done before. I think we are going to go around in circles on this one like we did in another area.

In relation to the targets mentioned by the parliamentary secretary, I refer to page 592 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and specifically the “Outcomes and Key Effectiveness Indicators”. The targets indicate that only 55 per cent of priority 1 areas will be achieved. I heard what the parliamentary secretary said. I have not implied or stated any criticism of the agency. I recognise his passion for the good work it is doing. However, I am seeking detail on the numbers. If the agency is spending the increased amount of money, the metric indicates that we will still achieve only 55 per cent in 2019–20 versus 67 per cent in 2017–18. I did read a bit of the detail in the budget on that. It seems to me that the past three winters have been average winters with about the same rainfall. Why are we spending this extra money when it does not appear that we are improving the percentage of priority 1 areas burnt? When compared with 2017–18, 55 per cent is obviously 12 per cent less than 67 per cent.

**Mr P. Dans:** Yes, I am not a particular fan of that effectiveness indicator either. The detail is that we prescribe a program of around 700 burns in the state. The vast majority of those are in the south west. We prescribe a program that large knowing that we can only ever complete 200 to 300 burns in any one season. We build that extra capacity in so that we have a lot of choice to deal with the prevailing conditions, fuel moisture and those types of things. Of those 700 burns, a number are designated priority 1. Given that we are doing only 200 to 300 burns at best, there are a number of priority 1 burns, as the effectiveness indicator shows, and 45 per cent do not get looked at. It is program capacity versus real capability in terms of the financial and human resources equation.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** The real question was about the substantial drop of 12 per cent from 2017–18 through to the 2018–19 and 2019–20 plan. That seems to be a substantial change across those years. Although it was indicated that it is not an accurate metric, nevertheless it is the one that we are using.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I will seek some further clarification, but my understanding of how prescribed burns work is that it is an inexact science. One year will be different from the next due to the opportunities provided by the prevailing weather, particularly the wind conditions at the time. We are at the mercy of things that we do not control. There may be good years and bad years, with the same amount of money invested and resources put into the program that result in fewer opportunities to reduce the fuel load. I am happy for Mr Dans to elaborate.

**Mr P. Dans:** The 2017–18 figure of 67 per cent is probably a reflection that it was a good result last financial year. We achieved a little under 220 000 hectares. That is probably a reflection of the fact that we focused on some rather small, discrete but critical burns close to town sites and critical infrastructure and the like. It moves around. It might have been just that the opportunities that presented last financial year favoured those smaller and potentially more critical and, thus, priority 1, burns.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** As an aside, it may be that a finer grain applied to the priorities would help.

I refer to service 9 “Prescribed Burning and Fire Management” on page 596 of budget paper No 2, volume 2. The cost has risen significantly. It was \$11 a hectare in 2017–18, \$15 a hectare in 2018–19 and will be \$16 a hectare in 2019–20, which is a significant increase of almost 50 per cent. What has led to that significant increase in cost per hectare?

[4.00 pm]

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I seek Mr Dans’ guidance.

**Mr P. Dans:** That is a whole-of-state measure and although we deal in targets in the order of 200 000 hectares through the south west of the state, the Kimberley region in some burning seasons can deal with two million hectares. That dramatically affects that particular indicator. I am well aware it has been a particularly dry season in the Kimberley this year. I suggest that that is causing the higher unit cost or the estimated actual that is reflected in the budget papers.

**The CHAIR:** Member for Moore, I understand you have a further question.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I do, and oddly enough I was going to ask about that very point. Is the enhanced burning program done entirely within the south west forests or is the extra funding for that program to be used across the state?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** It is a good question. I would like Mr Dans to respond.

**Mr P. Dans:** Yes, it is predominantly used in our three south west forest regions, which extend from a point on the coast pretty much between Denmark and Albany, roughly in a line up to around Lancelin. All the land south west of a notional line through there is what the program refers to. A very small amount of that expenditure occurs in some of the little blocks of state forest around Albany, such as Redmond state forest and the like, but that is as far east as it goes.

**Mr W.R. MARMION:** This is an area that is very important to the state. I know that the department does a wonderful job, as Mr Dans explained, in planning for hundreds of burns. It obviously depends on the conditions on the day as to what can be burnt. My question relates to the \$22 million in funding. The program is dependent on a lot of factors that are out of the department’s control, so the only way that I can see an improvement in the number of hectares burnt is if there are extra resources so that when the conditions are okay for burning, multiple burns can be carried out instead of just one. If the department had more money, it could have a number of teams doing the burning. Does the \$22 million give the department the ability to do more burns at one time—10 instead of five, for example—during that window of opportunity for burning?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** It is quite an operational question. My understanding is that that money is used for extra resources, which makes sense—if the conditions are ideal, more hectares could be knocked off on that particular day—but Mr Dans is better equipped to answer that question than I am.

**Mr P. Dans:** It is very much about moving human and other resources to where the conditions are optimal for burning. In the south west in an autumn burning arrangement, the moist climate of the Warren region, Pemberton, Walpole, Manjimup and the like will allow the fuel to become available for burning first. We will move resources down from the Swan region, Collie and Bunbury to assist in that area there. The workforce will stay in motels and we have to feed them and the like. The success of the program is based upon having human and other resources at the right location at the right time, and that is quite costly. As the fuels dampen down, it becomes too wet in the Warren region, and we will move up through the Collie and Wellington areas. As that gets too damp, we move up to the Swan region, the Darling scarp and the Perth hills area. It is about our conservation employee workforce of around 290 guys and girls moving the trucks around the south west to where the conditions are right to maximise our achievement during every window of opportunity.

