



# Parliamentary Debates

(HANSARD)

FORTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT  
FIRST SESSION  
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A

Wednesday, 22 May 2024

# Legislative Assembly

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## ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A

The meeting commenced at 9.00 am.

### Division 14: Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation — Services 5 to 7, Tourism —

Mr P. Lilburne, Chair.

Ms R. Saffioti, Minister for Tourism.

Ms R. Brown, Chief Executive Officer.

Ms S. Underwood, Acting Managing Director.

Ms R. Lowe, Executive Director, Destination Development.

Ms A. Last, Executive Director, Events.

Mr R. Sansalone, Chief Financial Officer.

Mr R. Williamson, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 31 May 2024. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

I give the call to the Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to page 196 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the points under “Tourism”. Paragraph 8.1 states —

increasing the Major Events Fund by an additional \$44.4 million over the forward estimates period to secure blockbuster events and drive visitation to the State;

Does the government try to forecast a return on investment for those projects at the time the funds are being allocated? We do not know the level of funding given to each project. What is the threshold return on investment that the government seeks in planning for an event?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** A number of factors are taken into consideration in relation to bringing major events to WA. One of them, of course, is how many visitors the event is expected to bring. That includes, for example, an estimation of interstate and overseas tourism, the average length of stay and average expenditure. That is all fit into a return on investment calculator. For events like the Margaret River Pro, we also look at how they can activate and bring tourists to a particular regional town and support regional WA. A number of factors go into that consideration, but a return on investment is determined. We are also looking at how we can incorporate a wider assessment of return on investment—for example, how we can support and acknowledge some of the social media following and the broadcast impact. We saw that with WWE wrestling, which had a major impact across the world.

The other point I will make is with regard to the social media impact. More and more of the people we bring here have an incredible social media following, so their support and promotion of Western Australia is also a part of our consideration. A number of considerations are discussed and put forward, Tourism WA makes a recommendation, and the government makes a final decision on its allocation of funding.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** What follow-up is done to try to assess both the success of the event and the accuracy of the government’s forecasting techniques?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** A review is undertaken after the event, where we have actuals in relation to the actual number of visitors. As I said, we are going to delve into and do more work on the value of the promotion of the state. For the IBF boxing event two weekends ago, again, we promoted Western Australia into target markets either through

social media or sections of the broadcast media. For example, the Supercars Championship was here over the weekend and two drivers filmed in Exmouth, which was edited into the broadcast and posted on social media. In many instances, the events, including both Supercars and WWE, have their own broadcasts. A number of them have their own broadcasts which means that we can, as part of the event, incorporate advertising and marketing of the state into that. That would cost a lot extra if we were trying to buy airtime or billboards in another part of the country. Those are some of the benefits of securing these international, global events—particularly in the case of something like WWE, and, as I said, the level of sophistication of what it brought to WA with regard to engagement with the local community.

More generally, as we go down the events path, it is also about making sure that Western Australians get to participate in these events. A real focus for us going forward is to not only hold the events, but also have local activation. We started that with the United Cup in January; we had some local activation. We want to ensure that Western Australians who maybe just want the atmosphere but do not necessarily want to go to the event can have a way of participating; WWE did that. For the FIFA Women's World Cup, we hosted the Perth FIFA Fan Festival in the middle of Forrest Place. Thousands of people went down there, watched the matches on the big screen and got to be part of the Matildas atmosphere, even though the Matildas were not playing in Perth.

I want to stretch that into regional WA; we have some ideas that we will continue to pursue. If we have a major event or concert, we want to have some local activation in regional towns so that people can feel part of it. I think Melbourne has been very successful with that. If you go to an event in Melbourne on a particular weekend, whether it is Formula 1 or the AFL grand final, you may not actually attend the event but you are part of that atmosphere. That is something that we are very keen to work on. The local community already gets the benefit of being able to go to things instead of having to travel. The feedback I have had on both WWE and IBF boxing was that people said, "Oh, this is great. I would have to travel to see events of this quality." It basically means they do not have to travel. But as I said, more generally, I want to create more activation around these blockbuster events.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I was actually trying to find out whether there is a threshold the government seeks in terms of what could be considered the minimum expected return on investment before it decides to fund an event?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** There is a strict return on investment, but, as I said, it is like the benefit–cost ratio for an infrastructure project. For example, the Albany ring-road was never going to get above 1, but we backed it because of the wider community benefits. I think the initial BCR for Albany ring-road was 0.7. In regional WA there may be further benefits. The Margaret River Pro is an example, given our status as a surfing destination and the global reach. All other aspects are taken into consideration. When we are bringing something that helps activate a regional town and also helps, for example, international women's football, it has wider benefits because we are encouraging young women to play sport. We saw with the Matildas, in particular, an incredible wider impact. We are going to get more and more sophisticated with how we model this because I believe that we need to do further work on the broadcast impact in particular and the social media impact.

[9.10 am]

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** A number of events take place at Optus Stadium. Has there been any consideration of the name of that stadium reverting to Perth Stadium or some other locally identifiable name as part of the promotional advantage from having these events?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Naming rights are given to major stadia around the world and nation; that is what happens. We broadcast the name Perth or Western Australia through our in-ground advertising. Of course, this is part of the promotion relating to broadcast. What we are doing very well—I congratulate the team at Tourism WA team for this—when negotiating the contracts and landing these blockbuster events is placing a big focus on how we can as part of the broadcast and lead-up create momentum in broadcasting Western Australia around the world. For example, promoting our beautiful whale sharks will be worth a lot more than the name of a stadium.

**Ms M. BEARD:** I am on page 196 looking at paragraph 8.1. There is an additional \$44.4 million of investment over the forward estimates period with \$26.8 million in 2024–25. Does the minister have any idea how many events that will result in?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Not yet. We will continue to successfully allocate funds. For example, we aim in the future to secure major blockbuster events. That fund has been used to support major events like Coldplay, WWE, past English Premier League matches, the upcoming match of Serie A teams and the Ultimate Fighting Championship. You name it; that is what it is there to fund. Promoters engage with Tourism WA and identify opportunities. Tourism WA does some assessments and goes to the tourism board, and then recommendations are given to government. We try—I think we have been successful—to get a diversity of events and we continue to pursue that.

I will give the member some examples of what we have funded for the upcoming year. As we know, there will be the Wallabies v South Africa match, the UFC 305, the Hockey Australia Masters Championships, the United Cup and Pair'd in the Margaret River region. Those are the types of events that we fund.

**Ms M. BEARD:** I am keen to understand. Do people in the department make approaches or is there a bucket available and people just say, "Yes. I'm happy to come"?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** It is best to describe it in two ways. There are the homegrown events, which I will talk a little bit about. In a sense, there are two streams of events—blockbuster events, which are hard to predict because we are not sure exactly what we will secure, and homegrown events. As part of our strategy going forward, we are very much into supporting blockbuster events and homegrown events. For example, we are very much focused on how we can support homegrown events over the calendar year so a key event is held in Perth every month that we can sell internationally and interstate. There is a calendar of events.

We are working across government and looking at events currently funded by Tourism WA, like Pair'd, the replacement for Margaret River Escape, and EverNow in October. These homegrown events are sometimes sponsored by Tourism, but the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries might have some such as the Fringe World Festival and the Perth Festival. Then there might be some Perth Racing events and some key regional events like the Shore Leave Festival and key events in Broome. We will create a calendar of homegrown events. We can then support those homegrown events by giving them longer funding certainty so that they can continue to grow and become key destinations themselves. That is very much a priority of ours. We are working through that. We are incorporating the whole of government. We are looking at what is happening in the racing calendar, the culture and the arts calendar and the regional events calendar. There are so many regional events happening. We are looking at how we can support them to grow bigger and maybe longer.

Then there are the blockbuster events. With blockbuster events, Tourism WA engages with promoters. There are some three or four key promoters who are always developing concepts or events. They put them to us, and we initially look at whether it is something worth us pursuing. If it is, there is further work to describe the event or to get the economic impact and cost of that event. WA's success, particularly with Coldplay and WWE, has really put us on the events map. I think everyone from tourism would agree that we are seeing a lot of promoters coming to WA first now because they know that we have very strong audiences. In particular, I think WWE here had the biggest ever audience for an WWE Elimination Chamber and it sold a record amount of merchandise for a non-WrestleMania event. We saw with our EPL teams last year and particularly with the UFC that our interstate visitation was very big.

We are seeing that promoters are keen to come to us. We understand the time of the year. To be honest, the other issue we have is negotiating access to grounds. For example, the AFL has certain contracts with Optus Stadium. We are always trying to negotiate through that as well. Since VenuesWest took operating control of Optus Stadium, it deals directly with Cricket Australia and the AFL. When we look at events, we have to make sure that we can get access to Optus Stadium.

**Ms M. BEARD:** Regional events are really important. There is sometimes difficulty for regional events to get exposure. Is there a thought around some of those regional events coming to Perth, like the Gascoyne Long Table Lunch, the Southern Forests Food Council or whatever it might be? Something could be run at the same time to promote that neck of the woods and give them exposure to a wider audience.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** That is a great idea. I was up for Shore Leave at the Abrolhos and I was blown away by the event. It was a one-day event. I came back with the idea to grow that event, because it is an incredible event and it was sold out that day. I also thought, "How many people are coming from interstate and overseas?" We want to give many of these regional events maybe three or more years of funding certainty and ask how we can work with the marketing team to ensure that we can promote those regional events interstate. We can then work with the airlines to help tourist airfares. It is far more sophisticated and complicated, but we will be picking some iconic events from around regional WA. There might be some arguments: "You haven't picked us" or "You haven't picked this", but we need to start from somewhere. Whether they happen around Margaret River, as I said, or around Geraldton or Broome—there are some incredible events through the Gascoyne as well—we will pick those and then elevate them to our major calendar of events. We will still support all the other events through our normal regional events program, but by targeting some major events, we hope to develop to the next tier.

It is something I am very excited and passionate about because, to be honest, I think it is normally the same people who go on our experiences each year, so let us expose what we have in regional WA. The Ord Valley Muster was on the weekend just past; let us expose events such as that to interstate and overseas tourists. On the Abrolhos trip, I thought: far out; some tourists from China or Singapore would absolutely be blown away by this experience and, in particular, the combination of fresh seafood and local cooking. Overseas tourists would love to be served freshly caught seafood that has been cooked before their eyes. There is a huge ability for us to do more.

[9.20 am]

**Ms M. BEARD:** Regional events rely heavily on grant funding. Some of the feedback I have had from event organisers is that sometimes the timing of finding out that they will get the funding prevents them from being able to book what they need to book earlier in the timeline to make the event happen. Is there any scope for flexibility in the timing of that funding?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Absolutely. For example, I want to move iconic regional events to longer funding certainty so that they know what they have this year and next year and they can negotiate a couple of years in advance. My view

is that funding certainty is important. We do not want event organisers to spend the first four months of the year trying to identify funding, because it does not allow them to grow the event. Events also help support local businesses. Some of the feedback I have had in the past is that we have not activated local businesses enough, and I think that is because we have not given people enough time to activate those local businesses. Funding certainty over two or three years is very much where we are heading.

I think racing is a great day out. I was at the Quokka Horse Race recently and there was some visitation from South-East Asia. We have other big races in regional WA, such as the Kalgoorlie Cup and the Broome Cup. I want to look at how we can further support them. I think Kalgoorlie is still very strong, but feedback on some of others is that they are not as popular as they were. It is partly because of funding support or, more generally, who is managing the event, and that is where we can engage our development commissions and local tourism representatives.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** On page 197, the service summary table shows that for both “Event Tourism” and “Destination Marketing” there are significant changes across the forward estimates. This year there is a larger allocation than in any of the other years. Can the minister explain why there is a decrease in the out years from the amount for this budget year? For example, “Event Tourism” goes from \$101 million down to \$53 million in the following year.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** As I have said, we have injected significant funding. A lot of this has been post-COVID. The former Minister for Tourism and now Premier, emerging from COVID, put in specific funding for major events and also recovery of our direct flights. There was a significant boost to the budget of both post-COVID. In relation to the recovery of direct flights, we now have 19 reconnected flights or new connections. We have also re-cashflowed some of that money from 2023–24 to 2024–25, and the same with events. We have re-cashflowed some money, but over the forward estimates we will see how we continue to support events. Hopefully, many of our homegrown events now will have taken charge and we have a fully-fledged homegrown events calendar. They are still blockbuster events. Post-COVID, we have attempted to make Western Australia an events capital of South-East Asia. We are working on that and that is why we injected particular extra funds. We will continue to monitor how we go over the forward estimates and if further funds are required, we will support that, but, in the meantime, we will support a homegrown events calendar.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to budget paper No 2 and the line item “Tourism Investment Committee of Cabinet” under the spending changes on page 193. Can the minister explain what that money will achieve and also how the committee of cabinet will influence further decisions around tourism expenditure?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Sure. The key feedback we got from industry, and something that I have always believed, is tourism is much bigger than what happens within Tourism WA. In particular, when we look at national parks, maritime facilities, transport and so many other portfolios, we see that they impact the state’s ability to attract tourists and create a positive experience for tourists once they are here. One of my aspirations was to ensure that tourism is a cross-government priority and, more generally, that we take into account the tourism benefits and the need for improved tourism infrastructure around Western Australia.

As we know, a lot of what happens in the environmental space, such as with national parks or trails, very much impacts on tourism. We have seen an incredible increase in trails visitation, whether it be for hiking, gravel riding or mountain bike riding. I think there was an event recently in Nannup. I received feedback about how popular it was. Also, international tourists are now targeting Western Australia’s trails because they want the experience of going through native forest and enjoying not only an incredible cycling event, but also a nature-based event.

Then we have culture and the arts. Fringe is a great event that supports the Western Australian community, but I truly believe it should be an international event whereby we bring over artists from around the world, create partnerships and support visitation from other parts of the world and interstate. We can then back that in with marketing and other flights. We can then also combine a regional event with it.

We have regional development, of course. Tourism is a very, very big part of regional economies.

This subcommittee has been created to ensure a cross-government approach to tourism. For nature-based tourism, we have the Minister for Environment on the committee so that when we support expenditure on our national parks, we ensure at the very early stages that it will support the tourism experience. Culture and the arts is also represented on the committee. Again, that will make sure that when we invest in infrastructure or events, tourism is a key part of it—and it is just not. It is all fine to be targeting our local audience, but I think Fringe can bring from interstate and overseas not only the performers and their teams, but also the tourists. That is why the subcommittee exists.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The membership of this subcommittee is based upon the relevance of the ministerial responsibilities to tourism as a portfolio. For instance, the minister mentioned the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions. I assume sport would be another portfolio. What departments or ministers will be represented?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** The ministers are Minister Templeman, Minister for Culture and the Arts and Minister for Sport and Recreation; Minister Whitby, Minister for Environment; Minister Punch, Minister for Regional Development; and Minister Carey, Minister for Lands and Minister for Planning, because those departments are also big contributors to increasing and improving visitor experiences. I am also on the committee; it includes transport.

**Ms M. BEARD:** My question relates to the service summary on page 197. I refer to service 5, “Destination Marketing”, in conjunction with service 7, “Tourism Destination Development”, which is decreasing. Can the minister advise why funding for destination development is reducing over time?

[9.30 am]

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Those numbers bounce around a little bit because it includes the aviation recovery fund, which was part of Reconnect WA. We supported \$75 million to recover air links across the world. We have been successful in some and we still have funds to be allocated next year to try to recover more connections. That is why it is a bit lumpy and then disappears. It was a set fund to entice airlines back to Western Australia. It is not continued funding for them, but it is some initial funding to help market the routes and to bring connections back. That is why there was a dedicated fund that then disappears.

**Ms M. BEARD:** Is the minister saying that it will likely disappear or will it still be there but with a lesser amount?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** The \$75 million was about reconnecting. As I said, it is not a long-term fund. It is embedded in those numbers, which is why there is volatility in that. The profile will depend on our expenditure. As I said, we have secured a number of direct connections, but we still have a number of offers on the table for some key markets out there like China and India.

**Ms M. BEARD:** In the same table, is “Destination Marketing” related to the five registered training organisations? It is the fifth point in the table.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** A lot of the funding under “Tourism Destination Development” is also supporting the workforce. We have specific training for young people entering the workforce. We have a partnership with AHA, which is all about encouraging younger people to enter the tourism industry. We also run programs for mature age workers to help people who are re-entering the workforce after being absent. We have specific initiatives to support workforce development. Destination marketing includes the aviation recovery fund and the regional tourism organisations.

**Ms M. BEARD:** Can the minister tell me the allocation for each of those RTOs?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Yes; by way of supplementary information, we can provide the annual allocation for each of the RTOs.

**The CHAIR:** Does the minister agree to provide the supplementary information, and, if so, state exactly what information will be provided?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I will provide the allocation of funding to RTOs for the 2024–25 financial year.

[*Supplementary Information No A11.*]

**Ms M. BEARD:** Is it still the case that marketing the regions is the core function of RTOs?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Affiliated bodies of Tourism WA each receive a portion of their funding from the agency. They may also be supported by local communities, local businesses and their members. The RTOs’ primary role is to deliver region-focused intrastate campaigns, working in cooperation with Tourism WA and the local tourism industry. They work on five-year agreements. The five RTOs are Australia’s coral coast, Australia’s golden outback, Australia’s north west, Australia’s south west and Destination Perth.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I refer to “Outdoor Adventure Tourism Package—Tourism Attraction Feasibility” under “New Initiatives” in the table on page 193. There is an amount of \$500 000. Can the minister outline what that package will deliver?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** It is a \$165 million package all up. We across government looked at some outstanding issues that we wanted to address. We also looked at the popularity of trails and how we support more hiking, mountain biking and gravel bikes—I am getting across all the different types of biking; it is really hard. We looked at maritime infrastructure and camping facilities. We worked across government to identify where we can support investment in projects. To confirm, does the member want the outdoor adventure package?

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** That is right. I am on page 193 and there is only \$500 000 allocated to that, but it sounds like this is spread across the whole division.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** There is further feasibility. The \$500 000 relates to tourism attraction feasibility studies, by which we fund tourism to do further work on proposals for new tourism infrastructure. We are working with them on that. More generally, \$165 million is to fund a number of outdoor adventure tourism items, including \$82.4 million in boating and maritime facilities, which includes \$17.5 million to extend the northern breakwater at Jurien Bay boat harbour; \$9.1 million additional funding for the Woodman Point jetty; \$6.5 million on the Onslow marina community boating facility, subject to some private sector funding; more funding for the Albany waterfront marina, in particular the boat ramp in Albany; and \$4 million for a new fishing platform in Bunbury. We have \$45.8 million in trails and other recreational facilities, which includes \$8 million for the Pemberton trail master plan; \$8 million for the Peel regional trails; \$3.5 million for the Kwinana Loop; \$3 million for stages 1 to 3 of the Kalamunda circuit

trail; \$2.5 million towards the Red Gorge hike and cycle trail at Karijini and \$17.1 million for campgrounds across the state, to deliver a range of upgrades. There is \$8.1 million for specific initiatives, such as a visitor centre and jetty at the Abrolhos Islands; \$8.1 million for the Kalbarri foreshore and beaches revitalisation; and \$3 million for the upgrade of the Gloucester and bicentennial trees in the Pemberton area.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** In the Central Wheatbelt, we have Northam, ballooning and the Avon Descent, which, from my experience of being a previous Minister for Sport and Recreation, falls between the gaps. It is most definitely a sporting event, but there is also tourism attached. I spoke to the Minister for Sport and Recreation and I think there has been some funding attached to the Avon Descent, but in terms of ballooning or those types of events, how do they find their way into feasibility or onto the radar?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Again, councils can present. There are two parts. There is the event itself. I agree: the Avon Descent is an iconic WA event that celebrates a great part of the world. When we look at iconic tourism events, Avon Descent is one I am looking at to see how we can promote that more and give it more funding certainty and help build on an iconic Western Australian event. We have the regional events scheme and last year we supported the Women's Hot Air Ballooning Championships in Northam as an event. There are two parts: we continue to support iconic regional events, and we hope over time to develop even greater exposure of the Northam hot air balloons. I think it is one of the most beautiful visions out there. I was in Northam for a wedding and there were a lot of hot air balloons that morning when we drove out and it was incredible. We worked with the Wheatbelt Development Commission, too. Looking at the calendar, the Avon Descent in particular is a good staple that we can build on over time. It would expose us to the rest of the world, bringing more and more people from around the world to come and participate.

[9.40 am]

**Ms M. BEARD:** The minister referred to Kalbarri and the foreshore. Can she provide more information on what that will provide for Kalbarri?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Sorry; I do not think we have the information. As I understand, it has been an aspiration and a project after cyclone Seroja. It has been a priority of both the council and the development commission to revitalise the foreshore and help re-beautify the foreshore to further attract visitors. There is some infrastructure and new landscaping supporting the foreshore.

**Ms M. BEARD:** I just want to clarify that that is new money and that there is no planning. Have any projects been started for that project?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** An amount of \$8.1 million will fund phase 1 of the Kalbarri foreshore and beaches revitalisation initiative. Yes; this is new money.

**Ms M. BEARD:** In relation to the tourism events and the solar eclipse referred to on page 205, what was the return on investment for the 2023 solar eclipse event?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I will say a couple of things. Sorry; I do not have that information. The total solar eclipse allowed us to fund some upgrades to infrastructure. As Minister for Transport, for example, I injected funds into the Minilya–Exmouth Road to support safety and provide more parking bays and more rest areas. A lot of permanent infrastructure was funded. Then there was the event itself. I was there for that event, and it was one of the most well attended and well controlled events I have ever seen. But I do not have the numbers for the return on investment.

**Ms M. BEARD:** Is the minister saying that she is unsure of the economic return to the state? How many visitors actually attended in person?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** There might be figures, but I do not have them in front of me. I can provide supplementary information on the visitation numbers for the total solar eclipse in Exmouth in 2023.

[*Supplementary Information No A12.*]

**Ms M. BEARD:** Is it possible to include in that supplementary information the economic return to the state from that event, if it is available?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Yes, if we have it. The visitation numbers and economic return to the state will be part of that supplementary information.

**Ms M. BEARD:** My question is about paragraph 8.2 on page 196, which states —

building Western Australia's density and diversity of attractions and accommodation by investing \$500,000 to explore the feasibility of new tourism attractions and investing \$1 million to grow the State's cruise tourism program;

Who is undertaking the work for that, and what attractions are being considered?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** There are a number of different proposals around the state. The committee will work through it and then allocate funds to develop feasibility studies for some proposals. We will work through that. They

will be outcomes of deliberations of the tourism subcommittee. Work on tourism cruise ship destinations is done by Tourism WA. Again, we are working with the cruise line companies, which facilitate a lot of engagement with cruise liners. For example, during the WA Cruise Exchange event last year, we engaged directly with the cruise line companies and helped to promote WA experiences with them. That money helps to do that. There is funding to support shore excursion development and building the capacity of destinations for cruise ships. Cruise ship tourism is much wanted, but it is ad hoc. It takes a lot of development to ensure that all the local tourism businesses in regional towns are geared up for hundreds, if not thousands, of people coming in on one day and getting around. All that work with local businesses in regional WA supports welcoming cruise ships when they arrive.

**Ms M. BEARD:** On page 193, there is the line item “Kimberley Tourism Support Program”. I notice that there is no funding after 2025–26. Considering the government’s decision to close Horizontal Falls, what is driving that significant reduction in funding?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** We very much continue to work with industry in Broome, in particular the tourism industry. A package was announced post the Kimberley floods, and that included an allocation of funds. We have helped support discounts on tours and subsidised airfares or discounted flights. Earlier this year, I announced \$2.8 million for further support, and that includes, for example, discounted tourism experiences and support for flights. It includes \$1.7 million for discounted flights to and across the Kimberley, some of which are currently on sale; a further \$500 000 in discounted tours and experiences with a new Kimberley Season Pass program; and a \$200 000 partnership with the Caravan Industry Association. We will continue to work on further funding. There may be other areas across the whole state that will need extra support for particular reasons. We continue to monitor what is happening in tourism. For example, there was an injection and a continuation of support, particularly post the Kimberley floods. We will continue to monitor it to see whether further funds are required in the out years.

**Ms M. BEARD:** Does the Treasurer know how many people have used the Kimberley tourism support program since its inception?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Post January 2023, when the then Minister for Tourism and now Premier announced the recovery package, there were 19 000 discounted airfares from Perth to Broome and from Perth to Kununurra. We now have our \$2.8 million extension of that support, which includes a \$1.7 million aviation package. I do not have those numbers because that sale is currently happening. Also, there is \$500 000 in discounted tours and experiences, with 50 per cent off the cost of tours and experiences across the Kimberley region. I do not have the full numbers because that support package is still out there. I have further information. We recently reported that 1 500 vouchers at \$100 have been used through the visitor centre.

[9.50 am]

**Ms M. BEARD:** Do we have information on the annual usage rate of the program in terms of the number of travellers and the amount of discounted travel, accommodation and airfares that was provided?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Yes, we do for post season, but we do not have all the information for this current season because it is still alive. I did read out those numbers for 2023.

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

#### **Division 42: Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions — Service 2, Tourism —**

Mr P. Lilburne, Chair.

Ms R. Saffioti, Minister for Tourism.

Mr J. Banks, Executive Director, Rottnest Island Authority.

Mr S. Smith, Chief Executive Officer, Rottnest Island Authority.

Ms L. Cassetai, Chief Financial Officer, Rottnest Island Authority.

Mr R. Williamson, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 31 May 2024. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.



I give the call to the Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Under the significant issues impacting the agency on page 698 of budget paper No 2, paragraph 13.1 refers to the project to build new staff accommodation. I have a couple of questions.

Can the minister tell me how many staff accommodation units are expected to be provided under that scheme?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** We are working through the planning now. The Rottnest Island Authority is engaging with industry on both the planning and the delivery of those units. This is a long-term project, and one of the ideas is to have a long-term program of delivery so that we can continue to support the increase in the number of units. We think that approximately 137 units will be provided, but it will depend on the size and nature of those units. We are working through that process with industry to make sure that we can have them made locally, in Western Australia. We might also have more diversity in the size of the units. The Rottnest Island Authority is consulting with industry and Rottnest Island businesses to understand their accommodation needs. That is being worked through at the moment.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Are any of the businesses on the island contributing to the project or is all the money from the authority?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** To be honest, across the island there is a range of existing arrangements. Some businesses have built their own workers' accommodation and some have control of and are using existing Rottnest Island Authority buildings. It is a little bit—what is the word—different. There is a range of existing arrangements. Going forward, we want to try to standardise those arrangements. It may be that the government builds the accommodation, but we would need to recover costs from the businesses over time. Like I said, there is a range of arrangements. In one instance, a business built its own accommodation, but it now rents other existing accommodation.

We are trying to standardise the system to release existing Rottnest Island accommodation that is currently being leased by businesses. That existing accommodation can then be rented out to visitors. The plan is to release existing Rottnest Island accommodation for tourists and families, and have a more standardised system that will allow us to recover our costs for the new accommodation over time.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** What would be the ambition in terms of a payback period or a time to recover these costs over time from businesses?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** We are working through the full feasibility and the business case now, or all the financials, because the cost recovery will depend on the cost of delivery. That is why we are working with industry. It will also be impacted, particularly by the size and nature of the existing leases, because, again, no-one has freehold tenure. They have existing lease arrangements. For example, there may be a business with a five-year lease, so we will have to marry, in a sense, the type of accommodation proposed with some of the existing leases.

It is quite complex, but we are trying to standardise not only the type of housing, but also the pricing system so that it is fair and equitable across all businesses. To be honest, as a new Minister for Tourism, the biggest complaint or issue I have had heard from all local businesses is the need for more accommodation. Some great new businesses have expanded onto the island. As I said, one of the existing businesses, The Lane Cafe, runs The Basin's new food van, and its staff are sleeping in bunk beds in Kingstown Barracks. That impacts that the business's ability to retain staff and our ability to market the Kingstown Barracks as affordable accommodation.

**Ms K.E. GIDDENS:** My question relates to page 198 of budget paper No 3. Can the minister tell me what efforts are being made to ensure the fairness and integrity of the Stay Rottnest online booking system?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** We have seen incredible demand for accommodation on Rottnest Island. Part of the reason for building the dedicated workers' accommodation is to free up more units, in particular affordable units, for visitors and Western Australian families alike. In December 2022, the authority introduced a new online booking system for accommodation called Stay Rottnest. One reason for that was to try to create a fairer system for those wanting to book accommodation. When bookings open, all customers waiting online are randomised into an order and then they progress in the queue and gain access to the booking system. We have seen incredible demand, with up to 20 000 devices sometimes waiting to register a place.

Security measures are being introduced to try to ensure that we prohibit bots claiming accommodation or getting an unfair advantage, so a new two-step process was introduced to ensure that questions were in place so robots were not in the queue. When the system detects suspicious activity or that the source location of the user is a known bot location, further challenges are issued. This is an incredible statistic, but for the recent open day for January 2025 bookings over 3 316 bots were rejected for suspicious behaviour and denied access to the site. It is quite incredible to think how many bots are out there trying to access the booking system. A total of 3 316 bots were rejected. We continually review the system to make sure that we eliminate these opportunities for people to game the system and then get an unfair advantage. We will continue to monitor that, but it is a very interesting statistic that 3 316 bots were rejected as a result of suspicious behaviour.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

[10.00 am]

**Division 39: Commissioner of Main Roads —**

Mr P. Lilburne, Chair.

Ms R. Saffioti, Minister for Transport.

Mr P. Woronzow, Director General, Transport Portfolio.

Mr J. Erceg, Managing Director.

Mr D. Snook, Chief Operating Officer.

Mr M. Cammack, Director Budget and Investment Planning.

Mr P. D'Souza, Executive Director Finance and Commercial Services.

Mr L. Coci, Managing Director, Office of Major Transport Infrastructure Delivery.

Mr P. Laing, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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I give the call to the member for Moore.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** We will start with the line item “Bridges Renewal Program” under “Spending Changes”, “Ongoing Initiatives” on page 593 of the *Budget statements*. I wonder whether the minister could give a breakdown of the works planned under that program.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I will give a brief update of what the program is. It is an Australian government initiative, with up to \$85 million a year provided to fund the upgrade and replacement of bridges to enhance access for local communities and facilitate high-productivity vehicles. The Australian government contributes 50 per cent of costs for successful projects in urban areas and 80 per cent for successful projects located in regional WA. There is a total of \$24 million in the bridges renewal program—I will just make sure I have the right number. That was approved last year and includes \$10 million for the Eric Street Bridge refurbishment in Cottesloe, which is projected to commence in July. There has been some discussion about that more generally. There are also the York–Williams Road Bridge replacement in Beverley and the Milo Road river crossing bridge renewal in the Shire of Irwin. They are the three projects.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Is the program itself the funding that comes from the Commonwealth Grants Commission through the local government funding or is that a different stream?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** As I said, the bridges renewal program is a separate program by which the Australian government has allocations in its budget and it opens up rounds and we bid and secure projects.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** How is the priority determined?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Main Roads has a very long list of timber bridges both throughout the metropolitan area and in regional WA. Ongoing assessment is undertaken on the quality of the bridges. Hundreds of timber bridges remain out there in regional WA. Main Roads has a list of existing bridges and it provides proposals and submissions to the federal government to get funding for those bridges.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Is this specifically for timber bridges?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Yes, because that is the majority of the bridges. I will refer to John Erceg.

