

Division 12: Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions — Services 1, 3 to 10, Environment \$375 551 000 —

Mr T.J. Healy, Chair.

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

Mr M. Webb, Director General.

Mr P. Dans, Acting Deputy Director General.

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

Mr M. Neilson, Manager, Strategy and Reform.

Mr G. Edwards, Acting Executive Director, Corporate and Business Services.

Ms M.E. Finnigan, Acting Executive Director, Zoological Parks Authority.

Ms M. Broderick, Acting Executive Director, Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority.

Dr S. Meredith, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witness 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 only be examined 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, 29 September 2017. 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.

I give the call to the member for Carine.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Parliamentary secretary, I refer to page 197 of budget paper No 2 and the table "Appropriations, Expenses and Cash Assets". Under "Delivery of Services", there is a reduction in the net amount appropriated to deliver services over the four-year forward estimates period, including 2017–18. What is the reason for that reduction, and what services will be cut in order to make those savings?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: The whole of government is having to look for savings and efficiencies. This agency, like the rest of the government, is in that same situation after the change of government and finding ourselves in this financial situation. It is true that this agency is having to cut its cloth according to the circumstances. There is a slight decline in the out years, and I will refer the member to the director general for further advice on this.

Mr M. Webb: I will make two points. The first point is that in 2017–18, we see a significant increase on the previous year. Most of that is taken up by depreciation and one-off costs, which is causing a decline in the out years. However, in the out years there is still a consistent base, or not a decrease. I also refer the member to "Expenses", where there has been a significant increase in 2017–18 in the budget estimate for net cost of services, most of which is new money directly related to the joint management of the national parks with Indigenous operators.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Looking at the forward estimates, does the parliamentary secretary think that the department will still be able to deliver the services required to be delivered at today's standard, in four years' time based on the amount of money appropriated for this particular area?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Yes. I defer to the director.

Mr M. Webb: If I understand the member's question correctly, in the forward estimates there will be a number of challenges. We are currently working through the implications of those. A number of reviews are happening within the department as part of the machinery-of-government process. At this stage, I cannot provide the member with any clarity about where we might be looking at savings across the forward estimates. However, that is certainly something I can inform the member on as we finish those reviews in next year's review.

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Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Obviously, there would need to be savings to be able to meet this budget. I assume that the cost of services goes up every year, whether we like it or not, and the fact that there is a reduction in the budget means that some services will either have to be scaled back or completely cut.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Not necessarily, member. Never overlook the capacity of this government to find efficiencies, which is what we are attempting to do. It is not always a matter of cutting services to meet the budget. We do have the ability and the intention to find greater efficiencies across government, and that would be part of how we meet these targets.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: That is great that the parliamentary secretary is looking for further efficiencies, but I am aware that the previous government put the pressure on various departments to find efficiencies. I would be surprised if enough efficiencies were found to sustain those reductions in the out years without a cut in frontline services. Can the parliamentary secretary give us a guarantee that the standard of service delivery will be at least the minimum of the standard that it is today, and that whatever cuts are made, if any, and whatever efficiencies are found, it is not at the expense of reducing the effectiveness of frontline services?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: The previous government was not exactly the master of managing finances. I would not equate what this government is able to do in terms of what the last government was able to do. There could still be room to find efficiencies. I will just make the point that this government will do all that it can to find those efficiencies, but still maintain the best quality services into the future.

Mr D.C. NALDER: I would just like to remind the parliament secretary that this is about focusing forward and not about the past. If I cross-reference page 3 in budget paper No 3—

The CHAIR: Is this a follow-up question?

Mr D.C. NALDER: This is a follow-up question on this line item. I will cross-reference page 3 in budget paper No 3 that shows wage price index growth and consumer price index growth, which are both increasing over the forward estimates. Wage price is increasing out to three per cent, but I will focus on CPI, which is increasing from one per cent in 2017–18, to 1.5 per cent, two per cent and then 2.5 per cent, which shows that we have a growing CPI environment. That exacerbates the impact or the efficiencies that will be needed to drive this over the next four years. We understand that the department has not finished the program. We just want to confirm that the department understands the challenge in front of it in being able to meet these forward estimates. Basically, after 2017–18, with its budget estimate of \$251 million, it comes back to \$247 million, \$249 million and \$249 million. If the inflation rates are put on top of that, the savings the department will need to make will be quite large.

[2.10 pm]

The CHAIR: Is the parliamentary secretary comfortable with that question?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I can respond. It would be nice to forget the past and to not refer to the legacy of the previous government, but that is something we have to deal with every day. If the member will allow me to continue to refer to the nature of the financial situation in which we find ourselves, it is inescapable. We cannot remove it from the record. We have to deal with it. As I said, we are dealing with it every day. My response to the member would again be that this is a tough challenge. It is a tough challenge across the whole of government to find efficiencies, to maintain services and to find savings. However, this government is equal to the task and will continue to work towards that.

Mr D.C. NALDER: The parliamentary secretary again made reference to the legacy of the previous government. On that basis, can the parliamentary secretary explain why the government is increasing net debt by 34 per cent over the forward estimates and the interest expense charge by 52 per cent? The parliamentary secretary spoke about dealing with the legacy. What we are seeing in these numbers is a wing and a prayer, but he cannot specify what the savings will be that the government will drive through this department. He is expecting us to believe that the government is dealing with the legacy of the previous government when it is actually increasing net debt to the extent that it is and the interest expense that this state will be paying. The state is paying \$975 million at the moment, and the former government takes responsibility for that. However, the government is projecting that the interest expense the state will be paying by the end of this term will be \$1.485 billion. That is a \$510 million a year increase in interest expenses, or an increase of 52 per cent. If the parliamentary secretary wants to talk about the legacy of the past, we will start wanting to understand what these numbers mean and what the government is actually driving for the people of Western Australia over the next four years. Alternatively, we can focus on the questions we have regarding this department over the next four years and we can spend our time going through those line items and seeking an understanding and assurance from the government about what is happening. If the parliamentary secretary continues to push the legacy of the past, I will continue to push some facts.

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The CHAIR: Member, so that I can get you the right answer, what was your question?

Mr D.C. NALDER: Given that the CPI is going to increase, does the department understand the size or quantum of what it needs to save over the next four years? It will require a greater saving than appears in this first line item, and I am just checking that the department understands that. We already understand that it cannot give us specifics until the report is finished, but I just want to make sure that the department understands the quantum of what is required, given the CPI factors built into the budget.

The CHAIR: We will take that as relating to page 3 of budget paper No 3.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: The member is asking for some indulgence, because he has wandered into an area with questions that would have been better suited to the Treasurer yesterday. I repeat: our department is very serious about achieving savings. It works with Treasury to make sure that these savings are achievable. It is an ongoing and difficult task.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to the spending changes on page 197 of volume 1 of budget paper No 2 and to the second line item, “Creation of a National Park—Mosaic of National Parks in the Kimberley”. An amount of \$1 million that appears to have not been spent in the current year is budgeted to be spent in the next year. Can the parliamentary secretary explain what that \$1 million will be used for?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Certainly. There was a carryover of \$1 million from 2016–17 to assist with the establishment of a new marine national park in the Buccaneer Archipelago. This is seed funding, which will be supplemented by an ongoing investment of \$1.2 million funded through re-prioritisation of existing funds.

Mr R.S. LOVE: There is nothing in the forward estimates for the creation of that park beyond that line item, or is there?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I refer that question to Mr Neilson.

Mr M. Neilson: The estimates at page 197 refer to a \$1 million carryover. That is a formal recognition in the Treasury budgeting system of an underspending last year that is to be carried over. On an ongoing basis, \$1.2 million per annum will be reallocated internally towards this project.

Mr R.S. LOVE: What expenditure is required for the creation of a national park, rather than for the recurrent costs of running the park?

Mr M. Neilson: The process of establishing a national park requires a broad consultation process. In this case, it is a particularly complex area. A number of stakeholders will need to be consulted. In terms of hard, physical infrastructure, there is no specific plan or allocation, but as plans are firmed up, the infrastructure requirements will be firmed up and an allocation will be made. At the moment it is a broadbrush allocation. That reflects the early nature of the planning process at this stage.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Would it be fair to say that the creation of a park, in the sense of its declaration and designation, is not a terribly expensive process? That amount of \$1 million seems to cover the cost.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I direct that to Mr Dans.

Mr P. Dans: The establishment of a marine park by virtue of legislation requires extensive consultation, it requires the preparation of an indicative management plan prior to the reserve being established, and in this case it would require extensive consultation and involvement with the traditional owner groups responsible for the area—the islands and the water body—and the preparation of an Indigenous land use agreement with those groups. There is an extensive program of consultation and planning, particularly with Indigenous traditional owners, the fishing industry and a range of other stakeholder groups. It can be a quite lengthy process, but it is required before a marine park can be established.

Mr R.S. LOVE: When the government decided as part of its election commitments to deliver this park and not the Abrolhos Islands as a national park, as had been mooted by the previous government, the avoided expenditure would actually have been minimal because the cost involved in the declaration of a park appears not to be very much. The parliamentary secretary has spoken about an extensive consultation process around native title and other issues, which presumably is somewhat less of an issue on the Abrolhos Islands. Will the parliamentary secretary concede that not making the Abrolhos Islands a national park has avoided very little expense on the part of the government?

[2.20 pm]

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I will make an observation. The member is correct: there has been a prioritisation towards Labor’s commitments on national parks in those examples but in the forward estimates there is still a commitment of \$10 million for protecting and enhancing the Abrolhos Islands. That certainly means that we have not ignored

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or dropped the ball on the Abrolhos Islands, it is just that we have chosen a different path forward for new national parks. I am happy to ask Mr Dans to answer that.

Mr P. Dans: There is nothing much really to add to what the parliamentary secretary said.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Does the member for Mount Lawley have a further question?