**Mr W.R. MARMION:** Mr Dans made a comment earlier about the Northcliffe area and how six years ago a massive wildfire went through and burnt out a lot of land. On the bad side there is that risk to farms, but on the good side it burnt a number of hectares, which created a bonus for the key performance indicators. When the sixth year comes around, there is a window of opportunity to see how much land has been burnt to reach that KPI of 45 per cent with a fuel age of less than six years, if that is the indicator—I am not sure whether that was the indicator when I was the minister. Under that model, the department knows in advance what burning is coming up. Would another way of allocating the \$22 million be to put \$7 million in one year, \$3 million in another year

and \$5 million in another year, because based on that model the department knows what burning it has to do each year? Rather than spreading the \$5.5 million over four years, would it be better to allocate it precisely to where the department thinks it should be spent?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** It is an interesting proposition. Again, the same issue of climatic seasonal conditions for that particular year would have to be faced.

**Mr W.R. MARMION:** It could just be rolled over.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I guess so, and perhaps Mr Dans has some thoughts on that. I presume that when the opportunity presents itself to burn in a big way, the funding is still there.

**Mr P. Dans:** The member's proposal could work once we are consistently achieving that 45 per cent with a fuel age of less than six years. As I said, one would need quite detailed visibility of when that figure was potentially going to drop below the 45 per cent, and resource accordingly. It would be wise for us to deal with essentially the backlog first before we consider a strategy like that.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** I refer to page 597, specifically paragraph 1.3 on the Collie adventure trails project. I note that \$10 million will be spent on mountain bike and hiking trails. This very exciting prospect will turn Collie into a hub of trail activity. Can the parliamentary secretary tell me how this relates to the expansion of Wellington National Park, which was an election commitment?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I am not surprised this area interests the member, who is a keen cyclist and conservationist—he is combining two great passions. This is a really exciting project. It has the potential to put Collie on the map as an adventure destination. We know that many people head down to Margaret River, for instance, and the south west coast to surf. But if we analyse the numbers of people who go hiking or mountain biking, they are right up there. It is also an activity that is really accessible for people in all weather conditions. The idea is to invest \$10 million over the next four years into the development of the Collie adventure trails. This will attract people from all over Australia and internationally. It will be another feather in our cap in terms of tourism, and it sits very well with the brand of Western Australia, which is known for being a place of rugged beauty and outback adventure. There is a great market for this sort of experience that people are not likely to get anywhere else. It is the biggest investment in any adventure trails program of its kind in Australia. As I said, mountain bike trails are certainly a growing trend. They attract people from Perth and across Western Australia, which is a good thing because it gets people to become tourists in their own state and spend money.

[4.10 pm]

It is going to involve a network of mountain bike and walking trails. It will traverse Wellington National Park in the vicinity of Collie, which has some incredible forest country, the amazing Collie–Preston area and the river. It is a very spectacular destination to get to. It is also a good shot in the arm for the Collie economy. It is a town that needs support, and as a government we are looking at all sorts of ways we can invigorate the economy in a clean and sustainable way. Public consultation has sought views on the proposal to expand Wellington National Park, because we are also very passionate about doing that. There is some good country down there, including some amazing forest country. As well as making it a destination of some excitement, we are also looking at expanding Wellington National Park, in consultation with the community. We have received many submissions, the vast majority of which expressed support for the expansion of Wellington National Park. It currently covers about 17 500 hectares of good-quality jarrah, marri and blackbutt forests. There is Wellington Dam and Collie River Valley, and it also has a park used by mountain bikers, hikers, fishers, swimmers, canoeists and bushwalkers. It is something we are quite excited about. It is about protecting more of our natural environment, but not locking it away. It will be protected and enhanced for future generations. Why would we not have an economy attached to it? Who says that being a conservationist does not mean building and developing an economic base that will benefit the people of Collie? For many years, the economic platform in Collie was based on the old industries of timber felling and coal mining, and that will continue, but we are transitioning out of that as renewables come online, and the economic case for those renewable sources of power makes more sense. It is not something we need to rush into, but we need to be mindful to seize the opportunities that are there, and this is one way that we can preserve a wonderful environment and also promote tourism and economic activity in Collie. The \$10 million adventure trail where mountain bikers can take part will put Collie on the map. It will be a destination, and it is very exciting.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** If it is so exciting, the parliamentary secretary should put out a press release.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** If we have the transcript in *Hansard*, I can just put that in the press release. This comes naturally. This is part of the budget because this is what budgets do. Budgets are about good ideas and investing in the right priorities. We have spoken a lot about getting down to the brass tacks of the numbers, but I think it is worthwhile talking up the good things that are happening in this state that the budget helps to deliver. We spend

a short time on these types of issues, but I think they are worth talking about. If the community is tuned into the proceedings today, I guarantee the issue that it will remember when it walks away will be the Collie adventure trail.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** On page 589, under “Joint Management and Visitor Services”, paragraph 14 states —

The Department will implement the Two Year Action Plan for Nature Based Tourism ...