**Mr J. Erceg:** The program is not specifically for timber bridges, it is just that we have an extensive stock of timber bridges so they tend to attract most of the funding.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Has there been any consideration of funding for the convict bridge at Greenough, which has been damaged for many years?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** We can provide the answer about that bridge by way of supplementary information. Like I said, Main Roads undertakes a comprehensive maintenance and inspection program, and the results are what drive our submissions. They are based on the engineering assessments about the quality of those bridges. We can provide supplementary information on the convict bridge.

**The CHAIR:** The minister agrees to provide the supplementary information and what exactly will be provided for that particular bridge.

[*Supplementary Information No A13.*]

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** On that same page 593 of the *Budget statements* there is the spending change for “Oakajee Strategic Industrial Area Access Road”, which now has \$17 million attached to it. I think there was a lesser amount attached last year for the building of that road. What is that program and when will it be delivered? Can the minister give us a description of exactly what will be achieved there?

[10.10 am]

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I understood this to be a \$20 million project. It was initially not within the Main Roads’ budget, as I recall, because it related to the Oakajee industrial estate and was in a different budget. I will confirm that I am absolutely correct on that. The initial allocation was in the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation budget. It has now been transferred to Main Roads for it to be the deliverer of the project. I will get the member some more information on that. It is new because it is a grant that has been received by Main Roads from the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation to progress the design and delivery of the Oakajee road, in particular its intersection with North West Coastal Highway.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The minister says that the project was transferred from JTSI’s budget. Was it also at the total cost as outlined in the budget? I am assuming that it has already had \$2 million spent on it, so what has that money actually achieved? The total budget is \$19 150 000. Is that the same amount that JTSI had on its books when the money was transferred across?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Yes. This is from my recollection. I am sorry that I do not have the information that was in JTSI, but, as I recall, it was a \$20 million commitment, so we have transferred those funds over.

**Ms L. METTAM:** My question relates to page 600 and road efficiency improvements. It states —

The objective of this service is to improve the efficiency, capacity and utilisation of the existing road network.

This includes our intersection improvements. I am really asking this question on behalf of the member for Central Wheatbelt, who has raised a matter about the Leeming Road–Great Eastern Highway intersection at the entrance of Avon Industrial Park. Is there any funding in the budget for this project?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Sorry; we do not have any information on hand, but we can provide it by way of supplementary information.

[*Supplementary Information No A14.*]

**Ms L. METTAM:** Thank you, minister, for the provision of the supplementary information, as the member had raised this matter already. As part of the supplementary information, can the minister provide an understanding of not only whether funding was attached, but also the progress of that project and when the community can expect construction to commence?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Sure. We can provide the status of the project. We may have that information here, but it may be called something else, so we can flick through our files for a few minutes. But I will say that we will provide a status update of that project by way of supplementary information.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** On page 594, in the spending changes table, there is “Ongoing Initiatives: Morrison Road Planning Update”. Some money was spent in this current year on that planning update. There is no money allocated in the forward estimates. Does that mean that there is no money for the Morrison Road improvements?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** No. We have dedicated funding for that project; it is just not in the forward estimates. We have a big program, so we have allocated funds—both federal and state government money—towards the project, but it is just not allocated across the forward estimates.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Can the minister give me a timeline of how much money will be spent in each of the years it is allocated? When will it be allocated to a project?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** We are working through that project, but we have a number of other projects that we are delivering, as the member would be aware, including the Tonkin Highway and Reid Highway grade separations and major roads in regional WA. We are working through that with further planning, but we have not yet determined the actual start date for that project.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** So there is no money for planning in the budget. I assume that planning has actually been done. What further planning needs to be done for the project?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** We have spent \$1.4 million on planning for the area. Early design and investigations are underway. We continue to look at options and assessments and also what would be the preferred solution. We are continuing to determine what would be the best option. As I said, it is something that we are working on, but we have other projects that will be delivered before that one.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Is it not possible to give an approximate timeline for when this project will be delivered, if it will indeed be delivered?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Not yet, because we have not made that final decision on the timeline of delivery.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I turn to page 603 of the budget documents and refer to “Works in Progress”. There are quite a few works in there that I would like to ask about, but we will work through them one by one. “Bindoon Bypass—Construct New Alignment” has the same allocation of \$275 million that it has had since its inception. It is one of those projects that was smoothed by the former Treasurer a number of years ago and has not progressed to its full extent. The estimated expenditure until the end of this year is \$106 million of that, so probably 40 per cent of the money has already been spent, but the major part of the work has not even commenced.

Is the \$275 million still a realistic assessment of the cost to build the Bindoon bypass? When can we expect to see that project completed?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** We are delivering this project through different stages—to support local Aboriginal employment, in particular. I have been out onsite on this project, and it has been quite incredible to see the number of Aboriginal people engaged on this project. Stage 1 of the Bindoon bypass was north of Calingiri Road to Seven Mile Hill. It was delivered through a partnership between Aboriginal construction contractor Garli and Service Stream and was opened in May 2022. Stage 3 of the Bindoon bypass is 11 kilometres long. Construction of the initial seven kilometres commenced in March 2023, and that is scheduled to be completed mid this year. Again, we went through a directly engaged contractor, Garli—through a sole-supplier arrangement. Again, that was to ensure that local Aboriginal people, and Aboriginal people from both the area and other parts of WA, were directly employed.

That work will continue until 2025, with the construction of a further four kilometres of highway between the New Norcia bypass and the current section. Planning and procurement are underway for the next stage, and we are working on that. We expect to go to market early next year for the procurement of the final stage.

[10.20 am]

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** If, as I suspect, the cost to build that final section, which is the major element of the project, is much more than the \$160-odd million that is left in the kitty, what will be the situation then? Will the government seek further funding from either the commonwealth or the state? How does the minister see that progressing?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** We have had cost challenges with all projects. Once we go through a more detailed procurement process, we will get a better estimated total cost, and then we will work with the commonwealth to fund those increased costs. It has happened for a lot of our projects around the state because of the incredibly hot construction market and the increase in prices as a result of COVID and international global supply shocks. It will be dealt with like other projects; we will get a clearer indication of costs and then work with the commonwealth as partners in delivering that project.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Has the government had any preliminary discussions with the commonwealth around that project or is there simply a hope that it will come to the party?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** The commonwealth is a partner with us in the majority of our projects. We work constructively with the commonwealth to understand the delivery challenges and have it work with us. This is a delivery challenge that every state is encountering. More recently, the Victorian government had to defer its rail link by four years. The estimated cost of its nine-kilometre rail link was \$13 billion. We understand that it is potentially now beyond \$20 million. Every state has the same challenges. Every state is working with the commonwealth on the cost pressures and challenges in delivering our major infrastructure programs.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** As I recall—I could be wrong—the original allocation of money was 80 per cent from the commonwealth government and 20 per cent from the state government. Since then, the commonwealth government has indicated that it is willing to put forward only 50 per cent for future projects on the national highway network. What is the minister’s expectation for a commonwealth contribution to any shortfall? Would she seek an 80 per cent level, or a 50 per cent level?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** We are seeking 80 per cent, but this is part of discussions on the future partnership agreement with the commonwealth for land transport. Similar to every other state, we are at the end stage of renegotiating the land transport funding agreement with the federal government. Our aspiration is that we have 80 per cent funding for regional road projects, and we will continue to hold that aspiration. The commonwealth has employed a changed methodology going to 50 per cent, but we will continue to aspire to 80 per cent.

I have some information about the Leeming Road–Great Eastern Highway intersection that refers to a previous question. Design is being completed for the intersection upgrade. This is a DevelopmentWA project because it will link the industrial park to the area. Environmental and heritage approvals are being sought. We are waiting to go through that approvals process.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Is funding allocated to that, or is it just going through an approvals process at this stage?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** It is going through the approvals process. It is a DevelopmentWA project, so I cannot clarify exactly whether funding has been allocated through DevWA, but I think the actual approvals process has been worked through, which will help determine the scope of the project and, therefore, the funding subsequent to that. I cannot guarantee that 100 per cent because I am not across DevWA's internals.

**The CHAIR:** Leader of the Liberal Party, are you still seeking to have supplementary information A14 allocated in writing, or is that information sufficient?

**Ms L. METTAM:** No, that information is sufficient.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Page 602 of budget paper No 2 contains points on Indian Ocean Drive. Paragraph 11 refers to stage 2 of the Indian Ocean Drive project from Leeman to Brand Highway. This is the upgrade of the section north of the Eneabba–Coolimba Road. Are any upgrades being considered for the Leeman town site as part of that project or any future project?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** The work is being undertaken in two stages. Stage 1 is the widening between Jurien Bay and Greenhead, which is completed. Stage 2 is the widening and realignment of 33 kilometres between Leeman and Brand Highway along the construction of two overtaking lanes. We are doing further work on the Leeman town centre and hope to secure funding once that final planning work has been done.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Can the minister give me some idea of the maturity of the planning that is being conducted in the Leeman town site and with whom the government is consulting?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I think Main Roads would be consulting with engineers, local government and the community on the planning for that work.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Community representatives expressed to me their concern that they are not being listened to about what is required in Leeman. Can the minister outline, by supplementary information if not now, exactly what consultations have taken place and with whom?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** My reading is that there has been community consultation plus direct communications with the shire about the concept. I can provide further information about the local level of engagement by Main Roads on this issue.

*[Supplementary Information No A15.]*

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to page 594 and paragraph 5 of the significant issues impacting the agency. Reference is made to congestion and the use of the intelligent transport system technology. I imagine the Smart Freeways program is a key part of the ITS program. Where is that program at and what is the measure of its effectiveness in addressing the congestion on the freeway? Has it been effective and are we winning the battle?

[10.30 am]

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** A couple of things. First of all, in relation to technology on the network, we now have a central system—the Road Network Operations Centre, or RNOC, which monitors 28 routes of our metropolitan highway network. It is constantly looking at CCTV vision to understand what is happening in relation to incidents that occur across the network. We are deploying more and more technology across the network, including CCTV and Bluetooth monitors, to understand congestion and efficiency of traffic flow. Main Roads then monitors the efficiency of movement and it is constantly monitoring that movement to ensure that when we put budget proposals forward, we can back them up with evidence of what any proposed spending would do to improve efficiency. That technology, of course, has worked very effectively with the Armadale line replacement. We have rolled out variable message signs, Bluetooth monitors and CCTV. The Public Transport Authority and Main Roads work together in RNOC to monitor the whole Armadale line corridor. There is also a dedicated incident response team at Victoria Park ready to move any vehicles that block our buses. That whole set of technologies is improving performance.

Smart Freeways is another element of the way in which we are using technology, and we rolled it out for Kwinana Freeway northbound between Roe Highway and Narrows Bridge. Some of the information so far includes road safety improvements along the main Kwinana Freeway carriageway between Farrington Road and Narrows Bridge. In the first year of operation on that section, including on-ramps, the statistics for deaths and serious injuries reduced by 16 per cent. That means there has been a significant reduction in serious incidents. With regard to network efficiency, there has been a six-minute reduction in travel times, whilst accommodating an additional 16 per cent of traffic. There has been some positive feedback on that section of Smart Freeway across all indicators and anecdotally.

With regard to Mitchell Freeway southbound, we are hoping to see similar numbers. Ramp metering helps existing traffic volumes flow better. There is also the ability to monitor different speeds, depending on the volume of traffic, which I think is a big gamechanger. If there is a lot of traffic ahead, the speed limit is brought down so that people are not driving at 110 kilometres an hour, then stopping and starting again. People get very irritated with that type of stop–start driving. Having that constant information—including estimated travel times and speed limits for particular lanes, and how people are entering the freeway—helps create better traffic flow on the freeway.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Just to clarify the figures the minister provided, a 16 per cent reduction in incidents and six-minute reduction in travel times, are we talking about Kwinana Freeway northbound?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Yes, Kwinana Freeway, because that is the one that has been rolled out. There has been a six-minute reduction, whilst accommodating an additional 16 per cent increase in traffic.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 603 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and the line item “Regional Level Crossing Upgrade”. I wonder whether the minister can enlighten us about the locations of those upgrades and what will actually be done?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** As we can see, there will be a significant increase in spending over the next four years on regional level crossings. We are upgrading seven give-way-controlled crossings to active flashing-light-controlled crossings and upgrading seven stop-sign-controlled crossings to active flashing-light-controlled crossings. This complements our existing program, which is outlined on page 323. The state government-funded program is underway. We want to remove all give-way-controlled level crossings and upgrade them to stop-sign-controlled crossings. That work is underway; it is expected to be completed by the end of this month. There is the state government program and there is also the new program for which the state government will partner with the commonwealth government. The state government program is already underway, and, as I said, is removing all Give Way signs at level crossings and replacing them with Stop signs. As part of the partnership with the federal government, we are upgrading Give Way crossings and flashing light crossings to Stop sign crossings.

There are 14 priority projects—the ones we have agreed to—and they include Crampton Road, South Greenough with Stop signs to flashing lights. I will not go through all the details, because that would take a while. There is also Short Road in Georgina; Burakin–Wialki Road, Cleary; Jaurdi Hills Road, Mt Burgess; Telegraph Road, Culham; Wyening East Road, Wyening; Wongan Hills–Calingiri West Road, Calingiri; Moulyerup Road, Broomehill; Robert Road, Ucarty West; Koorda–Kulja Road, Kulja; Rabbit Proof Fence Road, Moulyinning; Kukerin Road, North Kukerin; North Lake Grace–Karlgarin Road, Kuender; and Geraldton–Mount Magnet Road, Mullewa.

We are also preparing our next list for the second round of funding. With regard to the commonwealth funding, we are doing it in rounds. We apply for that and then match it with our own money. We have also been successful in getting \$490 000 to undertake a trial of a wireless level crossing system that utilises low-power, high-security radio technology with indicative wheel sensors to detect trains approaching at a level crossing. That trial is underway in the midwest and is scheduled to be completed later this year.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** What is the power source for the wireless unit?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I thought it was renewable, but I could be wrong. I do not have that information. I know our team has been working on this, but I am not sure about the power source—sorry; I do not have it here.

**The CHAIR:** Does the minister agree to provide supplementary information; and, if so, can she please state exactly what information will be provided?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Sure. I will provide information about the power source for the wireless level crossing system.  
[*Supplementary Information No A16.*]

[10.40 am]

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I turn to page 603 of the budget papers. I remember there was a question from the local member around the line item “Pinjarra Heavy Haulage Deviation—Stage One and Stage Two”. This is a \$250 million project. I can see that there is some money to be spent in the budget—\$3 million this year, \$10 million in the following two years and \$17 million in 2027–28. How long is it going to take to deliver that project at that rate? Is this project being entirely funded by the state government because it has been unable to attract federal government funding? Can the minister explain what is happening with the ability to attract funding towards this project?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Sure. There is some big history with this one. I think it was in 2017 that we made a state election commitment to start planning for the project. When the project was initially devised, it was a two-stage project. It was thought that we could do stage 1 and then do stage 2. In working on that, it became clear that a lot of the local sensitivities about the Pinjarra massacre site were creating a lot of concern for the whole community about how stage 1 could be completed in any shape or form. As a result, we went back and planned for stages 1 and 2 to be delivered in one project.

Significant environmental and heritage approvals are being worked on. We are working with a local Noongar community group. Following a recommendation from a community meeting in September last year, a working group has undertaken to co-design the route and the alignment. It is a very tricky road because no one really knows the scope of the entire area that was impacted by the Pinjarra massacre. There has not been a lot of work to document the extent of that site. As a result, it is a very tricky and sensitive project. We are working with the local community to determine a route alignment that will not impact the site.

As I said, one of the issues is that there has not been a lot of mapping or surveying of that area in the past. The example I gave for the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Bill was that, in many instances, we do not have a lot of existing

information. That is one of the reasons why Main Roads Western Australia is working with the local Noongar community to help map that. We are working through that. We want to deliver this project. It has been a big priority of ours. We got into government and undertook the planning for stage 1. It was clear that we had to do both stages 1 and 2 in one project. The local member has been very involved every step of the way. As a result, we have funding allocated. Once we work through the route alignment and get the appropriate approvals, we will be ready to go.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Has any of the funding for the project come from the commonwealth?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** No. We injected all the money. It is entirely funded by the state government, but we will continue to work with the federal government. As it goes through its forward estimates, it may identify an opportunity to partner with us on that project, particularly when we look at how it will assist Pinjarra to continue to grow as a great community to live in and as a tourist town. I was in Albany on Saturday and we saw the completion of the Albany ring-road and what that will do for the Albany town centre. Similarly, this will support efficient freight movements and the growth of Pinjarra, which is a dynamic town. It is a great place to live, and we are seeing more tourism opportunities that we are partnering with the council on.

Like I said, we are 100 per cent committed to this project. I remember standing on the side of the road and making the commitment to deliver this project. We will deliver this project, but we have to work through very sensitive issues. There are far greater hurdles than we initially imagined when we first committed to the project. In particular, there have been issues with the identification of the massacre site as, apparently, the impacted area is a lot greater than initially thought. I will ask whether John wants to make some comments on that about the sensitivities.

**Mr J. Erceg:** As the minister was commenting, it is an area of great sensitivity to the local Noongar community. We are proceeding very cautiously to make sure that we are including the right representation and are going through the correct process of consultation. We are also finding that there is quite a broad spread of interest amongst the Aboriginal community. I think the significance of the massacre that occurred there is something that the broader Aboriginal community has a real interest in. On that basis, we are proceeding very cautiously. It is going to take more time, but we think it is really important that we do that. As the minister alluded to, trying to define the exact area of impact is difficult. There is not a great deal of evidence there. We are relying on information that is available through storytelling and the physical survey work that we are proceeding with. I think the key message is that it is a very sensitive area and we are proceeding cautiously and methodically to make sure we get a good shared outcome with the community.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Did the minister approach the commonwealth government for funding and what was the result of that?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** We made it clear that we had federal funding, but as part of the initial review undertaken by the federal government of its infrastructure pipeline, it, in a sense, pulled the funding for three projects. We outlined that at the time. The three main projects it pulled funding for were the Covalent Lithium mine road, the Marble Bar Road upgrade and this road. We made a decision that the state government would go in and inject funding. We did that particularly for the two mining roads, because either those contracts had been let or the project was underway. We were not going to leave those projects stranded.

We have always made this project a big priority. It is one of our commitments. We put the money in. Once we get through the sensitivities and get a route alignment that everyone agrees on, I am sure the commonwealth will be interested again. However, we are currently going through that route alignment. That is why we will approach the commonwealth when we have far more definition of the route alignment and how we will deliver the project. It is probably a project that, similar to the Bunbury Outer Ring Road, can get good local Aboriginal employment and training opportunities. We are 100 per cent committed to the project.

Like I said, I have heard a lot of criticism, but those people who criticise are not out there trying to deliver those projects. I know that there are enormous challenges, particularly when we are dealing with a very sensitive site that we do not have a lot of information on. In a sense, we are starting with mapping and surveying with the local Aboriginal people. It is very sensitive. Members know me; I would like to start every project tomorrow. We have to get it right; otherwise, we risk losing the project altogether because we just will not get community support or the heritage approvals.

[10.50 am]

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Does the minister expect to see the construction of this road begin in the forward estimates period?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I do, but we have to go through the approvals. Each year, the next year of the forward estimates comes into our budget, so we move cash flows around according to our approvals and what we can deliver. I expect us to start construction in the next four years, but it is subject to the approvals. We hope to get through that and start as soon as possible.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The table on page 605 shows that some projects are funded by the royalties for regions fund. I am trying to find the appropriate authority to ask about this. If we look at the royalties for regions expenditure table

on page 222 of budget paper No 3, we see a total allocation for the “Mid West and Great Southern Secondary Freight Network Program” of \$4.8 million. Is that program being administered by Main Roads? Is this the appropriate place to ask about that program?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** We are trying to get some more detailed information, but my understanding is that it is administered through Main Roads, with the oversight of the Department of Transport. It funds local governments for road upgrades through that region. We negotiated the program probably about five or six years ago, similar to the wheatbelt secondary road network. Under this program, we fund local government roads to support the safer and more efficient movement of freight throughout those regions.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The wheatbelt secondary freight network was largely funded by the commonwealth. Is there a commonwealth fund for the midwest and great southern secondary freight network program?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** The midwest network is 80 per cent funded by the commonwealth and 20 per cent funded by the state. The great southern network is 100 per cent funded by the state. As I outlined, the federal government pulled funding from a number of projects. The top three were the ones I mentioned, plus a couple of minor ones—not minor in importance but minor in size—including the great southern road network. As a result, that is 100 per cent funded by the state.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Is it possible to provide by way of supplementary information the full details of the program? At the moment all I can find in the documents is the royalties for regions component.

**The CHAIR:** Does the minister agree to provide the supplementary information; and, if so, will she please state exactly what supplementary information will be provided?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I will provide the full program for the secondary road upgrades in the midwest and also the great southern, and the source of funding.

*[Supplementary Information No A17.]*

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to page 602 of budget paper No 2, and the line item “Causeway Precinct Works and Activation”. The total funding is \$84.1 million. Is this new funding for works associated with the new Causeway bridge?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** This is for works to help activate and futureproof the entire area. I will go through a bit of detail. One of the issues we contend with when we do projects—we found this across our Metronet sites—is that in many instances we are dealing with water pipes that are very old, so we take the opportunity to work with Water Corp to upgrade the infrastructure. We are upgrading the infrastructure for the future. It is futureproofing the state so that we do not have to go back and dig it up again and renew that infrastructure.

We have also worked really well with local councils, and we are bringing in some new initiatives—in particular, things such as landscaping and amenities to support the activation of the entire area. I can go through what we are doing in a bit of detail. It includes tree planting and work on the water main. As part of this funding, we are also looking at how we can support a future ferry stop in the area, in particular around Point Fraser, as part of our planning for the ferry extension. We want to take the opportunity to support the infrastructure in that area. It includes things such as ablution blocks and toilet facilities to support a better usage of the area. We have negotiated with the Town of Victoria Park to support a new toilet facility. We are still in negotiations with the City of Perth on toilet facilities in the City of Perth area, because it does not want to maintain them. We are trying to negotiate an outcome whereby it could possibly maintain a toilet block for us for the community. We are working on that.

A lot of activation is happening. We are doing that as part of the wider precinct. For example, we have enhanced landscaping design and other components. Another key point is that we want to make sure the entire principal shared paths network in that area works well, because we expect those people currently using the existing, very narrow, bridge to use the new Causeway bridge and for it to become a major piece of tourism and community infrastructure. As a result, we are also making sure we upgrade the local PSPs in that area to support the wider movement of people.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Are the additional works fully state funded or will there be commonwealth contributions to those works?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** We engage with the commonwealth across all our projects, and we will continue to engage on those projects. It is similar in concept to what happened with Matagarup Bridge, although, of course, there was no federal funding for Matagarup Bridge. As part of our wider works, we expended money on riverbanks and other activations that were not included directly in the bridge contract.

We will negotiate with the commonwealth and potentially secure more funding for those activations. I suspect the commonwealth will be really keen on the PSPs. If we can get the commonwealth to support us on the ferry expansion too, that would be great. Once it sees what we are proposing, I am sure it will want to get onboard.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Just on the discussion about ferries, I understand that the minister said the government is doing a feasibility study. How is that progressing and how many stops is the minister talking about? Obviously, the minister spoke about Point Fraser a minute ago and I know Optus Stadium is on the list. How is the feasibility study going and how many stops is the government looking at?



**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** That work is ongoing, and we will soon be going out to market to identify who will deliver the ferries. We have seen a lot of interest from Western Australian manufacturers in our ferry expansion project. To be honest, having locally made ferries with up-to-date technology will be very exciting for the state.

In relation to the stops, as we noted, there is the existing Elizabeth Quay and Mends Street stops. Then there is, of course, what can happen in the Canning Bridge precinct, in particular around the Raffles Hotel and the Como side of the Canning Bridge precinct, and the University of Western Australia and Point Fraser. Thousands of people will use the new Causeway bridge and Point Fraser will become a destination in its own right. We are very keen to support a ferry stop there for tourists to get to Optus Stadium and the Burswood precinct, as a major tourism hotspot, and, in the future, the redeveloped Belmont Park.

Those are the types of ideas that we are working through. With our expression of interest process for the ferries, we will be able to determine the estimated travel time. That will determine the operating model and the proposed routes and scheduling. It is very important to get an early indication of ferry design, estimated speed and some of the requirements for accommodating them. It will be driven by the expected ferry design, but it has been great to see there has been a lot of interest from Western Australian manufacturers of boats, ships and ferries even before we go out to the market. They are very interested in coming on board. It is great.

[11.00 am]

[Ms M. Quirk took the chair.]

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I saw a letter in the paper from someone who did a study 30 years ago and said it was not feasible; however, it appears the minister is very supportive of the idea. From the minister's perspective, she will push on—I would not say regardless, but she seems to be enthusiastic about this particular subject.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** There are a couple of things.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I have a point of order. We are not discussing the Public Transport Authority, so I am not quite sure why we are talking about ferries with Main Roads.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** The minister introduced it as part of the Causeway Bridge discussion.

**The CHAIR:** I am sorry. I just got in here and I do not know the flow. Are we still on Main Roads?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I am happy to talk about it under the PTA.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** It is the PTA.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** The minister is happy to talk about it.

**The CHAIR:** The more you protest, the fewer opportunities you will have for questions. Thank you, minister.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I do not mind when we talk about it, so if the member does not want me to talk about it, I will not talk about it.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** We have the PTA coming.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I will not talk about it. There you go, member for Roe. I will not talk about it.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I would take it up with the PTA.

**The CHAIR:** Get on with it. Member for Roe, you have had your further question.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** No. It was cut off by the member for Moore.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** He is not allowed.

**The CHAIR:** The next question goes to the Leader of the Opposition. It will be highly relevant.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I am conscious of the time. I refer to the table of outcomes and key effectiveness indicators on page 597. I am looking at the proportion of road network permitted for use by heavy freight vehicles. There is a list from B-doubles down to triple road trains, which have 45 per cent of the road network. A significant number of quad trains now run on the road network. Does Main Roads have a target or view on how much of the network is suitable for quad road trains?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I refer that question to Mr Erceg.

**Mr J. Erceg:** The quad road trains are triggered by a mechanism that is in place. There are performance-based standards that applicants can submit, which is a different mechanism or standard for managing access for heavy vehicles. Traditionally, it has been on length and there is a relationship between performance and swept paths et cetera. There is progress with technology around road trains and other vehicles. We can use a process in which an applicant submits the performance characteristics. Main Roads has used that in a number of instances to work with proponents regarding quad road trains. A number of them operate in the Pilbara. In fact, their performance is improved through the technology that they use in their design. They can be up to 60 metres long. They have very good performance in tracking, braking and performance characteristics. They can perform as well as, or even better

than, the 53.5-metre road trains. I do not have information with me about the length of the network upon which those quad road trains are operating, but it is dealt with on a case-by-case basis. It is not a designated restricted access vehicle network.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Mr Erceg mentioned the Pilbara; there is also a significant number of those road trains operating on Geraldton–Mt Magnet Road. That is causing considerable concern for people there. Are there any differences in road design that we would ideally have between a road that is capable of carrying triple road trains and one for quad road trains? Does Geraldton–Mt Magnet Road meet that specification?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I can provide some insight into that. I was in Geraldton recently and that question was asked. We are doing further planning and work on upgrades to Geraldton–Mt Magnet Road and planning a business case for future funding, given the amount of traffic travelling from east to west. That work is being undertaken to, hopefully, have a business case ready to go to secure federal funding.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The minister mentioned the amount of traffic on the road. There are forecasts from the port authority and others that lead us to believe that that will triple in coming years. What is the timeline for the development of the business case and when can we expect to see improvements to the road?

**The CHAIR:** That was two questions, member.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** The business case is nearing completion, or is completed, and we will go through a process of submitting to Infrastructure Western Australia and Infrastructure Australia. We see it as a priority and we will seek commonwealth funding for the project. Again, it needs to be approved by Infrastructure Western Australia and Infrastructure Australia.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to the construction of the new bridge on Queen Victoria Street outlined under “Works in Progress” on page 603. I note the estimated cost of \$430 million, which is up from what I understand was the original cost of \$280 million. Can the minister confirm that the budget has blown out by \$150 million? Can she explain what contributed to that cost increase?

[11.10 am]

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** That bridge, similar to other projects around the nation, has been subject to increases in the cost of key components, including structural steel and concrete, which have seen a significant increase in cost. I have some figures that help support that. There has been a cumulative increase in the cost of reinforced steel of over 60 per cent. Bitumen is up by 60 per cent, diesel fuel is up by 156 per cent and plant and equipment is up by 70 per cent. We have seen similar increases in construction costs across the nation. The cumulative increase around the nation is comparable. We are not the highest. South Australia has seen the biggest increase in some of its costs. Number one, there has been an increase in the component costs, with, as I said, the cost of reinforced steel up by over 60 per cent, bitumen up 60 by per cent, plant and equipment up 60 by per cent and diesel fuel by 150 per cent, and then there has been an enhanced design again. One of the key pieces of feedback that we get from the community is that when we build these new structures, people want something that provides a legacy to the community, so we have enhanced things like the principal shared path and connectivity, making sure the paths work well with the existing PSP network, and the design has been changed to extradosed cable-stayed bridge, which are interesting words. Originally, it was a simpler design, but now it will be an extradosed cable-stayed bridge and in generations’ time people will look back and say it is an incredible structure, and it will support the activation of Fremantle and tourism elements.

We negotiated with the council and the community on a number of designs. I understand that. We wanted to reconfigure some of the road network, but no-one else did, so we went with the existing alignment and pulling down the existing bridge and replacing it with an architecturally better bridge.

**Ms L. METTAM:** What is the timeframe for completion? Has the timeframe been extended?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** We have had to change a lot of things because of the alignment. Originally, the intention was to keep the existing bridge open while we did the work. We tried two alignments. One was to the east of the bridge, and that very much upset everyone in North Fremantle and East Fremantle. Then we went to the west of the bridge, and that very much upset everyone in Fremantle more generally. We managed to upset everybody with the alignment! That probably would have seen the works commence earlier but take longer to deliver because we would be operating in a very constrained site trying to manage the existing road. Now we will have to shut the road and hopefully get in and out and build very quickly so a lot more work can be done offsite. The aim is similar to the Fitzroy River Bridge for which a lot of work was done offsite, as with all of our projects now. We try to keep the impact of closures on a community to a minimum. We are doing all the early works on both banks, and some work has already been done. The geotech surveys are currently happening along Beach Road, which is why that road is currently shut. A lot of early works are happening. When we shut the bridge, we will be in there building the bridge as quickly as possible. I do not have exact timeframes yet because they will be subject to further information from the contractor.