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: If I may, Mr Chair, I have a further question to the parliamentary secretary while we are discussing national parks in the Kimberley. While we are on the issue of the cost of the creation of new parks, the second dot point under the significant issues impacting the agency on page 198 of budget paper No 2 reads —

... will be created and managed jointly by the Department and Traditional Owners to protect the environment and culture of the Fitzroy River area.

My further question is this: can the parliamentary secretary please advise how the Fitzroy River will be protected, and the budget allocated for the establishment and management of this park, bearing in mind what the deputy director general just said about those costs?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I thank the member. Yes, the creation of a Fitzroy River national park was a key Labor election commitment on the environment. It will involve the extension of the existing Geikie Gorge National Park along Fitzroy River to the north and along Margaret River to the east. Fitzroy Valley is a very rich environmental area. We anticipate enriching conservation and environmental values, but also employment opportunity and tourism potential. Part of it will also involve the employment of local Aboriginal people to provide meaningful employment and futures for local communities. It is really a great advantage at many levels for the community up there and for the state in general. There is no new appropriation in the budget for the development of this national park. The establishment of the management of the park will be funded through an ongoing investment of \$1.3 million, funded through a reprioritisation of existing funds previously allocated under the Kimberley science and conservation strategy. That money was there and it has been moved towards making this national park become a reality. It is certainly very exciting for the community. There is a lot of value in terms of biodiversity in the area and there will be ongoing consultation with the local community. The plans to consult and work on this will begin early next year. That will involve discussions with traditional owners, pastoralists and other stakeholders in the vicinity.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Do you have a further question, member for Mount Lawley?

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: No.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Can I ask a further question on that?

The CHAIR: On that one?

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: The parliamentary secretary said \$1.3 million was in the budget. The parliamentary secretary said the government had reprioritised that funding.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Yes.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Where is that \$1.3 million shown in the actual budget figures?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Yes, we can find that for the member. I have said it is not a new appropriation; it is existing money. I can perhaps refer the member to Mr Neilson.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I cannot find it quickly here.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Mr Neilson will probably do it quicker than either of us.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I thank the parliamentary secretary.

Mr M. Neilson: The \$1.3 million is not shown specifically in the budget papers because it is an internal reallocation of existing funding.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Where is the internal reallocation sitting at the moment? Where specifically is that money sitting at the moment in that budget where that \$1.3 million is part of that broader picture?

The CHAIR: Parliamentary secretary, through Mr Neilson.

Mr M. Neilson: The funds at the moment form part of the allocation within service 5. I am referring to page 201 under the service summary table. There is an allocation of \$107.297 million in 2017–18.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: That is included in there. I have a further question on that. Does that also cover the funding of the ongoing management of that? Is that included in that figure as well? I assume there will be requirements to

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spend money in the out years as well, so is there an initial establishment in the out years to maintain the services? Is that included in the budget as well?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: The information I have is that that \$1.3 million, as we said before, is reprioritised from the Kimberley science and conservation strategy, which was money intended for just this sort of process. It was set aside for conserving the environment in the Fitzroy River area. It is certainly in keeping with the intent of where that money was initially allocated. In terms of the member's question, that \$1.3 million will be available for the ongoing management and establishment of the park.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I have a further question. Does that mean that the Kimberley project or initiative where the money was to go is no longer a priority and is no longer important? Is the government not going to do it?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: No, not at all, and I can refer the member to the director general for further information.

Mr M. Webb: No, that is not correct. The money was included specifically in the Kimberley science and conservation strategy for the delivery of just such a conservation outcome. It is consistent with the purpose of the original funding and the original intent of that project.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I have a further question. It is for the same intended purpose, but which process was gone through to determine that the Kimberley project is not necessary, important or a priority because it has now been dropped off, and that this Fitzroy one is more important? Should the Kimberley one have been there in the first place, based on what the parliamentary secretary is saying? What is the reasoning for dropping the Kimberley, apart from reprioritising? Was an assessment made that showed that the Kimberley was a waste of money and is not important? Is that what the parliamentary secretary is saying, because the government is not allocating any money for that particular purpose?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: No, member. The member mentioned the word "project". It is not the case that a specific project was being developed; it was money set aside for conservation strategies. There could be no better conservation strategy than the establishment of a national park. It is not a case of taking money away from a project that was being established but now it ceases; it was money set aside for the ongoing conservation of the area. This is very much in keeping —

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Initially in the Kimberley and now for Fitzroy. Is the parliamentary secretary saying that the Kimberley does not need conservation anymore?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Fitzroy is in the Kimberley; it is in the Pilbara —

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I know it is part of it, yes.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: The other point I made was that it was an election commitment. We received a mandate to deliver our election commitments.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Is it not based on any science, research or analysis? Is it based on an election commitment and the people who voted for Labor would have no idea what that commitment was or what it meant?

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: Chair, can the member please identify the line item?

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: It is the government's line item. I have a further question.

The CHAIR: We still have a line item from the previous question, but is the parliamentary secretary happy to respond to that?

[2.30 pm]

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I have respect for the electors of Western Australia but, again, this is not a case of robbing someone and getting rid of a project; it is simply a case of money being set aside for a conservation strategy. We are now moving on with an excellent conservation strategy in the Kimberley, which is to establish the national park.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The discussion thus far has moved from the Kimberley and pointed to where the \$1.3 million that the member was asking about was found in visitor services and public programs. I refer to service 5 on page 201 of budget paper No 2, which the member brought to our attention during the discussion. There is a very big spike in the funding for visitor services and public programs. We found that \$1.3 million is apparently parked there, but the budget papers show there is \$86 million in 2016–17, which jumps up to \$107 million in 2017–18, then goes back down to \$91 million the following year. What is the reason for that spike in funding for visitor services and public programs provided in national parks in the current budget year?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I will let the director general explain that figure.

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Mr M. Webb: Briefly, that increase is a one-off commitment to the Murujuga project in the Burrup of, from memory, \$8 million. It also includes some depreciation components.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: My question is about the Aboriginal ranger program and various election commitments. I refer members to page 201 of budget paper No 2 and expense item 5; to the first dot point on page 198; and to the first line item under “Spending Changes” on page 197 for the Aboriginal ranger program with an allocation of \$4 million for the four years in the forward estimates. Can the parliamentary secretary please explain the government’s intention for this \$4 million per annum Aboriginal ranger program?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Certainly, member. As I explained in an earlier answer when I touched on the value of finding employment and meaningful engagement with local Aboriginal communities, that was certainly the intention of this program. It involves \$20 million over five years to employ Aboriginal people in local communities and to become the custodians of the environment in which they live. It recognises the social, cultural and environmental benefits of Aboriginal ranger programs and it will provide an integral step to improve community wellbeing and will certainly, I think, reduce poverty. It is quite inspiring stuff. It will give local Aboriginal people who need employment a purpose, a connection to country and the opportunity to be involved in a range of areas and issues, including the management and protection of local Indigenous flora and fauna. They can protect biodiversity by monitoring and helping to research what is happening in local biodiversity hotspots. Local Indigenous communities have a lot of valuable knowledge and that knowledge will be transferred into the management of traditional lands. It will also be transferred to practical areas such as fire management, feral animal management and weed management. There can also be value in increasing Aboriginal cultural awareness and passing that on to visitors and tourists in the area. We think it will be very valuable. It will also be valuable in terms of education for local students and students who visit the region. There will be a multifaceted pay-off for both the Aboriginal communities affected by this program and also for visitors to the area. There will be environmental, economic, and cultural enrichment pay-offs.

We think it is a valuable program and we are very excited about it. It is about empowering Aboriginal communities to engage in their local community and it is a way to provide real employment and training that they will no doubt be able to take to other areas and other forms of employment down the track. The more I look at this program, the more advantages I can see, so I think it will be well received in the community generally. An amount of \$20 million over five years has been allocated, which is a big amount of money, but we think it is a very worthy investment and it will pay off in a multitude of ways economically, socially and environmentally. I thank the member for the question because it is very good news.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I think it is a great program and it is fantastic to be investing in this area. As successive governments invest in social and economic benefits for Aboriginal people, they are also criticised excessively for not achieving those benefits—for putting a lot of money into this area but not necessarily managing it as well as they could. Can the parliamentary secretary tell me what mechanisms are in place, on an annual basis, to make sure that the outcomes expected from this program are being achieved? What is the department’s plan to change things, if need be, to improve outcomes if certain measures are not being met?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Thanks, member; I appreciate the bipartisan good wishes for the program and the fact that the member recognises it is a very worthy initiative. I think the point the member raised is fair enough because we have seen in the past that lots of money has been spent with very good intentions but it has not always delivered the right outcomes. We are talking about hard-earned taxpayer dollars, so, like the member for Carine, I would hope that the money is invested wisely and has a maximum return. Obviously, there will be a requirement for some rigour around the process to ensure the investment has a return for the community. Some of the return will not be able to be measured in dollars and cents; how can we put a dollar value on the cultural experiences that are shared within a community and the sense of purpose and achievement of someone who has never had a job? I think there will be economic pay-offs that we will be able to measure. It is a good question. It is a very good point and, especially in the current economic and financial circumstances of the state, it is incumbent on the government every time it spends money to make sure that it is getting the best value possible. I would like to refer the member’s question to the director general, to add some detail. It was a good question.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Before the parliamentary secretary does that, could he give me the specific details of the review process?

The CHAIR: I will let the director general answer, then we can deal with the further question.

Mr M. Webb: The process of developing the project was done in consultation with a range of stakeholders, especially Aboriginal people. They were involved in the design of the project. The mechanism by which that will occur will be announced by the minister very shortly. There will be a process of investigation in the beginning into the value of the project and the benefits that the parliamentary secretary has identified, and also how the outcomes of the project are being delivered year on year.