Where can I find the two-year action plan? I went on the website and I cannot find it. Is the plan complete and is it available for the public?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I know the member is very keen to read this. It has not been formally released to the public, but I can refer the member to the director general for more information on that.

**Mr M. Webb:** Thank you for the question. The plan has been developed and the two-year nature-based tourism strategy is currently being considered by the government. The expectation is it will be released very shortly.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I expect the Collie mountain bike path will be on the plan. Will the plan mention things such as the Abrolhos Islands national park and its development, or is that not envisaged in the plan?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** That is a good question. I am not in the cabinet, so I cannot confirm that even if I did know. Matters before cabinet are confidential, but I am sure we will find out. There are lots of exciting things besides Collie, and the Abrolhos Islands national park is one of them.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The national park is indeed on page 598 of the budget and \$10 million is allocated towards the development of the national park—\$5 million this coming year and \$5 million in 2020–21. What will this year’s \$5 million be spent on?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I have my notes here somewhere and I can dig them out, but to save time, the director general can talk about that.

**Mr M. Webb:** We have been working through a process in consultation with the local community in Geraldton and the residents on the island of how those moneys might be expended. The money will be expended on a range of visitor opportunities, including new shelters, upgrading the airstrip, a new public jetty and a range of other works that will happen over the next two years.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Does the \$10 million include a very large component for building facilities for staff on the islands?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** The director general can answer that.

**Mr M. Webb:** In round terms, approximately 90 per cent of the moneys will be spent directly on tourism-related facilities, and the remainder will be spent on a range of departmental opportunities, including facilities for staff.

**Mr W.R. MARMION:** My question relates to the national parks. The parliamentary secretary mentioned Wellington National Park in his answer to the member from Gosnells about Wellington National Park, but a number of national parks are mentioned on page 587, including the Houtman Abrolhos Islands national park and the Helena and Aurora Ranges in the table under “New Initiatives”. Firstly, I note that there are now over a hundred national parks in Western Australia. The word “national” is of interest too. When I was the Minister for Environment, I worked out that I would probably have to be the minister for 20 years to have any chance of visiting them because it would take that long. Is the money allocated for the creation of the national parks that are mentioned here for the process of establishing them or does it also include money to maintain them?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Thank you, member. It depends on which park the member is talking about. Some of these are proposed national parks, so there will be some instances in which the money will be used to begin the planning for that, as well as for improving some local facilities. It really depends on which national park the member is talking about.

**Mr W.R. MARMION:** I will start with the Houtman Abrolhos Islands national park.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Obviously we can elaborate further, but the \$10 million allocated to the Houtman Abrolhos Islands national park over 2019–20 and 2020–21 is going to be used for public facilities to support tourism and improve visitors’ safety and amenities. We are talking about jetties; the installation of signage and paths; and the extension and upgrades to the airstrip, which is obviously important in that part of the world. Additionally, \$630 000 will be provided for the day-to-day management of the national park in 2019–20, rising to \$1.18 million in 2021–22. It is a total of \$3.8 million spread over the four years. Part of that number is for day-to-day ongoing maintenance and managing of the park. Certainly, some new capital expenditure is going towards enhancing the tourists’ experience and making things better and safer for tourists.

[4.20 pm]

**Extract from Hansard**

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B — Wednesday, 22 May 2019]

p318a-331a

Mr Shane Love; Mr Reece Whitby; Dr David Honey; Chair; Mr Bill Marmion; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Mark Folkard

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**Mr W.R. MARMION:** From a tourism angle, this is a good opportunity for a tourism destination so it cuts across other portfolios. I refer to staffing and the money allocated for its ongoing management. Will department staff be on the island and some in Geraldton? How will the management be undertaken?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I do not have the detail off the top of my head—it is an operational question—but I will refer to the director general.

**Mr M. Webb:** Part of the conversation with the local community is around the use of the Abrolhos Islands and the tourism facilities. I do not anticipate that staff will be permanently based on the island. But they will certainly be using a locational base on the island, from where they will do their operational activities.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I imagine we are talking about a boost to Geraldton.

**Mr M. Webb:** Staff will be most likely based in Geraldton but they will be regularly travelling out to the Abrolhos Islands to undertake operational duties.

**Mr W.R. MARMION:** I have been to the Abrolhos Islands; I got there by helicopter. Will the department have to have a fast mode of transport such as a boat or will the staff use a helicopter? I think there is a landing strip out there. How will the department budget for access for department staff administering the new park?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** We will be buying a new expensive jet! No; we will not.

**The CHAIR:** Parliamentary secretary, be careful; Hansard is here.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** We will provide personal jet skis for each staff member! How will staff members at the national park get to work each day on the Abrolhos?

**Mr M. Webb:** As operational needs require, they will travel to the island most likely by plane and land on one of the airstrips. They may do it in consultation with the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development. We are building a relationship with DPIRD, so we may use its boat for operational purposes. We will work alongside that department, consistent with its activities. It will be a mixture of, I guess, those two opportunities.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Upgrading the airstrip was mentioned. Which particular airstrip, because there are several out there? Is it in the Wallabi group?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** That is a very good question.