**Ms L. METTAM:** What is the estimated completion time?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** We hope to be finished by late 2026.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Are there any contributions from the commonwealth to this project?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Yes; it is 50–50.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Does that 50–50 take into account the uplift in costs?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Yes. Our understanding is that the commonwealth has contributed to fund this whole project 50–50.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

*Meeting suspended from 11.14 to 11.20 am*

**Division 40: Public Transport Authority of Western Australia —**

Ms M.M. Quirk, Chair.

Ms R. Saffioti, Minister for Transport.

Mr P. Woronzow, Director General, Transport Portfolio.

Mr M. Burgess, Managing Director, Public Transport Authority.

Ms R. Lamont, Executive Director, Finance and Contracts, Public Transport Authority.

Mr A. Vincent, Managing Director, Metronet.

Mr L. Coci, Managing Director, Office of Major Transport Infrastructure Delivery.

Mr P. Laing, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information she agrees to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 31 May 2024. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

I give the call to the member for Roe.

[11.20 am]

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to the line item “Ferry Services” found in the bottom table on page 621, and I go back to our previous conversation about ferry stops et cetera. The minister was just enlightening us on the number of stops and the potential of the ferry service and she said she was happy to provide further information.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** There are a couple of things. As I said, first of all, it is about going out to market and seeing what is available in relation to locally made ferries. Once we get a greater understanding of travel speeds, that will help to determine the schedule. Then there is, of course, how we roll it out. We cannot make 20 ferries overnight, so there will be a gradual rollout. We are looking to go out to the market very soon with a call for expressions of interest to ascertain what model and type of ferry we can use. There is a lot of interesting technology out there now with electric ferries compared with the traditional ferries. The design also needs to be considered to make sure that we do not create a lot of—is it wake? Sorry, it is wash; I know my boats! Other issues include jetties and ferry stops, and then what, if any, dredging is required. That will be the next level of investigation. Projects have been set up to ascertain potential stops, what level of dredging will be required and what the impact of that will be on the local environment. That work is being undertaken, plus early market soundings, before we go to a formal process.

I suspect that there will be different stages to the rollout of potential ferry stops. For example, if we look at where we have density and a lot of population, the Canning Bridge area is one that pops up immediately. I think the comment was that 30 years ago, the feasibility did not stack up. That is because these significant developments were not around. A significant node of density has been established at Canning Bridge, so one would sense that that would be a very good stop. The potential time taken to travel by ferry across the water from Canning Bridge to UWA, for example, will probably beat the train and bus times. It will potentially be a lot quicker. With regard to other potential stops, as I said, Point Fraser will become a key point as a result of the new bridge. Potential stops may also include Burswood, Optus Stadium and the Swan Brewery, but there are a number of them.

The patronage of the ferry system has been very strong. The current route is very popular because families love to catch the ferry from the city to the Zoo in South Perth and vice versa. It is a short and easy route, and on a cost-recovery basis, it has the best figures across the entire network.

We believe that the extended ferry network will be a good proposal. The current work on this proposal involves the assessment of existing jetties, geotechnical and marine surveys, marine engineering and looking at the environmental issues. Another key issue is where an overnight berthing facility will potentially be located. The ferry route investigation involves a marine survey and also looking at the dredging and grading requirements.

The ferry design will be a key part of this work. We will not be designing the ferries ourselves; we will let the market do that. Given our very strong history and strength in shipbuilding in this state, with the new ferry *MV Tricia* that was made in Dongara and also the shipbuilding facilities in Henderson, we have a lot of capability, which is very exciting. This contrasts with some of the bad experiences over east when ferries were bought from overseas and did not fit under some of the bridges; people had to duck every time the ferries went under those bridges.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I would be interested to know about the subsidisation of the ferry service at the moment compared with rail; and, if extra ferry stops are rolled out, what does the minister predict that subsidy will go up to?

[11.30 am]

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** There has always been a cost-recovery rate across public transport of around 20 to 30 per cent, depending on the mode. Sorry, I do not have the mode. I can get cost recovery for the existing ferry to the member by way of supplementary information. I swear it is published somewhere. It is in the annual report. Anyway, we can provide the current cost recovery rate for ferries compared with other modes by way of supplementary information.

**The CHAIR:** Minister, can you indicate what you will provide?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I will provide the cost-recovery rate of the existing ferry system.

[*Supplementary Information No A18.*]

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I sense the minister's enthusiasm for the project and adding further stock. Does the minister expect that there would be an 80 per cent chance of going ahead or is she waiting for the feasibility studies to come in? It sounds like the minister is pretty enthusiastic about this being a good option for Perth.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I am because I think Perth has changed dramatically over the past 30 years, both from a commuter perspective and, as I said, due to the significant developments in Como and near Canning Bridge. I suppose there are three grounds. The feedback from a tourism perspective is always that we have a brilliant river but we just do not use it enough. We should promote it as a tourism experience, and the ability to go to major tourism destinations by ferry will add to the experience. We have an incredible river and weather, yet we probably do not utilise the river enough. The third thing is ferry technology, which I think has moved significantly in relation to construction and what materials they can be built out of, the different fuels or energy sources and the fact that the technology has improved to limit the wash and the impact on the riverbanks. Those three things lend themselves to us adopting ferries. As I said, we just want to make sure there are no showstoppers, and that is why we are doing all the work on the geotechnical engineering, jetty structures and what levels of dredging would be acceptable.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Has the government done any numbers on how many cars this would take off the freeways?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I do not have the exact numbers, but we can get them for the member—that is, numbers on the potential impact on congestion. As I said, having better links to Canning Bridge from the University of Western Australia and the whole Queen Elizabeth II Medical Centre precinct is quite an interesting point and very, very important for the future management of congestion around the city. We can provide that information on the number of cars estimated to be removed.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I would appreciate that. Will that be by way of supplementary information?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Yes, it will be by way of supplementary information.

**The CHAIR:** Minister, can you just repeat what you will provide?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** We will provide the likely impact of the number of vehicles removed from the roads if there was an expansion of the ferry system.

[*Supplementary Information No A19.*]

**The CHAIR:** Members, I am very mindful of the time, so can we limit questions —

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Yes, that is it. I have finished that section.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Sorry; I have the ferry cost recovery. The estimated cost recovery of the ferry system for this financial year is 41.5 per cent, noting it is a very short route and very popular. We will not initially expect that same level across the whole system, but if we got near it, it would be great.

**The CHAIR:** I am mindful of the time. There was a bit of speculation in your last question, member for Roe; you really need to stick to just the facts, ma'am, all right?

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to the third significant issue impacting the agency, the Morley–Ellenbrook line, on page 611 of the *Budget statements*. Can the minister explain why every other Metronet project has experienced a cost blowout apart from the Morley–Ellenbrook line?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** It depends on the nature of the contract, how it was entered into and the relationship with subcontractors. Every rail line is different. It just depends on the nature of the relationship with the contractors, as I said, and when the contract was entered into.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Does the minister anticipate that there will be any increases to the project cost before completion?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I do not expect any major changes, but we continually work with the contractors to make sure that we get a good result.

**The CHAIR:** Member for Moore.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I have a further question.

**The CHAIR:** I have just given you some advice, member for Vasse. Again, you are going to future possibilities. If your question is in that vein, I suggest no. If the member is asking a question about the nature of the contract, I think that is fine. I can already see tension there with people wanting to get a question, so please keep it quick. Member for Vasse.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** No tension here!

**Ms L. METTAM:** Is the operating subsidy for this line included in the budget papers or does it still need to be included?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** The operating subsidies for all the rail lines to be commissioned are in the budget.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I turn to some of the outcomes and key effectiveness indicators on page 613 of the *Budget statements*. I find one item particularly concerning, and that is “Customer perception of safety—Independent external surveys: Train station—Night-time”, which indicates that in 2022–23 it was budgeted for there to be a customer perception of safety of 72 per cent at night-time. Is it good enough for the Public Transport Authority to set a target that low—that is, 72 per cent of customers having a perception that they felt safe at train stations at night-time? Would it not be better for the authority to aspire to something much higher and take some measures to achieve that?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** We always take measures to increase safety, and we are doing that across a number of fronts. I think the targets rely on past performance and we are looking at gradually improving. We will continue to look at improving perceptions of safety. We are rolling out a number of key initiatives across the network, which of course include the continued rollout of closed-circuit television cameras. How many CCTV cameras are there across the network, Mark?

**Mr M. Burgess:** There are about 12 000.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** There are about 12 000 CCTV cameras across the network as part of our renewal and upgrade of train stations. For example, whether it be Bayswater station or all of the existing Armadale line stations, a key factor is safety and making sure we improve visibility and increase the number of CCTV cameras across the network. We have also expanded further security across our buses, with enhanced security patrols. We are constantly looking to improve safety and, in particular, the perception of safety. I take the member’s point about the target, but if we were to target 90 per cent but reach 78 per cent, the member would be very upset. I think we targeted 72 per cent and we reached 78 per cent, so we exceeded the target. Of course, we continue to do everything we can to maximise safety.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The minister just said that the government set a low target of expectations so it did not fail to meet that target.

**The CHAIR:** I do not think she actually said that.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I think she did. Again, I go back to the question: does the minister think that having 28 per cent of people who do not feel safe using train stations at night is an acceptable target?

[11.40 am]

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** This is a perception survey. I suspect that if we ask people’s perceptions of a lot of things, their answers will be different from what we want to hear.

We are doing a lot of different initiatives. In fact, if we look at all the other numbers, we see that the passenger satisfaction thermometer survey shows that the level of satisfaction with Transperth bus security remains very high, with 99 per cent of passengers feeling safe on board a bus during the day and 85 per cent at night. We always aim for 100 per cent, and we will always aim for 100 per cent. The Public Transport Authority is basing its targets on last year’s numbers, and for them to not get any worse. But, of course, we always want to improve.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Will the minister consider increasing the target in future years to set some sort of aspiration for the organisation to achieve a better outcome?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** One of the reasons we are delivering Metronet, which the member criticises and opposes, is to improve people’s perception and experience on public transport. That includes capping fares and improving security across the network. It also encompasses increasing the number of people who live near our train stations. In my view, passive surveillance is absolutely integral to continue to support people using public transport. For example, we continue to encourage people to build near our train stations so that more people have passive surveillance. But, more generally, all the opposition does is criticise transport. The member’s concern for this issue is a little bit hollow.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 617, “Western Australia Agricultural Supply Chain Improvements” under the heading “Freight Program”. In addition to the \$22 million provided to upgrade the four CBH Group sites: Brooklyn, Broomehill, Cranbrook and Moora, \$34.8 million will be spent in 2024–25 to increase freight capacity on agricultural transport routes. What projects will be delivered using this funding?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I think we can give the member some of that information from the Department of Transport. I will see whether I have any further notes on this section. There are two references in the components here. The current grain freight upgrades have all been allocated and are underway. Those are the four sites the member mentioned. Brookton, Broomehill, Cranbrook and Moora all have funding agreements with CBH and there is the total contribution, plus there are further works that, as I understand it, include further extension of seven rail sidings on top of the existing \$22 million. Works on the Midland line between Carnamah and Mingenew will upgrade it from a 16-tonne axle load to a 19-tonne axle load. Those are the projects we have agreed to. We are in current and final discussions with CBH about how we allocate the rest of the funding, particularly for future projects. Very soon, we will probably finalise what other projects are funded in the agricultural supply chain improvements program.

**The CHAIR:** Before I give the member a further question, can I remind members that we have Metronet and division 43, services 1 and 2, to go before 12 noon. Therefore, does the member really think he has a further question?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I have a further question. Does any of this include the \$72 million that was allocated in 2023–24 to examine recommencing the operation of the Narrogin–Wickepin rail line?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** That \$72 million still exists. It currently has not been dedicated to our alternative projects. But, as I said, we are in discussions with CBH about the allocation of that \$72 million, and I think we will be able to make some further announcements on that very soon.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I turn to page 621, budget paper No 2, volume 2, and the income statement. The net cost of services for the PTA is laid out there. In 2022–23, the net cost of services was around \$1 722 000 plus a bit. In 2027–28, the out years, we are looking at \$2 132 382. There is an increase of around \$400 million in the net cost of services from 2022–23 to 2027–28. In the main, is that number the increased subsidies from the increased cost of the expanded Metronet network?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I think there will be a number of different components in there. For example, there would be an increasing cost of buses and the delivery of the bus network. That will be indexed by things such as fuel cost. There will be the increased cost of delivering rail because we are expanding the rail system by 72 kilometres and adding 25 new stations—a big percentage of that being additional stations. It is the cost of improving our public transport delivery of buses and trains. That number includes a lot of things—like I said, the entire bus network and rail network. Of course, we have capped fares, so as a result the net cost of services will increase because we are not recovering that through higher rates of cost recovery because we made a policy decision to cap fares for Western Australians. It is also increasing in the out years because of Transwa and the orange school bus network.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The minister mentioned buses. Significant issues impacting the agency, on page 611, refers to the electric bus fleet. Can the minister give me an idea of how much an electric bus purchase costs as opposed to the current vehicles?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** This is a good question about electric buses. Currently, we are converting the Malaga bus manufacturing facility to manufacture electric buses. In Joondalup, we did a trial with four electric buses—two on the Joondalup CAT bus route and the other two running on other parts of the network—to ascertain the efficiency of running the buses on the Joondalup network. On that project, we put solar panels with battery backup, so it was a 100 per cent renewable facility. That trial proved to be very successful, and so we made a decision to start the conversion of our bus network to electricity, and we are doing that through Malaga. There is an extra capital cost of an electric bus versus a diesel bus, but when we look at the total cost over time, and we did it over a 20-year period, we see that electric buses come out in front because of the very reduced energy cost. That was before some of these diesel price increases, too, so that difference would be greater. Estimates were put in about the current diesel cost and the increase in diesel cost. But since we did that analysis, diesel cost has jumped up about 157 per cent, so that cost difference is even better for electric.

The key point about electric buses is that we have to go with proven manufacturing technology. The head of Volvo was here last week and we discussed our approach compared with that adopted in other parts of the world where governments have bought 100 buses from somewhere but have been impacted by the significant maintenance costs and battery life and the need to understanding how battery technology will change. Our system involved trialling the bus at Joondalup and across the network, converting the Malaga bus manufacturing business to electric, and upgrading our depots. Two tenders are out to convert the existing bus stations at Elizabeth Quay and Malaga to electric charging facilities. Over the 18 to 20-year life span of a bus, it is far more favourable to go with electric buses if the right partnership is in place, if maintenance costs can be managed, if the life of the battery and expected time of replacement is understood, and if the right charging infrastructure exists. That is why the government has adopted this program. It is exciting. People tag me on Twitter and ask why Western Australia is not doing what a city in another part of the world is doing. We are making sure that we do not get crazy outcomes in the fifth year

when the buses are not working and the battery life is not what we expected. We have gone with trusted worldwide suppliers such as Volvo but have had a local partnership with Volgren in Malaga where we are building electric, as opposed to diesel, buses.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

[11.50 am]

**Metronet projects under development —**

Ms M.M. Quirk, Chair.

Ms R. Saffioti, Minister for Transport.

Mr P. Woronzow, Director General, Transport Portfolio.

Mr M. Burgess, Managing Director, Public Transport Authority.

Ms R. Lamont, Executive Director, Finance and Contracts, Public Transport Authority.

Mr A. Vincent, Managing Director, Metronet.

Mr L. Coci, Managing Director, Office of Major Transport Infrastructure Delivery.

Mr P. Laing, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information she agrees to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 31 May 2024. If the minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

Are there any questions? I give the call to the member for Vasse.

**Ms L. METTAM:** My question relates to paragraph 1 on page 624 of budget paper No 2, which states that funding will be allocated to specific projects upon completion. With reference to these final investment decisions, how does the minister justify her claims of local content manufacturing of the C-series railcars? Can she provide a guarantee that these investment decisions relate only to local manufacturing in WA?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** We have an executive director at the Public Transport Authority who manages the contract. We have an internationally renowned supplier. We have 12 local businesses that are all participating and producing locally made components. I am not sure why the Liberal Party wants to attack local manufacturing. The member's government produced two per cent of trains in Western Australia. It had no plan to replace the A-series trains. In fact, as I recall, her government's plan to replace A-series trains had \$1 million allocated to it. It was going to privatise the rail network. This chasing down a project —

**Ms L. METTAM:** Just give me a clarification.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** No, honestly—I invite the Leader of the Liberal Party to visit the facility. She can see all the Western Australians walking around producing trains. For a government that failed public transport on every front, the member has more front than Myer asking questions about local content!

I have further information: the second locally made C-series train is on the network today. That is great news.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Is that a locally manufactured C-series train?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Yes.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I have a question around the subsidy that will be required for Metronet when it is fully operational. How much will the subsidy be for the operation of the new sections of the train line?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** They are all included in the numbers the Leader of the Opposition read out from the income statement. The income statement of the PTA incorporates the ongoing subsidy for our bus services, new bus services to feed Metronet and the rail lines themselves. They are all included in there. I do not know whether we have breakdowns on individual lines. It is difficult because we cannot capture, for example, whether someone catches a Fremantle line from Daglish or Claremont to Bayswater; it is hard to differentiate. We can provide a breakdown of the cost recovery for the rail, bus and ferry networks.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Will the minister provide that breakdown by supplementary information?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Yes, I will provide a breakdown of the subsidies for the rail network, the bus network and also the ferry network.

[*Supplementary Information No A20.*]

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Will that breakdown on the bus network include the buses that are being purposed towards feeding the stations?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Yes.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer again to the reference on page 624 to funding allocated to specific projects upon completion. Can the minister provide an update on the Armadale redevelopment works?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** There are two projects as part of the Armadale line transformation. The Victoria Park–Canning level crossing removal includes 5.2 kilometres of elevated rail through Cannington and Victoria Park; new stations at Oats Street, Carlisle, Queens Park, Cannington and Beckingham; and the removal of level crossings at Mint and Archer Streets, Oats Street, Welshpool Road, Hamilton Street, Wharf Street and William Street. I do not know whether the member has seen it, but there has been a lot of work on the elevated rail. I think 50 per cent of the piers and beams for the viaduct are in place. Of course, the other work is pre-prepared so it is a matter of just putting it in place. The team is working at a very good rate. The new station in Armadale–Byford is taking shape, member for Darling Range. The old Armadale station is being demolished and works are happening. The Thomas Road overpass, an early part of the project, is in place, and works are happening on the other overpasses, too. Elevated beams have started to appear through Armadale. Progress has been pleasing. The feedback I get from everybody is that they cannot believe how fast that project is being delivered. The lift shafts appeared at Carlisle station last week.

**Ms L. METTAM:** What is the anticipated completion date for that?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I think we have outlined May 2025. We said 18 months from when we started.

**The CHAIR:** That completes the examination of the Metronet projects under development.

[12 noon]

**Division 43: Planning, Lands and Heritage — Services 1 and 2, Market Led Proposals, Perth City Deal, WACA —**

Ms M.M. Quirk, Chair.

Ms R. Saffioti, Minister for Transport.

Mr A. Kannis, Director General.

Mr N. Hindmarsh, Executive Director, Market-led Proposals, Business and Corporate Services.

Mr P. Laing, Senior Policy Adviser.

**The CHAIR:** We are now dealing with division 43 and we have 30 seconds if members want to ask a question.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I just want to know whether the Western Australian Cricket Association ground improvement project is on time and on budget, and when it will be completed.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** That is being managed through the WACA. We provided the funding and we are involved in some support, but I am afraid I do not have that information in front of me.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

**Division 38: Transport —**

Ms M.M. Quirk, Chair.

Ms R. Saffioti, Minister for Transport.

Mr D.R. Michael, Minister Assisting the Minister for Transport.

Mr P. Woronzow, Director General, Transport Portfolio.

Mr P. Seares, Managing Director, Westport.

Mr P. Parolo, Chief Financial Officer.

Mr I. Cameron, Managing Director.

Mr P. Laing, Senior Policy Adviser, Minister for Transport.

Ms R. O’Toole, Chief of Staff, Minister Assisting the Minister for Transport.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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



A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 31 May 2024. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

I give the call to the Minister for Transport.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** This is quite different; there are two ministers. David Michael is here as Minister Assisting the Minister for Transport and he will be focusing on driver and vehicle services and, in particular, maritime issues.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to page 576 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and, in the table under “Spending Changes”, the line item “Freight Infrastructure—Commercial Option Analysis”. It is a relatively small amount of money, but I am interested to know what it is and what options it is analysing.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** This is in relation to Arc Infrastructure and its management or ownership—sort of ownership—of the rail network. Working across government, the Department of Transport, the Public Transport Authority, Treasury, the State Solicitor’s Office and the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development are all looking at the existing lease arrangements and how we can get better outcomes in relation to Arc.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Better outcomes in what way?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** A better deal for farmers, because when the previous government privatised the tier 3 rail lines, it gave the private owner at that time a lot of control over setting rates for moving product and control over the entire corridor. For example, every time we need to fix a footbridge in Toodyay, it becomes very difficult. The previous government gave the owner a lot of control and, as a result, we have had some serious issues across the wheatbelt and across the state as we try to encourage more freight on rail.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Further question.

**The CHAIR:** You are a sucker for punishment, member!

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** With the option analysis that the government is undertaking, is it in some way considering renegotiating or buying back the lease? What exactly is the government hoping to achieve?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** You guys closed the tier 3 rail, which I know was a massive mistake.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** No, we did not close the tier 3 rail.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Yes, you did.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The PTA closed the tier 3 rail.

**The CHAIR:** Member, just ask the questions.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** You actually needed ministerial approval, so, yes, as a cabinet and as a Liberal–National government, you closed the tier 3 rail.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** It did not go to cabinet.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** We are looking at all aspects of it and how we can improve performance for farmers. I have never had a meeting with anyone from Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd who did not describe some of the difficulties CBH has had. The mediation for setting a price to access the rail network went on for about six years. The state and federal governments are investing in the rail lines and we have major projects coming up in respect of, for example, how we can continue to support rail freight movements into Bunbury; that is an intersection with Arc. Everything we want to do in regional WA in respect of rail intersects with Arc, so we want to work with Arc, CBH and other users on how we can get a better outcome for the state in the longer term.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Is there any specific information the minister can give me about the types of changes the government would like to see, be they regulatory or contractual?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Not at this stage.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Not at this stage. When will that analysis be completed? Will the minister then make some further announcements around that?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Yes. This is the establishment of the working group. Once we get further advice, I will be able to inform the community. We also have to engage with the stakeholders, so the initial work will be engaging with the key stakeholders, such as CBH and others. The first meeting has already taken place, but we will continue to engage with all the key stakeholders.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** When did that meeting take place, and who was involved?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I do not have that information.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Could the minister provide that information?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Okay; by way of supplementary information, I will provide the date of the first meeting of the working group and who was involved.

*[Supplementary Information No A21.]*

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to page 589 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and, under the table headed “Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies”, the line item “Western Australian Bicycle Network (including Principal Shared Path Program)”. What projects will be undertaken for 2024–25?

[12.10 pm]

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** There are a number of different funding sources for the principal shared path program and different forms of delivery. One of the things we do as part of our Main Roads contracts when we undertake major road upgrades is incorporate new PSP infrastructure. That is happening across the freeways and other major road developments across the state. For projects that are part of the principal shared path program delivery, we have PSPs along rail lines such as the Midland rail line, Armadale rail line, Kelmscott rail line and the Mandurah rail line. We have the Thomas Road upgrade. We have upgrades to Wellard and Rockingham stations. Further works are being allocated by Main Roads Western Australia. Main Roads will continue to undertake the Mitchell Freeway PSP and PSPs as part of other projects. We have Abernethy Road to Tonkin Highway and other various rehabilitation projects. We have some feedback from the cyclist community that not only does it want new PSPs, but also it wants some of the older ones upgraded. We are doing those works as well. Those are the types of works being done. In particular, some of the big projects that will be finalised in 2024–25 include, of course, the Mitchell Freeway projects, which are part of the freeway widening works.

**Ms L. METTAM:** What accounts for the drop in funding allocated to this program in this year’s budget?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I think it is probably as a result of the level of roadworks. As part of this, there is some big expenditure. Like I said, the Mitchell Freeway works in themselves will see a continuous path from the city to Reid Highway—someone help me out; is that where it is going to? It is going even further. The Mitchell Freeway works are being done as part of the widening.

We have three road projects: the smart freeways, the road widening and the Stephenson Avenue extension. There is a big expenditure coming to finish those works. There are also works incorporated in the new Fremantle Traffic Bridge. That is another expenditure that is likely to happen in 2025–26.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I am on page 592. I refer to the net appropriation determination of boat registration fees. I note that this issue was raised with the Leader of the Opposition’s office. It was also raised with me. What assumptions are made about boat ownership numbers and how are the fees set?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I will ask Minister Michael to answer this one.

**The CHAIR:** Is this your first estimates, minister?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** It is.

**The CHAIR:** Welcome on board.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** We might take as a supplementary question the modelling of how we get the number of boats that might be registered in the out years.

**Ms L. METTAM:** This issue was raised with the Leader of the Opposition’s office and my own office by a constituent.

**The CHAIR:** Just ask for the extra information you want please, member.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Is there consideration about having a set fee per metre?

**The CHAIR:** That is a question. We are still dealing with supplementary information.

**Ms L. METTAM:** It is as part of the supplementary information.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Sorry to interrupt, but that is just a hypothetical. We can give the member the facts, which is the number of boat registrations that our forecast is based on. We can do that. However, the member cannot ask for a policy deliberation as part of supplementary information. Let us provide by way of supplementary information the number of boat registrations the forward estimates are based on.

*[Supplementary Information No A22.]*

**Ms L. METTAM:** What logic goes into the way that fees are set?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Is the member talking about maritime fees or fees in general?

**Ms L. METTAM:** I am talking about maritime fees.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** In 2022–23, the Expenditure Review Committee approved the revised vessel accommodation cost modelling and a new benchmark fee of \$696 per metre of pen length, which is what the member was kind of talking about before. It was considered to better reflect the actual costs incurred in providing those services.

Aligning with this approval, the benchmark fee has been retained at \$696 in 2023–24 to allow for the stabilisation of harbour occupancy and customer trust. However, from 1 July, the statewide benchmark target fee will be increased by three per cent to \$716.50 to continue the transition of vessel accommodation fees to a single statewide fee for each vessel accommodation fee category.

A lot of the fees that come in go back into providing some of those berths and the accommodation for boats at our marine and Department of Transport harbours across the state. I think the member will see elsewhere in the budget over the last couple of years and into the future some of those fees being used to improve the services to boaties out there.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I turn to page 578. There are significant issues there. The last paragraph refers to the Westport program. As I understand it, the Westport project falls under the purview of the Department of Transport. Can the minister give us an idea about how far the business case for Westport has progressed? If we do that, I will then maybe ask some questions around the sequencing.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Work on the business case has been undertaken for a number of months. We expect the finalisation of that business case in the next quarter. That business case will then provide the basis for the further work on the project development plan. In the meantime, we have started a number of the other parts of this project. In particular, the environmental process was referred to the Environmental Protection Authority two months ago. We are planning the landside logistics. Work is underway with Main Roads through Westport to understand and develop the Anketell Road–Thomas Road freight corridor, upgrades to the freeway and the last mile, in a sense, which is from Rockingham through to the coast. A number of different streams of work are happening.

Of course, federal government support for the planning for the project was really welcome. We expect to partner with the commonwealth, particularly on the land side, because that would all be available under the land transport infrastructure agreement. But we continue to do further design. We have been negotiating with businesses, purchasing land and, as I said, undertaking all the approvals processes to ensure that, first, we have a sound business case; then we can start making investment decisions, noting the land side of things will be one of the first investment decisions because to build the port, we will need to build the road to get to the port to take all the material to build the berths and the breakwater. That is the planning. As I said, the front end will be very much the land side and transport infrastructure.

[12.20 pm]

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Do the expenditures that are earmarked for the business case development for Westport over the coming years include any of the approvals or preliminary designs? What is it envisaged will be delivered for that investment over the coming years?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Two years ago, I think it was, we allocated \$400 million to a special purpose account for Westport to assist in funding planning and other key components, such as land acquisition along Anketell and Thomas Roads in particular, to futureproof the alignment. We have been doing a lot of futureproofing and making sure that no decision of government would affect the delivery of the project. We have been doing detailed planning on the land side. When we look at what is happening with AUKUS and the significant developments that are happening in the industrial area of Kwinana, we see that a lot of different projects are happening down there. As a result, work has been underway to futureproof, do some early designs, lock in an Anketell corridor, do the road alignment and confirm the nature of the Anketell upgrades. There are also the rail alignments, the fact that we need to duplicate the line, level crossing removals and a number of other works. The other key component has been the intermodal terminals. We are drilling down and identifying where they will be located and the timeframe for development. All that work has been ongoing.

The business case will be comprehensive and look at the nature of the port and identify the key landside logistics. It is a comprehensive plan, noting that we do not want to create the same issues that we are moving from in Fremantle, which is a constrained site without dedicated freight networks that impacts suburbia. Kwinana will have a dedicated freight network. In relation to the freight networks, we are incorporating the Roe Highway works plus further works on Tonkin Highway. The extension of Tonkin Highway to Mundijong will assist with the planning and delivery of Westport.

On the landside logistics, I make this point: a lot of work needs to be undertaken regardless of Westport, in particular on Thomas and Anketell Roads where we are seeing a lot of east–west freight movements. With the further development of Kwinana as a major industrial base—of course, it already is—and the works being done in Henderson, the road network in that area will need a significant upgrade regardless.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** With the timelines for the development of the business case, does the minister have any indication of when she expects that there would be a project ready to be funded and developed on the ground?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I would say through next year, I will have that detailed information. But, as I said, there are a number of components. In particular, we would progress the land side first. Upgrades to the freeway, Roe Highway and Anketell Road will probably have to happen regardless, so there may be some earlier investment decisions on

road and rail upgrades because they are needed. Of course, the shape and size of Westport informs their design. The Tonkin Highway extension will help deliver Westport. The Tonkin Highway grade separations that we have done and that we continue to do help Westport. A number of different decisions are being made along the way that will all lead to supporting the Westport program.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** What assumption is there in the planning around Westport for the eventual shift from Fremantle? Is it envisaged as being a hard switch from one site to the other? Will there be a gradual development? How does the minister see that working, because, as part of that, Fremantle will still have to be kept going for, presumably, decades?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** The team has modelled a number of different assumptions, including a two-stage approach whereby we move one stevedore and then move the next one, but it is designed to be done in one move. The team looked at the operational impact of a two-stage move and it was decided, and the advice was, that a one-stage move would be cleaner, more cost-effective and operationally far easier. That is in relation to containers. Of course, further work is being done on the non-container trade, which is fairly separate in thinking in relation to movement from the container trade.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to paragraph 12 at the top of page 578, which refers to the new infringement processing system and management functions moving from the WA Police Force to the department. Will full-time equivalents transfer from the police into the department and how will that play out?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I will refer that to Minister Michael.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** We think about 65 FTE will come over from the Western Australia Police Force to the Department of Transport.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** This paragraph says that this —

... will enable the provision of more customer-focused services and flexible payment options for drivers who receive an infringement.