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B — Wednesday, 20 September 2017]

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Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Will an annual or some sort of report be produced to show Parliament the success of those various measures, whether they be social or economic, as part of this program, so that we can track whether it is doing what we expect?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I am certain all aspects of the program's operations each year will be part of the department's annual report. It will be available through the department's annual report.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Will the rangers employed in the program be working only on the conservation estate or will they be utilised in other areas of crown land?

[2.40 pm]

Mr M. Webb: Part of the development of the project, in consultation with traditional owners, was that this opportunity would not be available only on lands managed by the department but would have a much broader brief.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Can the parliamentary secretary outline the regions in which the program will be put in place and how many Aboriginal people will be employed directly through the program?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: It will be a statewide program. If the member would like to offer an area of choice, we would be happy to look at it.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The director general said that there was consultation. There must be an idea about where the program will be put in place. I am wondering in what regions it will be. The commonly held belief is that Aboriginal people are mainly in the far-flung areas of the state, but, of course, Aboriginal people are right throughout the state. I am wondering whether it will be a truly statewide project. Will there be benefits for Aboriginal people throughout the state or is it confined to remote areas?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I will defer to the director general, but I think it is fair to say, and my observation and understanding is, that certainly there are some key areas in the Kimberley that immediately come to mind, in which we have remote communities, and areas of biodiversity and natural values that need to be protected and certainly are attractive to tourism, and in which there are pressures on the natural environment whether from tourism or visitation. It is a statewide program, but certainly I can see those more remote areas of the Kimberley and the far-flung parts of the state being where it would be activated initially. Certainly, it would be obvious in those areas, but I am happy for the director general to explain more.

Mr M. Webb: Further, the process of communication with the traditional owners in the development of the project indicated that it would be very much a statewide project. We are seeking—through an expressions of interest process that the minister will soon be announcing—their input and advice on how they would deliver a range of program outcomes in whatever region they might reside.

Mr R.S. LOVE: There is an allocation for the forward estimates of \$4 million. I will first make an observation and then ask a question. One of the problems that I see often recurring with Aboriginal people is these programs are put in place and are then cut. Changes are made and then people are dumped more or less out of an employment scheme because that government funding has come to an end. What will the department do to ensure that this becomes to some extent a self-sustaining program into the future so that it will not necessarily be 100 per cent reliant on government funding forever after?

Mr M. Webb: Again, shortly the minister will make some announcements on this matter, but we are really clear that we are meant to build on this program and seek partnerships with others to ensure that those communities that might participate initially in the program have enduring outcomes.

Mr D.C. NALDER: I refer to page 197 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the table "Appropriations, Expenses and Cash Assets". Note (a) under that table refers to the amalgamation of many authorities, being the Department of Parks and Wildlife, the Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority, the Zoological Parks Authority and the Rottnest Island Authority. Could the parliamentary secretary provide an understanding of the costs of amalgamating those departments and how they have been attributed back to each of the previous departments?

Mr M. Webb: As indicated on 1 July, the government's decision was to reassign the former Department of Parks and Wildlife and include the Zoological Parks Authority, the Rottnest Island Authority and the Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority. In the consideration of how we achieve efficiency and effectiveness, we have done a number of reviews internally and we are slowly working through those reviews. I am not aware of any consultative costs that we have used in this process. I am happy to be corrected. Most of the costs relate to staff time in determining how we fit into and work with this new department as one joined-up department.

Mr D.C. NALDER: So to clarify, is there a specific cost allocation for the amalgamation process?

Mr M. Webb: The costs associated with the amalgamation are occurring within the department.

Mr D.C. NALDER: But I am clarifying that they have never been identified; they are just included in the ongoing costs of current operations. I know this decision has been taken by the new authority coming in, but in the absence

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of a business case, there must be expected savings to be made from merging departments to drive efficiencies. I imagine some of that is in that line item. Is the parliamentary secretary able to provide us with a breakdown of the cost benefits of merging the authorities in—probably simplistic terms—wages and administration?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: The answer I have is that a number of reviews are underway in various departments. Until those reviews have concluded, we are unable to provide that detail.

Mr D.C. NALDER: Can we have that as supplementary information so that the parliamentary secretary will provide a response when the information is at hand?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Given the nature of the reviews and not knowing the timing, I do not think we can commit to something we are unable to deliver.

Mr D.C. NALDER: Sorry; I cannot hear properly.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Given the nature of the reviews, we have to wait for those reviews to be complete. I am not sure that that could happen in time.

The CHAIR: The clerk advises that there is a one-week window for supplementary information. It may not fit within that.

Mr D.C. NALDER: Can the parliamentary secretary advise when the reviews will be completed?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: The director general is happy to give members some idea of when those reviews will be concluded.

Mr M. Webb: Reviews are being done in the corporate and business finance area. I expect those reviews will be completed towards the end of October. A site review is occurring in late October. I suspect we will receive a report from that in mid-November. There are also reviews being done in audit, risk and marketing. Again, I do not have a time frame for those, but I suspect they will conclude towards Christmas.

Mr D.C. NALDER: Can I confirm that these reviews will potentially include not only the structure of the organisation and, therefore, what efficiencies may come out of it, but also the strategic nature or direction of the department moving forward?

Mr M. Webb: We are in the process of developing strategic plans for the new department. I think that will be completed again by about mid to late October. That will provide that higher-level approach or strategy for the department. We will retain separate strategic planning for each of the statutory authorities and for each of the major functional areas within the department.

[2.50 pm]

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: With regard to the reviews, is it not unusual for the government to amalgamate departments and then decide to review how the amalgamation will work after it has been done? Is it not normal to first sit down and do a review of how to bring people together and then make it happen in a coordinated and structured manner? It seems haphazard to me that the government has grabbed all these things, stuck them together and then said that it had better work out how it is going to work, how the departments will relate to each other and how the new department will function. Does that not mean that from the day the amalgamation happened until the reviews are complete, potentially each department could be dysfunctional or not be operating to its maximum capacity?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I will refer the member to the director general for more detail, but I do not think there has been any indication of dysfunction in the agencies. It has been a rather smooth transition. I also think that we can make a fairly solid —

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Transition like a duck—smooth on the top, but paddling really fast down the bottom!

Mr R.R. WHITBY: The government made the assumption that when it amalgamated 41 agencies into 25 and removed a number of director generals and other senior staff, it would realise savings. I have seen no indication of dysfunction, and certainly the indications are that it is happening very smoothly, but I refer the member to the director general for more details.

Mr M. Webb: I confirm that in my opinion, the department is operating in a very professional manner. There has been no impact on the business of the statutory authorities; in fact, they are operating in a very professional way. We are looking for synergies that may exist across the department and its statutory authorities to see whether we can also make some savings in those synergies.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Being statutory authorities and the nature of the beast, it is probably easier to amalgamate those agencies than it would be to amalgamate many other parts of the government. The parliamentary secretary is right; amalgamating 41 agencies into 25 agencies and getting rid of all the DGs and senior managers across the board with all their expertise and knowledge, one would assume, standing back and watching with a helicopter

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view, that there will be ensuing chaos. Hopefully, while the reviews are going on, the government will be able to manage them and the stress level of staff in the departments will not be excessive, especially because of all the redundancies that are happening.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Member, thank you for good wishes; I know you mean them!

Mrs L.M. O'MALLEY: I refer to page 201 of budget paper No 2, the table “Service Summary”, and service 4, “Visitor Services and Public Programs Provided in the Swan and Canning Riverpark”. I refer also to the first dot point on page 199. Can the parliamentary secretary detail how the \$15 million allocation towards managing the Swan and Canning Rivers in 2017–18 will improve the health of these important waterways?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I thank the member. She is asking a tough question and has us on the run! It is a very good question. The condition of the Swan and Canning Rivers is crucial, and I appreciate that the member for Bicton has a very close affinity to the river and a deep interest in ensuring that it continues to be healthy. Part of our commitment has been the installation of artificial oxygenation plants at several points on the rivers. There are two on the Swan at Guildford and one on the Canning River near Kent Street Weir. These are crucial to improve the health of the rivers. The oxygenation plants provide oxygen in a 10-kilometre zone depending on tidal movements. We are also very concerned about making sure that the riverbank is protected. That is an ongoing process with \$1 million of funding for foreshore restoration and protection works. This will continue to be matched by riverside land managers. Riverside land managers are a way of getting value and activation of community support. It equates to a \$2 million value in those volunteers coming to the fore through the local councils of the City of Fremantle, the City of Swan and the City of Armadale. More than \$600 000 has been invested in local groups to improve the quality of the water in those areas and another \$200 000 is being contributed by the Swan Alcoa Landcare Program in 2018. There is very much community engagement as well as government support. We very much acknowledge the importance of a healthy Swan River. The Swan is central to the lifestyle of Perth. There are obviously ongoing pressures on the Swan as development continues. The member is obviously aware of the stadium and the precinct around Burswood. It is a pretty part of the world and it is going to be an exciting time when the bridge is finally built.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: It is a very good project.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: It is a great project, indeed. We want a river that is healthy environmentally and one that is part of the showcase of Perth. I thank the member for Bicton for her question. She can rest assured that the government is committed to the ongoing health and preservation of the Swan River as one of the great natural assets of Western Australia.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The parliamentary secretary mentioned in that response that there is significantly less money than last year, but I understand a restoration program is coming to an end. He also mentioned community groups receiving money. Can he outline which community groups are eligible and the amounts of money that are available?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Certainly. An amount of money was invested in national resource management groups. I can seek more information on the make-up of those groups and who they are, but they are involved in coordinating water quality projects on the Swan River and other parts of the environment. There is also the addition of \$200 000 that was contributed to the Swan Alcoa Landcare Program in 2018. The member is right; the pressure is always on our finances. We are finding money for community groups because we find that there is often a great return; indeed, a lot of the work involved is not a price for labour, because it is a volunteer contribution by people who want to get involved and offer their time, so we can leverage a much greater return than we could in a commercial transaction. We see it as a good way to get a result for the community and to get the best bang out the taxpayers' bucks.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Without the figures in front of me, can the parliamentary secretary outline whether there is as much money, less money or more money available this year to community groups as opposed to last year?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I refer that to Mr Neilson.