**Mr M. Webb:** It is the airstrip on East Wallabi.

**Mr W.R. MARMION:** This is a totally different type of park to manage. What sorts of resources might be allocated to the place like the Helena and Aurora Ranges? When I was a minister, the department sometimes received criticism from pastoralists on adjoining pastoral stations who complained that the department was not looking after its particular park or lease to the same standard that the pastoralists were. They were concerned about certain types of weeds blowing onto their properties. That is why I asked.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** Is it weeds from the pastoralists' stations going onto the national park?

**Mr W.R. MARMION:** No; that is not how it happens.

I am interested to hear how the funding is being managed and to hear comment on those criticisms that are often made by pastoralists.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Sorry, can the member repeat that?

**Mr W.R. MARMION:** I refer to the Helena and Aurora Ranges under “Plan for Our Parks” on page 587. Is money allocated to help set up the Helena and Aurora Ranges? If not, is it for some support for the ongoing management of the area that will become a national park?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** At the moment, it is a conservation estate, and the amount of \$1.4 million is allocated to progressing to a new national park. Obviously, it has very significant values in being a very old and unique range with unique biodiversity in that part of the world. There are significant opportunities in the future. There is already tourism there, but I think there are opportunities in the future for tourism just north of Southern Cross in the goldfields. There are also social benefits for the traditional owners. This is something that recurs with all our national parks and the Aboriginal ranger program. We have spoken in previous estimates about the value of that program, economically and culturally, to traditional owners. At this stage, the money is for engagement and planning for the development of that national park. As it is a conservation estate, I might seek clarification about whether there is already a cost for managing that area. The member suggested weed control as part of management.

**Mr W.R. MARMION:** It was as an example.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Director general, can you elaborate?

**Mr M. Webb:** In relation to the Helena and Aurora Ranges in particular, currently irregular visitation by our staff is made to that site. As the parliamentary secretary has indicated, those moneys will allow more regular engagement and activity, particularly with local Aboriginal traditional owners. That is part of that conversation. We also have a good neighbour policy that applies across all our national parks to address issues around fire and feral animals and weeds to ensure that we do not negatively impact upon our neighbours in the way the member indicated.

**Mr W.R. MARMION:** Can the parliamentary secretary remind me whether national parks can be classed differently, such as class A, class B or class C et cetera? Is the Helena and Aurora Ranges being looked at to be made an A-class reserve?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** That is right, member; there is that range. The government's view at this stage is that such is the significant environmental value of that area we anticipate it being an A-class national park.

**The CHAIR:** Member for Moore, do you have a further question?

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I thought I was down the list coming down the line.

**The CHAIR:** I am terribly sorry; I did not have your name on the list for a new question.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I am sure you will enjoy listening to my question following on from that.

I refer to "Conservation Land Acquisition" under new works on page 598. An amount of \$360 000 is in the budget estimates for that. I refer further to "Conservation Land Acquisition—2018–19 Program" on page 597 and two purchases of \$340 000 in the preceding two years under that program. Why is there no money in the forward estimates for this program? Where does the funding come from for the conservation land acquisition program?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Thank you for the question, member. The government has previously identified the areas that it wants to add to the conservation estate. An area has been identified and money has been allocated but, at this stage, there is no additional area to that. We are working with a known quantity of land and a value attributed to that.

[4.30 pm]

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The other part of the question was: where does the funding come from for the conservation land acquisition program?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I refer the member to the director general.

**Mr M. Webb:** It is an allocation within our budget that occurs each year, and, as is indicated on page 597, it continues for the next four out years.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** There is a contribution where?

**Mr M. Webb:** Correct—in each year. It is \$360 000, \$380 000, \$400 000 and \$420 000.

**The CHAIR:** Can you direct our attention to the page number and the line item that you are looking at, please, sir?

**Mr M. Webb:** It is on page 598 under the heading "Conservation Land Acquisition". Each year it indicates an amount of money.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** So the program continues every year—I see.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** It is a different program on the lines.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Where does the funding for that purchase come from?

**Mrs A.J. Klenke:** I am able to confirm that it is a capital contribution from Treasury for the conservation program that is referred to on page 598.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** My understanding is that the state government has a program whereby it purchases conservation land using money garnered through the offsets program. I want to know specifically whether the funding for this land purchase is provided by that offsets program, which I will ask about in the next division. This is the spending side of the money and I want to know whether that is where the money comes from.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** The member is right and we can get to that in the next division. In terms of the spending side, I defer to Ms Klenke.

**Mrs A.J. Klenke:** We have some 06 specific-purpose accounts whereby we have environmental offsets that come from external parties. That is in addition to this line item in the asset investment program.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** So is it a restricted asset?