How will it provide a more customer-focused service?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Obviously, with the support of Parliament, some months ago we passed the Road Traffic Legislation Amendment (Infringement Management Reform) Bill 2024.

The first part is that the police system that we currently use, in which people get—thankfully, not me for a little while—a green slip in the mail, is a legacy system. It is very clunky and unwieldy and it is on its last legs, so we are moving to a new system that the Department of Transport is in the process of finalising. It is getting ready to change over. It will bring a number of benefits. The member might remember from the debate on the legislation that if someone is unable to pay their fine, the only way they can enter into some sort of payment agreement or defer payment is to allow it to go to the Fines Enforcement Registry. That incurs not only the humiliation of having to default the fine and getting another letter from the Department of Justice via the FER, but also being slapped with a somewhat hefty fee on top of it. By moving to the DoT system, people with a fine will be able to do one of three things: they can pay it, defer payment for a month if they just need a bit of extra time or enter into a payment plan, which will be set into regulations depending on the size of the fine, for no extra charge. There is no fee attached. That is one of the most important things that we are looking to do by bringing in the new system.

The second part is that at the moment when people get a fine, they can view the photo online and those kinds of things. Through the Department of Transport's DoTDirect, people can sign up and do their registration, driver's licence, skipper's ticket and a few other things online. People will be able to go on DoTDirect to view any infringements they might have and view the photo and conduct business, pay or do anything else they might have to do online, which we think will be much better than the system we currently have with the police.

[12.30 pm]

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Is that through the Service WA app or is it a separate online scenario?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** It is DoTDirect.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** How much extra revenue does the minister expect to gain from this new infringement system compared with the current green paper slip system?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** That is probably a question to ask me later, under road safety. I do have that; however, I will caution anything about revenue assumptions. It is tied to how many infringements come in. All camera infringements go to the road trauma trust account. I hope there is no extra revenue, because I want people to do the right thing on the road. We see terrible behaviour. I am sure we will talk about it with the member and his colleagues this afternoon when we talk about the new safety cameras that we will introduce next year. They detect seatbelt offences and mobile phone use. The number of people who did not wear a seatbelt during the trial floored me. I do not want to fine people for not wearing a seatbelt. Everyone should be wearing them. Although there are projections, I would treat them with caution. I hope we do not go anywhere near those projections, because although it would deliver more money into the road trauma trust account to be spent on black spot funding et cetera, I do not want people doing the wrong thing on the road.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Will the system developed for infringement processing be coupled with the existing transport executive and licensing information system within the Department of Transport, or will it be a separate platform?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** It will interface with TRELIS. It is its own system, but it will pull data from TRELIS to send infringements to people.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Myriad people have access to TRELIS. That has been well documented in the Corruption and Crime Commission's reports. Will the same people have access to the information that is on the infringement management platform?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** The staff who have access will have access to that information. After the issues the member has alluded to, the staff and their access to the system is highly controlled at the Department of Transport.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Will the contractors who have had access to that system in the past have access in the future? Will they all have access to this information?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** I need clarification. Does the member mean contractors in terms of people working on the system or IT consultants?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I mean the people who log into the system—inspectors et cetera—who, in the words of the CCC, unlawfully accessed information on the system.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** I am told that the people who access this information will be authorised to have access to that information. Access to information through TRELIS is monitored. When someone's information is accessed, it is logged, and those things can be checked.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Have there been any further improvements to the current TRELIS system to ensure that the access breaches, which were highlighted in the CCC report, have been addressed?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** I am told that all requirements following the CCC report have been complied with and I think the CCC is aware of that and is satisfied with the Department of Transport's progress. I note there is another line item in this budget for cybersecurity programs. There are a number of items in the budget that will further assist the Department of Transport to strengthen its cybersecurity, including privileged access management.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to "Towing Industry Reform Program" under "New Works" on page 587. I note there is \$130 000 allocated to that this year. Can we assume that the legislation has been drafted? When can we anticipate seeing the legislation on this?

**The CHAIR:** That is a dangerous assumption, member.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I refer to Minister Michael.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** The legislation is almost with us. I have seen a draft. I think it is in its third draft and there is not much to go. I hope to bring it to Parliament shortly.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Will the legislation look at increasing standards and limiting caps or prices on towing and storage of towed vehicles? Are the objectives the same?

**The CHAIR:** Minister, I am not sure that can be answered, given it has to go to cabinet, probably, for approval.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** It has, but we have gone on the record about what is going to be in the legislation, so I am happy to say that the proposed legislation will include maximum charges for the towing and storage of crashed vehicles in Perth and Peel, the authorisation of tow truck drivers, towing assistants, towing service providers and storage yard providers that are involved in crash towing, including fit and proper person character provisions across the state. It will include the prohibition of crash spotting fees and other incentives, safety improvements for the crash towing industry and enhanced enforcement powers for government.

**Ms L. METTAM:** What is the \$130 000 for? What is its contribution as part of this?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** In starting the regulation of an industry that is loosely regulated, the department will have to build a system in which it will have to eventually register people involved in the towing industry. It is for the preliminary work to work out how the system may work.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to "Driver and Vehicle Services" on page 581, which refers to collecting revenue on behalf of government. The minister may not be aware, but a Department of Transport invoice for a zero amount, issued for a driver's licence fee, was sent to one of my constituents. My constituent did not bother paying the account because it had a zero dollar balance; therefore, their licence lapsed and they were forced to pay a fee for registration plates and they had to put the vehicle over the pits. Is that system something that can be addressed, because it is confusing for people to have to make a BPAY payment for zero?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I refer that to Minister Michael.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** It is not something I have heard of before. If the member would like to give me that invoice, I can do two things. We can check to see why it happened and, if this person is still in some kind of confusion or limbo, we can try to work it out.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I have taken it up with either the minister or his office and was told that that is the system as it exists at the moment: if people do not pay their zero balance, they will not be listed as having renewed their vehicle licence. I will certainly take it up with the minister again.

While we are still on the matter of vehicle driver's licences, the table on page 579 states that the estimated actual for "Percentage of driver's licences issued that comply with the Graduated Driver Training and Licensing System (Safe Drivers)" is 97.5 per cent with a target of 100 per cent. Can the minister explain the 2.5 per cent? How can drivers' licences be issued to persons who have not achieved graduated driver training, safe drivers, status?

[12.40 pm]

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** This indicator measures the extent to which licensing of drivers is conducted according to processes designed to establish levels of competence pursuant to provisions of the road laws as defined in the Road Traffic Act 1974 and its regulations. To measure the indicator, driver and vehicle services conducts a sample oversight of drivers' licences issued, ensuring that each component of the graduated driver training and licensing system is completed and passed. The sample audit is conducted quarterly. The system is based on using automated reports that provide all drivers' licences issued under the graduated licensing system in the past week, of which 10 to 20 are selected at random to a total of 100 per quarter. This gives a total random sample for the year of 400 out of almost 30 000 licences issued, and the sample size gives a confidence of approximately plus or minus 4.88 at a 95 per cent confidence level. In 2022–23, a total of 390 applications were found to be correctly completed. In 2023–24, the estimated actual is a total of 390 applications out of the 400 were found to be correctly completed.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Are these car licences or truck licences or are they any sort of licence?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** I do not have that information. This is a process measure to make sure that the system is working.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Are truck licences issued for a higher level of truck—for instance, someone who has gone from a medium rigid licence to a combination licence—assessed through authorised registered training organisations, or are they all done through the department officers?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** They can be assessed with an RTO. I am told that due to integrity issues, body-worn cameras are used in RTO assessments.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Is the minister aware of growing concern amongst heavy vehicle operators that there is a lessening of vehicle licence requirements and that drivers who appear not to understand the road rules are gaining access to heavy vehicle licences. This has been raised with me by a number of people, including members of the union movement and trucking bodies. I am told that many experienced truck drivers are leaving the industry because of the concern over the level of danger that they see people undertaking. These people are presumably coming through the RTO system. Is that something that has been raised with the minister?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** I have regular conversations with the Transport Workers' Union of Australia, the Western Roads Federation and the Australian Livestock and Rural Transporters Association on these issues. Federally, there is also some concern about—I have my road safety hat on—the national standard for driver training for truck drivers around the country. It has been put to me, and I will get this wrong, that some people can get their licence to drive a truck and then just wait out 12 months before they can graduate to the next level, and they do not actually have to drive a truck in the meantime, and those kinds of things. There are different standards across states. It is something that we are really keen to work on with our colleagues in other states, with the commonwealth's lead, to try to get a better system for these kinds of things.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Given that a lot of these trucks operate across state boundaries, will the minister undertake to have discussions at the national level and with other states, like South Australia, to actually get some confidence that people driving heavy vehicles have actually been through the appropriate training and have done the number of hours required to gain their licence?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** The infrastructure and transport ministers' meeting has already contacted Austroads, and I know the state has input into those things through the Minister for Transport and the director general of the transport portfolio. Austroads was asked to work with states on a national standard that we can all consider. The state will absolutely continue to talk about this with our colleagues east of our border.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** On page 583, "On-demand Transport" refers to all sorts of things, including taxis. I have had, and I think both ministers have had, complaints from taxidriviers about the monitoring of some of the activities of on-demand drivers, especially around Perth Airport and the like. Is the minister aware of concerns expressed by taxidriviers about those types of issues. In particular, it appears that drivers who are international students are causing concern and allegations of meter tampering et cetera have been made.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** The Department of Transport has a whole team to look at complaints that come in through the on-demand transport area, whether it be taxis or some other rideshare situation. I have seen some of them through my office, but I think the Department of Transport gets them directly as well. All that is required is evidence of

any of the things the member said. There are other things, including people or drivers from any service driving off when they should not be driving off or refusing to take someone when they should not be refusing to take someone. The department has a whole team to investigate any evidence that we can get.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Is the minister satisfied that the department finds that when it has audited the online on-demand booking services, for instance, there is only as little as 30 per cent that are compliant with the department's requirements? There is actually a figure on page 579, but I thought I might get away with it as a follow-up question. It is at the bottom of page 579 under "Outcomes and Key Effectiveness Indicators".

[12.50 pm]

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** In terms of that figure, the Department of Transport has identified that safety management systems are a common area of noncompliance with on-demand transport booking services. SMSs are required to document procedures in writing and to review and update them to mitigate or eliminate risk caused by hazards to the health and safety of drivers, passengers or other persons in connection with the passenger transport service. DoT has developed and implemented an education compliance program that aims to increase the awareness and understanding of the legislative requirements concerning a safety focus to encourage compliance in particular regions or amongst a particular fleet size band of booking services.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I have a different question.

**The CHAIR:** New question for the member for Moore. You seem to be a one-man band at the moment.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** It is my shadow role.

I refer to the line item "Joondalup Driver Assessment Centre" under new initiatives in the table on page 576. What can the minister tell me about the development of the Joondalup Driver Assessment Centre? Why is the minister spending nearly \$10 million on that centre when I think she actually closed it not that many months or years ago? Can the minister explain the reversal of that decision and what effect that might have on the wait times for driver assessments?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I will defer that to Minister Michael.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** The member would be aware that in 2023 the former Joondalup Driver and Vehicle Services Centre had its functions and staff relocated to the new purpose-built site in Butler. That move was based on information from 2018 that indicated that Joondalup would become problematic as a driver and vehicle service centre due to local government intentions to redevelop a nearby car park and the volume of general traffic in the area. Since that assessment was made, the expected growth in traffic around Joondalup and the redevelopment of the car park has not materialised. Therefore, it was considered that the Joondalup centre could be used for a further two or three years to trial a full-service driver assessment centre. It is not a full DVS centre. That centre is still located in Butler and is where people go to pay regos and things like that.

In the first six months of operation, DoT staff at Joondalup have processed nearly 30 000 transactions, including conducting more than 10 000 practical driving assessments, issuing nearly 7 000 new learners' permits, conducting well over 6 000 computer theory and hazard perception tests, and processing nearly 2 500 interstate and overseas driver's licence transfers. Given the demand for practical driving assessments, especially with the influx of people from overseas and interstate, the idea was to use that Joondalup site, which was already fitted out as a DVS centre, just for those services to take pressure off the other centres.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Do the allocations for that line item relate to the operational cost of that centre or the capital component? What do they represent?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** I am told that it is largely the operating cost.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The centre has an allocation of \$6.38 million for this year, but nothing in the out years. Will the centre close at the end of this year?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** There is no money in the out years because the centre was reopened for a trial run. Obviously, an assessment will be made, but given those numbers, it has been pretty successful to date.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** When will a decision be made on whether or not to keep that centre open?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** That will be made through the normal budgetary process. It has been open for only a little over six months.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** If the decision is made to not continue with the centre, how will the demand that exists in that area for driver assessments be addressed?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I will defer to the minister, but it is a hypothetical, and, as Ross Lyon says, we do not do hypotheticals.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** That is a very hypothetical question that will be dealt with during the budget process, but I have just given the member some numbers on how successful it has been.

**The CHAIR:** Any other questions?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Perhaps there will be. Just give me a second and I will think of something.

**The CHAIR:** Do not feel you have to ask any.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to the line item for the Carnarvon One Mile jetty and the \$54.5 million estimated actual on page 576. Are works complete and is this project on budget?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** There are a couple of issues in Carnarvon. I was in Exmouth last week presenting a post-budget presentation and the mayor or the president told us how successful the works were that we did at the Carnarvon fascine. The dredging has completely changed the fascine, so they were very appreciative of that. Of course, a lot of other projects are happening in Carnarvon.

The Carnarvon One Mile jetty project has had a lot of consultation and a long history. Recently in February, a working session was held to look at the methodology and assumptions for the jetty repair. Further approvals are required under Aboriginal heritage consent, as is a native vegetation clearing permit to clear the mangroves immediately surrounding the jetty to enable core pole testing and geotech investigations. The approvals process is underway and we understand that written consent is pending. The planning, geotech and approvals process is ongoing to undertake some works.

As I said, I was involved in this project for a long time. There has been a lot of consultation and engagement with local community and with both the Carnarvon Heritage Group and the Aboriginal heritage group. A lot of the discussions have been held, but they are moving forward. The planning works are underway and we expect to commence works by the end of this year. There is a lot of good news in Carnarvon. The fascine is working and we have funded the airport, too, which is very exciting.

**The CHAIR:** We have time for one further question or another question.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to the table titled “Details of Administered Transactions” at the bottom of page 592. My question is about the line item “Payments to Off-Road Vehicle Trust Account” under expenses. When will we see an update of the payment system for off-road vehicles from the current paper-based system?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I will refer that last question to Minister Michael yet again.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I am happy to take it as supplementary information.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** We will take that question as supplementary information.

**The CHAIR:** Minister Michael, can you state what you are going to be providing?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** I will provide an update on the new service for off-road vehicle licensing.

[*Supplementary Information No A23.*]

**The appropriation was recommended.**

*Meeting suspended from 1.00 to 2.00 pm*

**Fremantle Port Authority —**

Mr P. Lilburne, Chair.

Mr D.R. Michael, Minister for Ports.

Ms J. Ransom, Acting Chief Executive Officer.

Mr D. Good, Chief Financial Officer/General Manager, Corporate Services.

Ms R. O’Toole, Chief of Staff, Minister for Ports.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 31 May 2024. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

I give the call to the Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I have a question about the Westport development, which is the fourth significant issue impacting the government trading enterprise on page 626 of the *Budget statements*. I asked this question about Westport



of the Minister of Transport in the transport division. Can I get an understanding of how Fremantle Ports sees the development of Westport and the continuance of operations at Fremantle in the meantime? What will be required to ensure that Fremantle port can continue to provide the service until Westport is built? Given that there is no indication at the moment whether it will be a quick switch or a slow transition, how is the port planning to accommodate that change, given that it might not be its decision?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** As was in the budget, the port authority is obviously integral in working with Westport for future planning. As we heard a couple of hours ago, the Westport business case will come to government hopefully later this year and it will probably have some timings in it. Parallel to that, the Fremantle Port Authority is producing a port development plan to articulate how the port will develop in the near future to support trade while the broader planning is done for Westport in the coming years. As the member would know, Kwinana Bulk Terminal, former terminal 1 and current terminal 2, are both within the future Westport plan that was announced six or so months ago. Obviously, neither of them can stay there, but we need to make sure trade continues, noting that a new terminal is being built on the site of the new container terminal at that preferred location in Kwinana. There is a question of how it will be done and whether it will be built first or built around the current KBT 2. That is something that the port authority is actively looking at in parallel with Westport.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Will the Westport final plan need to encapsulate whatever interim solutions are required at the inner port to enable the carrying on of trade until Westport is delivered, if ever?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** As well as the Westport business case and the port development plan that I have spoken to, there are a couple of other pieces of work being done in government. The member has probably heard of the Future of Fremantle planning process to look at things like the redevelopment of Victoria Quay and what happens at Fremantle inner harbour after all the trade has left except cruise ships. The other thing is to look at what we would do with non-container trade, what a staged move might look like and where it would move to. As the member knows, non-container trade is cars, the roll-on roll-off and the like.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Is it envisaged that Fremantle will no longer be an operating cargo port? That is what the minister confirmed there.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** The business case will come to government later this year, and, as I said, there is another bit of work being done for non-container trade that will look at options for where it might move to.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** In the lead-up to the discussion, I think we were talking about the interim period, and I remember there was a funding source, but I cannot see it here, that spoke of the relocation of livestock shipping from Fremantle port. Given the discussion from the federal government about live sheep, is that now no longer being considered or is there still work being done for a transition for cattle, for instance?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** That will probably be part of that ongoing work looking at options for non-container trade for Fremantle port. As the member well knows, if the live sheep industry were to cease, there would still be live cattle coming out of the south west, so the government would need to look at how using the existing port might work once we get the business case.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** There was a dedicated body of work on the livestock export sections, and I wonder what happened to that work. It was funded in last —

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Does the member have the line item?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** It is not there now but it was funded last budget, so that is why I am asking about it. I think the figure was \$2 million at the time.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** I am told that some supply chain work has been done and it has now been completed.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I refer to the Victoria Quay waterfront strategy, which is discussed at paragraph 6 on page 626 of the *Budget statements*. A little while ago, before the minister had to worry about these matters, there was a proposal for a major movie studio on Victoria Quay, and it was an announcement made with great fanfare before the last state election. One of the issues that was obvious at the time, and it was commented on and I think led to the demise of the project, was the intrinsic conflict between that proposed activity and the ongoing activity of the port. My understanding from talking to Main Roads about a bridge matter there is that the thinking is that the outer harbour might be completed in 2037, or maybe after, but we will have to have another working port in Fremantle for at least another decade. What cognisance is being taken of the ongoing operations of the port in these redevelopment activities? My ultimate point is, as with the previous proposal, will we see limitations on port activity because of this work and, conversely, will we see businesses impacted because of the ongoing port activities?

[2.10 pm]

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Thank you for the question. The member went through a few portfolio areas, so I will not comment on a former decision that involves art and culture.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** It was an example.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Yes; I know!

There is an area on the west of Victoria Quay, from the museum. The Rottnest ferry is obviously not really a port operation. If the ferry were not in a port, it would be in a Department of Transport harbour or somewhere such as Hillarys or something. It is not a big ship. The Fremantle Port Authority is putting a lot of work into thinking about what we will do with the heritage buildings in the western part of Victoria Quay well in advance of any potential move. I am not talking about the passenger terminal. Again, a bit of work is being done across multiple agencies on the Future of Fremantle plan that will tie in with the business case later this year, we hope. In the western area, A Shed, as the member knows, is the location of Gage Roads Freo Brewery, which is an amazing place to have a beer if people want to watch a ship come in and go out in front of them. It is quite good for a sunset if the member has not been there yet.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I have no time, minister.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Yes—no time! In the budget, there is \$5 million for B Shed, which is right next to the Rottnest ferry, to enable ferry operators to move into the eastern end of B Shed after some quite significant works are completed under the deck near B Shed, where the waterline extends halfway under the building. That work is almost complete, and we will then do a fit-out at the eastern end of that building.

Again, the Fremantle Port Authority has been working hard to look at the tenancy mix for the B Shed, C Shed and E Shed part of Victoria Quay. We also have the workshops that are around the corner close to the submarine—if members know what I am talking about. We are working out what kinds of commercial, not-for-profit or any other activities we can do in them because we can do that almost without impacting port operations at all. Obviously, it is well used at the moment and has been used for some time for things such as the museum and E Shed Markets. Again, the Fremantle Port Authority is quite active in working out what we will use that western end for.

I assume that as time goes on and as the staging of Westport happens, more land might be freed up to the east, up towards the passenger terminal. Again, once we have the Future of Fremantle plan, various parts of the port can be freed up. It is worth noting, of course, that given the passenger terminal is heritage-listed, it is envisaged that that will continue to be where cruise ships will always come.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** In relation to that, Navy ships, polar supply ships and other ships come into that area, so there is significant interaction there. I guess I wanted that reassurance that there is cognisance that this is a working port and that that should take precedence over these other activities.

My question is on the same topic of the Fremantle port. It will be at least a decade—in fact, it is absolutely going to be longer—before an outer harbour can be constructed. Fremantle port will continue to operate at least into the mid-2030s or later, and it will have to cope with a massively growing state. We had 100 000 people come here in a year, and we expect that that is going to continue for a while, so the state is growing.

The previous modelling of harbour options showed that there was an expectation that general traffic, not freight traffic, would increase by 50 per cent through the old Victoria Bridge, which is being rebuilt and the like. What work is being done to ensure that the container freight, which is around only eight per cent of the total traffic, can continue into at least the next decade and that we will have efficient delivery of container freight from Fremantle port for, as I say, at least the next decade?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** The member asked about the next decade or so, and I am told that the port's modelling shows that there will be capacity into that timeframe. That is on the waterside where the ships come in. Obviously, as the member knows—I think the Leader of the Opposition spoke to the Minister of Transport about it earlier—the government's position is to try to get as much out of the port on rail as possible.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** There was plenty of information on this. The Fremantle port is at only one-third of its capacity, so it is not even close to halfway. The previous data was that expenditure of \$250 million would allow the port to triple its existing capacity, so that port does not have a capacity issue. Is the port authority confident that the combination of road and rail will cope, given the predicted substantial increase in general traffic? Obviously, we would expect to see continued growth in container traffic.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Obviously some of these questions go to other portfolios, such as Main Roads Western Australia and the Department of Transport. The member has probably touched on one of the main reasons we need to start planning for Westport—to get that freight out of Fremantle. Governments in the future will continue to try to get as much on rail as possible, and, again, that is another good reason to build Westport. But, again, Fremantle Port Authority's early modelling shows there is capacity in the next decade, and I would suggest that some of the answers to the member's other questions might be in the Westport business case.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** We will not ask questions about Roe 8—do not worry, minister!

Fremantle is obviously our principal container port into the state. Essentially all the container traffic in the state comes through there. Mining is obviously a massive consumer of traffic through that port, but if predicted expenditure on the renewables transition goes ahead—even for Western Australia, where we are talking investment levels of, say, around \$800 billion or more in a decade, nearly all the physical equipment for that will be imported, so there

will be huge demand on the port—is it envisaged that until Westport is built, Fremantle will be effectively the sole container port for the state? Or is Fremantle Ports working with other authorities to see whether there are other solutions for the container traffic that will come in over that time, given that, as I say, if people’s stated plans go ahead, we will see a massive increase in the importation of goods in containers through that port?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** In terms of bringing in renewable equipment, we bring in solar panels in containers. As the member well knows, the equipment required for wind turbines is very large and clunky and that kind of thing. All our port authorities do great work in planning for the uptick in bringing that renewable energy kit into the state. Again, the member said how much he thinks will be coming in, and it could be multiples of that depending on how the world goes. Ports such as Bunbury and Geraldton already deal with some renewable equipment coming in. We can talk about this later this afternoon; they are obviously active in working out for their port development the lay-down area and making sure they have the right road, and even things like powerlines not being in the way of getting some of the kit in. At the moment, it comes in, but it tends to be relatively ad hoc, which means the logistics around it can be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. The member mentioned how much he thinks might be coming into our state, or across our state from the far north to Esperance; however, we need to make sure our logistics are right for when that happens—probably late into the decade and into the 2030s. It is probably not a Fremantle Port Authority question but more that we are looking at how we get that kit in because we need to plan for it now.

[2.20 pm]

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Is it out for the next decade at least? Will Fremantle effectively be the only container port for the state?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** We will talk to the federal government about getting things like first point of entry for containers at other ports as we need to. Doing some of that work will let us know where they have to come into.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to paragraph 4 on page 626, which is about Westport and port development. I believe the Western Australian Marine Science Institution is doing some work on the Westport marine science program. Is the minister aware of that? If not, does one of the advisers know about it?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** The member would understand that Minister Saffioti is responsible for Westport. The Westport officers were here earlier. That is not in this part of the budget, I am sorry.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I understood that the Fremantle Port Authority encompassed the Kwinana area, because there is an existing port there. I assumed the FPA was involved in that study.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** The FPA collaborates with Westport on engineering at a planning level and is obviously involved in that business case. However, the consultancy the member mentioned would be a question for the Minister for Transport.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Under the outcomes and key performance indicators on page 627, my eyes are naturally drawn to the customer satisfaction score. The 2022–23 actual was 60 per cent and the 2023–24 estimated actual was 50 per cent. That is not a very encouraging customer satisfaction score. Although it is a monopoly, I thought we would want to do better than that. Can the minister or his advisers comment on that low score and what is being done to improve the customer experience?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** The results are related to items such as the condition of some of the assets at the port and the congestion that has been seen for many years, and increasingly so, at Kwinana Bulk Terminal in terms of the demurrage that is being paid. That is what is behind that number and is something that we are looking to address with future projects, including Westport.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** I refer to paragraph 7, which is on sustainability, on page 626. Do ships plug into the Synergy–Western Power electricity system when they are in the port, or are they allowed to burn their very dirty bunker fuel to power themselves while they are in the port? Of course, that has a polluting impact on the community nearby.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Currently, ships are self-powered. The port authority has looked at it, but it would require a significant investment to allow that to happen.

**The CHAIR:** That completes the examination of the Fremantle Port Authority.

#### **Kimberley Ports Authority —**

Mr P. Lilburne, Chair.

Mr D.R. Michael, Minister for Ports.

Mr L. Westlake, Chief Executive Officer.

Mr C. Nganga, Chief Financial Officer.

Ms R. O’Toole, Chief of Staff, Minister for Ports.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information he agrees to provide and will allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 31 May 2024. If the minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

The Leader of the Opposition has a question.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to page 635 and the significant issues impacting the Kimberley Ports Authority. Paragraph 2 states that the authority will work with the commonwealth government on the requirements for the first point of entry status. How long will it take to work through those issues in order to gain that first point of entry status? Following on from the member for Cottesloe's question about container traffic, what opportunities would that open up for the Kimberley Ports Authority going forward from, I assume, just the port of Broome for the whole of the Kimberley?

[2.30 pm]

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Obviously for the whole of the Kimberley, we recognise that the first point of entry is incredibly important. There are a lot of examples, at Broome especially, of industry having to bring in equipment or materials via Darwin, Port Hedland or sometimes Fremantle. Things have sometimes been trucked up from Fremantle because they have not been able to come up otherwise. We have had cruise ships dock in Broome and passengers' luggage has had to be sent via Fremantle. In the East Kimberley, around the Ord, some of the horticulture, cotton and fruit and vegetable producers have had to bring in fertiliser from a port in Queensland or the Northern Territory because Wyndham does not have a first point of entry. A year or so ago, the Fremantle Port Authority put an application in to the commonwealth government for first point of entry. Minister King wrote to the FPA late last year to say that the commonwealth had agreed to work with it to have first point of entry at Broome. That required more information from Wyndham. For the purposes of this conversation, we will set Wyndham aside for a second, but I am very pleased about that. There is \$6.9 million in this budget to do some of the work required at Broome port to have first point of entry—the wash-down bays and those kinds of things. We are continuing to talk to the commonwealth; I know these things take a little time from this point on. Although the commonwealth has agreed to it, it still needs to be worked up. Only a few months ago, I met Minister Watt in Canberra to thank the commonwealth government but also impress upon it that it is very important for this process to move along.

I might ask Mr Westlake whether there is anything else he would like to add.

**Mr L. Westlake:** On the question of timeframe, we are talking only about import cargo; that is what the first point of entry is in reference to. Exports are able to be exported, containerised or otherwise. On the first point of entry process that we are working through, we have already started engagement with the federal Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and the Australian Border Force. We are really working to their timeframes. They have given us some guidelines in respect of their processes, but it comes down to a project execution plan that we will provide to them, and then they will review that. We have no set timeframes at this stage, but we expect that we will progress fairly quickly through that over the next 12 to 18 months and get agreement on what needs to be constructed. It is not a major construction, but there is a wash-down facility and some services that need to be relocated, and things like that.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** In respect of the ongoing arrangement, the minister spoke of the construction of some facilities, but presumably the commonwealth government would have to authorise some level of officer to be stationed there to take care of Border Force issues. What would that mean for the port? Will that be a cost for the port or is it an arrangement with the commonwealth? How will that be structured?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** The cost of having staff to do this—biosecurity staff or customs and the like—is federal government resourcing, so it will be on the federal government once this gets going. With regard to the cost to the port to have somewhere for staff to work from, the good news is that there is already something there, because Border Force is at a location they will be able to use. I do not know whether the member has been to Broome port, but it is on the left-hand side as you go out to the jetty. It is already there with the federal government logo up on the wall, so it is mainly the staffing costs of having someone located there.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Has any modelling been done as to the types and volumes of cargo that may be able to be imported through the port at Broome? If that is available, could the minister perhaps provide it as supplementary information?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** The types of trade we think it would allow, other than regular containerised commercial or industrial goods, would be kit for the oil and gas industries and fertiliser.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I recall three or four years ago talking to a private sector proponent in Broome who indicated that they were well advanced with a project to build a container port. This was when freight costs were a lot lower than they are now, and they told me that it would reduce freight costs by something like \$6 000 per container, which would have a huge impact on our mining industry and others. The old sorghum shed—because at one stage we were going to be a massive exporter of sorghum—was identified as an appropriate facility for that. It seemed like that was a well-advanced idea; is the minister or his staff aware of what the barriers were to that project going ahead? Was it simply that the commercial side fell away for the proponent, or were there regulatory and other hurdles that prevented it from going ahead?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** By way of clarification, can the member remember whether it was a floating —

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Yes, it was going to go with the tides.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Okay; that is the Kimberley Marine Support Base. We are hoping it will go into construction later this year; the pre-drilling work has been done. It is going to be located directly to the right of the current jetty—is that the one the member is talking about? Yes? As far as we know, it is all go. The contractors are leasing an area from the Kimberley Ports Authority on Gubinge Road to get ready for construction. It is going through its final approvals and, as far as we know, it is good to go.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Will that facility be able to be used for importations, subject to the authorities being in place to check things?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Absolutely, as long as we have that first point of entry.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Beautiful; okay. Thank you.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to page 636 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and the line “Berthing availability”, about three down in the table under “Outcomes and Key Performance Indicators”. I would just like to have some explanation of the figures indicated there. There is a budgeted figure of 62 per cent berthing availability in 2023–24, with an estimated actual of 32 per cent and a budget of 35 per cent going forward. Can the minister explain what those figures represent, and why that very low figure of 35 per cent is seen to be acceptable?