Mr M. Neilson: Details in broad terms are provided on page 210 in the table headed “Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies”. There are two line items in that table relating to grants to both community groups and local governments. The first line item is new funding of \$300 000 per annum, commencing in 2018–19. The second line item is an ongoing program that derives funding under arrangements with the Burswood Resort.

[3.00 pm]

Mr R.S. LOVE: I have a further question to the parliamentary secretary: what is the amount of money referred to in the second item? I could not quite follow that.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I will refer the memo back to Mr Neilson for the details.

Mr M. Neilson: The line item is titled “Swan and Canning Rivers Management”.

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Mr R.S. LOVE: Okay. Just to be clear, that money is all allocated to community groups.

Mr M. Neilson: It is a combination of community groups and also allocations to local governments to undertake works in their areas.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Could the parliamentary secretary indicate what the split between local government and community groups might be in that allocation?

Mr M. Neilson: The information on that breakdown is not to hand.

The CHAIR: Would that be supplementary information?

Mr R.S. LOVE: Would the parliamentary secretary be pleased to provide that as supplementary information?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I am just checking that that can be done, and we are certainly happy to provide that.

The CHAIR: Just so I can state it exactly, it is the breakdown of local government and community —

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Before I commit to that, I might refer the member to Mr Dans, who might be able to deal with the issue.

Mr P. Dans: The allocation to local governments for the riverbank program is \$1 million, and that is matched, dollar for dollar, by the local governments. There is \$600 000 going to community groups and an additional \$200 000 coming through the Swan Alcoa Landcare Program, so there is \$800 000 in total to community groups for local-level water quality programs, riverbank restoration-type work and near-shore vegetation rehabilitation-type work.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Thank you for that. I assume the rest of the money is used by the department to carry out management of the systems?

Mr P. Dans: That is correct.

Mr R.S. LOVE: That was my follow-up question. I have another question. I refer to the spending changes on page 197 and the line item “Regional Workers Incentive Allowance” under the subheading “Other”. There is a reduction of money in both this year and the next two years running forward. Then, extraordinarily enough, there is a jump in expenditure of \$810 000 in the final year of the forward estimates. I wonder if the parliamentary secretary can explain to me what that actually means to the workers in the regions of Western Australia who work for the department, and the reason for the \$810 000 jump in the final year.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I thank the member. I am happy to request Mr Neilson’s advice on that question.

Mr M. Neilson: Addressing the \$810 000 figure in 2020–21, that is the establishment of the budget in that year. In broad terms, there is an allocation of around \$700 000 to \$800 000 per year against that line item. The negative items in the first three years are a reduction to the existing provision of the budget. In the last year, there is then an allocation of a new figure for the budget.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I have a follow-up question to that. What does that represent? Does that mean the government is expecting fewer workers in the regions in the next few years? Are they being paid less? What does the reduction in the first three years represent?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I thank the member. I will just give him some extra detail and perhaps I can follow up with Mr Neilson’s advice. As part of the review of the overall royalties for regions program, a reduction of approximately 10 per cent to budget provisions for district allowances has been made, in line with expectations of reduced cost-of-living adjustments. This adjustment relates to the former Department of Parks and Wildlife, and I presume that was a decision made in the previous term of government. But that is part of the explanation for why there is less money there. I am happy to refer to Mr Neilson for further detail.

Mr M. Neilson: The district allowances are adjusted on an annual basis to address changes in cost of living. A survey is conducted and the district allowance rates are adjusted accordingly. As part of this year’s budget process there was a review of the general level of anticipated expenditure against that line item, and the outcome of that review was around a 10 per cent reduction in the overall budget.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Thank you.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: My question relates to fire management. I refer to page 199, firstly, and page 206 after that. On page 199, an amount \$5.5 million is available from 1 July 2017 for prescribed burning to reduce bushfire risks in the south west. I have a couple of questions. Firstly, how much was allocated last year and in previous years for this particular burn-off? Where it reads “From 1 July 2017”, does that mean there is \$5.5 million for the next 12 months, or is it spread over the forward estimates?

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Mr R.R. WHITBY: I thank the member. This is a very important area, and I think this agency is very keen to increase the number of burn-offs after some of the recent tragedies we have had. With regard to the detail of the money allocations, I will refer the member to Mr Dans.

Mr P. Dans: The \$5.5 million referred to on page 199 is for the 2017–18 financial year, so for the next nine months, and there is a further allocation of \$5.5 million in the 2018–19 financial year. That is a new funding program that is additional to a pre-existing recurrent allocation to prescribed burning in the south west of around \$10 million. The total expenditure in the south west of the state, from Lancelin to, say, Denmark, and south west of that line, is in the order of \$15 million or \$16 million.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: The parliamentary secretary has indicated that that is for the next two financial years. Is that because the department is assuming that after that it will have it under control and it will not be required any further, or is it just because no appropriation is being thought about during this budget process beyond the next two years?

Mr P. Dans: The additional \$5.5 million is a fixed-term, four-year funding program that comes to an end in 2018–19. We have made extremely strong inroads with that funding program. We achieved 247 360 hectares of prescribed burning last year, which was the best result in 29 years, but there is a body of work ahead of us. Prescribed burning is a shared responsibility; it is not just the responsibility of the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions. Local governments and private property owners all have a very strong role to play. DBCA manages about 46 per cent of the land in the south west so we have the lion’s share of the responsibility. We will assess where the program is at as we near the end of the funding and take the matter forward with the government at that time.

[3.10 pm]

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Based on the last two years and assuming that is projected forward as a scenario, would that necessitate further funding beyond that four-year cycle on the trajectory the department is heading at the moment?

Mr P. Dans: There will always be a requirement. As I said, we have an underlying recurrent allocation in the south west of something in the order of \$10 million. Depending on how all the parties contribute and depending on the success of all land managers in the coming years, there may be a greater need or a lesser need. Essentially, we need to get to a state whereby something in the order of 45 per cent of the land that DBCA manages in the south west has a fuel age of less than six years. We never complete the process because the effectiveness of prescribed burning lasts about five or six years. It is effective in limiting the incidence and extent of large damaging fires for five or six years. It is something that government and other landowners and land managers will be doing forever after, in the south west of the state particularly.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Are we on target to meet that benchmark of less than six years?

Mr P. Dans: We are progressing towards it quite well. We have an objective of 45 per cent. As at 30 June 2017, we were at about 40.5 per cent, but the achievement has to be maintained or that percentage falls accordingly. It is about all parties consistently achieving.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Does the department think that the funding for this year and in the forward estimates is enough to maintain that standard?

Mr P. Dans: At the current level of activity, over the next couple of years we will have sufficient resources to deliver a strong program, given that we get the appropriate weather conditions to undertake the burns in a safe manner, without disrupting traffic or impacting on horticultural production and those types of things. It all depends on weather conditions that are available. With the resources we have, if the conditions are right, we will be able to push towards that 45 per cent measure.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: The adviser said “the next couple of years”. Does that mean four years, as in the full forward estimates, or was he talking about the next two years?

Mr P. Dans: As I mentioned earlier, it will be necessary, as we get towards the end of the \$5.5 million enhanced funding at the end of the 2018–19 financial year, for us to raise seriously with the Minister for Environment the appropriateness of ceasing that program or whether we need to look at a whole-of-government level to continue that enhanced-level funding.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I am looking at “Prescribed Burning and Fire Management” on page 206 of the budget papers—obviously, that whole area. I see that \$45 million is targeted for that in 2017–18. I am not sure what the forward estimates are for that, but is the funding for prescribed burning and fire management maintained, increased or decreased over the forward estimates?

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Mr R.R. WHITBY: Sorry, member; on page 206, what was the line item again?

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: It is “Prescribed Burning and Fire Management”. I can see that the allocation for 2017–18 is \$45 million. I am not sure what the forward estimates are.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: It is in the table at the bottom of page 201—number 9.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Are other members of the committee now answering questions?

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: Sorry, Chair; I was just helping out.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I thank the member for bringing that to my attention. I can see that it is reducing in 2019–20 and 2020–21. That is obviously indicating that \$5 million is not budgeted for in the forward estimates. That will finish next year, and the department will get less money, considering that inflation and costs will go up. It looks like the department will have to do a lot more with a lot less over the forward estimates. Is that how I am reading that in terms of the prescribed burns?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I do not know that the inflation rate is a worry these days, but I seek the advice of Mr Dans.

Mr P. Dans: That is the step-down of that \$5.5 million funding that I mentioned. It is a four-year program. It comes to an end at the conclusion of the 2018–19 financial year. As I said, depending on the state of achievement over the coming financial year, we will work across the whole of the government and local government to see whether there is a requirement to continue working at that enhanced level to satisfactorily address bushfire risk.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: The department obviously has a bushfire plan and a strategy for tackling prescribed burns, and it indicated that it is happy with the way things are going. Does the adviser think that the department will have things under enough control this summer that we will not have any serious incidents, as happened in recent years, around population centres?