**Mrs A.J. Klenke:** If we have had the money in advance, it is held in our restricted cash.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** The table on spending changes on page 588 of volume 2 of budget paper No 2 indicates that there is around \$1 million for the voluntary targeted separation scheme. However, at page 581, it indicates that employee benefits seem to be quite stable, as there is a saving in the VTSS of \$1 million a year. Furthermore, footnote (b) —

**The CHAIR:** Just be careful, member for Cottesloe, because that is in a different division. That is division 39.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Sorry; it is on pages 593 to 596. It indicates that the number of FTEs will go up by about 10. I have two questions. Firstly, how many FTEs have reduced through the VTSS? Secondly, are we anticipating any reduction? If I add up the numbers in those tables relevant to those services, it looks as though the number of FTEs will go up by 10 across the forward estimates, not down?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Obviously, there are savings from the VTSS, but extra funds are also coming into the agency for the plan for our parks. That involves extra resources and an extra 10 people. Although the VTSS would have resulted in a decline in some numbers, we have also received an increase in other areas for these programs.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** If the number is going up by 10, how is the department achieving a reduction through the VTSS? It looks as though the number is going up, not down. I assume that the government is spending money in this case to reduce staffing in the department, not to increase staffing in the department.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** The point I would make is that if we had not done that, the numbers would be even higher. We brought in extra people to facilitate extra projects, which makes sense. We were able to reduce the initial number at the starting point through the voluntary targeted separation scheme. If that scheme was not operating, there would be an overall higher figure.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** How many voluntary targeted separations did the department achieve in 2018–19 and how many is it planning to achieve in 2019–20?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I refer the member to Morgan Marsh for a response.

**Mrs M. Marsh:** There were 76 severances through the VTSS. That scheme ended that financial year, so there were no official VTSSs offered in 2018–19 or are planned for 2019–20.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** The spending changes indicate that there is a \$1 million saving year on year. Is that just carrying forward the original saving rather than representing a new saving each year?

**Mrs M. Marsh:** Yes, it is carrying forward the savings for the initial number of staff lost, not additional ones for the following years.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Just to be clear, it is not in fact a saving each year, if you like; it is simply a saving in one year that is then repeated every other year. A budget is normally a budget against each year, rather than taking a fixed point at the start and then carrying it on forever. If we did that for everything, it would be an interesting budget.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I will get Ms Klenke to elaborate on that as well.

**Mrs A.J. Klenke:** The department had three tranches of the VTSS. The number that the member is looking at on page 588 represents the T2 and T3 components, but they have come since the *Budget Statements*. That is why they appear in this budget. There are other savings for the other numbers that Ms Marsh mentioned.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I am still not clear. I think I heard that there will be no more reductions in the number of people through the VTSS in the forward years, so what has been achieved has been achieved. I am a little dumbfounded to understand how there can be a saving when people are not leaving the department.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Perhaps Ms Klenke can explain the forward numbers at the bottom of the table on page 588, which are all different, and why they are there.

**Mrs A.J. Klenke:** For tranche 2 and tranche 3, it was a timing issue. Treasury had a cut-off for its *Budget Statements*. That is why T2 and T3 appear in the 2019–20 *Budget Statements*; that is the table of spending changes made since the last budget. T2 and T3 did not make it into the prior year's *Budget Statements*. The 963 that the member sees for 2019–20 comprises 748 for T2 and 215 for T3.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** The additional numbers are 974 for 2020–21 and 991 for 2021–22. If I heard the earlier answer correctly, there are no further planned reductions, so I am still intrigued about how there can be a saving.

[4.40 pm]

**Mrs A.J. Klenke:** Because the numbers were already in the budget statement, it flows through the out years. Because it is in the income statement, we have to reduce it in the out years. The member will see that it goes up marginally. That is to account for the extra \$1 000 built in for the wages policy. That is why it is going up each year. There are no additional people, but it is the additional cost for those people in the out years.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** There is an additional \$221 000 in 2022–23. That was obviously not in the last budget. We only reported four years out. Are there a further couple of reductions?

**Mrs A.J. Klenke:** No, there is nothing further. It is the same number of people. It is to do with the way the budget statements appear. When we do our rollover of the out year, it is the numbers that are in the statements at that time, and then we have to make that adjustment. No, there are no further FTE reductions in 2022–23.

**Mr M.J. FOLKARD:** I refer to the Aboriginal ranger program at paragraph 4 on page 588 of the *Budget Statements*. Can the parliamentary secretary explain the process of the \$20 million five-year program and how the funding will be used?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I appreciate the question. It is an important question because Aboriginal employment is an issue, and it is important to see more people in our Aboriginal communities employed. That has positive ramifications across the social spectrum. The Western Australian government obviously recognises the important benefits of the Aboriginal ranger program. As the member said, a \$20 million five-year program is currently underway. I am pleased to report there has been a lot of progress in this initiative. A number of applications from communities has resulted in \$8.5 million being spent to create 85 new jobs and 80 training positions for Aboriginal people, including 47 female Aboriginal rangers. That is the first tranche. Expressions of interest for the second round were called in November last year. We anticipate that that funding will be \$9 million. We anticipate a similar number of people will be employed under that second tranche, and there will be a third tranche in 2019 to round out the \$20 million.

It is really important that Aboriginal people find employment, but also remain connected to country. They often have innate knowledge and cultural knowledge of the land they are charged to protect and enhance. They have a lot of traditional bush knowledge about the flora and fauna on site. It is very useful. They provide services in weed control and protecting exotic species of flora. It is also important that people involved in this program are actually gaining transferable skills. It is highly likely that people who have been employed as rangers might, in the future, also find employment in the private sector. Mining companies that maintain conservation areas or are concerned about their impact on the environment would be very interested in employing people from the local communities in which they operate. There are huge benefits in an economic sense to Aboriginal communities. The broader community gains that benefit from Aboriginal cultural knowledge of areas. It is a real success story. There is a lot of keenness to be involved. The member has seen the take-up in the first tranche. We expect the same in the second. These people will be employed in national parks in a variety of functions. As I said before, there are future employment opportunities in other areas on country. These people will also be serving as role models in their communities. It is something that has been embraced by virtually everyone. It is a successful program and I think it is well worth the investment.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I noted the investment of \$20 million over five years. However, the grant summary on page 600 shows that the Aboriginal ranger program will cease. Where does that program appear in this budget? Where does the \$20 million appear?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Paragraph 4 under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency” on page 588 mentions the investment and the impact of the Aboriginal ranger program.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I noted that, but I do not note it in any other expenditure table. It is not a trick question; I am not —

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Is the member after a line item for that money?