[2.40 pm]

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** I ask the CEO to take this one.

**Mr L. Westlake:** The answer to that is that “utilisation” was mistakenly used instead of “availability” during the budgeting process. The member will see that last year’s budget figure is very similar to the estimated actual and next year’s budget figure. During the budget process, “utilisation” was used instead of “availability”.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Is the figure in the budget of 35 per cent accurate?

**Mr L. Westlake:** Yes.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** That is the accurate one and not the incorrect one.

**Mr L. Westlake:** Absolutely.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Note 1 tries to explain it as well.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** It sort of does, but I did not understand what it actually meant when I read it.

I move on to the asset investment program outlined on page 637. This is interesting. The Wyndham port has had some money spent on it in the past, but I note that there is now some concern about its future. Can the minister explain what is happening regarding the future of the Wyndham port? I believe its major export has stopped. I am just trying to find a way to talk about Wyndham.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Obviously, the electrical works were just a minor upgrade to make sure that things are safe and that sort of stuff. As I said, the Kimberley Ports Authority, going for the first point of entry, put in an application for both Broome and Wyndham. Although Broome has been approved and we are going through that process, the federal minister wrote a letter about Wyndham—I do not have the words with me—that was not a flat out no; it stated that we needed more information about future trade. It has now fallen back on the KPA and the state government. We are working on going back to the commonwealth government to try to talk about what we think are the trade opportunities in having the first point of entry in Wyndham.

We know there are some proposed mining and resource projects in the East Kimberley that would very much be able to use Wyndham port. We obviously know that there is agriculture and horticulture. There are simple things like bringing in fertiliser that it cannot do at the moment, even on an ad hoc basis, which is unfortunate. With my other hat on as the Minister for Mines and Petroleum, a lot of project proposals come to me that could use Wyndham port if it had first point of entry. It is now on us—we are working on this—to go back to the federal government to prove why we think it makes sense to have Wyndham as the first point of entry. Once we do that, we will know what kinds of upgrades will be needed.

**Mid West Ports Authority —**

Mr P. Lilburne, Chair.

Mr D.R. Michael, Minister for Ports.

Mr D. Tully, Chief Executive Officer.

Ms S. Pigdon, Chief Financial Officer.

Ms R. O'Toole, Chief of Staff, Minister for Ports.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 31 May 2024. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, the member should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

The Leader of the Opposition has the call.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I turn to page 644 of the *Budget statements* and the heading “Relationship to Government Goals”. Desired outcome 3 is to be a sustainable port. I ask about the dust that has raised itself a little around the area. I am talking about the port of Geraldton, not any other port in the midwest area. Can the minister explain a little about the dust situation? Are there any known issues and programs to address it?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** It is important to know that the Mid West Ports Authority holds and complies with its environmental licence conditions as issued by the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation. The member is probably aware that since late 2021, the port authority has been actively working to reduce dust generation and migration resulting from port operations. It has made a significant investment of over \$2.3 million in dust improvement measures in the time since. That includes wind and dust dispersion modelling to better understand discrete dust sources and their transportation paths. The construction of the DustTamer fence has seen a reduction of 50 per cent in the dust carried from a leased talc site into the fishing boat harbour next to the port. There has been the acquisition and installation of a dry fog system for the iron ore shiploader on berth 5 to contain dust within the holds of iron ore ships when loading; dry fog systems through the berth 5 iron ore handling circuit to contain any dust within the enclosed facility; dust hoods on the berth 4 truck unloader to prevent the movement of mineral sand dust when unloading trucks; and an enclosure of the berth 4 truck unloader in order to reduce the influence of wind while unloading trucks. There has also been acquisition and commissioning of cascade chutes for the berth 4 shiploader to reduce dust generated while loading mineral sands.

I am told that the above measures and the heightened surveillance have seen a downward trend in the particulate matter 10 daily average from July 2021 to February 2024. I know that the team at the Mid West Ports Authority continues to work closely with core users to ensure compliance with live monitoring of dust levels through approved air-quality monitoring stations, and it continues to communicate dust performance and improvement actions through numerous community forums. I am told a meeting was held quite recently—about a month or so ago—regarding that matter. If the member goes to the heading “Retained Dividends” on page 646, he will see under paragraph 6.2 that \$6 million has been allocated in this budget for the recladding and dust extraction system for the state-owned shed 88 storage facility. This is something that we know is an issue and has been for some time. The member can see that since 2001, the government has applied all those measures, and now has more measures and increased monitoring. The government will continue to work with the local community to mitigate any impacts.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to paragraph 2 under the heading “Significant Issues Impacting the Government Trading Enterprise” and the opportunities that might exist for new mining projects and wind turbines. Are there any restrictions or issues about bringing larger wind turbines into the port? I know some wind turbines being built in the midwest are to a much smaller standard than some of the proposed future wind turbines that we hear about. Is there a point at which it would not be possible to import those larger wind turbines into the area? Is there any thinking about how that could be achieved using the current Geraldton port?

[2.50 pm]

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** I will ask the CEO to answer.

**Mr D. Tully:** At the moment, we are importing up to 85-metre wind turbine blades through the port. That is the result of some recent roadworks. Before the upgrades, we were able to import only 68-metre blades. As part of the port maximisation program, we are looking to upgrade the road network to cater for up to 105-metre wind turbine blades. The advice is that shore-side wind turbine blades will not get much larger than that size.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to the port maximisation project, which is the subject of paragraph 3 under significant issues. Can the minister give me an update on that project and the eventual tonnages that the minister hopes to achieve through the port?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** The *Port of Geraldton master plan* was endorsed by the state government in 2020 and part of that looked at new trade and possible new customers in the midwest. There was a proof of design in the 2021–22 midyear review and construction is ongoing from the 2022–23 budget. Some of the multi-user multiproduct facilities will include the expansion of port facilities, incorporating a new berth 1; expansion of existing berth 6; new materials-handling facilities on Ocean Street; a shiploader on berth 6; construction of a new berth 1; construction of fuel loading upgrades to berths 5, 6 and 11; dredging of new berths 1 and 6 and a tug harbour; construction of a new truck unloader to allow for the quicker and safer direct loading of vessels at berth 4; construction of new pilot boat facilities; construction of a long-period wave breakwater and associated tug harbour; and the construction of a number of road realignments within the port. There is some further construction scope for some other parts of the PMax project that I will not read out or we will be here all afternoon.

I will ask the CEO to talk about some of those future trade volumes. The main part for me in this budget was the long-period wave breakwater, so maybe the CEO will be able to give a quick explanation of that project as part of the PMax project.

**Mr D. Tully:** The PMax project will allow trade volumes to expand from 25 million tonnes to 35 million tonnes a year. At the moment, we are trading around 18 million tonnes a year, so we still have some volume left there. There are things independent from that, such as the environmental approvals that we will have to seek to expand our licences to do that. As the minister referred to, as part of the design process that is proceeding with Pmax, we are currently at 85 per cent across the entire project. Our consultants, along with our own design team, have essentially designed in a mitigation against our long-period wave issue at the port of Geraldton. We are confident that the expansion of a tug harbour and a northern breakwater should see an up to 50 per cent reduction in our port closure days across the year. Effectively, we will move from 32 days to around the 16-to-20-day mark. We are currently in design and still doing modelling on that and we will confirm that through the design process.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Still on the developments around the port, what is the status of the old Mt Gibson Iron assets at the port? Are they being utilised? Is there a plan for them?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** They were transferred to a company that already owned one of the sheds, so that company now has three sheds and shed 88 is still managed by the port.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Are they being fully utilised, to the minister's knowledge?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Utilisation of those three sheds has increased since that private transaction happened.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I wanted to talk about the port's involvement with Oakajee. Page 644 refers to Oakajee and other port developments. Can the minister give me a quick run-down on the state of any planning or discussions that the port authority has had around further developments at Oakajee and other potential port developments listed in that area? The member for Cottesloe and I were in Carnarvon talking to people about hydrogen, for instance, in the Gascoyne area and the potential need for port facilities there. How much discussion is going on and to what level is the port involved in those types of ongoing discussions?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Mid West Ports Authority is an active participant in the Oakajee industry reference group, which comprises some industry representatives as well as state government agencies and government trading enterprises. They have been working together to facilitate the activation of the strategic industrial area. Significant work has progressed in the past 12 months on a trilateral study between Mid West Ports Authority, the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation and the Port of Rotterdam and Fraunhofer Institute to investigate and report on a feasibility and technical assessment for a fast-track solution to export green hydrogen from Oakajee to Germany via Rotterdam. Early indications demonstrated a single-point mooring capable of exporting ammonia at Oakajee as feasible. The study is expected to conclude at the end of this year. Mid West Ports Authority is working with Development WA and consultants to undertake spatial planning of the port of Oakajee site to incorporate emerging industries such as the export of hydrogen alongside traditional resources exported from the midwest region. That planning is expected to conclude towards the end of the year.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** When we had an opportunity to talk about this last time, the view was that we would not expect to see a port at Oakajee in the foreseeable future. Obviously, things have moved on since then, but is there any thought about a potential timeline for the Oakajee facility? I take it from what the minister just said that there are parts to it and there is the idea of having a mooring point, if you like, but more particularly a bulk goods jetty at Oakajee as well. I assume they are now separate plans. I have seen the original plans that the port authority had put together in conjunction with the previous—I think it is still going in name, at least—Court-led iron ore export terminal. Are there separate timelines for those two things; and, if there are, what are the likely dates?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** I do not think I can give the member any firm timeline. Those things will be a decision of government. As I read out, there are a couple bits of work and I think, as the member can imagine, there is other

work across government on strategic industrial areas. The member would be well aware of the \$500 million strategic industrial areas fund in the budget. It would be possible for that to be used for a project like this if it stacked up. Again, we are expecting those two bits of planning work towards the end of the year and then a decision by government will have to be made.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** If the decision were made to progress with, for example, a mooring point for discharge of hydrogen or ammonia, or whatever, what sort of timeline would it take for that facility to progress? I assume there would be some reasonable approvals phase because we are working in the marine environment, but also there is a just straight construction phase. If the minister said we were going to do it today, for example, how long would it be before that facility were progressed—approximately? I am not going to hold people to it, but approximately.

[3.00 pm]

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** It is a difficult one to answer, as the member can imagine. I think the member is right, though. With some of the approvals, it could not be built overnight. A lot probably depends on key initial players that might want to use the port in their work. JTSI is the lead and has a working group on this. Earlier today, I heard some of the discussion about the work Main Roads is doing on the road into a future Oakajee. There is work being done across government, but, unfortunately, in terms of a timeline, it is difficult to answer the member without knowing the proponents involved and those kinds of things. I think the member is generally quite right. It would take a little while because anything waterside or concerning water—as I am finding as Minister for Ports—takes a little while to get from go to whoa.

**The CHAIR:** That completes the examination of the Mid West Ports Authority.

**Pilbara Ports Authority —**

Mr P. Lilburne, Chair.

Mr D.R. Michael, Minister for Ports.

Mr S. McSkimming, Chief Executive Officer.

Mr N. Sarandopoulos, Chief Financial Officer.

Ms R. O’Toole, Chief of Staff, Minister for Ports.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

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I give the call to the Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** There are probably a lot of questions to ask, but I will start with something that caught my eye in the “Outcomes and Key Performance Indicators” table on page 654 of the *Budget statements*. I refer to the line item “Ship revenue earned per visit” under the heading “Outcome: Maximise regional benefits through management of existing and future ports”. For the coming year, the port of Port Hedland’s ship revenue earned each visit is \$168 684 compared with the port of Dampier’s figure of \$22 449. What does that figure represent and why is there such a disparity between the two ports?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** The port of Port Hedland provides more services to vessels, such as helicopters and pilots—obviously those two things are linked—and other vessel services. Private proponents primarily do those jobs themselves in Dampier.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to the Port Hedland voluntary buyback scheme on page 653 of the *Budget statements*. Can we get an update on the status of that scheme and when or whether it might be complete?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** The first part of the scheme ended on 31 December last year. That was the first two years. Before that, the government made a decision to extend the scheme and make minor changes to it. It added a small element of risk for anyone who is retaining their property who thinks the price can never go down, if that makes sense. The price gets indexed every year and there is no downside. We have added a downside, so if property prices decrease in Port Hedland, there is now a risk. We understand there are quite a few international investors in that area.

In terms of an update, more than 63 per cent of eligible residential properties, which is 247, have been settled to date. More than 85 per cent have been valued, with more than 22 per cent of eligible non-residential properties involved. To date, two per cent have accepted an offer. I think those non-residential properties have only been since 1 January. That is part of the change we made to allow the purchase of non-residential property in a complex



that is connected to residential properties. Obviously, it would be hard to do anything with that property if there was one hold out. It was a voluntary buyback. It was never anticipated that all properties would be acquired. We recognise that the best option for each owner will depend on their circumstances. We extended it in late 2023 to include non-residential properties. We changed the value mechanism so that any downturn in future market value will be reflected in price offers. Since 1 January, which is when the scheme extension came into place, another 18 properties have been acquired, which is a really good result in only a few months. There are an additional six properties expected to be settled and acquired by the middle of this year. It is encouraging to see that number start ticking up, which will allow future planning to take place on what happens in the area.

We started a new initiative at the end of last year, with a new steering committee to oversee the project. The Hedland Maritime Initiative, which is run by Pilbara Ports Authority, does the purchasing; however, there is a new steering committee, which is chaired by the Pilbara Development Commission, to look over the whole scheme and future planning. I think it will have its first meeting relatively soon. It includes the council, Pilbara Ports and others, and will start planning for the future of the west end.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** What was the rationale for the inclusion of non-residential property in the buyback? I want to get further clarity. My understanding is that the port is a safe working environment but not a safe place to live 24 hours a day.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** There are 22 properties in the area, including holiday lets—a business that looks like a house—and there are properties that are attached to residences. Imagine a block of flats—for want of a better term—that might have a commercial property at the bottom. We could purchase all the residential properties, but the block would be sterilised because there would be a commercial property unsold in it. There are only 22. They are not all commercial properties in the west end. It is only the 22 properties that meet the criteria.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** What happens to properties that the owners do not wish to sell and will not sell? At some point, will it stop being a voluntary buyback and become a compulsory acquisition? Is that the minister's plan?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** The current scheme ends on 31 December 2025. The future of the scheme after that point will be a policy decision for government leading up to that date, notwithstanding that some planning has to be done by the steering committee, and that will probably involve the Western Australian Planning Commission at some point.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I know a price was set and a premium was put on the price at a certain point—in 2019 I think it was. Could the minister give me an idea of the value or the median price that the government has paid as part of the voluntary buyback?

[3.10 pm]

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** I cannot believe I got the number. The median price is \$648 000.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I want to get an idea of the situation with the container port at Lumsden Point. How will additional shipping be accommodated? As I understand, at the moment, the port is only a tidal operation. At certain times of the day, ships cannot navigate into the port. How will that busy bottleneck accommodate the general freight going into the development at Lumsden Point?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Lumsden Point is an incredibly important project for our state and definitely for the Pilbara. It will be a multi-user facility and logistics hub in Port Hedland and will facilitate the export of battery minerals, the import of renewable energy infrastructure and the growth of direct shipping services. I am told that the tidal issues, which are very well managed already by the Pilbara Ports Authority, are not a constraint to the use of Lumsden Point.

**Mr S. McSkimming:** We can put additional vessels on every tide relative to what we are doing now. That would not be one of the operating constraints at Lumsden Point.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** When will the development at Lumsden Point be final and complete? Is there an update on the development itself? Has the minister done any modelling on expected cargoes through that port, and is that modelling available to the opposition?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** I will talk briefly about where we are at with the construction. I might ask the CEO to add to my answer. I was in Port Hedland a few weeks ago with our member for Pilbara, Kevin Michel. The first stage of construction is now complete, with a seawall successfully created. That is a crucial step to enable the dredging and subsequent construction stages to progress. There are two ponds down a road where the causeway is with a seawall around them. They will be filled in with a dredge spoil to create the land at the back of the berths. Pilbara Ports Authority has also recently awarded two major construction contracts for the dredging, reclamation and causeway construction packages. Construction of the causeway is now underway, with dredging and reclamation expected to begin in a few months' time. The delivery of the project includes dredging of the channel access and turning basins, construction of two new multi-user berths and construction of a central access road and service corridor connecting to Great Northern Highway, enabling private sector investment. The landside logistics hub is an enormous piece of land behind Lumsden Point. We have heard the demand for it is quite high, even though at the moment it is just sand and a massive area. I do not know whether the CEO wants to mention when we think Lumsden will be ready, as well as any of the trade forecasts if we have them.

**Mr S. McSkimming:** In answer to the member's question, as the minister mentioned, we have completed the seawalls and are currently working on the causeway. The dredging will start midyear. Once those works are complete and the landside portion of the project is finished, the next major piece of work is the construction of the berths. We are at tender for that at the moment. The tender will inform our view on timelines in terms of the construction industry's capacity to support that. Regarding the member's question about the demand forecast, there are two predominant trade purposes for Lumsden. One is the export of battery metals, predominantly lithium. I refer the member to the government's announcement that Pilbara Minerals and Mineral Resources have already signed up for that export capacity. The other use is imports, predominantly containers, general freight and renewable energy. There is an extensive business case available on Infrastructure Australia's website that includes quite detailed trade forecasts that the member would have available to him.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Going back to page 651 and revenue from operations, there is quite a significant increase in revenue from 2022–23 through to the 2023–24 estimated actual. What has driven that increase?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** There is a one-off \$60 million contribution within that from industry for dredging.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** That significant increase persists across the forward estimates, so there must be some other factor that has driven that. Is it simply an increased volume of trade or some other factor? It is a good thing, by the way—a good problem.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** It is a good thing. There is an expected increase in trade. As we go along, Lumsden will factor into that. There is an expected increase in the volume as well. Yesterday was the first transshipment for Mineral Resources out of the port of Ashburton, which comes under the Pilbara Ports Authority. Within there as well will be some revenue derived from the Barrow Island port, which is currently a Department of Transport port. It is expected that that will transition into the Pilbara Ports Authority over the next year or so as part of the port amalgamation.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** My question derives from the answer just given. Could the technology adopted by Mineral Resources for its Onslow operations potentially provide a simpler solution to exports from the midwest? It just seems to be quite a revolution from the typical deepwater approach.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** That is a commercial decision a company has taken. It is difficult for us to answer. With my other hat on, as Minister for Mines and Petroleum, I get the odd proponent talk to me about wanting to run similar operations in a very remote area around the state nowhere near a port. Whether or not it will ever be commercial or they get finance for those things, I cannot speak to that. It is a commercial decision.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** On page 652, under "Financial Changes", there is an adjustment for the iron ore transshipment at the port of Ashburton. What does that figure represent? Is that a contribution from the state towards the transshipment or is it the cost of running the port?

[3.20 pm]

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** That is additional revenue from those operations.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I will go back to the Hedland Maritime Initiative referenced on page 655 and the special-purpose vehicle for the buyback scheme. How much of the \$245.8 million that is forecast has been expended in that buyback scheme to date?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** I am happy to provide that as supplementary information.

**The CHAIR:** Does the minister agree to provide the supplementary information; and, if so, state exactly what information will be provided?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Is the member happy if I provide the spend to date on the acquisition of properties?

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Yes; thank you.

[*Supplementary Information No A24.*]

**The CHAIR:** That completes the examination of the Pilbara Ports Authority.

#### **Southern Ports Authority —**

Mr P. Lilburne, Chair.

Mr D.R. Michael, Minister for Ports.

Mr K. Wilks, Chief Executive Officer.

Mr A. Asthana, Chief Financial Officer.

Ms R. O'Toole, Chief of Staff, Minister for Ports.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 31 May 2024. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

I give the call to the member for Roe.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I have a couple of questions on the Esperance projects found on page 664. Can the minister give us an update on the progress of the \$11.5 million recladding of iron ore shed 3 listed in paragraph 3.4?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Iron ore shed 3 at the port of Esperance has been used for more than 20 years and requires refurbishment due to its location in a highly corrosive coastal environment. The cladding system has reached the end of its life and major funding is required to renew it. The project includes repairing and repainting the internal structure columns, as well as remediating the roof structure through the repair and placement of roof sheeting, purlins and fascia purlins affected by advanced localised corrosion. The prior year tender exercise resulted in only one bidder, whose price was double the budget due to market conditions. In the 2024 financial year, the project was rescoped and retendered to deal with the worst corrosion degradation to provide a five-year period for the contractor market to cool. Those temporary works have allowed us to delay the full cladding until the 2027 financial year.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Is the minister saying that because there was only one tender that came in at double the price, a temporary job was done and the full job will need to be looked at in five years?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Yes. By spending an estimated \$2.5 million, we have bought a few years to allow the market to cool before doing the full repair.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** What would the minister predict the cost of recladding to be in five years?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** The member will see that \$11 505 000 has been allocated in the budget for the 2026–27 out year. That money is currently sitting there for the project.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to the \$2 million to design a new general-purpose berth in Albany to enable trade facilitation through the great southern region, which is found in paragraph 2.6 on page 664. I know that it is a limiting scenario there with the former woodchip berth. Can the minister explain the plans to expand with another berth and what materials will be loaded at that berth?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Some of this will probably be a little hypothetical, but I am sure that the member has seen berths 1 and 2, and I was standing on them with Mr Wilks in February. Berths 1 and 2 assets are well beyond their design life. They are in poor condition and require replacement. The replacement is unlikely to be finalised prior to the berth being shut down for reasons of operational safety. Existing trades will have to be redeployed to adjoining berths and that will have to be managed in the years ahead.

This funding in the budget will allow for the first stage of the planning. Funding for some of the things that the member asked about will come out of that \$2 million to look at berths 1 and 2 and what trades they will need to accommodate. Discussions will also need to occur with the primary user of berth 3, which is Co-operative Bulk Handling, to make sure that we accommodate them, because some of the bigger ships hang over onto berths 1 and 2. The funding will allow the planning to occur, and some of the things that the member asked about will come out of that planning.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Ten years ago, there was a plan for magnetite to come in from the Wellstead project. I have heard a rumour of that project restarting. Is there any allocation or planning for that?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** The port authority or I can speculate on whether or not the Wellstead project gets up, but, by the sounds of it, there has been contact with the Southern Ports Authority on the odd occasion over the last 10 years to discuss matters.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to paragraph 2 under “Trade Growth” and “Significant Issues Impacting the Government Trading Enterprise” on page 661. It refers to “trading options to better diversify risks across customers and commodities”. I have a couple of questions around that, the first of which is about the closure of the mine at Ravensthorpe and the threats to other mines in the area. What would that mean for the turnover of the port? Is that a material risk to the business and would it mean some writing down of expected revenues?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** First Quantum Minerals has moved to care and maintenance, but it will still be doing some work on improving its equipment and plant and getting more approvals for mine expansion. I saw that the nickel price today has hit well over \$US21 000 a tonne, whereas back in February it was \$US15 500. Although the nickel price has improved a bit, I am not saying the mining will restart anytime soon, but I hope that the nickel industry might have a brighter future ahead of it than we thought a few months ago. That notwithstanding, the impacts on the port of Esperance from First Quantum Minerals’ cessation of operations is expected to predominantly relate to trade volumes, obviously, and terminal handling operations. No advice has been received from FQM about the term of the care and maintenance period other than that it is based on the global economic outlook for nickel. The Southern Ports Authority has a diverse range of trade through Esperance port, with FQM’s nickel and sulphide only a small portion—around two per cent—of the total trade volume.

[3.30 pm]

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I have a further question on trading options to diversify risk, which is what this is about. Are any of the ports in the Southern Ports Authority zone first point of entry ports?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** All three are.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Is there any consideration of integrating any of the southern ports into the container traffic we have been talking about with Westport et cetera seeing that Bunbury, especially, would be a place that could be positioned?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** I do not know, but within each first point of entry authorisation, there are subcategories of what can and cannot come in. I am sure that a port like Fremantle has all the categories covered. Although Albany, Bunbury and Esperance have first point of entry, I am told that Esperance is able to bring in containerised cargo, whereas the port of Bunbury is only for project and general cargo—so Esperance can bring in containers.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Is there a plan to expand trade? Given that a lot of the containers that come into Fremantle end up on the train in one way or another, is there a way of integrating Esperance into that trade?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Obviously, we have had a few discussions today about renewable energy and what we might need to bring in through different ports in WA. The work and the planning for that is ongoing. Should there be a need to ask the federal government for approval to bring containers into another port or to change any of the first point of entry cargo types, for want of a better term, that is something the state can talk to the federal government about once we know a little bit more about the trade need.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to paragraph 2.2 on page 664 of the *Budget statements*, which states —

... upgrade the Esperance port entry and internal roads (Stage 2 and 3), providing safe and functional heavy vehicle access and supporting recent growth in non-iron ore trade transported by road;

Can the minister enlighten us about what the recent growth is?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** This project is the approval to progress stages 2 and 3, following the approval of stage 1, for the pavement renewal and lighting and drainage upgrade of Hughes Road. It is part of the staged program to upgrade ageing road infrastructure. The program consists of two core components, which are stage 2, the heavy vehicle port entrance off Hughes Road, and stage 3, some internal roads, and that is the pavement renewal and drainage upgrades. I am told that the trade growth is primarily related to spodumene for lithium.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I have a further question on a similar theme as the member for Moore's question. I understand that India has dropped its tariff on fava beans, for argument's sake, so there is the potential for container loads of that type of thing to go out of the Esperance port. Is the minister trying to promote that as a way of increasing volume?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** The port of Esperance has already been exporting some grain in containers, so the capability is there. I know that the team at Southern Ports is always willing to talk to any proponent, shipper or anyone else about opportunities to use its port.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to paragraph 2.1 on page 664 of budget paper No 2 and the \$14.9 million to upgrade the tug pen and pilot jetty in Esperance, which I know is very welcome. There is a local tug operation there that is very well regarded. Can the minister let us know some more detail on the tug pen and the pilot jetty upgrade, if possible? Is there any breakdown?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** The existing Esperance tug jetty was constructed around 2001 to accommodate two smaller shallow-draught aluminium harbour tugs. From 2010, the facility has been used for three larger tugs, with two tugs rafted in parallel on one side. The small boat pens accommodate the pilot boat and lines boats, and are also considered part of the project. A condition assessment in 2019 identified that elements of the tug jetty were at risk of failure due to severe deterioration and/or overloading due to the extra tug rafted in parallel. Therefore, both facilities need to be repaired and modified to meet their operational requirements.

**The CHAIR:** That completes the examination of the Southern Ports Authority.

#### **Division 26: Western Australia Police Force — Service 4, Road Safety —**

Mr P. Lilburne, Chair.

Mr D.R. Michael, Minister for Road Safety.

Ms R. Hamilton, Acting Road Safety Commissioner.

Mr V. Ianni, Chief Financial Officer.

Ms C. Monaghan, Senior Policy Adviser.

Ms R. O'Toole, Chief of Staff, Minister for Road Safety.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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answers should be short and to the point. Consideration is restricted to items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must relate to a page number, item or amount related to the current division, and members should preface their questions with those details. Some divisions are the responsibility of more than one minister. Ministers shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 31 May 2024. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

I give the call to the Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to paragraph 15, under the heading “Data”, at the top of page 408 of the *Budget statements*. It says —

The Road Safety Commission is developing inter-agency arrangements and supporting intergovernmental agreements to improve the collection, consistency and sharing of important road safety data.

I point to the fact that the Australian government, through the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, has announced a requirement for a state seeking funding arrangements to provide road safety data and also that the Australian Automobile Association has been calling for the provision of that data via the Data Saves Lives campaign. What actions has the Road Safety Commission taken to date about this matter?

[3.40 pm]

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** The national road safety data sharing agreement, which WA signed, was signed only in March this year. All states signed up to it at the road safety minister’s meeting. As we all know, data is incredibly important in most facets of our lives. The Road Safety Commission does a very good job of collecting data. I think the crash data for 2023 is due to come out in the next few months or so. This is no criticism, but the data collected is the same as it has been for some time. All the states are the same in that they all collect data from the health system, police reports and the like. We know of the increased ability of computers to analyse data and be more predictive about where a crash or serious injury might happen. It might help inform road funding decisions or other decisions relating to particular cohorts of people who are, unfortunately, getting themselves killed or seriously injured by their behaviour. We know that data improvements are needed to help deliver high-quality, detailed and timely data to get a better understanding of crashes, the road environment and driver behaviour.

As I said, in all states, data is collected by several different agencies, not necessarily just the road safety agency, although, by the very nature of the data, some always comes from the police and the health department. The Road Safety Commissioner is already working with other agencies to try to get higher quality data, improve access and support meaningful integration of data. The commissioner is also working collaboratively with research groups and road safety organisations across the transport infrastructure sectors nationally to ensure that research funding in each of the areas is leveraged for road safety outcomes.

As I said, we, as well as other states, signed the national road safety data sharing agreement in March this year, and that now formalises national road safety data sharing arrangements and provides governance for agreeing to any future road safety data sharing requirements and the mechanisms to consider and resolve data requests from third parties. As part of the national data agreement, all states need to agree, with the commonwealth leading, on what data we will provide to a central hub to help assist some of the decisions. This is some of the stuff that the AAA has been asking for.