Mr P. Dans: I think our bushfire preparedness in advance of the southern bushfire season is progressing well. We have not had a lot of opportunity to date to do prescribed burning because we have had rainfall event after rainfall event and another range of fronts are coming across the south west of the state over the next week. We need a reasonably dry cycle before we can get into some larger scale prescribed burns. We have been chipping away at some smaller urban interface burns up against developed town sites and those types of things. We have to do larger landscape scale burns plus those much smaller burns in and around areas of human dwellings. As I have said a couple of times, it is dependent on the weather conditions. If it is too warm—if it has dried out too much—fire behaviour is too intense and it can be quite dangerous and escapes are quite possible. If it is too wet, it just will not burn.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Because of the wet season and because of the smaller time frame to do the prescribed burns, does the department have access to adequate resources to do more in a constrained time? Obviously, if it has a long time to do it, it can do it with a certain number of people, but if it says, “Instead of doing it over three months, we are going to do it over three weeks”, it may need three times as many people to achieve that. I am not sure what the figure is but I assume the department would need more resources to do it in a shorter period of time. Does the department have access to the necessary manpower and equipment to be able to meet that target in a shorter period of time?

Mr P. Dans: Prescribed burning is an absolute priority for us at this time of the year. Over the coming weeks we expect to employ in the order of 100 seasonal firefighters, who will be employed for spring prescribed burning, summer bushfire suppression and autumn prescribed burning. The contract would generally run for six to eight months of the year, purely for fire management activities. That would bring our total frontline firefighters in the south west to something in the order of 290. Another 500 to 600 staff would probably step up and participate in prescribed burning when conditions are right. Lots of people who do not have fire management explicitly outlined in their job description step up and lend a hand for these activities. That enhanced funding that I spoke about earlier and that the member questioned is used to move staff around the south west of the state. Suitable burning conditions generally arrive first in the north around the Perth hills, and then, as the south west dries out, we move down through Harvey, Collie and the Blackwood area, and finally down into the Warren region and the karri forest around Pemberton and Manjimup. The staff at Pemberton and Manjimup will most likely move up to the Perth hills to bolster the capacity there when the conditions are right, and then the Perth hills people will reciprocate. As things become too dry in the Perth hills, they will move down south and we will put them up in accommodation and feed them, and they will bolster the local capacity in the southern forest area.

[3.20 pm]

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: The parliamentary secretary mentioned that it is a shared responsibility between local government and landowners. Is local government doing its fair share and stepping up to the mark to meet the

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targets? After the parliamentary secretary has spoken about that, can he tell me if private landowners are doing the same?

Mr P. Dans: The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions has excellent working relationships with volunteer bush fire brigades and the local governments that oversee them. However, it is the Department of Fire and Emergency Services that essentially works with local governments and funds local governments and volunteer bush fire brigades, and, I guess, oversees their prescribed burning activity. However, throughout the south west in a number of areas we have collaborative burning arrangements with local governments whereby they burn on local government land abutting land managed by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions. The burns are done in a collaborative, borderless manner, if you like, member.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: But are they doing enough? For example, are they meeting the required targets or are they doing just the bare minimum and expecting to ride off the back of the department that does most of the work and they just, sort of, drive along? Would the parliamentary secretary say that they are financially contributing the right amount into that particular area to make sure that their ratepayers are protected, or is the department having to pick up that slack, if there is any?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Most local governments are doing a good job, especially those in regional areas who know the importance of preparing for the risk of fire. However, this department is responsible for only the lands that it manages, and, to that extent, that is its responsibility in terms of fire mitigation.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Does that mean that there is no communication, consultation or planning of targets with local government and private landowners? Does the department work in isolation?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I am sure that is definitely not the case.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: That is why I asked if they are meeting their targets. Obviously, if the department is working in collaboration with them and it has a seamless approach, it must have a view about whether local governments and private landowners are contributing their fair share, rather than them just saying that it is someone else's responsibility.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I am just clarifying the responsibilities of the department.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I understand that, but I would like to hear the department's views.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Sure, but as the member probably realises, this is a very important issue for regional councils. It is also an important issue for this department, and, of course, there is interface with communication. I am sure that Mr Dans can elaborate more.

Mr P. Dans: It would be fair to say that bushfire risk management planning in local governments is not as well developed as the bushfire risk management planning in the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions for managed land. We have undertaken prescribed burning for over five decades and we have very detailed fuel-age records throughout the whole south west for the lands that we manage. That level and history of information is not yet available in all local government authorities. The budget provides a line item, through the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, with a funding allocation of \$3.7 million to accelerate the rollout of that local government bushfire risk management planning process to bring the fuel-age knowledge and the bushfire risk of local government lands up to par with the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions' planning process. We prepare an annual plan for the south west and we break it down into three regional areas. We consult very closely with local governments and get their views on our intentions, which is where we develop those collaborative arrangements that I referred to in answer to the member's earlier question.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Would it not be appropriate for the department to set targets for local governments to meet; and, if not the department, who would be responsible for setting those targets? I assume that as much as it is important, they may not necessarily contribute the right amount of finances towards achieving a target if they do not know what that target is. Are they held accountable to make sure that they are genuinely trying to reach that target and doing everything that needs to be done, as opposed to just doing the job as best they can along the way without meeting certain statutory obligations or otherwise? I know that some local governments will do better than others. This is about how we not only make sure that they have robust plans and work off the department's experience, but also hold them to account to make sure they meet those targets so we do not have the bushfires of the past.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I am not sure that prescriptive demand of local government is necessarily something that we have examined. A collaborative effort is probably always the way to go when we deal with another tier of government and we want the cooperation and support of that other group. I do not think that has ever been looked at directly in terms of the way the member put it. I am happy to seek some advice on that from Mr Dans.

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Mr P. Dans: That is precisely what the bushfire risk management planning process that DFES has been seeking funding for seeks to identify. It seeks to identify the highest bushfire risks in local government areas and to prioritise treatments of those particular risks. The Office of Emergency Management, which also reports to the Minister for Emergency Services, is establishing an assurance function to ensure that there is some checking to see that land managers are exercising their responsibilities in terms of bushfire risk management.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The program that the member for Carine highlighted on page 199 states —

\$5.5 million will be available for prescribed burning to reduce bushfire risk.

That is the same amount of money that was available in the forward estimates in the last budget through royalties for regions. Will the \$5.5 million for this year and the following be entirely funded through royalties for regions?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Thank you, member. I will defer to Mr Neilson for his advice.

Mr M. Neilson: The \$5.5 million is entirely funded through royalties for regions.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The only reference to prescribed burning that I can find is on page 207. An enhanced prescribed burning program is listed in the table “Asset Investment Program” under the heading “New Works”. That program is allocated only \$110 000 for this year and the next. Can the parliamentary secretary explain the difference between the \$5.5 million and that amount of money? What does the \$220 000 in total represent and why is the \$5.5 million not listed in the asset investment program?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I would like to refer to Mr Dans to clarify.

[3.30 pm]

Mr P. Dans: The amount identified under “New Works” on page 207 is capital works within that \$5.5 million program, so that is probably the purchase of variable message boards—those signs on trailers—ignition equipment, water tanks and those types of assets, member.

Mr R.S. LOVE: So it is part of the \$5.5 million, but it is specifically for the purchase of a few capital items, rather than the development of the asset by enhancing its protection through fire protection. I refer to page 339 of budget paper No 3 and the heading “National Partnership Agreements: Current Agreements Applicable to Western Australia”. Under “Environment”, there is an allocation for national bushfire mitigation. Will Western Australia participate in that? There is nothing in the 2017–18 budget for that, although there has been money in previous budgets. Does the appearance of this national partnership indicate that work has been done on further partnering with the federal government, thereby receiving some other form of income in the future for the ongoing task of bushfire mitigation?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I will refer the member to Mr Dans.

Mr P. Dans: Member, we have some awareness of the national bushfire mitigation program. From memory, it is administered by the Office of Emergency Management, which reports to the Minister for Emergency Services. I cannot provide a lot of detail on the program, but there are a number of commonwealth-funded programs for bushfire risk management initiatives that local governments and the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions have applied for. They are generally reasonably small grants of less than \$100 000 for projects like the maintenance of water points in state forests and those types of things.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I will return to the member for Carine and I will take a short break.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: The parliamentary secretary indicated that there are collaboratively developed plans with local government around their strategies. Do the developed plans contain targets and are local governments meeting those targets or does the government have concerns? We do not want to go through the bushfire season and find out there is a major bushfire somewhere and the work has not been done because, for example, the local government has not achieved the target or done a sufficient amount of work in that area. Is the parliamentary secretary aware of any plans or local governments that are not doing enough work or planning from the government’s perspective or any that need to do more?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I thank the member. I think the member is referring to the bushfire mitigation strategy —

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Yes.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: — and the obligation that puts on local government. I would prefer the director general to clarify that one.

Mr M. Webb: I will just make an initial comment that Mr Dans has already spoken about the bushfire risk management plans that are the responsibility of local governments, together with the Department of Fire and

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Emergency Services, to deliver. We certainly are aware of those and provide information in the partnership when we can. But the responsibility for managing bushfire on local government lands or on private estate is certainly outside the realms of the responsibility of our department.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Who has responsibility for making sure local governments meet their target?

Mr M. Webb: Again, Mr Dans has indicated that the Department of Fire and Emergency Services is partnering in the development of those bushfire risk management plans, and there is an assurance function being delivered again through the Office of Emergency Management to ensure that the outcomes identified in the bushfire risk management plans are delivered.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: The department is involved in helping develop the local government plans. I know the director general says it is not the department's responsibility, but the department must have some idea of how well they are going because the department has a major component of the land. If the department is, sort of, three kilometres ahead of the local governments and they are five kilometres behind where they should be, the department would know that, obviously. I assume that the department communicates its concerns to the relevant authority to make sure they hurry up and meet their obligations and catch up to where they need to be.