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Yes, the line item in the budget where that spend appears.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Okay. We will try to track that down.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Webb?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** No. We are seeking to track down that page.

**The CHAIR:** They have done that!

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** We have found it, have we?

**The CHAIR:** Mrs Klenke.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Sorry, I thought we were still looking for it.

**Mrs A.J. Klenke:** The Aboriginal ranger program is loaded in the *Budget Statements* within the services and contracts area as well as employee expenditure because, when the program was undertaken, it was not clear exactly how that money would be distributed. The reason the member only sees \$1.247 million in 2017–18, on page 600, is that we have made those payments out as a grant payment. Also, in terms of the number of recipients quoted earlier, they do not receive their full amount; they need to achieve milestones and the like before getting their full allocation.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** To be clear, on which page of the budget is that included?

**Mrs A.J. Klenke:** It will be within the income statement and the cash flow. I will get those page numbers. There would be a component on page 600. I do not have the exact page number in front of me.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** It is in the table at the bottom of page 600. I will pass it to Mrs Klenke.

**Mrs A.J. Klenke:** Within the *Budget Statements*, the \$20 million for the Aboriginal ranger program would be reflected as a combination in the employee benefits in the income statement, and in the services and contracts within the income statement. There would be a corresponding entry in the cash flow statements in those line items.

**The CHAIR:** Can you pause for a minute so the member has a chance to follow it? I am having trouble finding it, so members probably are too. Does the member for Cottesloe have enough information?

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Only in that it is not transparent.

**The CHAIR:** Is the member okay if I let this continue?

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I do not think there is anything further to go on. It cannot be found in the budget.

**Mr W.R. MARMION:** My question relates to the line item on the election commitment for Lake Kepwari under “Works in Progress” on page 597. We have been waiting a long time for this lake to be rehabilitated. The budget has expenditure of \$2.475 million allocated to —

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Sorry, member, which line item was that?

**Mr W.R. MARMION:** It is under “Works in Progress”. It looks like some work has already started. What progress has been made? What will the \$2.475 million be spent on? Water from this lake was not of the right quality for it to be used as a recreational lake. I will be interested in comments from the department about that. When the work is complete, will people be able to recreate on the lake, and to what capacity will that include swimming in it?

[4.50 pm]

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I refer to Mr Dans, who can tell the member a lot more than I can about this issue.

**Mr P. Dans:** A lot of planning and design work has been done on the development of Lake Kepwari. The capital funds will be expended on an access road in, the development of a boat ramp, finger jetty and boat trailer parking, and some basic camping and picnic facilities. The issue we face is that the area is still a mining lease held by Premier Coal. The lake area and the area where the department will undertake the works will need to be surrendered before we can start on-ground works. Premier Coal is still responsible for it while it is a mining lease under a state agreement act. We anticipate that early in the new financial year we will get to the point at which we can start works. We will need to wait for the soil to dry out because our first task is to replace the bridge on the access road. Having had the design work done, we are confident that we can go to tender for the boat ramps, car parks, finger jetties and picnic facilities towards the end of spring.

**Mr W.R. MARMION:** In terms of Premier Coal owning the site, is the issue of transferring the site to the department related to water quality, because under Premier Coal’s rehabilitation agreement, the quality of the water has to meet a certain standard before it can be transferred?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** My understanding is that the water quality has vastly improved recently, which is good news, but Mr Dans can elaborate.

**Mr P. Dans:** The water quality in the mining void was an issue some years ago because the Collie River south branch was diverted around the mining void. The Collie River south branch now flows through the mining void and, as part of the completion criteria, the diversion channel is being infilled. The water quality is now considered completely acceptable for contact recreation activities.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** My questions relate to the concessions that are granted to people upon entering property controlled by the department. Budget paper No 3 summarises the concessions quite nicely.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** What page?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Page 252.

**The CHAIR:** Which section in the division does it relate to?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** It relates to several of them. For instance, it relates to visitor services and public programs provided at Perth Zoo, for which the cost of service is impacted by the concessions granted in the scheme; therefore, it is quite a legitimate issue to raise.

**The CHAIR:** I am just pinning it down somewhere. Are you with us, parl sec?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I am getting there. Are we talking about Perth Zoo?