All states need to agree on the definitions of some of the data. Some of these things are not easy to do, but the Road Safety Commission works with the opposition’s counterparts in other states. I have made it clear in my discussions with Senator Carol Brown, who is the Assistant Minister for Infrastructure and Transport—she is, as I said, basically the senator for road safety, for want of a better term—that Western Australia is absolutely keen to collaborate on this and do whatever we can to get the next steps moving as quickly as we can.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** At this point, it seems that the commission is developing interagency arrangements. Is the commission the body charged with sharing the data with the commonwealth or is that charged to various bodies that share various pools of data? Is the commission being the lead in dealing with and collating this matter, with the commonwealth as the leader?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** It is envisaged that the Road Safety Commission would, from our state’s point of view, be the collector of the data from other agencies and then give it to the commonwealth.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** As yet, there is no clarity about what data would be required and shared. Does the state have a view that there is some data that it gathers that it would not want to share in this exercise?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** I cannot think of any data that our state would not want to share in the interests of road safety and in the interests of collaborating with other states in our Federation to work out trends and other issues,

which we can all benefit from when working out why people are getting killed or seriously injured on the roads. The Road Safety Commission knows that my point of view is that once we have the agreed set of data, or even an initial set of data points that we are being asked to provide, we need to do as much as we can to get that moving from our end as quickly as possible, and so if there is one part of a dataset that we currently do not collect on a police crash form or something, it would be upon the government to work out what we need to do to provide that data.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** At the moment, apart from this newly signed agreement, has there been less formal data sharing already going on between peak organisations in each state? Let us compare and take as an example the volume and range of random and targeted drug testing that takes place in each jurisdiction. Would there already be a record kept of data such as that?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Yes. Obviously, the Road Safety Commission and similar organisations across the country collaborate all the time. The federal department also runs a data hub, which I presume will be replaced by the new one, that collects data about road conditions and those kinds of things. Here we are talking about a much more modern system that can be used at a much more granular level. Again, from our point of view, as long as we protect people's privacy and all those kinds of things and make sure that it is all anonymised information that goes to any sort of research hub, in the interests of road safety, it should be a very good thing.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I turn to page 407 and the paragraph on effective enforcement. At the end of it, it states —

The latest road safety camera technology, paired with powerful data analytics, will enable targeted and effective enforcement focused on improved road safety outcomes. The Government has committed an additional \$6.1 million over the forward estimates ... to include additional Smart Freeway camera sites on the Mitchell Freeway.

How is the commission progressing the rollout of this program against the targets it set for itself in *Driving change: Road safety strategy for Western Australia 2020–2030*?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** The recent passing of the infringement management legislation, which I am thankful the opposition supported, as well as the issues we discussed earlier today regarding the Department of Transport, allows for the use of the new smart cameras. These are the smart cameras that can detect the non-wearing of a seatbelt, mobile phone usage, driving in a closed lane on a smart freeway—an X lane—as well as speed and point-to-point speed if one camera is teamed up with another one. These cameras already exist on the freeway south. They were used there for the trial and they were also used for some of Main Roads Western Australia's activities regarding the commissioning of the smart freeway.

Later this year, there will be a tender release for cameras on two gantries on the smart freeway north. There are also six trailers—three sets of two—that can be teamed up and deployed anywhere in the state, in both regional and metro areas. Again, I am sure that local communities will have a say on where they can be used. Two trailers can catch point-to-point speeding as well as the non-wearing of seatbelts and the use of mobile phones. The tender is now closed and is under assessment.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I had a second part to that question, but I think the minister was getting some advice when I asked it. Generally, how is the progression going towards the targets that are outlined in the safety strategy 2020–2030?

[3.50 pm]

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** The member may have heard me speak on radio about road safety. Obviously, too many people are still getting themselves killed. Having said that, the fatality trends are in line with the rest of Australia. Most states are consistently seeing high fatality rates in 2024 in contrast to 2023. In Western Australia, 2023 had a much lower fatality rate than usual, albeit still too high. I will leave others to think about the reasons for that.

There has been a relatively consistent decrease since about 2018 in people being seriously injured. Some of that might be due to the fact that a lot of money has been spent on roads, road treatments and infrastructure, the new safety features in vehicles and reduced speed limits around the state, in urban settings and towns. We still have a lot of work to do to meet our targets for fatality trends generally, and I think most states are in the same boat. Our driving change plan is linked to national targets. There is still a lot of work to do.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I turn to page 406 and the road trauma trust account. Can the minister confirm the total funds that are expected to be deposited into the account in 2023–24, given that we are coming close to the end of the financial year, and the total funds that might be expended from that? Could the minister detail how that will be spent?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** There is a month and a bit to go in the 2023–24 year. Page 285 of budget paper No 3 details the special-purpose account. Does the member want to know about the current financial year or the budgeted amount for next year? In 2023–24, the account started with \$95 million. At the time of putting the budget together the prediction was for \$117 million worth of receipts, with \$126 million paid out, leaving a closing balance of \$85 million. We know that there will probably be higher revenue coming in from cameras. I cannot give the member that number because we are not at the end of the financial year.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** When will the minister be able to estimate the amounts coming in from those cameras?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** The member said “those cameras”; is he talking about the new cameras?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The new cameras—the \$6.1 million worth of cameras.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** The estimate for that money is encapsulated in the receipts of \$113 million as indicated in the table in budget paper No 3. As the member knows, we need the system up and running and to then procure the cameras; therefore, they will not be in operation for the full year. A lot of what I am talking about is the existing camera fleet on the side of the road, which will continue.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Is there no absolute start date for when all the cameras are acquired and ready to go, or will it be staggered?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** No; it will be staggered. As I said, the procurement for the trailers has only just closed. There will be several months of evaluating the tender for those. The tender for the smart freeway cameras has not opened yet. That will have to open and close and there will have to be an assessment of the new cameras. From a Department of Transport point of view, I very much want to make sure that any bugs in the new infringement system are bedded down early in the new financial year for the infringements that will start flowing into it, before we turn off the police system, so that we know everything is fine before we add a new class of infringement coming in.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Are the police cameras the minister talks about those at the traffic lights that point down?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** I mean the current cameras—the tripod cameras on the side of the road and the stationary cameras on Mitchell Freeway and Kwinana Freeway and highways. All the existing cameras will continue. The data currently goes from those cameras into the police infringement system; from early next year, it will go into the DOT infringement system. I want to make sure that that system is up and running properly and the bugs are ironed out and that we are not infringing the wrong people and all that kind of stuff first before we start introducing these new cameras and new infringement types for seatbelts and mobile phones. I want to make sure that things are working properly.

**Mr M.J. FOLKARD:** I refer to government goals on page 408 of budget paper No 2 and to the table with the goal “Safe, Strong and Fair Communities”. The desired outcome for the service Road Safety Commission is to improve coordination and community awareness of road safety in Western Australia. What road safety education programs are planned for the next financial year?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** I will ask the Acting Road Safety Commissioner to answer.

**Ms R. Hamilton:** We have our usual program of road safety campaigns. People have probably seen the suite of adverts to raise awareness of road safety issues. In particular, we have been running a campaign titled “No one plans a crash”. There is a series of items in that. More importantly, we have been working with the Transport Accident Commission in Victoria to look at introducing an incursion program next year, in the first instance for regional high school students to link with their science curriculum and enable them to understand some of the physics behind road safety before they start the process of going for their L-plates and P-plates, and to get a sense of some of the risks they will need to be able to navigate when they get their licence. That is a major change for us. This program will complement the existing programs that are delivered through the Department of Education. It will be a significant expansion in road safety educational programs for the state.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** The next round of “No one plans a crash” ads will go live pretty soon. I saw a couple of them the other day. They will bring a tear to your eye; they deliver the message well.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to the ongoing initiatives on page 406. There is \$2.5 million in the budget this year and in each of the following years for school zones and crossings. Is that money to pay for extra wardens? If not, what is that money for?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** No, it is not. There are approximately 600 trained warden crossings in the state, who we all know, and, especially as MPs, love in our electorates. The majority of them are in 40-kilometre-an-hour school zones, but more than 160 of the warden-controlled crossings are located outside that zone, including in locations where the speed limit is 60 kilometres an hour or even higher. This money is to add to the old flashing lights program to install and maintain electronic signals in school zones and to extend that to include both static and electronic signage at crossings that are located outside school zones to provide for increased safety for pedestrians.

There are 93 sites in the state located on roads for which the speed limit is 60 kilometres an hour or more; they will be prioritised for electronic signage where there is a warden. A further 71 sites are located on roads for which the usual limit is 50 kilometres an hour or less, and we will be putting static signage on those sites.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

*Meeting suspended from 4.00 to 4.06 pm*

**Division 16: Energy, Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety — Services 1 and 3, Mines and Petroleum —**

Mrs M.R. Marshall, Chair.

Mr D.R. Michael, Minister for Mines and Petroleum.

Mr R. Sellers, Director General.

Mr J. Kwong, Chief Financial Officer.

Mr A. Chaplyn, Deputy Director General, Resource and Environmental Regulation.

Ms S. North, Acting WorkSafe Commissioner.

Mr M. Beach, Principal Policy Adviser.

Mr M. Andrews, Senior Policy Adviser.

Ms R. O'Toole, Chief of Staff, Minister for Mines and Petroleum.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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I give the call to the member for Central Wheatbelt.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I refer to page 239 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the heading “Resource and Environmental Regulation”. I note that the first sentence of this service is —

Regulate the resources sector and provide geoscience and resource information to reduce exploration risk and increase the attractiveness of Western Australia as a destination of choice for resource companies.

Could the minister provide some advice on why Western Australia has slid down the rankings in the Fraser Institute’s *Annual survey of mining companies, 2023* from top spot in 2021? What has or has not happened, or changed?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** I am proud of the resources sector in Western Australia and the continued support that governments have provided it with. I saw the Fraser Institute report last week or earlier this week, and the member is right; it has gone from second to fourth place.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Overall.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Overall, yes. There has been a slight fall in investment attractiveness, albeit in an investment environment that is predominantly populated by the US, Canada and Northern Europe. I note that two of the top US states were likely influenced by the introduction of the US Inflation Reduction Act, which provides some very, very generous support to mining activities in the US, especially for critical minerals. We know that there are similar schemes in Europe, and we are obviously very pleased that the federal government now supports a production tax credit here in Australia. WA has remained in the top five global investment destination jurisdictions for 13 consecutive years and has been first in Australia for the past 14 years.

This is a survey of a couple of hundred mining companies and individuals. There were 293 responses from individuals; 207 completed the survey and 86 partially completed it. It is an annual survey that was conducted last year from a relatively small number of Australian miners in global terms, if we consider that 293 miners were surveyed. Having said that, it reminds us all that we need to continue to support the mining industry in Australia. As Minister for Mines and Petroleum, that is something that is always a focus for me, and I am very pleased with the federal government’s support in the recent federal budget.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I thank the minister. As stated in the first part of the service I referred to, it is the department’s responsibility to provide an environment for reducing exploration risk and increasing the attractiveness of Western Australia as a destination of choice. That is a marker, and I think the minister will find that previous ministers used that when we were sitting at the top of the rankings to the advantage of their respective governments, so I will not accept that we can dismiss it, particularly when it shows that there has been a slip in the policy perception index—from fifth to seventeenth. That has happened under this government’s watch. What is the government doing to try to address some of the concerns that have been raised around permit approvals, which have continued to increase? It is clearly something that is raised with the minister on a regular basis and it is going in the wrong direction, yet significant funds have been allocated across the forward estimates to address these kinds of matters.



**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** The member will be well aware that in December the Premier made a large announcement regarding the overhaul of approvals in Western Australia to deal with some of those matters. Multiple departments and ministers are involved in progressing those matters and that work continues. As Minister for Mines and Petroleum, I can say that work is being carried out by the Department of Energy, Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety. The member will have seen that only a week or so ago we put out a consultation for eligible mining activity. That is something that the industry, and particularly peak bodies such as the Association of Mining and Exploration Companies, has been calling for for quite some time. That will allow for easier approvals, especially for exploration, because knowing what is under the ground and how to access it is part of the lifeblood of our mining sector. We will continue to look at reforms and as the year goes on there will be more announcements regarding the approvals overhaul that the Premier announced in December. I know that a lot of work is going on behind the scenes and I am sure the mining industry will be very happy with what is announced and the direction in which the government is going as the year goes on.

[4.10 pm]

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** The minister is proposing to do work. I think every government, federal and state, has said it will reduce the timeframes for approvals. I do not think any government has actually ever achieved that! It is a lofty ambition, but I think the reality is that when anyone in those sectors sticks their head above the parapet, somebody with a lot more money comes and pinches that person and then it is back to square one. What are the approvals timelines that the minister seeks to reduce? What targets have been set?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** The Vogel–McFerran report had 39 recommendations, all of which have been accepted or noted. The ones that I think will make the most impact are changes to the Environmental Protection Act that the government has announced. They will allow the Minister for Environment to direct the Environmental Protection Authority to access a project of state significance within a specified timeframe, and allowing other government approval processes to run parallel with the EPA approval. Once the detail of that is known, which will probably require some legislation at some point, that is something that will obviously impact my agency and its ability to do work in parallel with work of other agencies like the EPA. It will expand the board of the EPA to include more skills-based members and will require the EPA to have a statement of intent from the environment minister recognising the government's priorities and policies. Those are the large ones. Obviously, a lot of those are in the environment portfolio, but they will very much impact on the timeframes of proponents.

I frequently get visitors or have meetings with people from overseas, especially from fledgling countries, who are looking to expand mining, and to do it in the right way. One of the things that they say is that approvals in Western Australia mean something. We need to always ensure that we retain the importance of our approvals. We continually need to strive to make sure that approvals are done as efficiently as possible, to remove duplication through different processes where we are able to and to move things through the system. There are things like the eligible mining activity regulations for the exploration sector. Once consultation is over and we can draft those regulations in the second half of the year, I think it will make a great impact. I think the plan is that there will be about a one-day turnaround to allow some of the exploration activity to occur. Later in the year, we will also be releasing Resources Online to reduce some of the complexity of the application process for that approval system.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I will come back to Resources Online, minister. I refer to budget paper No 2, volume 1, page 233 and the total appropriations for the department. If the minister runs across the total appropriations provided to deliver services line, the budget for 2024–25 is \$351 million, and it then drops back to \$226 million in 2027–28. There is a \$70 million decrease between 2024–25 and 2025–26. Can the minister please explain why there is a decrease in resources being appropriated to the department? I refer to the total appropriations line at the bottom of the table.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** It is important to note that this is the appropriation for the entire Department of Energy, Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety, not just for the mines area. Within the appropriation, there are some one-off increases for the electricity system security demand management measures, and also some increases for programs like the nickel financial assistance program and WA rent relief program. It also allows for almost half the \$48 million for the critical minerals advanced processing common user facility. That is the estimated actual to the budget year. Again, the nickel financial assistance program and the rent relief program are in there as one-offs. Those are the two big ones that I can see.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Those are the two one-offs and then it returns to normal baseline funding. Is the \$280 million down to \$221 million and \$226 million considered baseline funding? There is still a gap between 2025–26 and 2027–28.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** There are some smaller ones within that, like the vacant property rental incentive scheme reduction. There are basically some one-off programs. Is there anything else Mr Sellers can think of or has information on?

**Mr R. Sellers:** Thank you, minister. Outside the mines part of the portfolio, the minister has mentioned the short-term rental accommodation register and the rent relief. There are a number of those that are time limited.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I guess the further question then becomes: Is there a decrease in the services that we are talking about? Is there any decrease in funding in terms of FTE resources going to the services that the minister is responsible for in this section of the budget?

**Mr R. Sellers:** The minister outlined the bulky numbers that are time limited. The rest that is sitting beneath that is pretty much standard.

[4.20 pm]

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I refer to page 234 and new initiatives. I know that this approvals reform goes across a number of different departments, but in this instance the amount is \$780 000. Is the amount for “Approvals Reform—Cross-Government Triage Team” within the department’s services? My question is: What does the \$780 000 deliver? How many staff? Will there be new hires to the department? Where will they be located? That is more than one question; sorry, chair.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** I will get Mr Sellers to let me know if I miss something, but the government has approved additional appropriations totalling \$3.3 million—that includes the \$780 000 that the member mentioned—over the four years of the budget year and the forward estimates to enable the department to establish a cross-sector triage service with other regulatory agencies to support the environmental approvals systems review. The initiative will establish a triage team consisting of experienced staff within relevant regulatory agencies to provide a single point of contact in each agency, ensuring connection between agencies and the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation’s case managers to smooth the process for proponents across approvals processes for immediate review and rapid up-front assessment of applications received, including for green energy projects, and immediate feedback to proponents for applications recorded for learning and process improvement purposes. Four positions will be created over 2023–24 and 2024–25 to establish a team, using a combination of internal salary underspend and appropriation funding.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** That was a lot of information, minister! Will new staff be hired or will they be seconded from within the department? The question is: are we just shuffling the deckchairs?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** From the 2024–25 budget year, it is four new FTE.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Four brand new bodies. Who will they report to?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Mr Sellers is indicating it might be Mr Chaplyn.

**Mr A. Chaplyn:** The new staff will be inside our compliance area and report to the general manager of that area.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** These are DEMIRS staff.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Right. As I understand the answer previously, there will be similar FTE in other departments.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Mr Sellers.

**Mr R. Sellers:** The group that is set up in JTSI currently headed by Mr Marney will include some people who coordinate the triage team across the various portfolios.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I remember a program some years ago called Streamline WA, and I think the director general was one of the head executives involved in that. Whatever happened to that program? That was supposed to do exactly the same thing as what we hear this new program will be doing. I think there have been other iterations throughout the years as well. What confidence can we have that this new program will be any more successful than the streamline program announced a number of years ago?

**Mr R. Sellers:** I thank the member for the question. The member is right: there has been ongoing development to make sure that our approvals processes stay relevant. The minister mentioned the Fraser Institute survey and when WA kicked up and stayed up for about 14 years. I have been back in Western Australia for about that time, and we have been working on doing things to reduce parallel processing, bring transparency into our systems and a range of things since that date, and some of it reflects that. The Streamline WA program was ongoing under the Council of Regulators. There were time-constrained initiatives in there that were delivered, and it is an ongoing process. We deliver one package; we have another set of works to do.

Within the portfolio, the earlier works were around us making sure that during COVID, for example, we pivoted some of our staff to make sure that approvals did not suffer. With the skills shortage and our losing people out of the agency, that was one of the Streamline WA pieces of work. Another piece of work was Andrew’s team transitioning our system so that people who have made an application can see where the application is in our system and who they need to ring. All that sort of stuff was on an old platform and Environment Online, which the minister just mentioned, is the next iteration of that. That was one piece of work in the Streamline program. The Streamline program has had some things that have finished and some things that are close to being finished and now there is another iteration of the next tier of work to be done.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Is there any performance or management monitoring of any benefit that these programs have achieved; and, if so, where would they be reported?

**Mr R. Sellers:** Members might be aware that our agency does quarterly reporting of all its statistics. There are regular meetings with the Chamber of Minerals and Energy and the Association of Mining and Exploration Companies and others. We discuss the progress of approval improvements and people can judge and critique us based on our actual performance. That is an ongoing thing. Reducing the approval times and writing in the new policies that Andrew's team have done are then reflected in the next quarterly results and discussed directly with industry.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** All reports are that approval times have blown out, so that would mean that the program was unsuccessful, would it not, minister?

**Mr R. Sellers:** It is true that in COVID, we were not meeting our targets on the lower level ones called program of works, and Andrew's team implemented some strategies that got that back to the agreed timelines that we have with industry. I might add that it also coincided with an exploration boom and a range of activity, so there was a lot of extra numbers—so well done to the team on that. That is part of the reporting we are talking about. Clearly, the Department of Energy, Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety is a portion of an approvals process.

Andrew might be able to talk a bit more, if the member is interested, on other parts of the approvals process that we deal with, but it is true that when there is a surge on, we have to adjust how we do things. We have to move things around to try to get close to or at our targets. That is an ongoing discussion with industry. I think the minister will be able to comment on it. We see industry daily. Although there are outliers—clearly, there are—and sometimes we have to lean in and help industry around the mines part of an approval process, the majority of approvals happen close to or on time.

[4.30 pm]

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** The member will remember the reforms to the Mining Amendment Act in 2022, which introduced eligible mining activities and mining development and closure proposals. As I said before, the eligible mining activity is out for consultation at the moment. It is an alternative authorisation for eligible mining activities that would otherwise require an assessment by a program of work. Having that on a very fast-tracked approval, which I would say is almost instantaneous approval, means that the assessment queue will be reduced. The mining development closure proposals will be a single application document that consolidates the information requirements of existing mining proposals and mine closure plans for mining operations, streamlining the information requirements and assessment by removing the duplication we were talking about earlier. The department and the government are always looking at further ways to make the approvals system more efficient for both staff of the department and, importantly, for proponents.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Is the Streamline WA package of work, the new approvals reform and cross-government triage team, finished?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** There is overlap between the two. There are still things that are ongoing.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Does Streamline WA still exist? Is this part of Streamline WA?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** I refer to Mr Sellers.

**Mr R. Sellers:** Some of the programs of work that were started under the Streamline WA banner still have some way to go before they are finished. The next body of work is happening over the top of that. It does not mean that things that we agreed to work on and have not yet been completed in Streamline WA are not going to be completed, whether it is in my agency or another part of government.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Pending the completion of those bodies of work, is there any more work coming into Streamline WA, under that banner? Are we done with that?

**Mr R. Sellers:** Maybe I do not understand the question. There is still a council of regulators and they still meet. They are working on the next package of work.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Part of the Premier's announcement in December was the next tranche of approval reforms. These things will always continue, no matter the name.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I refer to the "Heritage Survey Assistance Program" under "New Initiatives" on page 234. Is that one of the minister's areas?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** It is significant issue number 20 on page 236.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I have questions for the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs as well. Can the minister advise how much has been spent through this program to date? I note that the department has received 64 applications. How many of those have been finalised and settled?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs launched the program in November. It will help offset the increasing costs of conducting Aboriginal heritage surveys reported by WA's mining industry. It will run for five years and is targeted at prospectors and explorers who are actively undertaking survey works and incurring costs. DEMIRS has worked very hard to stand up the program in a short space of time with a bit of effort required behind the scenes to bring it to fruition. I am told that the first payment was made on 1 May. As of 6 May, there are currently 22 payments totalling \$113 830 pending approval.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Out of the 64 applications, 22 have been paid out since 1 May; is that correct?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** There are 22 payments pending approval.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** They are pending approval. Have they not been paid?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** They have to complete the activity before they are paid. There are 80 applications as at 6 May.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Eighty—that has gone up. Is that data published anywhere? Is it reported on, other than through budget estimates?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** It is a new program and a lot of work has gone on behind the scenes to set it up so we can support our miners. It is not currently reported, but that might be something that we consider at some point. I will take that on notice and discuss it with the department to see whether that might be possible in the future.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** My question might be ultra vires to the minister, but it should not be. I refer to mines statutory positions on page 236. They are regulated by work health and safety legislation, but because it directly affects many mines, I ask the minister whether he has been alerted to an issue about the switch to statutory positions required under the new act and the effect that it has on many small mine sites. Is the minister aware of any small mines that may be unable to continue under those new arrangements because of the burden placed on them? Is work being done by the department to assess the likely effect?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** It is not my portfolio; however, I understand the point the member is making. The acting WorkSafe Western Australia Commissioner is here, so I will ask Ms North if she can comment on that.

**Ms S. North:** Thank you. We are not aware of any impact of that type, because under the requirement to hold a statutory position, which existed under the previous mine safety laws and is in a transition phase at the moment, there is no imminent requirement due to the transitional arrangement. Throughout the transitional years up until March 2026, people who seek to transition their statutory position will have multiple opportunities to pass the legislation exam, which is an open-book legislation exam that the department offers. We are not aware of anyone getting to a situation in which it has had that kind of effect.

[4.40 pm]

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The issue is not so much that people are not aware of that. I think a number of people are also not aware of their requirements. I am talking about maybe a small pit that is open for only a few months of the year.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** A gravel pit.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** It could be a gravel pit or whatever. If they are all shut down, that makes a real problem for the state because there are not those supplies of sand or gravel or whatever is regulated under that regulation. I am aware from operators that their compatriots do not have any idea that they have to comply. One of them wrote to me. I had a letter from Mr Sato that outlined that there was a process of communicating with registered owners—the people who are registered as being responsible for that site—but I am not sure whether that message is getting out there.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** It sounds like that letter was written some time ago, but if the member wants to write to me again, even though it is within the industrial relations portfolio—the member was talking about gravel pits and those kinds of things—maybe we can have another look at it after a bit of time, noting that the transition period has been extended.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Just while I have the minister's attention on that front, one of the answers we were provided was that there are limited places where people can sit the exam. As the minister would be aware, there is a significant amount of mining activity in the north of the state, but all the centres are in the south of the state. I would suggest that, from an industry perspective, that is not an ideal outcome.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** I absolutely take that on board. If the Leader of the Opposition is writing to me, he can add that, or the member can as well, and we can have a look at that properly for her.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** The third paragraph on page 33 of budget paper No 3 refers to the support for nickel producers. We spoke about this earlier. I will read out the paragraph —

To support nickel producers, the State Government has provided a Nickel Financial Assistance Program. This Program provides a 50% rebate on royalties paid on nickel sales each quarter from the March quarter 2024 through to the June quarter 2025. The rebate will be provided if the average price of nickel is below US\$20,000 per tonne for a given quarter. The rebate will be repayable by the companies in equal quarterly instalments over the following 24 months.

As the minister pointed out this morning, the nickel price is back over \$US20 000, which is good news, of course. My first question is: exactly how much has the minister set aside for the nickel financial assistance program?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** The amount that has been set aside for the nickel financial assistance program is \$69.3 million over three financial years.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Given that Ravensthorpe is in my electorate, as the minister knows, I am very concerned about the situation with First Quantum Minerals. Given the care and maintenance that the company is potentially going into, is there a scenario of modifying the terms of this? By the time it has completed its care and maintenance, it will just about be the end of the June quarter 2025. Is there potential for that scheme to extend longer than the June 2025 quarter?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** That would have to be a decision for government. This decision is that it will go for that time. Any government could decide to extend a scheme like this. The operation of this scheme was very much modelled on previous schemes from both this government and the former government. In the future, governments could decide to vary the terms if they wished to. The scheme started in the March quarter, so it has been going for only a few months. Again, at the moment, it has a \$US20 000 cap. If the price were to stay up around \$US21 000, which I understand is primarily due to the civil unrest in New Caledonia, no-one could apply for it because the price has recovered from around the \$US15 000 mark, where it was when we introduced the scheme.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Has there been any uptake of this program up to this point?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** There has been some interest from nickel producers in the state, noting again that the scheme has been available for only a few months. I am told that FQM went some way to applying before it took the ultimate decision that it took, unfortunately. I am sure the member would have seen a nickel production cost curve somewhere in his travels. In Western Australia, we have some relatively cheap-to-produce nickel against worldwide production costs—not just in Indonesia but generally worldwide—and we have some relatively expensive nickel. I am told that, at the moment, some nickel producers in other parts of the state from where the member is based have a relatively low cost of production, in an Australian context at least. They would not qualify because to qualify for the nickel assistance, they have to open their books to the government and show that they have tried to restructure and right their finances to the point at which they cannot do anything more. It is not for every nickel producer; it is for the ones that really need it. Again, there has been interest and inquiries to the department, especially from FQM when it was still producing. It remains there for anyone who might want to apply, should the price decrease again. It provides some certainty as it has a time limit, so people can make investment decisions knowing that the scheme exists.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Can the minister confirm that, in fact, this will not cost the government anything, apart from the interest, because they will have to rebate the amount over the following two years?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Yes; like the schemes that I talked about before, which I think were for iron ore and lithium and some other commodities, the royalties are payable to government over the repayment period. The only risk for government would be that if a company went bankrupt and insolvent in the intervening period, the government would lose the royalties. It would become a creditor and probably would not see too much of it. That is the risk government takes. It has to have the money in the budget because it works on that four-year cycle.

[4.50 pm]

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I have a final question. As the minister said, the scheme is capped at \$20 000, and some producers are high-cost producers. Is there some sort of six-monthly review period during which the price of nickel or the conditions might be looked at, or is this cap set in stone? Is it that this is the program and if you do not fit into it, bad luck?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Again, I would have to go through the normal budgetary process for there to be any change to the scheme. Although it is payable, it impacts, at least temporarily, the state budget. I cannot say whether I will do that or not because it is not 100 per cent my decision; it is a government decision.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to paragraph 1, “Resource and Environmental Regulation”, under services and key efficiency indicators on page 239. It notes that part of the function of the department is to regulate the attractiveness of Western Australia as a destination of choice for resource companies, and to regulate the mining industry to ensure environmental compliance and rehabilitation, along with a number of other things. In terms of mine rehabilitation, I know that there is an abandoned mines program, which I am sure will be discussed with regard to the mining rehabilitation fund. A situation has developed in my electorate recently that was brought to my attention in which a very large hole in the ground was to be left as a large hole in the ground because the operator had declared that the mine was now in care and maintenance, despite the resource, for all intents and purposes, and as far as everyone is aware, being exhausted. Does the department see that problem happening regularly? How often are mines fully rehabilitated, and how often are they parked in care and maintenance for years and years? Has that issue been raised before? It has certainly been raised with regard to this current situation.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** The first thing I would say is that if there is a concern about a mine in the member’s electorate, he should please let me know and I will make sure that the department looks into any of the concerns that the member or his community might have.

If a mining operation enters into care and maintenance, it is not exempt from its legal responsibilities under WA’s mining laws. The mining operator must continue to comply with all relevant statutory obligations, including the payment of rent and levies and to ensure environmental protection, site safety and appropriate rehabilitation. The member talked about the mining rehabilitation fund. The tenement holder or operator is required to continue to

contribute to the mining rehabilitation fund, which, as the member knows, and as we have discussed, is for the rehabilitation of mine sites even when the company goes into liquidation. During care and maintenance, the mine operator must lodge an annual MRF report providing information on the disturbance area and types for each tenement. Mines go into care and maintenance all the time around the world, as we know. Companies obviously do it for commercial reasons based on factors like we just discussed with the nickel industry. In my short time as Minister for Mines and Petroleum, I have been given lots of examples of mining operators that are doing amazing work to rehabilitate their mine sites, including working with local communities, especially Indigenous communities, on seed collections. I have visited mine sites that have kept onsite some of the woodland that was taken away from the mine because it holds some of the very small bugs and those kinds of things. When a mining operator is ready to rehabilitate the mine site, which it does on an ongoing basis as it closes down one section to move somewhere else, it can bring those logs and things back to reintroduce that sort of stuff to the site.

Just a few years ago, a resources showcase book talked about the new technologies, thinking and strategies that underpin some of our responsible development of mines in WA, including examples such as South32's Worsley Alumina operation in Boddington and its rehabilitation of state forest; Atlas Iron in Pardoo and plant growth on waste rock landforms and species richness; Buru Energy in the Canning Basin; and Iluka Resources—I could read out a list of them but I will not. It has never been put to me before that mining operators that put a mine site into care and maintenance are abrogating their responsibility around mine rehabilitation, other than that they go into care and maintenance for commercial reasons with, I presume, the hope of coming back at some point.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** If a mine declares it is going into care and maintenance, is an assessment carried out to ensure that the mine is in a position to restart at some point? In other words, if a mine has virtually exhausted a known resource, could it sit indefinitely in care and maintenance or does the department have some mechanism it can use to investigate that; and, if so, does it do that?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** As I said, the annual reporting needs to occur, but I might ask Mr Sellers to add to this one.