Mr M. Webb: Again, the bushfire risk management planning process is the mechanism by which that occurs. The responsibility for that is with the Department of Fire and Emergency Services. Mr Dans has already indicated that there is a lot of history of information that is available to the department that most local governments have at their disposal. But, again, part of the development of those bushfire risk management plans is understanding the risks associated with the lands they manage and identifying how to mitigate those risks.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: After the development of these plans, if someone is not meeting their obligations to the right standard, that will obviously have an impact on a major bushfire. So the department has a direct interest in that because it is the largest landowner, although it owns less than 50 per cent. If the owners of the other 50 per cent are not doing their job, I assume the department has a responsibility to identify and articulate that to the minister and people of Western Australia. The department should say, "Other people aren't doing their fair share", rather than just say, "That's not our responsibility; that's someone else's responsibility. We are doing our bit. Whether they do their bit or not, we're not interested in that." I would suggest that the department has a very strong interest in whether local governments are meeting their responsibilities and that the department should have a direct say in making sure they meet their obligations.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: The member is absolutely right; there is an inherent interest in this department to ensure that other landowners and areas outside of the lands that this agency is responsible for are safe from runaway wildfires, but, again, I come back to the point made earlier that areas outside this department's responsibility are the responsibility of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services. I am happy to let the director general elaborate on that point.

Mr M. Webb: I think in the member's opening statement he made a comment something like that bushfire risk management plans are our responsibility. They are not. They are the responsibility of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, together with the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries. The management, oversight and assurance program associated with that lies with that department.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: After the machinery-of-government changes that were about bringing like-minded areas together, is the parliamentary secretary saying that 46 per cent of the bushfire responsibilities lie in one mega-department, the other 54 per cent lie in another mega-department, and it is not one department's responsibility to tell the other department what to do or to make sure they meet their targets and vice versa? Two silos are doing the same thing but not holding each other to account, which is a bit of a concern when talking about bushfires.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Member, the whole point of the machinery-of-government reform is to destroy those silos. Who knows? We might be able to further reform the government to even fewer agencies and departments in the future. Because certain responsibilities may sit in different departments, it certainly does not mean there is not communication. There is constant communication between departments and working groups that consist of members of representatives from the departments. That is ongoing. That continues. If anything, that process has been enhanced because of the reforms that have so far happened.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I have a further question. Can we get a guarantee from the parliamentary secretary that his departments will communicate with other relevant departments to make sure that the right targets are achieved and that they are working in unison to achieve those targets?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Member, all departments do work together in this area. It is vital that they do. We will always work together to make the countryside as safe as possible and reduce fire risk as much as possible.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I have a further question.

The CHAIR: Last one, please, because you have had a fair crack at this.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Thank you. Obviously, it is an important area.

[3.40 pm]

The CHAIR: It is, absolutely, but I am conscious that people are lining up.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I suppose I am a little bit concerned that I do not see that cohesiveness as strongly as I think it should be there. Being the largest landowner and having the most experience, the department should take the lead in this area. It needs to make sure that other landowners are meeting their obligations and someone needs to oversight that from a holistic perspective rather than —

The CHAIR: Is that a question?

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: It is.

The CHAIR: What is the question?

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Who is oversighting the holistic approach here?

Mr M. Webb: At the highest level, it is the responsibility of the State Emergency Management Committee, and the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions is represented on the committee. Operationally, there is very close and almost daily contact between the departments, but I will ask Mr Dans to speak to those details.

Mr P. Dans: We prepare a spring and an autumn burn plan wrapped up into an annual plan. We consult widely with local governments right throughout the south west. We consult on the plan with the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, and the State Emergency Management Committee also gets to acknowledge our plan. We will take feedback from local governments, DFES and the SEMC as appropriate, and do what we can to incorporate feedback into our plan.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: My question will bring us back closer to home, or at least closer to the home of my constituents in Mt Lawley. I direct members to the service summary table on page 201 of budget paper No 2. A number of my constituents enjoy visits to Kings Park and my question is about expense item 1 in the table. I understand that a significant number of volunteers contribute to the Kings Park authority. Can the parliamentary secretary provide some details regarding the activities undertaken by these volunteers? Although we cannot always put a dollar figure on it, what is some of the value that we get from the services provided to the Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority by our volunteers?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: As I mentioned before, there is a wonderful tradition of—I know the opposition is interested in this as well—voluntary service. It is a way of leveraging the taxpayer dollar to do more. It certainly shows great love and devotion to Kings Park in particular, which is iconic in Western Australia. In fact, the member is correct. About 1 500 Western Australians are members of about five volunteer groups that generously give their time at Kings Park and also Bold Park. They care for the natural environment, welcome visitors, advance science through aiding in research and help to preserve Western Australian history. The total number of volunteer hours recorded in 2016–17 was more than 38 000. It is an impressive contribution to the state at no cost to Western Australian taxpayers. These services are estimated to be the equivalent of 19 full-time positions and the labour or wages value of that contribution is put at about \$1.7 million annually. I guess it is more than the economic return; it is also a priceless contribution because of their engagement and connection, which has a flow-on effect. People get great value out of community service and volunteering. It is a return for not only Kings Park and the state but also the individuals who take part in the volunteer groups. I am sure that they do it for a love of the environment, the city and Kings Park. The volunteers at Kings Park have been very active and the Friends of Kings Park managed to secure a \$2.4 million contribution from Lotterywest in July last year to construct a new volunteer hub. This will prove to be a very useful facility in the future. The hub concept was approved by the board in June this year and construction is planned for next year. It will be a great central location for volunteers to be based in and to work from in the park. It will be the home of volunteers in the park. I will also mention the volunteer guides in Kings Park. They provided more than 20 000 hours of service in the past year, so they are really pulling more than their fair share. Their commitment to the community and Kings Park was recently recognised by Volunteering WA in the community group awards for 2016. I have no doubt that some of the member for Mount Lawley's very own constituents would be among these volunteers. I am sure they would also be recognised and we appreciate the value that they get out of helping to look after such a great, iconic and valuable resource and facility for all Western Australians.

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Mr D.C. NALDER: I think it is a huge credit and a wonderful asset that we have in Kings Park. It is fantastic for the people of Western Australia, and the level of volunteering that we have across many facets of our community never ceases to amaze me. I am blessed enough to have a couple of lovely assets in my electorate. One is Blue Gum Lake and the other is called Booragoon Lake. There are a number of volunteers. I cannot find it in this budget to be able to refer to a specific line item but the volunteers contacted me in recent times to suggest that funding has been cut for the conservation work that the group does to remove invasive weeds from these lakes. They have worked on it over time and have done so much a year to try to remove these weeds. Can the parliamentary secretary provide any sense of whether the specifics are known about the programs for that wetland area in the southern suburbs so we can understand whether cuts to programs have been made for these volunteers who do a lot of work to try to remedy that environment?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Certainly, member. I am not familiar with which department that might be with, so I will take some advice. We are happy to take that question on notice, but we are not sure whether that group has a relationship with this department.

Mr D.C. NALDER: Okay; I would appreciate that question being taken on notice. It may not be here, but it is to do with the environment, so I imagine there is a connection somewhere.

The CHAIR: Will the information be provided as supplementary information or just on notice?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I would appreciate it being put on notice.

Mr D.C. NALDER: Does the parliamentary secretary want me to put the question on notice?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Yes, if that is —

Mr D.C. NALDER: I thought it was pretty specific. I am trying to chase the changes to environmental funding for Blue Gum and Booragoon Lakes.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Okay; yes, member. We are happy to provide that as supplementary information.

The CHAIR: Can we clarify what information will be provided, for the record?

Mr D.C. NALDER: It is to confirm the funding arrangements that have been in place and what changes will occur moving forward on the conservation efforts for Blue Gum and Booragoon Lakes.

The CHAIR: Parliamentary secretary, is that agreeable?

Mr D.C. NALDER: I think that is the best way of trying to describe it. I am not trying to be political here.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Yes. We are happy with that.

[*Supplementary Information No B21.*]

Mr D.C. NALDER: I refer to page 199 and the fifth dot point under “Science and Conservation”. I will provide a little bit of context around the question as well so the parliamentary secretary understands where I am coming from. I would like to understand what is meant by “Invasive pests, weeds and diseases will continue to be managed.” I ask this question because I had some problems with invasive weeds in a past life as Minister for Agriculture and Food.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Not a current life!

[3.50 pm]

Mr D.C. NALDER: A number of the community in the south west were really concerned about certain pests and weeds. At one point the Department of Agriculture and Food was looking at shifting it from a declared weed to something else, such that it did not need to be eradicated because it was out of hand. We found that although the community down there and the department of ag wanted to tackle the issue, there were other landholdings, such as DPaW land, where this weed was—it might have been cotton bush—and we were worried about the coordination needed across all departments to eradicate it because it is a declared weed. Does the term “continue to be managed” mean “working to eradicate these declared weeds”? I make specific reference to arum lily, blackberry, blue lupin and narrow-leaf cotton bush.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: The curse of the land.

Mr D.C. NALDER: I want to make sure, because it says “continue to be managed”. I want to make sure the focus is still on working to eradicate this thing. There is no point one department working to eradicate it if another one is changing its mind and saying that it will manage it, which means that it will try to stop it growing but it will not get rid of it. That means it then blows back into other land areas. It is similar to this bushfire issue with different departments having different views. I am trying to clarify what “managed” means.

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Mr R.R. WHITBY: I think probably the Department of Agriculture and Food will give the member a more thorough response. I understand what the member has said and I will give him a response from this agency.

Mr D.C. NALDER: I am making specific reference to DPaW land. I am not trying to be political. I am trying to ensure it works and we nail this stuff.

The CHAIR: That is what estimates is about.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I refer the member to the director general to get a more specific answer, if that is all right.

Mr M. Webb: I understand the context of the member's question and certainly, within the available resources, this department looks at managing pests, diseases and weeds across the lands that it manages. My understanding is that we have responsibility for 21 million hectares and a further 89 million hectares of crown land. Certainly, programs such as Western Shield and others are addressing some specific issues. If the member is asking whether we try to eradicate all weeds, which I think is the essence of the member's question, in some instances—for example, arum lily—we limit spread. With the available resources it would be impossible to totally eradicate a weed such as arum lily. Our focus is to manage the extent of its spread.