Mr Shane Love; Mr Reece Whitby; Dr David Honey; Chair; Mr Bill Marmion; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Mark Folkard

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**Mr R.S. LOVE:** We are talking about the concessions generally that the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions provides to people upon entry to its properties. There is a list of different concessions, starting off with Perth Zoo, which is one of the larger groups of concessions provided. How does the department or the minister ascertain the appropriateness or otherwise of the level of concessions that are granted and the effectiveness of those concessions in ensuring that target groups are able to visit and enjoy the facilities offered by the department?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** The member's question relates not to the total charge for entry but the discount in the concession for students and pensioners —

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** And through that the implied net cost, I suppose, to the individual.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** The fees for Perth Zoo rate very competitively with similar attractions across Perth and certainly with zoos around the country. For instance, the standard adult entry—that is, for people aged 15 years and older—is \$32 and the fee for children aged between four and 15 years is \$15.50. I presume it is free entry for children under four years of age. Students on a school excursion are charged \$10.50. The concession rate is \$25 and the rate for seniors is \$25. Sorry, I will restate those figures because they have moved slightly. The new standard adult entry fee is \$33, which is a \$1 increase. The fee for children aged between four and 15 years is \$16.50. The school student concession is \$10.75 and the concession rate is \$26. In comparison, the entry cost at Australia Zoo in Queensland is \$59 and at Taronga Zoo Sydney is \$47. The entry adult fee at Adelaide Zoo is slightly above ours at \$36 and at Melbourne Zoo is \$37. We are very competitive in prices. If we look at the entry fees for other attractions, it is \$29 for Caversham Wildlife Park; \$30 for the Aquarium of Western Australia; \$59.50 at Adventure World for a person aged 14 years and over, which is a little different; \$26 for the IGA Perth Royal Show; and \$34 for the Maze in the Swan Valley. Perth Zoo is pretty price competitive. I will seek further advice to determine how we price concessions as a discount from the standard charge. Visitation at Perth Zoo has been fairly consistent and actually grew last year with the dinosaur exhibit. We can get a bump in attendance with specific attractions. Perth Zoo is looking to reinvigorate itself in a number of ways, including developments to the wetland area and a new cafe facility, which will make it a much more popular destination for events. I can see a pretty bright future in patronage for Perth Zoo. I will pass to Ms Attenborough for an overview on how the department works out concessions and how competitive the Zoo is.

**Ms W. Attenborough:** The concession rate is determined as a proportion of the full rate, obviously, and this again is benchmarked against other attractions both in Perth and interstate. As the parliamentary secretary indicated, it is indeed highly competitive on both those fronts.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I have a further a question and a comment to make on the answer that I received. It is interesting that Perth Zoo is benchmarked against things such as Adventure World because I would have thought that Perth Zoo also has significant educational value. Perhaps the efficiency indicator should not be how it compares with commercial activities. It is not actually the official efficiency indicator, which is the average cost per visit to the Zoo. One way to drive that indicator price down quite rapidly would be to greatly increase patronage at the Zoo by having extra concessions for families at certain times, because a trip to the Zoo for a family of four children who are above the age of four, for instance, makes for a pretty expensive outing. My concern is to ensure that as many Western Australian families as possible enjoy the benefit of Perth Zoo. Has the department considered trying to drive down the unit cost per visit, not by higher costs but by driving patronage with periods of free entry or targeting particular groups, such as a Mother's Day event or some such, just as an idea?

[5.00 pm]

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I think it is a good idea. Just to be fair, I did say it was not an exact comparison with Adventure World.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I was not trying to make anything of it—not at all.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** It is always a balance in a whole range of government services. We have to calculate whether dropping a charge will increase patronage to meet the shortfall created by dropping the per person fare. It is an interesting idea. It may be worth considering a special day for families with discounted or free entry. I will ask Ms Attenborough whether that has been considered or whether we have any experience of having open days at the Zoo, but, before I do that, the member's initial question was about not only the Zoo, but all the facilities —

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I have some follow-up questions.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Maybe we can come back to that and deal with the Zoo question now.

**Ms W. Attenborough:** There are a range of days when Zoo entry is offered free. On Mother's Day, for instance, mothers receive free entry; similarly, on Father's Day. We also have a membership product that results in a cheaper annual overall cost for entry. The price paid is covered after three visits to the Zoo, but is valid for entry over the full year. There are various mechanisms to both drive visitation and ensure affordability for families.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I will briefly follow up on the issue of concessions. There is a list of national park entry fees and a list of fees for other attractions, such as camping and otherwise. I take it that none of those camping concessions or other events are included in the national park entry fee. Are there additional charges for camping, for instance, in national parks?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Of the 100 national parks we have in the state, 33 parks, or one-third, charge an entry fee, so people can waltz in free of charge to two-thirds of the parks. The national parks with charges have services and facilities that need to be maintained and the fee is to help cover the cost of that. Yes, there is a basic entry charge. People who want to camp overnight have to pay an extra charge. I have camped at Nanga Brook at Dwellingup. The charges are fairly reasonable. A campsite with basic toilet facilities and showers is \$11 per night for an adult, \$7 for a concession and \$3 for a child aged six to 15 years. If the park has camping facilities, that charge would cover the cost of camping overnight.