**Mr R. Sellers:** I might just step back and then answer the question just asked. When a mine is put into care and maintenance, and the minister went through the sort of things that mines are obligated to do, Andrew's team will look at it. If we reach a view that the mining operator is not meeting some of its obligations around tidying up the site, maintaining it and paying into the mining rehabilitation fund through a levy, the legislation provides us with an option to bond the mining operator with unconditional bank guarantees to cover the work that it has not done. That is not normally used because most mining operators do exactly as the minister said and look after the site and roll on.

Our ability to look at a mine site and ask the operator to remediate it is impacted because our current understanding of an ore body might be a bit different to the company's prediction or aspiration. For example, the Greenbushes lithium mine, a super pit, and a range of other companies might have mined a commodity and finished it, and then government of the day—some of them 40 years ago—could have moved in and said, "You've finished that activity", when, in fact, they are piling metallic ore bodies, like the Greenbushes mine announced with part of its lithium mine. With the examples in the goldfields, some of the mining operators started mining at ounces per tonne and are now mining at grams per tonne—even one gram per tonne. It is not a discussion that normally takes place. It would need to have some very strong reasoning behind it. Simply put, it is not a discussion we would normally have unless it were raised as an issue, and we would talk about it with the company. During my time in regulating mines here and in the Northern Territory, it is more about being unlucky enough to have a mine site where the ownership somehow evaporates, and then we get into a more serious discussion.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Is there a danger that some miners might use the mining rehabilitation fund to effectively rehabilitate the mine simply by changing ownership at some point towards the end of the mine's life and, thus, avoid the need for them to pay for rehabilitation?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Again, I have never heard that accusation being made —

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** It is not an accusation; I am asking a question.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** It has never been put to me that a mining company would seek to do that maliciously, almost, but Mr Sellers might have something to add.

[5.00 pm]

**Mr R. Sellers:** Under current legislation, when a miner is operating a mine, there is a mine closure plan that is updated throughout the life of the mine. It is a public document, so the department or anyone can look at it and know the obligation a miner has. If someone is selling an asset, they are selling an asset with the liability of the mine rehabilitation plan that goes with it. As I mentioned a little bit earlier, if we were to recognise a high risk, through discussions with the minister of the day, we would look to bond a site as well as paying into the mine rehabilitation fund. There is an unconditional bank guarantee for the cost of rehabilitation, so that if an owner's funds evaporated, the money would be there. That is like a nuclear solution for that problem. Because of the way the Mining Act plays out, a mine cannot be started without a talk about rehabilitation with us, and that mechanism goes hand in hand along the life of the mine.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The concern would be that if the mine were transferred to a \$200 shelf company or something, all those liabilities would not be all that safe. I will leave my questioning at that point. I might put some questions on notice about the number of mines that enter into those circumstances and other members might have questions on this issue.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** If the member has a concern about the closure plan for a particular mine or what a miner has been up to, can he please write to me and we can get the department to check it.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I refer to the mining rehabilitation fund. I know the Marsden Jacob report has just been completed. Is there a timeline for the government to respond to the recommendations in the report?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** As the member knows, the review made a number of recommendations for the state government to consider, and although industry was involved in the review, we now want to make sure we talk to industry about those recommendations as we form our response. The department is planning to discuss the recommendations with key stakeholders and progress any potential legislative amendments in 2025.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Will the fund not change until those consultations have occurred? There was some consultation about proposed charges and contribution rates. That will happen over the course of this year, so will industry be consulted this year and then the changes will be next year, or does engagement start next year?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** I do not propose to act on any of those recommendations until there has been public consultation, which, as the member said, is likely to happen this year and next year, and then we will go forward from there.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I refer to paragraph 17 on page 236 of budget paper No 2, volume 1 and the fast-tracking mining approvals strategy. I am looking for an explanation as to why, when this was an election commitment made in 2021, we will not see the introduction of the first module of this strategy until the last quarter of this year. Referring to the department's Resources Online, which the minister was speaking about earlier, the portal launch and first release will be in September 2024, but I understand the commitment to introduce it was made in 2021. Is there a reason why it has taken so long? What will be available to industry in the release of the first phase?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** The member is correct that it was an election commitment, with funding of approximately \$27.4 million over the four years. There are two pillars. The first pillar is to increase resources to improve processes and regulatory oversight and introduce minor improvements such as the Warden's Court integration, online approvals tracking and lodgement simplifications. I am told that the first pillar has been implemented. We have increased resources and delivered minor enhancements within the allocated budget.

The second pillar is what is to come, which is the undertaking of a digital transformation initiative to expand and modernise the existing Department of Energy, Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety digital capability, reduce assessment timeframes and improve service delivery. That is worth \$14.3 million over the four years to 2024–25, and there is an ongoing cost of \$1.6 million, inclusive of five FTE. The second pillar is to complete procurement activities and finalise design discovery, resulting in the formal engagement of a service contractor, with nearly \$3 million of capital and \$1.9 million of operational funding allocated in 2023–24 to commence delivery and development of the digital solution Resources Online.

It is not as if nothing has happened in the last couple of years. I am sure that the member knows that as we digitise government and the world, new online systems will take some time to plan and get right before we can start building architecture around them. I might ask Mr Chaplyn to give us a quick run-down of Resources Online with the current update.

**Mr A. Chaplyn:** In addition to what the minister has just outlined about the two pillars, in concert with those two pillars we also had to make some amendments to the Mining Act to allow some of these changes to happen in the processes. We had those amendments passed in 2022 and early 2023, and it obviously took some resources to get that work done. We worked on a new digital system, going through the Office of Digital Government, and had to make sure that what we were proposing was in line with the government's direction. That has been quite fruitful for us. The member might be aware that the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation has been working on Environment Online. We have tried to make our system able to talk to that, and in the future we will see even more benefits from information coming into both of our systems and we will be able to transmit information between the two. There has been some great forward thinking. We will be ready in September for the first use of Resources Online, and it will modernise some of our old environmental assessment and regulatory systems. It is a great step forward on what we are doing. The regulations are just getting finalised now, the system will kick off in September and there will be full implementation by early next year. For us, it is still on track and on budget in terms of our spending.

Referring to the some of the things that the member has been talking about such as the plans and some of the work, when an approval is in the queue on the system, we will be able to see what has been worked on, so what we are doing and reporting will be a lot more transparent. It is a big step forward for us on making the system work for industry and ourselves.

The other component that has been mentioned is eligible mining activities. Parts of those low-disturbance areas, for some of the smaller programs and work, will, more or less, get automatic approval. We have set the parameters so that if the proponent is under those triggers, it will just about be an instant approval. Obviously, the proponent will need to have computer access for those, so maybe some of the prospectors and smaller groups may have to make sure they have that ability, but it will definitely speed up some of those processes and allow us to focus our attention on some of the more complex and bigger approvals as they come into the system.

[5.10 pm]

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Thank you for that information.

Can the minister confidently say that this is on time and on budget? I note that paragraph 18 refers to the WA array project and very specifically states it will be “on time and on budget”. This one will be within the allocated budget. Have there been delays in the development of this project? Given that we are now in the final year of this term of government, would it be fair to characterise that as something that has been delayed?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Mr Sellers.

**Mr R. Sellers:** Thanks, minister. Clearly, I had issues such as skills shortages. Trying to employ 22-odd people had its challenges. If we characterise delays like that, yes; it has had small delays, but it is largely on track.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I am sorry; there was a lot of information in the answer that was provided before. When I looked at the website, it referred to the project being delivered in phases—so phases 2, 3 and 4—but dates were not attached to them. Did one of the minister’s advisers just refer to the dates?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** We are hoping to go live in September, for stage 1.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Will stage 1 go live in September?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Stage 1 goes live in September.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** When will the further stages go live? Are there dates? How many dates? What are they?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Mr Chaplyn.

**Mr A. Chaplyn:** I do not have all those dates with me, but we will have finished by the end of 2024–25.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Is it possible to get the information about the stages and the dates?

**Mr A. Chaplyn:** Yes.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** We are happy to make that supplementary information.

**The CHAIR:** For the record, does the minister agree to provide the supplementary information; and, if so, please state exactly what information will be provided.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** We will provide the proposed implementation timeline of Resources Online.

[*Supplementary Information No A25.*]

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I refer to page 250 of the same budget paper. I think it is mentioned in other places, but does the critical minerals advanced processing common-user facility fall within the minister’s bailiwick? It is under expenses, in the table of details of administered transactions, with—I cannot say that acronym—MRIWA, or the Minerals Research Institute of Western Australia.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** MRIWA—like the place.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I understand that the CMAP will be funded with \$100 million from the state’s contribution. Is that correct? That contribution is conditional upon the commonwealth confirming that it will contribute \$100 million, but I did not see \$100 million in the federal budget; I saw \$10.2 million. At what point will the minister have confidence that the remaining funds are coming from the commonwealth so that he has confidence in his budget figures?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** We think this proposal very much stacks up and will help the critical minerals industry in Western Australia. It will focus on upstream activity, such as the recycling of mining waste and tailings, and midstream activities such as minerals processing, high-purity metal refining and advanced mature manufacturing activities, with the aim of providing common-use pilot plan equipment to support the growth and diversification of WA’s resources and industries. Organisations such as the Association of Mining and Exploration have done a lot of work on this, and I very much thank them for that. The former minister, when I took over the portfolio, described this as like a bit of a toyshop for critical minerals. The facility will have some relatively expensive equipment. Currently, smaller players, especially, have to send samples and things overseas and do that kind of thing, and they will have somewhere that they can do that. Therefore, we very much think that this project stacks up.

We chose to put our contribution in the budget and not under a contingent liability or anything like that. It is appropriated even though it has the asterisk next to it. We think it stacks up, and we want to spend the next year advocating for it to the federal government. The member would be well aware that even before the federal budget there were already varied grant programs in the critical minerals space. There are funding programs that can be accessed. We think this stacks up. We hope to use a bit of the \$10 million from the federal government fund for



what it calls “feasibility work”. It is for this kind of thing across Australia. We hope that we might be able to access some of that fund for pre-planning work for this particular one. Again, we will continue to advocate for it to the federal government.

We took the decision to have this as a budget line item. I think it is important for us to show the federal government that we have actual money on the table, and that it is not a case of “Let’s talk about it.” We actually have some money on the table that is ready to go, so we will advocate for it to the federal government and that will be ongoing. Given we know where the demand for critical minerals will go worldwide—even though there will be the odd price fluctuation and those kinds of things—I cannot see a world in which we will not need a lot of the rare earths and critical minerals for batteries and cars and all those other things that are coming in pretty fast in societies around the world.

This will be an incredible asset to not only WA, but also the country. I hope that we will continue to talk to the federal government about that. We have a great federal Minister for Resources, She knows about this project, and I will continue to work with her.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** What will the funding that is appropriated in the budget be spent on? Will any of it be spent in advance of getting that guarantee from the commonwealth? Is it contingent on being released—to have the full \$100 million guaranteed and in the budget—from the commonwealth?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** At the moment, we are still working through what pre-works we might be able to fund and how we might be able to do that from this fund. That is something that we are still working on, but it is very much front of mind.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Is there an idea about where this might be located? We have an amazing minerals province in the goldfields. We have an emerging one down in the south west.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Given the map of our critical resources, this could go in many locations. Some initial ideas have been to put it somewhere on the western trade coast or somewhere regional like Kalgoorlie. There is no set place where it has to go. The main thing we want is for it to be accessible to these companies.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** What kind of facility or infrastructure does it need to be? Will it be a brand new build? Is it something that exists and can be enhanced? Are we talking about a greenfields startup? Is it something that can be done relatively quickly, or we will still be talking about it in 10 years’ time?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Mr Sellers might be able to answer that.

**Mr R. Sellers:** Thanks, minister. Thanks, member. A large portion of potentially \$200 million will go on pieces of equipment. Although the common-user facility cannot go completely anywhere, it does not necessarily need to have a purpose-built building for it. There are plenty of equivalents where it could go. I am going to say sheds, but it would be better than a shed. On the point of where it might go, as the minister said, we would want the facility near an ecosystem that supports it and has allied activity around it—potentially the Western Trade Coast or Kalgoorlie and other areas. Nicole Roocke and her team did a lot of work on what that potential looks like. They talked to the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation and did the Neerabup robotics and a couple of other facilities that had a similar gestation. That is the work that is also being done at the moment. It is not unusual for the commonwealth to put just a small amount into it. That is not unusual for big funding proposals that we work through with the commonwealth. If it steps in and helps to do the business case, we are much more confident about the other money coming.

[5.20 pm]

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I am not entirely sure about this, but it looks to me as though the funding of \$100 million from the minister’s budget comes from the collection of mining tenement rental revenue. I am not sure how much that fluctuates, but the government would want that to be the first dollar, as opposed to the last dollar, if it is relying on being able to deliver that, or having to then go back and find it from consolidated revenue. It says in the notes that this is now being collected by the department. Who was it collected by previously? Note (b) on page 250 states that the department will collect additional revenue for MTR from 2024–25 onwards.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** The director general might answer that.

**Mr R. Sellers:** It is part of our normal process to collect the fees and revenue streams.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Could you explain for me why there was a necessity to include note (b)? Does “additional revenue” mean that is going up?

**Mr R. Sellers:** Fees and charges regularly have a consumer price index or percentage increase and I was referring to that.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Okay. It just says “increased revenue”. Is it just CPI or is there an intent to increase the funds that are collected through the mining tenement rental? Is it an increase in the charge or an increase in the quantum that will be charged? How is it determined?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** The mining exploration rentals have gone up for a couple of years in a row now. That glide path —

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** So it is a hypothecated fund—it is estimated?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Yes.

**Mr R. Sellers:** It is not a hypothecation in the true sense. It is recognising a revenue stream and governments choosing to spend that equivalent amount.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I turn to the potash financial assistance program under expenses on page 250. The potash industry—this is something the government itself said—had a lot of upside for regional economies, particularly our agricultural sector. I note that \$795 000 was budgeted, but only \$85 000 has been accessed, which is around 10 per cent of what was budgeted. Would the minister like to provide a comment on whether that particular assistance program has been useful in light of the number of businesses that have failed over the past three years? This is something the Leader of the Opposition has pursued for some time.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** It is fair to say that some potash producers have made commercial decisions, including one entering administration and others surrendering mining leases. Although that scheme has been running, some of the producers have not been able to have the success they wanted—and that we all wanted.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Further to that, the scheme was fairly limited in its application. It did not meet certain criteria. I forget the windows of opportunity, but there was probably only one project that was ever going to be able to meet the timelines that were laid out. It should come as no surprise that it has not been taken up. I wonder whether the government regrets the decision to not listen to the industry and to adjust the royalty rate that was applied to the potash product, which I think was five per cent of the value, and instead to have rated it as salt like it had suggested. Perhaps then we might have a potash industry instead of none.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** I remind members of the 50 per cent royalty rebate that was established in the 2022–23 budget. In November 2022, it was extended for two years to provide a non-repayable 50 per cent rebate on royalties to companies that made the first sulphate of potash sales before the end of 2027. As opposed to most of the other royalty rebates, this one was non-repayable. I am told that the former minister also gave some rent relief to some of those companies. I was not in cabinet when these decisions were made, so I cannot talk to whether it is regretted or anything like that. I know that was significant support that we tried to give the industry. I also know—I will not go into it now because it involves the companies concerned and I do not want to publicly talk about their difficulties—that the companies have had some difficulties with things that are beyond the government's control.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** They had difficulties and they alerted the government to the fact that they would not be able to finance their projects under the royalty regime that the government insisted upon. That was the difficulty. What happened was always going to happen. Anyway, that is a comment, not a question.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I appreciate that the minister was not in cabinet at the beginning of 2018, but the previous Premier and previous minister on behalf of the government, which is still the government, announced a commitment from this government to assist in the development of a potash and minerals in brine industry in Western Australia. Has that changed? Is there still a desire to assist the development of a potash industry in WA?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** The assistance program is still available. I make a point of meeting most producers who want to talk to me and outline concerns. If someone wants to put something to me, I am always willing to listen. I make the point that obviously the potash price has decreased significantly worldwide. In any government support we give, whether state or federal, when dealing with world commodity prices, royalties will be a small proportion of the issue. The former minister gave rent relief to some producers, but I am always willing to listen to arguments if there is more we can do.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I am not advocating for any particular company; I am just pointing out that the government said it had an interest in developing a potash industry in Western Australia. It has importance for the mining industry and also the agricultural sector. It has great upside if the government can make it work. I am just asking whether there is a strategy or whether it was just a statement.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Is the member asking whether we support the industry?

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I am asking whether there is a strategy within government to go down the path of developing a potash industry. We talk about critical minerals and having a multifactorial strategy and initiatives—not just royalty relief or some of the support mechanisms we have talked about, which clearly did not hit the mark—and then there are business factors well. What is the government doing, other than making the statement that there is a desire for it to happen? How are we supporting the development of an industry?

[5.30 pm]

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** I will continue to look at any support we are able to give to the potash industry or any other mineral or mines and petroleum commodity, but as I said, the state government has already provided significant support to the industry, including the royalty rebate scheme, mining lease rent concessions, payments extensions,

specific mining rehabilitation fund levy rates and investments in infrastructure. Again, if there are proponents who wish to start producing potash again, or to continue or to start up production, I am willing to meet with them and listen to their concerns and how they think the state government might be able to help.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I have a new question. I refer to page 234 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. In the “Spending Changes” table, under “New Initiatives”, there is the line item “Office Accommodation Consolidation”. I am looking for a bit of detail on this line item and whether the consolidation of offices has had any impact on the regional presence. Have any regional offices been closed or relocated, or is that anticipated going forward?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** That \$3.8 million to be invested in the budget and over the forward estimates is to start work on consolidating the department’s five metropolitan offices into a single lease premises in the CBD.

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

**The appropriation was recommended.**

**Gold Corporation —**

Mrs M.R. Marshall, Chair.

Mr D.R. Michael, Minister for Mines and Petroleum.

Mr P. Graham, Chief Executive Officer.

Mr T. Leach, General Manager, Financial Management and Recording.

Ms R. O’Toole, Chief of Staff, Minister for Mines and Petroleum.

Ms D. Plummer, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. In that instance I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 31 May 2024. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

I give the call to the Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to page 253 and the heading “Significant Issues Impacting the Government Trading Enterprise”. There is a paragraph on the Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre, or AUSTRAC, that states, in part —

On 30 August 2022, AUSTRAC ordered the appointment of an external auditor ...

Can the minister confirm whether PricewaterhouseCoopers was the external auditor?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** I am in a bit of a bind; it is AUSTRAC’s appointed auditor. AUSTRAC has not publicly released the name and the government has not publicly released the name, so I do not think I can answer that.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Okay. I have a further question on the appointment. Does the minister know on what date the auditor was appointed and whether the contract has been renewed or is continuing?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** It was appointed on 30 August 2022, and it is continuing.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** It is continuing now. Does the minister know what date it will continue to?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Through to the end of the program and the enforceable undertaking, which is in April 2025.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Can the minister enlighten me as to whether that particular auditor is providing any other services for the organisation whilst being the external auditor?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** The auditor is engaged by AUSTRAC, so when the member says “the organisation”, is he talking about AUSTRAC or Gold Corporation?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I am talking about the Perth Mint and Gold Corporation.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** That auditor does not do any other work with Gold Corporation.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Okay, thank you. I have a new question on the discussion around the enforceable undertaking, which was highlighted in the discussion point I quoted earlier. Has the minister kept abreast of the matters around the enforceable undertaking? Has he had any briefings about that situation?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Along with an initial briefing as minister, the CEO and I have a briefing once a month. As the member can imagine, issues to do with AUSTRAC and the enforceable undertaking feature heavily.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Thank you. In those discussions, has Perth Mint highlighted any risks to the taxpayer or to the organisation from the carriage of the enforceable undertaking?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Could the member expand on the risks he is talking about?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The risk of not being able to comply with the requirements under the enforceable undertaking or the risk that, at some point, AUSTRAC may indeed impose some sort of penalty.

[5.40 pm]

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** I am pleased to advise that the anti–money laundering remediation program implementation remains on track. That has been verified by the Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre auditor, who continues to look into these matters.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Can the minister outline the total amount of funds that have been required to comply with the enforceable undertaking to date?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** There is \$34 million in total set aside to strengthen anti–money laundering systems and to process any historic noncompliance issues. As I said, that enforceable undertaking will remain in place until it is completed, which is due for April next year.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I will just go back to the question I asked about the risk to the organisation. Has the minister been advised of any possible future penalties for the Perth Mint or Gold Corporation as a result of the AUSTRAC inquiries and the current situation?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** I am advised and have been briefed that it would be highly unlikely that any penalties come forward, especially given that the Perth Mint is on track, and in some cases out in front, with progress on the enforceable undertaking.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Is there a contingency fund or anything set aside in case there is such a penalty in the future?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** No, there is not.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I will ask a further question on the issue of paragraph 5. Leading up to the situation in which there was the appointment of an external auditor, there had been a number of circumstances in which noncompliance was identified in internal audits at Gold Corporation, including one in 2020. I think there might have been another in 2018, with one very early on in 2011. In at least those three reports, there was the identification of breaches of the Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing Act obligations. Was that circumstance made known to the minister at the time that he had his initial briefing or in conversation since around the Perth Mint?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Obviously, as part of my special initial briefings, this issue was discovered in depth. The Gold Corp briefed me about the self-disclosure of those historical compliance issues to the federal regulator AUSTRAC, which it did in early 2021. The briefing then very much covered what work the Gold Corp has done since then and plans to do as part of the enforceable undertaking and within all systems of the mint.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I am bearing in mind that I know none of the individuals here were probably around at the time—although I do not know that about Mr Graham, I take it he has not been there that long. Is the minister aware of, or are there records of, any of these three occasions in which those compliance shortfalls occurred and it was drawn to the attention of the responsible minister of the day?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** That would obviously be very difficult to answer. Some of it would go into the former coalition government as well and its minister at the time—whoever that was, I am not sure. If the member has something specific about what records were kept, then I am happy to answer.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I am just asking about the occasions in which those breaches occurred and whether they were brought to the attention of the Premier of the day in 2021.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** With this being an estimates committee, I am not in a position to answer that, obviously.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Perhaps the organisation may have some knowledge or record of that?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** Again, it would be very difficult to answer. An estimates briefing talks about what is in the budget. Perhaps the member could try to put in a freedom of information request for those documents. I do not know. This is an estimates briefing talking about the work that is currently going on.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I am still on this significant issue at paragraph 5. Noting that the inquiry on Perth Mint and its regulatory failures is actually going on at the moment in the Senate, were any Western Australian government officials, Treasury officials or persons related to the department of the relevant minister called to appear in those Senate hearings?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** I think that if the member looks back on the transcripts of the Senate, he will see that a whole host of witnesses have appeared, some of whom have been from the Gold Corporation. That is notwithstanding the many requests for information and documentation from the Senate inquiry that the Gold Corp has complied with.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Is the minister aware of whether any government officials refused to appear?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** To my knowledge, many government officials have appeared. I know that from time to time, some have been unable to appear. However, they have always been very happy to have questions put to them to respond to in writing, as I believe some have done in the past. I think the Gold Corp is doing its best with over 250 written questions so far to comply with the committee's requirements.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I again refer to the significant issues impacting the government trading enterprise in the budget paper. The retained dividend is mentioned in paragraph 3. Can the minister tell me whether there is a business case for the spending of that dividend payment and the funding of future infrastructure? If so, has that been prepared?

[5.50 pm]

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** The member will note that elsewhere in the budget papers, over the last year or so and this coming year, there have been some improvements to the machinery at the refinery out near the airport. This is using dividends retained in the past. All those projects had business cases that had to go to the Expenditure Review Committee and through the budget process. For any new retained dividend, the same process would apply, which is that any business case for the strategic infrastructure requirements of Gold Corporation would be subject to approval by the ERC.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I asked this question of the Treasurer and did not get anywhere. We are talking here again about significant issue 5 and the risks that holding the organisation poses to the taxpayer given that it is a guarantee of the organisation. As a result, an options analysis was undertaken into the appropriateness or otherwise of the current ownership structure. My question is: has that analysis been completed and is the minister aware of the result of the analysis?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** It is a Treasury question. The options analysis was conducted by Treasury. I am aware that work was being done on that analysis, but I cannot say too much more than that.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** We have a budget estimates process in which I ask both the relevant minister and the Treasurer and still cannot get an answer on whether that options analysis is complete or whether it has made a report.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** It is the Treasury's analysis so I am sorry; I cannot give the member more than that.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** That is sad but, anyway, I have a couple of other questions that are more about the trading position of the organisation. The item at the very bottom of page 252 is "Trade Update". I am wondering whether the minister could outline what that particular item under "Financial Changes" refers to.

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** As the member would understand, we are dealing with commodities—primarily gold, silver and platinum. With the coin mintage, the bullion and the other refining that goes on, the trade update reflects not only changes to this year, but also a future prediction of a combination of all those things onto the balance sheet of Gold Corporation.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to page 254 and the outcomes and key performance indicators. The table towards the bottom of the page shows an "Estimated % of Australian gold doré production refined". The footnote states —

This calculation is based on the refinery's records and an estimate of the total Australian gold doré production.

First of all, how confident is the minister that that is an accurate estimate of the total amount of production and, therefore, how confident is the minister that the Gold Corporation's share of the refinery market sits at 80 per cent?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** I am confident when we look at the 2022–23 actual of 78 per cent, the estimated actual of 80 per cent and then the budget target of 80 per cent, but I might ask Mr Graham to make any other comments on that one.

**Mr P. Graham:** I thank the member for the question. Yes, that percentage of newly mined gold across Australia has been consistent now for a number of years, so we retain the confidence that that percentage that we have both today and in the forward period remains.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I know there is competition in the market as a refinery. Could the minister explain what are the drivers for someone to choose who refines their gold? Is it on cost? Is there some other factor that would drive a choice?

**Mr P. Graham:** Yes, cost is certainly a factor, but it is not the only one. Something that plays very heavily in our favour is our history. We have been supporting the gold industry for 125 years. The government ownership of Gold Corporation is certainly a factor and, of course, we need to understand and value the relationships we have and service them accordingly. Each has their own requirements to be serviced and we have a really good grasp of that. The feedback we typically get from each producer is they really enjoy and value the relationship.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Mr Graham mentioned government ownership. Does the government guaranteeing the value and the store of gold have any part to play in that market share as well?

**Mr P. Graham:** Yes, it does. It is certainly a factor.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Could the minister perhaps give some idea of what would be the effect if that government ownership or that guarantee were removed?

**Mr D.R. MICHAEL:** It is hypothetical and, obviously, no decision such as that has been made, so we will not —

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I am trying to find out some way or another. I do not have any more questions for the Gold Corporation. I just thank you for coming along and answering as best as you possibly could.

**The CHAIR:** That completes the examination of the Gold Corporation off-budget authority.

*Meeting suspended from 5.57 to 7.00 pm*

[7.00 pm]

**Division 29: Fire and Emergency Services —**

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Ms J.L. Hanns, Parliamentary Secretary representing the Minister for Emergency Services.

Ms M. Pexton, Acting Commissioner.

Mr C. Waters, Deputy Commissioner.

Mr D. Mosconi, Assistant Commissioner.

Mr M. Carter, Executive Director.

Mr P. Leach, Executive Director.

Ms G. Camarda, Chief Finance Officer.

Mr M. Dixon, Principal Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 31 May 2024. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system.

The member for Moore.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to page 450 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and “Additional Firefighters” under the heading “New Initiatives”. Close to \$23 million is spread across the budget and forward estimates to provide additional firefighters. Can the parliamentary secretary confirm that that represents a net increase of 60 FTE firefighters to Western Australia’s career fire and rescue service?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** Yes, \$23.014 million was approved over the forward estimates period to fund 60 additional career firefighters to provide adequate resourcing for emergency management services throughout WA. The purpose of that is to bolster the frontline service of the firefighting unit. It is an ongoing commitment and over the next four years the additional 60 career firefighters will be online and employed in the career fire and rescue service. DFES is WA’s leading emergency management agency, delivering emergency management services to over 2.8 million Western Australians across regional and metro areas as legislated in the Emergency Management Act 2005. Due to a combination of demand and supply issues in recent years, the department has increasingly relied on overtime to meet minimum crewing requirements and deliver services. As a response to that clearly demonstrated need for those additional 60 personnel, the decision was made to fund those services. There are a couple of reasons for that, including fire seasons becoming longer and more severe; fire and emergency services personnel being more regularly deployed to assist with major incidents locally and nationally; and the increasing scale, severity and overlapping of incidents. Is there anything the commissioner would like to add to that?

**Ms M. Pexton:** I reiterate that the proposed onboarding of those will be 20 in each of the financial years, commencing and phased, starting from 2024–25 through to 2026–27. There will be 20 firefighters onboarded during each of those three years.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Further to that, on page 454 under delivery of frontline services, it looks to be only 11 FTE from 2023–24 to 2024–25. Does that include those 20, or is that a different number of personnel?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** There is a note on page 454 with an explanation of the significant movements around that. It states —

The increase between the 2023–24 Budget compared to the 2023–24 Estimated Actual is primarily due to wages growth in line with the public sector wages policy and cost pressures ... In addition, some FTEs and associated expenditure were allocated to this service to more accurately reflect the timing of trainee firefighters being deployed to stations. The 2024–25 Budget Target reflects reductions in temporary FTEs and expenditure associated with enhanced recovery activities primarily in relation to Ex-TC Ellie, partially offset by an increase in costs associated with the employment of 20 additional firefighters in 2024–25 (the first tranche of an additional 60 firefighters).

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Rather than 60 additional firefighters, there are nine fewer than the claim. There are 51 extra FTE, not 60, over the period.

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** I will direct that to the commissioner.

**Ms M. Pexton:** Thank you. I will get confirmation from our CFO, Ms Camarda.

**Ms G. Camarda:** Those FTE numbers relate to full-time equivalent employees under that frontline service. It talks about movement in FTEs in the recovery services space in CFRS—there is a number of FTEs that have gone up and down and that is the net impact. The 20 firefighters are included in that count. It is a net impact. That is why the note disclosure explains the movement in the FTE number.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The claim is that there are 60 extra firefighters, at 20 a year. Instead of that, in the first year there are 11 extra firefighters because of retrenchments of some additional people who were put on during the emergency situation. In fact, the claim is not quite right. There are actually 51 extra FTE compared to the FTE in 2023–24.

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** I refer that to the commissioner.