Mr D.C. NALDER: Can the department provide data that gives us a guide as to whether these invasive weeds and those specific ones that I talked about—arum lily, blackberry, blue lupin, my pet hate, the cotton bush—are growing across the land areas under the department's responsibility?

Mr M. Webb: If it is a declared environmental pest through the Department of Agriculture and Food or comes under the responsibilities under the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act, we only have a responsibility for managing those on the land that we manage.

Mr D.C. NALDER: Can the department share whether they have grown in areas under its control? If the department is responsible for managing it, I assume that it has an understanding of the land area the weeds cover. How has that changed over recent years?

Mr M. Webb: I do not have the answer to that question. I am not sure whether Dr Byrne does.

Dr M. Byrne: No, I do not have that information to hand here.

Mr D.C. NALDER: Could that be provided as supplementary information?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Member, I have been advised that to collate that information would be quite an ask. The member is free to put it on notice.

Mr D.C. NALDER: I will put that question on notice. We are coming back to this term in the fifth dot point, which states that the weeds will continue to be managed. I am keen to understand what that means because if the department cannot tell me whether the area with weeds is reducing or expanding, I am concerned about whether it is genuinely being managed. I am keen to see whether the department is able to expand on a definition of "managed" or whether that needs to be considered in a review.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I understand that and it is a fair question. We need to collate that information and get some sort of idea of what is happening there.

Mr D.C. NALDER: I will put it as a question on notice, but it is a critical part of our science and conservation.

I applaud the focus on feral cats and mitigating their impact on native birdlife and so forth, but is there any consideration of expanding the program? There seems to be a growing concern in the broader community about feral dogs. I am not talking about dingos. I am talking about dogs that are crossbreeding and growing in numbers in certain areas. I wonder whether this will become an area of focus for the department.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Certainly, not only feral cats but also wild dogs, as the member points out, are an issue. They are a main focus of pest management in the department. The Western Shield program is working to reduce those numbers. It is also involved in attracting some corporate sponsorship. The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions is also participating in the national wild dog action plan, which involves industry representatives from sheep, cattle, grazing and primary industries and regional development. We are certainly aware of that issue. Not only feral cats, foxes and pigs but also wild dogs are part of that problem and, as I have just explained, it is certainly being addressed.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I would like to come back to an original question, but on the point of dogs, what specifically —

The CHAIR: I am not too sure whether dogs was —

Mr R.S. LOVE: The member for Bateman asked a question about dogs and I am following up on it. Can the parliamentary secretary explain or detail any programs being undertaken to control wild dogs on the conservation

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estate? What research has been done about the effect effectiveness of Western Shield, for instance, in controlling dogs? I understand that that program is designed for foxes, presumably with a different dose rate of poison being distributed. Is the department confident that using Western Shield is effective against dogs? How widespread is it and what is the current program?

Mr P. Dans: We work with regional biosecurity groups around the state, on dog control programs. In many instances, we use contract doggers on jointly developed and prioritised plans, largely in the Pilbara and goldfields sort of regions in pastoral interface areas. I think the part of the member's question about research is probably best referred to Dr Byrne.

[Ms J.M. Freeman took the chair.]

[4.00 pm]

Dr M. Byrne: We have no active research programs on the control of wild dogs. We are doing active research into the control of cats. We are developing further effective baits, such as rolling out Eradicat and incorporating it into the Western Shield fox baiting program. In conjunction with the commonwealth Department of the Environment and Energy, we are trialling the Hisstory bait, which is a new hybrid bait between Curiosity and Eradicat, in the northern areas of the state.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I represent an area in which dogs are an invasive pest in the northern grain growing areas and proximate to the area there are large areas of conservation estate and former pastoral leases. Will the state government increase its expenditure on that land to try to control those animals? What cooperation does the department undertake with neighbouring landowners and the recognised biosecurity groups in the area?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I will ask Mr Dans to give the member some more detail.

Mr P. Dans: As I said, member, we are doing work through the RBGs to prioritise the available funding for wild dog control. It is quite limited. It is targeted in areas in which it will have the greatest impact. The results of the contract doggers are encouraging.

Mr D.C. NALDER: On the dog issue, I heard the point that it is Pilbara and goldfields. Recently I was out in the Murchison —

The CHAIR: Question, member.

Mr D.C. NALDER: I want to make sure that they understand the context. It is not political.

I was shocked about the increase in the number of dogs in the Murchison over the last five years. Is it likely that the program will be expanded into the Murchison because of its impact on pastoral land?

The CHAIR: I was not here for the original question. Is that consistent with the original question?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I am happy to take it, Chair. I will seek some advice from the director general.

Mr M. Webb: Just briefly, the minister responsible for Primary Industries and Regional Development convened a working group recently—it may have been as recently as last week—to look at the wild dog action plan and how the state can broadly address this issue.

Mr D.C. NALDER: Will the department be involved in the action plan, given that conservation land falls under the department's remit and therefore it will likely bear responsibility for some of the solution?

Mr M. Webb: The short answer is yes. Mr Dans has already indicated that communication occurs with other departments, so the answer is yes.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: On the point of invasive pests, we have talked about cats and dogs. Does the department deal with white corellas? I am not sure whether this is the right time to raise this, but they are a pest and they are invasive.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I will refer the question to Dr Byrne.

Dr M. Byrne: Yes, we recognise that there is an increasing problem with corellas across the Perth metropolitan area and into the south west. We have been working with local government authorities to work up a plan. We held a forum in 2015 with the affected local authorities to develop a coordinated approach, recognising that a coordinated approach is the only way to deal with a mobile flocks of large birds. The department provided seed funding for a coordinated approach last financial year and this financial year to enable local governments to formulate a plan on how they will go about managing the corella problem.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Has enough funding been allocated to this problem because it is a big problem?

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Mr M. Webb: As Dr Byrne indicated, this program has been ongoing in partnership with local government. It is certainly a responsibility that we share. It is my understanding that this plan is being developed and that local governments are looking at the money they allocate to that program.

The CHAIR: The member for Moore is next, but I note that you have had three questions to the member for Thornlie's one question. Let us make it timely.

Mr R.S. LOVE: We are the opposition; it is our role to try to interrogate the budget.

The CHAIR: Member for Moore! Member for Moore, I will talk over the top of you if you talk over the top of me!

Mr R.S. LOVE: Thank you, Madam Chair; I am always taking your instruction.

I refer to page 199 and the significant issues impacting the agency. The second dot point under "Forest Management" refers to the sandalwood biodiversity management program and the Biodiversity Conservation Act. What happened to plans for the Forest Products Commission to fund an extra position at the department to assist with enforcing the sandalwood compliance measures contained in the act?

Dr M. Byrne: We welcome the increased funding and recognition that the Forest Products Commission has provided for the management of this issue. A person has been appointed to that position with the funding provided by the Forest Products Commission.

Mr R.S. LOVE: What is the time frame in which the government will finalise the regulations associated with the Biodiversity Conservation Act so that they are proclaimed?

Mr M. Webb: The process of dealing with the regulations has already commenced and there is a program of communication that we will have with the environmental movement and the aim is to have those regulations done by mid-2018.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: My question is about the Wellington National Park expansion. I refer to the fifth dot point on page 198. Can the parliamentary secretary please bring us up to date on the expansion and the opportunities provided by the expansion of Wellington National Park, which is near Collie?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: That part of the world already has a rich section of forest and natural vegetation and the government seeks to encapsulate that in the expansion of Wellington National Park. The government is currently looking at recognising the tourism value of that area and the potential for the Collie–Preston area. Of course, Collie could do with a boost. It is looking to diversify its economy and we see this as an opportunity to do that and encourage tourism in the area. There has been \$32 million committed to boost tourism to showcase regional destinations, and that would be a very attractive regional destination within fairly close proximity to Perth and the attractions of the south west. As part of the extension of Wellington National Park, \$3 million has been provided to develop Lake Kepwari and another \$300 000 is in the budget to promote the Ferguson Valley and Wellington Forest. Anyone who has done the drive between Bunbury and Collie knows how spectacular it is. Of course, there is a lot to value in the natural vegetation and timber in that area. There are obviously conservation values as well as providing opportunities for recreation, tourism and, as I said before, jobs. Wellington National Park covers an area of 17 000 hectares of jarrah, marri and blackbutt forests. It includes the Wellington Dam and the Collie River Valley, and it is already used and appreciated by hundreds and perhaps thousands of people each year for camping, mountain biking, fishing, swimming, rafting, canoeing and bushwalking et cetera.

[4.10 pm]

The decision on the size and the boundaries of an expanded Wellington National Park has not yet been determined. It is important that the state government considers the true conservation values of that area and the impact on the timber industry. I know that the minister is working with his colleague Hon Dave Kelly in his capacity as Minister for Forestry. The first step in the process, as I understand it, is that the minister has asked the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions to work with the relevant state agencies, including the Forest Products Commission, to consider a range of issues, including environmental, social and economic. The potential is there to expand an already very valuable national park in close proximity to both Perth and the south west, and one in which we can see employment and tourism opportunities. It could also be a shot in the arm for Collie, and I know that the member for Collie–Preston is very proactive in this regard; he has been known to get involved in the forests and embrace nature, and I am sure he will be very keen to see this developed further.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I would like to go back to the spending changes on page 197. Can the parliamentary secretary explain the line item "Revision to Indexation for Non-Salary Expenses"? I see there is about \$7 million, all up, over the forward estimates. Can the parliamentary secretary explain what that is in each year and what it covers?