The agency also waives a lot of fees—totally in some cases—for members of disabled groups, seniors and study groups. There are opportunities for people in certain categories to access our national parks free of charge. It is always an issue of balancing charges against the return and whether the department would get a higher return if the individual fee were lower, but I think for what people get, the charge is pretty reasonable. If people are ready to go camping and have to pay \$11 each for mum and dad, and \$3 for a child under 15, it is probably very competitive.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** There is no line item for this, but will people entering the Abrolhos national park be granted concessions?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** The advice at the moment, member, is that there is no plan to introduce any charges for entering what will be the Houtman Abrolhos national park. Certainly, facilities are provided and being maintained, but at this stage there is no fee. Obviously, we are still working that out, but at this stage there is no plan for that.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** So there will be no income from the park?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I do not know whether we can say firmly either way; this is something we are still working out. The plan is still being developed for the national park and to provide those facilities.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** This is a serious concern I have had for some time. I refer to page 590 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and note 29 referring to invasive pests. I believe narrow-leaf cotton bush, *Gomphocarpus fruticosus*, is a prescribed weed. I have seen it take over the entire mid-south west. I do not expect members to know, but I spent a significant time in the south west working with Alcoa, and I can say that that weed is now up and down both sides of Forrest Highway. Going through the Baldivis electorate, I have seen whole paddocks of that weed. It seems to me that at a level of government—I am not pointing the finger at any one government—we have completely given up on controlling that pest, which can expand tenfold or a hundredfold each year. Is there any effort to try to seriously control this weed? Certainly, it cannot escape departmental members' notice that as they drive along Forrest Highway just south of the metropolitan area, the weed is on the road reserve and in the all paddocks on either side. It seems we have given up and that this highly invasive weed is taking over substantial areas of parkland, reserve and national forest. Is anything being done about this and will we see a renewed focus to control this highly invasive and very rapidly expanding weed?

[5.10 pm]

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I have not given up the fight against cotton bush. There is a community group called Riding for the Disabled Peel, located on the border of Baldivis, Kwinana and Leda, and it has a property there. Weekend after weekend they are there, pulling this stuff up, and it is a real issue—certainly in parts of the electorate that I represent. I have done my bit on the odd weekend pulling it up and trying to eradicate it. My advice is that it is not on the list of prescribed weeds that the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions is taking action against, but that it probably sits under the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development as an agricultural weed. I am not sure when that agency is coming up, but it would be a question better directed to it. I agree with the member that it is an issue and something we need to be aware of.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I think it is an area that needs to be looked at. The bushland in the reserve around the Harvey diversion drain has been completely taken over by it. I think if it is not a priority for the department, it should be, because I cannot see why it will not be the predominant plant in the south west, given the rate at which it is expanding.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I thank the member. He has put the team here on notice and we have all heard his concerns. I know the director general will go away and consider it, so I appreciate that.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** My question is in reference to page 597. I am interested in William Bay National Park and Kalbarri National Park. There are allocations for extra infrastructure in both those national parks. Could the parliamentary secretary tell us about the detail of the infrastructure we will see at the William Bay and Kalbarri National Parks?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** This is an issue that we have spoken about before. The Kalbarri Skywalk and national park tourist infrastructure are due to be completed this financial year, which is very good news. It is a highly anticipated attraction. I have not seen it, but I am looking forward to it. It involves two cantilevered viewing platforms from which visitors will be able to experience soaring views of the spectacular Murchison River Gorge and surrounding environment. The state government will invest \$2 million in completing the visitor infrastructure at the Kalbarri Skywalk. Of course, tourism is integral to Kalbarri's economy; we know that, and this is about delivering a world-class facility and infrastructure that will help Kalbarri continue to be a place to visit and to draw even more visitors into Kalbarri National Park, which is a big favourite. It is a place where people routinely escape to, and this will be another reason to go there. Kalbarri continues to be a popular destination for tourists and visitors; it is iconic. It is, of course, famous for its 80-kilometre gorge and coastal cliffs, striking wildflowers and various recreational activities.

The member also mentioned the William Bay National Park tourist infrastructure renewal project. It is a \$4.4 million investment that will start with improved road access, expanded parking capacity, new visitor facilities, and several —

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** A shower?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** A shower! There will also be several sites across this popular south coast park. The state government will make \$2.5 million available to develop world-class visitor facilities and to upgrade infrastructure at the iconic Greens Pool and Elephant Rocks sites within this national park. The overall picture is good with regard to visitor numbers, so we are doing things that are really improving the visitor experience. I have spoken about the trail in Collie and the Abrolhos coming online, Wellington Dam and now the Kalbarri Skywalk and William Bay National Park.

There was an estimated 20.4 million visits to department-managed lands across the state in 2018–19. For a population of approximately 2.5 million in Western Australia, 20 million visitors to our national parks and other lands managed by the agency is a pretty impressive number. As tourism builds and as people more and more appreciate the kind of adventure environment we have to offer in Western Australia, I can only see those numbers increasing.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Just quickly, paragraph 32 on page 590 refers to managing sandalwood. I just want to clarify the statement about including the management of taking sandalwood from private and public lands, including access by traditional owners and control of illegal harvesting. Does that imply that traditional owners will be given automatic access to private property for sandalwood harvesting, or are those two separate points?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** The sandalwood industry is one that we want to pursue and there are some benefits for traditional owners. With regard to the issue the member is asking about—private land and interaction with people collecting sandalwood, including traditional owners—I will pass over to Dr Stanley.

**Dr F. Stanley:** With regard to the private and public land elements of the sandalwood industry, access may be provided to Aboriginal people in both those elements. On private lands, it is up to the landholder to determine who may access that resource, subject to licensing, but the comment in the budget papers regarding Aboriginal businesses and people accessing the sandalwood industry is more around public lands that have native title determinations over them.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

[5.20 pm]