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Mr R.R. WHITBY: With regard to the revision to indexation for non-salary expenses, the former one per cent allowance was built into the agency budgets for the consumer price index and for goods and services; it was removed in May 2017, as part of the efforts to improve efficiencies in departments. It means that that automatic increase for allocations each year will cease, which will encourage agencies within government to be more efficient when seeking goods and services. In 2017–18, for instance, the revision across the statutory authorities is in the order of about \$900 000, and 80 per cent of that figure—or \$761 000—related to the former Department of Parks and Wildlife.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Further to that, I notice that it is increasing every year, with savings of \$1.8 million, \$2.6 million and \$3.3 million. Is the parliamentary secretary expecting that efficiencies will be found every year, or is the service review going to find efficiencies up-front? I know the government is doing a service review and finding efficiencies through that. What procedures is the government going through to find those efficiencies in the out years by such an extravagant amount compared with the current year?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I refer the member to Mr Neilson for more detail.

Mr M. Neilson: The reduction is cumulative, as the member indicated. The original expectation was that there would be inflation of around one per cent per annum. In rough terms, that equates to around \$900 000 in increased costs. That indexation has been removed as part of the budget process. Ongoing efficiencies will need to be delivered in order to balance the budgets.

The CHAIR: Member for Bicton.

Mr D.C. NALDER: Bateman.

The CHAIR: I have you on the list here; you are obviously not. Member for Moore. You are on the list, member for Bateman; do not worry!

Mr R.S. LOVE: I would like to remain on the list because I have lots of questions. Whenever there is nobody available, I can put my hand up!

The CHAIR: Member for Moore, there have been 73 questions from the opposition compared with eight from the government, so you are going pretty well. Member for Moore.

Mr R.S. LOVE: That portrays our level of interest in the environment and all things to do with it.

I refer to the last dot point on page 198 under the heading “Joint Management and Visitor Services”. It states that the Kalbarri skywalk and Kalbarri National Park tourist infrastructure project will be finalised in 2018. Can the parliamentary secretary please update me on the progress of that project and when the final stages of the skywalk is to be tendered and when it will be completed?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Certainly, member. I am not sure whether the member is aware but there have been some issues with the contractors involved in that project.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I am very aware.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Indeed. That is, as he will appreciate, an issue beyond the control of government, but certainly, as a side issue, this government is very interested in protecting subcontractors and ensuring that they are paid for work that is done. I mention that as a side issue that I am sure the member is aware of, because it was an issue under the previous government.

It is my understanding that the tender for the skywalk development is going to be advertised late this year and we hope to see that development completed by mid-2018.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I have a further question. During the construction of the skywalk, will we see any further closures to access areas within Kalbarri National Park or will the work progress with normal access being granted to visitors?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I will refer the member to Mr Dans.

Mr P. Dans: I would anticipate that, given the nature of the engineering works, there will be some site access restrictions when the cantilevered lookout structures are transported and constructed on-site.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Through the parliamentary secretary, do we have any idea about the length of time those types of restrictions might be in place for? Is there an anticipated time for how long this project will take to be delivered?

Mr P. Dans: I think we will need to wait and see until we call tenders and review the responses we get and the methodologies proposed by the chosen contractor. It will be a fairly lengthy build; it could be four to six months to deliver on that mid-2018 time frame, but without knowing the construction methodologies that will be proposed, we cannot be definitive. As I said, I would expect some visitor access restrictions; the designated worksite will

absolutely be off limits to visitors, but obviously we will endeavour to minimise impacts one the school holiday periods and other high-visitation periods of the year.

[4.20 pm]

Mr D.C. NALDER: I come back to the question about Wellington National Park. I concur with the adviser's comments that it is a fantastic asset, particularly Wellington Dam, but also Lake Kewari.

The CHAIR: Which line item is the member referring to?

Mr D.C. NALDER: It is the sixth dot point under "Government Initiatives" on page 198 of the budget papers. My questions are around Lake Kewari because I think it is beautiful. I have never seen a waterway like that; it is fantastic. How will the government solve the liability issues that have kept this project from advancing in recent years?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: As the member would know, the lake is a former open cut coalmine and was filled with water from the Collie River in the late 1990s. A total of \$3 million has been committed to develop the lake as a water-based tourism destination, as I commented before. The department will take back responsibility and management of the land. Detailed recreational planning will commence to ensure that the facility is developed. The member's question relating to the liabilities —

Mr D.C. NALDER: It is obviously what is in there—the heavy metals.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I know there is a liability issue with that lake so I will defer to Mr Dans.

Mr P. Dans: It is still an active mining lease and still subject to the state agreement act. Premier Coal needs to satisfy some completion criteria and it is required to relinquish the mining lease. The area of the lake will then revert to state forest—its underlying tenure, if you like. Premier Coal is in the process of preparing rehabilitation plans for the diversion channel, which diverted the Collie River south branch around the mining void. It is also preparing a contaminated sites assessment study. When those two bodies of work have been provided to the state and the agencies involved have deemed the rehabilitation plans to be appropriate, it can progress to surrender of the mining lease and the state will assume liability for that area that has been surrendered. Development work on Lake Kewari—an election commitment—can then commence on site.

Mr D.C. NALDER: Can the adviser please provide the current levels of heavy metals that are in and around the floor of that lake? How have they changed over time?

Mr M. Webb: I understand that this issue arises under the Contaminated Sites Act 2003. I think the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation is responsible for managing that act.

The CHAIR: That comes under division 13. The advisers are sitting patiently at the back of the chamber, member, so you can ask them.

Mr D.C. NALDER: Given that the department is going to take responsibility for the recreational activities there, I would imagine this is a potential issue that needs to be resolved prior to that. I would imagine the department needs to be aware of this issue and what is occurring so it can take it over.

Mr M. Webb: Again, I will say that the implications of water quality both in Lake Kewari and also downstream are the responsibility of DWER.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I want to go back to page 199 and the Forest Management Plan 2014–23. How well is the department achieving against the targets that were expected in the sustainable timber industry, environmental factors and conserving plants and animals? How often, if at all, does the department review that plan?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Sorry, member; what dot point are you talking about?

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: It is the second dot point under "Forest Management". It is simply about the Forest Management Plan. The department has a plan. How well is the department sticking to that plan and is it reviewing its achievements on an annual basis and reporting back against that plan?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I will refer the member to Mr Dans.

Mr P. Dans: The department is working very closely with the Forest Products Commission to implement the plan. A formalised works agreement is in place between the two agencies. Key performance indicators are written into the plan, which will be the subject of a mid-term review, which will commence in 2018. I understand that the review will be published in 2019, halfway through the 10-year term of the plan.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to page 197 and the heading "Spending Changes". The second line item under "Other" is "2017–18 Tariffs, Fees and Charges". The 2016–17 estimated actual is zero, with \$872 000 and so on over the forward estimates. Where will these tariffs, fees and charges be imposed, and how will they be collected? Following on from that, does this mean that visitors will be paying more to see the natural attractions of the state?

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Mr R.R. WHITBY: These are fairly moderate increases, generally in line with the CPI. They usually involve a per vehicle charge to access national parks et cetera. I understand that they will increase from \$12 to \$13. There are also camping fees and a range of other increases. I understand that they are modest and in line with the consumer price index. I am happy for Mr Dans to provide more details on that if the member wishes.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Yes, thank you.

Mr P. Dans: There is not a lot more to add to that. It is a very minor increase to the national park and park and reserve entry fees. The revenue earned through entry fees to national parks is retained for reinvestment into those particular parks to ensure that the level of service provided to the public can be maintained.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to page 201 and the table headed “Service Summary”. Service 5 under “Expense” is “Visitor Services and Public Programs Provided in National Parks and Other Lands and Water”. Under the previous government, a program was announced for some changes to the management of Wedge Island. Is this covered in this line item or any other line item in the budget?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I am not sure of the answer so I will refer the member to Mr Neilson.

Mr M. Neilson: The revenues and costs associated with leases at Wedge Island and Grey are shown as part of service 5 on page 205. The revenues form part of the income for that service of \$31.4 million.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Just to be clear, no changes will occur on Wedge Island despite what was announced previously about some rationalisation of shacks and changes to the management of the reserve going forward?

[4.30 pm]

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I refer to Mr Dans for a further explanation.

Mr P. Dans: Consultation and planning for future management arrangements at Wedge Island and Grey settlement is ongoing. The Shire of Dandaragan is involved, as well as the Wedge and Grey squatter shack associations, and affected Aboriginal organisations. A fairly lengthy and very thorough consultation process is still underway into the future management arrangements of both settlements at Wedge Island and Grey.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Is that the consultation process that was specifically to be put in place following the announcement of the former minister in estimates, I think, two years ago; is that the same program?

Mr P. Dans: Yes, it is, member.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I have one further question on the same issue. Is there an anticipated end date for this lengthy consultation process?

Mr P. Dans: Member, we would like to bring it to a conclusion as soon as possible, but there are issues of compliance with local planning schemes, and, as I said, obviously Aboriginal involvement, Aboriginal bodies who have an interest in the Wedge and Grey areas, as well as the shack owners’ associations. I understand that heritage organisations are also involved. It is a fairly lengthy and protracted process, but we will be working to bring it to a conclusion to provide a clear way forward as soon as possible.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I have one further question, and I promised it is on the same issue. There is no pot or pool of money or any anticipated program in the forward estimates to put in place any changes that may come about following that consultation?

Mr P. Dans: That is right. There is no funding in the forward estimates for a future development or whatever. The revenue that the department retains from the shack licence fees and leases at the moment assists in the day-to-day management of the site, the provision of a rubbish removal service and the removal of abandoned and derelict shacks.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I will make a liar of myself and ask one more question. Could you explain from the income received from the leases, what percentage of costs does that represent to run the sites at Wedge and Grey?

Mr P. Dans: My understanding is that it covers the majority of the management costs for the provision of the administration of the leases and licences, the provision of the rubbish removal service and the removal of derelict and unsafe and abandoned shacks as required.

The appropriation was recommended.