**Ms M. Pexton:** Thank you. I think the adjustments and the 11 FTE that the member is referring to relate to, as our CFO has explained, the adjustments in the FTE bases from this year. The additional 60 firefighters are the ones we are onboarding, with the 20, 20 and 20, with an overall total of 60 FTE for firefighters.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Thank you; with a reduction of nine to begin with, there will be 51 extra firefighters than existed before.

**The CHAIR:** Is that a question or a statement?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** It is a statement, and I think we will move on from that matter. I think our positions have been made known.

Will this extra \$23 million be funded through the emergency services levy or through consolidated revenue?

[7.10 pm]

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** It is consolidated revenue.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** On page 455 under “Works In Progress”, the table refers to “Primary Fire and Emergency Fleet” as part of the vehicle replacement program. Do the new fire trucks that are being introduced into service have the rollover protection fitted to them; the primary fire vehicles that are being brought into service?

**Mr D. Mosconi:** No; they do not have rollover protection, although we are investigating implementing rollover protection on some of our appliances.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** My understanding is, and I am happy to be corrected on this, when the minister was looking at vehicles, an assessment was done on the relevant risk. The risk of vehicles fitted with airbags was chosen over a vehicle alternative that had rollover protection. When I was told that, I was intrigued. As I said, I am happy to be further informed on that matter. We have seen a number of vehicle rollovers. I would have thought that as fire vehicles are required to go into extremely difficult terrain, a rollover would be a more likely hazard in operational duty as opposed to minimising harm with airbags in vehicles. I am happy for comment on that and why airbags were prioritised over rollover protection. You are the experts, but my intuitive thought is that a rollover was a greater risk to human life than needing airbag protection.

**Mr C. Waters:** Correct me if I am wrong, but I thought it was the other way in relation to airbags. We moved away from having our bushfire response vehicles equipped with airbags because of their inadvertent activation while traversing through rough terrain and potential impacts from small shrubs on the way through. We shied away from introducing that type of vehicle into the fleet. Recent reviews have identified that rollover protection is required, and so we are undertaking the review to look at what our future fleet will look like going forward.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I will be specific rather than talk in generalities. I was informed by the local vehicle manufacturer OKA that the reason that vehicle was rejected, or the reason it was told that its vehicle had been rejected, was because it did not have airbags. It does have superb rollover protection intrinsically built into the vehicle’s chassis,

whereas the vehicles that were chosen were imported vehicles that had airbags but did not have rollover protection. I think the point raised is very logical and reasonable. When you are crashing through the bush, you do not want the airbags going off and blinding drivers. But if airbags are subsequently not required, I am interested in the selection criteria that were then used for the vehicles.

**Mr D. Mosconi:** I am not sure exactly why a particular model of vehicle was not chosen. That was part of the procurement process. From an operational perspective, although it is dangerous driving through the bush at a job, our most dangerous time is probably getting to an incident travelling under lights and sirens, exceeding the speed limit and going through uncontrolled and controlled intersections. I suggest airbags are important, but we want to have as many safety features as we can and include those in our vehicles. A lot of that comes down to a risk assessment process. As I said earlier, we are looking to see if we can implement rollover and full-on protection onto our trucks.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** What is the anticipated timeline? I did not study this in detail, but by reading the paper I noted there have been a number of firefighting vehicle rollovers in recent times because we have had really severe fires in difficult terrain. Is there some sort of timeline for fitting rollover protection to the vehicles?

**Mr D. Mosconi:** No; we do not have an anticipated timeframe at this stage, although, as DC Waters advised, we are aware of some recent reviews. We are actively looking at what we can do in that space.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** On page 457, there is a line item for “Local Government—Community Emergency Service Managers”. It states a budget figure for this particular year and an estimated actual of \$2 713 000, which is the same as the following year and increases fairly lightly in subsequent years. Why has there not been any increase in the funding in this program? I understand that a number of local governments have indicated that they would like to participate in the program but have been told that it is oversubscribed. I think there are at least seven local governments that we are aware of that have been unsuccessful in receiving funding. Could the parliamentary secretary explain why this is a static fund throughout the forward estimates when we have that demonstrated shortfall?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** Firstly, at the outset, I would like to say that this has been a highly successful program. It is oversubscribed, which certainly indicates how successful that program has been. By way of background, local governments are responsible for emergency management across the prevention, preparedness, response and recovery spectrum. That is in relation to the Bush Fires Act 1954. Local governments are directly responsible for bush fire brigades. The community emergency service managers program was established in 2003 and provides the capacity to share costs associated with the delivery of emergency management services with local governments to assist them to build safe and resilient communities. The objectives of the program are basically in partnership with local government to enhance emergency services management doing things like coordinating and delivering strategic mitigation programs with stakeholders to reduce the impacts of the consequences of bushfires in the local community. They operate within a set of consistent protocols and equipment standards. There are others that I will not go through, but I can read them out if the member would like me to.

Essentially, the five key areas of focus for community emergency service managers are bushfire risk management plan development and maintenance; support for local government to comply with the emergency management legislative requirements; the development of volunteer capacity and capability to maintain competencies and skills; the provision of hazard and community engagement programs, which is incredibly important to educate local communities about fire hazards and emergency incidents; and operational response coordination in the local government jurisdiction area. We currently have 34 community emergency service managers who support 57 local governments across the state. Of those CESMs, 27 are local government employees and seven are Department of Fire and Emergency Services employees—27 plus seven equals 34. I am happy to see whether the commissioner would like to provide any further information about the role, but there is no additional funding in this budget.

[7.20 pm]

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I do not need any information on the role. I am aware of the role. I am also aware that a number of local governments have not been able to participate in the program because it is fully subscribed at its current funding level. The question is to the parliament secretary, not anyone within the organisation, because it is a matter for government. If the government was aware that a shortfall existed, why did it not increase the funding? In answering, perhaps the parliamentary secretary could advise whether she is aware whether the minister’s office or the department received any requests from the Western Australian Local Government Association or any other local government to increase the level of funding?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** As the member can see across the forward estimates, the funding is static. It is a successful program that is fully subscribed and at this stage there is no additional funding in the budget to expand that program. The member asked a question about local governments that have applied—can the member just repeat that section of question for me again?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I know that a number of local governments have applied for the program. In making a consideration about whether to increase the amount of funding for the program, has the minister’s office or the department been approached by any of the local governments or WALGA about the need to increase the funding?



**Ms J.L. HANNS:** The program has been very successful and it has been approached by other local governments. DFES will continue to look at different operational approaches and alternative regional service delivery options. WALGA included this in its pre-budget submission and a number of local governments were also involved, but I can certainly refer to the commissioner for other examples or strategies.

**Ms M. Pexton:** Thank you for the question, member. The parliamentary secretary is right; we have had a number of advances from local governments, and WALGA's budget submission certainly included a position that sought support for some additional resources, particularly for CESMs. This is an ongoing success from many of the activities that the department has been undertaking in terms of bushfire risk management mitigation activities, and certainly through the Rural Fire Division with a real focus on what those bushfire management activities could be. We, as a department, continue to provide options to government around what that will look like going forward, but a number of activities in the bushfire space support local governments across the board.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I have a final question. I am aware of seven local governments that have applied for funding support. Can the parliamentary secretary confirm how many local governments have applied for CESM funding support that have not been successful?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** Can I just clarify that question? The member said that he was aware of seven —

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I am aware of seven, but can the parliamentary secretary confirm how many local governments have approached the government for funding support that have not been successful?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** Thank you for the question, member. We cannot confirm that number, but my adviser tells me that it is close to the number that the member mentioned. I am sorry but we do not have the specific numbers in front of us this evening.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to the table on page 450 of volume 2 of budget paper No 2 and the line item "Consolidated Emergency Services Acts" under ongoing initiatives. The funding for that line item is \$1.202 million in 2024–25 and \$1.078 million in 2025–26. It has been scaled down to \$504 000 in 2026–27 and there is no funding in 2027–28. Can the parliamentary secretary provide an update on the consolidated emergency services acts?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** I thank the member for the question. Modernising the fire and emergency services legislation in Western Australia is a critical undertaking by the government. It is driven by the recognition that existing statutes such as the Fire Brigades Act 1942, the Bush Fires Act 1954 and the Fire and Emergency Services Act 1998 need more clarity, interoperability and consistency. Evidence from coroner's reports, inquiries and stakeholder feedback point to the urgent need for reform. The state government embarked on a journey to craft a new and improved act. On 8 April 2019, the cabinet approved drafting of the exposure draft bill for community consultation around that, presenting a model for the new legislation. Parliamentary Counsel's Office commenced drafting the exposure draft bill. Financial analysis is underway and the Department of Fire and Emergency Services had engaged the Western Australian Treasury Corporation to develop a cost model for implementing the new act. Cabinet and parliamentary processes will follow, including public consultation for at least three months once cabinet approves the release of the exposure draft bill. Feedback from stakeholders will be absolutely crucial in refining the legislation, with cabinet approval sought for new drafting instructions for the final bill to be introduced to Parliament.

It is really important to understand that overhauling three pieces of quite old legislation and consolidating them into a single act is a formidable task for the drafters and everybody involved in that work. The prioritisation of this work has resulted in significant progress from the government's perspective. When released, the consultation draft bill will provide stakeholders with a proposed legislative model aimed at making Western Australia a safer state.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Can the parliamentary secretary outline what those three amounts of funding are actually for?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** I will defer that question to the commissioner.

**Ms M. Pexton:** That funding is inclusive of some FTE to support this significant project. Obviously, we are doing some significant consultation processes in that. We also heard about how we are engaging with the Western Australian Treasury Corporation, and some other activities around engagement and consultation are inclusive in those figures.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** The DFES website states that —

It may take several years to develop the new CES Act and the supporting regulations.

Is this a concession that this bill will not be passed during this Parliament?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** I am going to defer that question to the commissioner. Just by way of clarification, the exposure draft bill is still being drafted. As parliamentary secretary, I have no understanding of where that is at the moment, so I will defer to the commissioner.

[7.30 pm]

**Ms M. Pexton:** Yes, it is still under drafting at this point in time, and as soon as it is finished drafting and it goes through the normal parliamentary process, it will be released as an exposure draft bill.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Given that this started in April 2019 and we are five years down the road, I interpret that to mean that this will not be passed during this Parliament.

**Mr P.C. TINLEY:** Is that a statement or a question, chair?

**The CHAIR:** Patience. Member for Roe. Thank you, member for Willagee.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** What is the status of the interagency working group formed to provide advice on the act, and when did it last meet?

**Ms M. Pexton:** That interagency working group continues to meet. I do not have the very last date that it met with me, but it is still an active group that, as I indicated, is still being consulted for the purposes of the drafting.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I note that on 12 September 2023 the minister told Parliament that the exposure draft bill would be released for stakeholder consultation in early 2024. That obviously will not be the case. I know the parliamentary secretary has outlined the timeline, but it would appear that that timeline has been delayed. Can the parliamentary secretary put any cause or reason behind that delay?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** We still have a month to go, but I will defer that question to the commissioner.

**Ms M. Pexton:** We are continuing to draft; that is the reality. I cannot confirm the timeframe on that at this time.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to the local government emergency services grants under the details of controlled grants and subsidies page 457 of the *Budget statements*. Last year's figure was \$33 million; for this current year, the budget is \$35 million; the estimated actual is \$32 million; and there is \$37 million in the budget year ahead. Are the funds allocated to each year fully expended each year? In other words, are the grants given out in full to local governments for each year or is there residual money in that program that has not been allocated over time?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** This item refers to the provision of capital and operating grants to local governments to fund bush fire service brigades and State Emergency Service units. The 2024–25 budget year includes a re-profiling of 2.183 million from 2023–24. The lower than estimated actual expenditure achieved in 2023–24 is mainly due to the consequence of delays in completion of the local government grant scheme capital projects stemming from the local government grant scheme vehicle program and the local government dependant facility projects. I am happy to defer to the commissioner for any additional information.

**Ms M. Pexton:** A number of factors have influenced the ability for either the money to be dispersed or for those local governments in receipt of those funds to deliver on that. Just for the member's awareness, some of that is due to supply restrictions that were enforced by the original equipment manufacturers when we were talking about the high global demand and erratic component supply, particularly in our appliances. There are production limits and delays, again, in the manufacturing plants, resulting in orders being applied to an Australian dealer network that would have been considerably lower than the demand we could meet. The high-volume requirements for our various chassis are being supplied at rates of one to two and five a month, so that has obviously slowed down some of that expenditure getting through. The introduction by the original equipment manufacturers of new model cab chassis during 2023–24 has determined a degree of recertification and re-engineering of the appliance design requirements across a number of our Department of Fire and Emergency Services fleet classes, which, once again, in turn causes a delay on the transition to full-scale production programs. Just finally, a number of those approved facility projects, the facilities, have also been delayed due to those unforeseen issues associated with land tenure, provision of utility services and other planning-related issues. Cost escalation is also very evident across most projects, resulting in further delays, with some of those projects' scopes also being reviewed.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** In the completed year 2022–23, money had not been spent by the local government but it had been allocated. Does that money remain open and available? Does it sit in a bank account somewhere ready to be spent? Is that the case or is the grant lost because it has not been paid out in time?

**Ms M. Pexton:** Yes, that is still able to be spent.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Even though 2023–24 is not finished, would it be correct to presume that all the money has been allocated?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** That is correct, yes.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Whether now or perhaps by way of supplementary information, could the parliamentary secretary tell me for the applications that money has been spread over, how many were made that met all the criteria but were not funded, and what was the total funding requested that was not able to be funded?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** The information is not in the budget. There is a line item that refers to the expenditure but it does not indicate the numbers.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I am sorry. I could not hear what the parliamentary secretary said.

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** The line item says what the expenditure is but the budget does not detail the number of allocations. It just indicates a financial line item.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I am aware what the budget line item says, but I am asking for further information about that, which is a normal process in estimates. Is it possible for the parliamentary secretary to provide me with the number of applications that were made for this program that were not successful and what the total amount of funding that was not able to be met might have been?

**Mr P. Leach:** We do not have those details here at the moment, but, yes, part of the money is allocated, and the bit that is unspent, according to the reasons of the commissioner, will be carried over. But we do not have all the detailed information right here, right now about all the applications that were submitted, which ones are eligible, which ones were not, which ones met the criteria for approval and which ones did not meet the criteria. We do not have the information right here today.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I am aware that the information is available, which is why I am offering the opportunity for it to be provided as supplementary information; otherwise, I will just ask a question on notice.

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** I advise the member to place that question on notice and we can attend to it through that process.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I turn to one final matter. I assume that there was a heavily oversubscribed program because that is what I was led to believe. If that is the case, would the government consider expanding the program or the scope of this grants funding to better meet that demand in the future? In other words, if there is a continual oversubscription, perhaps the parliamentary secretary may prevail upon the government that this needs to be increased.

[7.40 pm]

**The CHAIR:** Parliamentary secretary, that question asks you to give an opinion and take a view on something. It is not technically a budget line item specifically, but you can respond how you see fit.

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** It is probably the same response that we provided around the community emergency services manager. This is fully subscribed. It is obviously very successful, and there is no additional money in the budget for the expansion of that project.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** This question is similar to the last one. Did the minister or DFES receive any request from local governments or the Western Australian Local Government Association to increase the amount of money available under the local government emergency services grants round?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** I will defer to the acting commissioner.

**Ms M. Pexton:** Thank you, member, for the question. Yes; we receive a number of grants through the application process, as the member has outlined and as we have outlined. That is oversubscribed. We recognise that. The Western Australian Local Government Association has positions, as the member has indicated, on what it advocates for on behalf of its members. DFES goes through the local government grants scheme processes, assesses those grants and distributes the moneys that we have available to us.

**Mr M. HUGHES:** I refer to page 450 of budget paper No 2 and the heading “Spending Changes”. Can the parliamentary secretary explain how the strategic partnership model at the Bushfire Centre of Excellence will provide enhanced community safety?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** Having visited the Bushfire Centre of Excellence, I can say what an outstanding facility and outstanding asset it is for emergency services management. The Bushfire Centre of Excellence is the first of its kind in Western Australia. It serves as a comprehensive resource for knowledge dissemination, technical expertise, scientific research and training for bushfire responders and emergency services personnel, including for exams. The day that I went there, a number of people were undertaking exams and were as stressed as I had ever seen those people. It was quite surprising, actually.

The Bushfire Centre of Excellence is a central learning and event hub, as well as being accessible to all bushfire management stakeholders. The strategic partnership model will be established to help expand the centre’s network of partners and enhance its ability to deliver a broad spectrum of services, including knowledge dissemination, technical advisory services, scientific research and training. The model will also help to diversify the array of services provided, including training, engagement and outreach, knowledge management and business administration.

Examples of the potential programs and projects that may be delivered through the strategic partnership model include, amongst many others, building planned burning capacity across agencies and organisations that are responsible for managing fire; collaborating with industry, academia—this is a significant asset here in relation to this part of the response—state, territory, national and international partners to foster the development and sharing of bushfire research, management expertise and best practice; establishing a unit of competency in cultural fire to be delivered through vocational education providers; offering scholarships for training and accommodation for regional Aboriginal rangers to participate in training programs; and initiating community safety projects aimed at enhancing bushfire preparedness.

It is an incredibly exciting opportunity, and I am sure that all the people involved in bushfire mitigation and management will benefit from that asset into the future.

**Mr M. HUGHES:** I hope my question relates to the work of the bushfire management entity. Under the spending changes, I noticed that reference is made to the Spatial WA business case. Is that being undertaken by the Bushfire Centre of Excellence? Is that in fact being done by DFES itself?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** It is being undertaken by DFES but not for the Rural Fire Division.

**Mr M. HUGHES** interjected.

**The CHAIR:** No freelancing—what are you doing, member! I call the member for Cottesloe.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** It was remiss of me at the outset not to recognise that it is National Volunteer Week and acknowledge today's emergency services volunteers. Thank you, parliamentary secretary, for allowing us to recognise that with our ribbons.

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** May I add something to that, member?

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Absolutely, parliamentary secretary.

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** We threw directly to questions, but I had a brief statement to read out at the beginning that was going to do exactly that, so thank you, member.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Maybe the parliamentary secretary can read that out in full, in response, before she answers my question. That would be appropriate, I think!

I grew up in the bush. We have a little family farm down in the bush, and I go down there regularly. I will say that the quality of the firefighting vehicles provided to the rural fire services and the provision of the safety equipment is first rate compared with when I was a boy, when it was a 200-gallon tank, which was pretty well unrestrained on the back of a truck, and we would just put on a woollen jumper and long pants and boots if we had them. It really is something to behold. There was a bushfire right next to our farm at Christmas and the speed with which the locals responded and put the fire out was remarkable. It was all volunteers. I just say thanks for equipping them so well. It is very impressive in those areas. But that is not a question, so thanks for your indulgence, chair.

I have a simple question that I am sure the parliamentary secretary can quickly answer. In each of the services and the key efficiency indicators, there is an income recognised. How is that income derived? I apologise, chair; it is on page 453, services 1 and 2, and then over the page to service 3. There is an income statement on page 456, which I have a further question on, but how is the income applied to those services? What is the methodology that is used to apply that income? It is my assumption that the income is as stated in the total income line on page 456, and I assume the regulatory fees and fines are the emergency services levy income, plus fines. I would just like an understanding of how the budget is put together, parliamentary secretary.

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** In relation the funding of services, I will defer to Acting Commissioner Pexton.

**Ms M. Pexton:** Just to clarify, yes, those fines and regulatory charges are the ESL, so thank you, member—I was nodding. I will defer to Ms Georgina Camarda for that response.

**Ms G. Camarda:** Just to start with, that income that is used for all three efficiency indicators relates to total income in the income statement, which excludes income from the state government. The methodology we use, where we can, to allocate or apportion the income across the services is a direct revenue allocation to the type of activities within those services. I do not have the actual methodology in front of me to describe to the member, but there would then be an apportionment or a weighted allocation of the income as well. It is quite a large calculation, but it is part of our cost allocation and revenue allocation methodology.

[7.50 pm]

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Just to clarify—I was not concentrating at the start—does that allocation of income exclude the income from government?

**Ms G. Camarda:** Yes.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I am not trying to be tricky, but those numbers add up to \$596 million and the income, including government income, adds up to only \$442 million, so I thought it would have to include the government income as well.

**Ms G. Camarda:** Those revenue amounts should total \$442 million.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Yes, sorry, the cost was the \$596 million; I apologise. Does government make up the balance?

**Ms G. Camarda:** Yes, the net cost of service element in each of those efficiency indicator tables shows the cost to the government rather than the income derived by the department specifically through its regulatory fees and charges, and grants revenue from the commonwealth and other revenue.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** At the bottom of page 456 is a surplus/deficiency for the period. In this case the surplus is increasing across the forward estimates. What is the logic behind the income from government exceeding the cost of the service? Why are we building up this buffer of surplus for the period? As an ancillary question to that, does that surplus accumulate somewhere or is it just folded back into the next year and consumed and another surplus generated?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** I am certainly not an accountant either, so I will defer to the acting commissioner.

**Ms M. Pexton:** Thank you, and I will refer back to our chief finance officer.

**Ms G. Camarda:** It is a good question. This one is quite complicated. We generate income to fund our assets as well. When we generate surpluses, it is often related to our programs not having delivered as we anticipated, so our expenditure in that year is not as high as we have anticipated and we have had carryovers. If the member likes, I can take that question on notice and give him a better explanation. There could be other reasons.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Could I ask the parliamentary secretary to provide as supplementary information the reconciliation of the surpluses generated? As part of that, what happens to that surplus? Is it consumed in the next year or is that surplus accumulated in another account?

**The CHAIR:** Parliamentary secretary, I ask you to explain what you are willing to provide.

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** Sure; we can provide the member the information he is seeking. Just for clarity, could he explain succinctly what he is seeking?

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I am very happy to do that, parliamentary secretary. How is the surplus that is generated at the end of the year derived? What is the purpose of accumulating a surplus, given that the government is making up the difference? What happens to that surplus—is it simply folded back into expenditure in the next year or does it accumulate somewhere else?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** Thank you; there are three parts to that question.

[*Supplementary Information No A26.*]

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I turn to the significant issues impacting the agency on page 450 of budget paper No 2, volume 2. Paragraph 1 states —

Western Australia has continued to experience an increase in the frequency, intensity, and impact of natural disasters.

Despite noting that natural disasters are becoming more frequent and intense, does the state government provide any contingent funding to leverage commonwealth funding to rebuild damaged or destroyed assets—roads, bridges or buildings—so they are more resilient against future events?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** The Department of Fire and Emergency Services has been proactive in adapting its strategies to the escalating threats posed by changing climate. The significant initiative is around the bushfire management frameworks and enhancing those by refining land use planning regulation in bushfire-prone areas. The department also supports the State Emergency Management Committee and its commitment to delivering strong action to increase the climate resilience of the emergency management sector. The SEMC, as the peak body for emergency management in Western Australia, provides strategic oversight of emergency management arrangements and advises the Minister for Emergency Services on the preparedness of the state to be able to combat those emergencies. Further measures taken by DFES include intensifying its efforts in community engagement and education programs, which is an incredibly important part of that work. It has also bolstered its firefighting capabilities by investing in additional equipment training and resource allocation. I will throw to the acting commissioner for further information on that.

**Ms M. Pexton:** In addition to what our parliamentary secretary has just outlined, the member mentioned commonwealth grants. DFES administers a significant number of programs on behalf of the commonwealth that eligible applicants across a raft of sectors, whether that is local governments, not-for-profit organisations, other state government agencies and other critical partners, can apply for. Some of those are in the disaster ready fund. It is the second year that this has been released and there has been a significant uptake in those across the state. The national disaster risk reduction program has incredible partners that can apply for funding.

Of course, the primary mechanism, particularly for betterment, when we see post-emergency and the “build back better” concept, is the disaster recovery funding arrangements. I think WA has really maximised that in recent events—for example, with ex-tropical cyclone Ellie. The bridge was damaged significantly and was rebuilt in record time, with a significant component of betterment included in that. We have advocated strongly to the commonwealth government about the ability to build back better. We are pleased to hear that we are able to include the element of “betterment” in our disaster recovery funding arrangement packages in order for many of these communities with this infrastructure that may be more vulnerable, as the member framed the question, with regard to climate change that we can incorporate into our activities as we move forward.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Thank you; however, the question was whether the organisation keeps any contingent funding—now that it has that arrangement with the commonwealth—to leverage against that to ensure that the infrastructure and community assets are built back better and are more resilient. Is the department setting aside money to enable that to happen? Is that something the state government is doing? In order to leverage some of the commonwealth funding, I would have thought there would need to be some seed money from the state.

[8.00 pm]

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** I will defer to the acting commissioner in a minute, but hot off the press today, Western Australia was successful in receiving a \$2.5 million national disaster risk reduction grant. That media release was sent out today. It is a joint initiative between the Australian and Western Australian governments. The National Disaster Risk Reduction grant program has now funded locally led products to the tune of \$12.5 million, so that is significant and the details were released today. It includes grant recipients from the Shire of Victoria Plains, the City of South Perth and the Shire of Toodyay. I am just trying to find recipients that would be relevant to the member! There is also the Shire of Boyup Brook, St John Ambulance and the Volunteer Marine Rescue Service Port Hedland, to name just a few.

I am happy to pass to the commissioner for further information.

**Ms M. Pexton:** After each emergency, we apply for that funding under categories C and D, which I realise sounds a bit like lingo, but under the disaster recovery funding arrangements, we have the ability to request additional funding from Treasury in support of the activities that are based around the needs of those individuals. The betterment component, as I have indicated, is relatively new, so we will be exploring those avenues as we go forward with these emergencies.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 455, budget paper No 2, volume 2, and the line item “Primary Fire and Emergency Fleet”. We have roughly \$22 million a year for 2024–25 and 2025–26, and then it drops to \$18.9 million in 2026–27. Is there an explanation for that drop-off?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** Can the member just repeat that for me so I can follow that line item across?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** It is under the subheading “Vehicle Programs” on page 455, under the heading “Works in Progress”, and it is about 10 lines down from the top.

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** Again, I will provide some information to start with, and then defer to the commissioner. As was recognised by the member for Cottesloe, there was significant investment by government in appliances. I am sure the commissioner will detail some of that shortly. Investment in these service vehicles across Western Australia continues to bolster our firefighting capacity. Currently, the Department of Fire and Emergency Services’ operational fleet consists of more than 1 600 vehicles, and they are capable of responding to a range of hazards, including bushfires, structure fires, cyclones, rescue, storms, floods and HAZMAT incidents. A number of appliances have been provided. I will hand over to the commissioner to detail some of that for the member.

**Ms M. Pexton:** As the parliamentary secretary has outlined, there is a significant number of vehicles across a number of our career fire and rescue services, volunteer fire and rescue services, and a number of our other brigades, groups and units. With regard to the member’s specific question about funding and how that will feature in the out years, I might pass to Assistant Commissioner Mosconi.

**Mr D. Mosconi:** Yes, there is a reason for the reduction in funding in 2026–27. With our forward planning, we expect our urban pump program to slow down, given that we will be putting a lot of effort into that over the next number of years. The requirement to replace those pumps in the fleet will be less. Because they are such a complex vehicle, they are quite expensive, which is why there is a reduction in that particular year.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Can the parliamentary secretary explain that pump? Is it a vehicle or a pump on a vehicle?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** I will pass that to Commissioner Pexton.

**Ms M. Pexton:** For that question, I will pass to Assistant Commissioner Mosconi.

**Mr D. Mosconi:** We call it an “urban pump”; it is a fire truck, and I guess it is a fire truck that will still attend bushfires, but is primarily used for road crash rescues, HAZMAT incidents and structure fires.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** In last year’s budget estimates discussions about the service life of each vehicle in the primary DFES fleet, it was identified that some 281 vehicles continued in operation beyond their approximate service life. Can the parliamentary secretary provide us with the status of the primary fleet replacement program, given that fairly large number?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** I will defer to the commissioner.

**Ms M. Pexton:** Member, I will defer to Patrick Leach.

**Mr P. Leach:** Yes, we have had prior questioning on that, and also questions outside the estimates process. The terms used have been slightly different, but have significant meaning in our strategic asset planning world. There are a number of definitions, including “extended life”, “service life”, “operational life” and “extended service life” et cetera. Depending on the terminology and the question, that often results in a different answer. Part of what we explained last time is that all the vehicles we have now in our operational fleet are fully operational, fully functional and fully serviceable, and we inspect them regularly. All our operators, career and volunteer, are also trained in twice-daily inspections—when they turn up, and when they retire the vehicle. If they detect anything at the operator level, they are able to lodge a vehicle fault report, which then goes back to the workshops and the faults are

rectified. In the sense of having a number of vehicles that are arbitrarily past some particular life, that is a much more complex conversation, depending on which particular statutory asset planning terminology is being used in a particular question.

To alleviate a lot of that confusion, I prefer to say to people that all the vehicles we have are regularly inspected, regularly checked and are operational, functional and serviceable. They are well within the original equipment manufacturer's operating provisions. To give the example of our large Scania fleet, and especially the urban pumps or urban fire trucks that we use, we often retire them based on our parameters of somewhere between 200 000 to 250 000 kilometres, regardless of the chronological age. The manufacturer's specifications go up to 900 000 kilometres, so we are well within that. As Assistant Commissioner Mosconi alluded to earlier, these are very complex appliances, especially the more modern ones that we are now building. From memory, I think they have 38 onboard computers and two control area network buses that connect all those computers to each other. They have multiple operational hydraulic functional parts on the back end, which do not come as part of the cab chassis.

The point at which we retire them depends on a lot of those components, so it is not as simple as saying "At particular X years of age, this particular appliance is now non-serviceable". For example, an appliance might go into a particular geographical area and it might do 2 000 kilometres a year, while another one might be doing 200 000 kilometres a year. It is a very difficult proposition. It also goes to life, as Assistant Commissioner Mosconi again alluded to earlier. Some of these things are, for want of a better term, bush-bashing a lot more than others, while others are staying on very sedate, bituminised roads. They have different lives, even on the basis of chronological age and kilometres of usage. Some of them have a hard life and some have an easy life, but we inspect them regularly, and at such time as we believe them to be no longer operational, serviceable and functional, they are retired.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Thanks for that comprehensive answer. I hear what is being said in relation to those vehicles being inspected and on track, but we were given the figure last year of 281 vehicles beyond their approximate service life. Is there any indication of that figure this year? Is there a reduction or an increase? That figure was supplied last year, so has there been an improvement in that number? Is there any answer to that?

[8.10 pm]

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** I have the *Hansard* here from last year. I can see what the member is referring to. I am happy to hand the question to the commissioner to respond.

**Ms M. Pexton:** I think, given the explanation that we have all just been given, we can see that we do not have a current figure linked to the figure that the member has requested or is referring to from last year. I will just confirm with Patrick Leach to see whether there is any other numerical indicator.

**Mr P. Leach:** Again, no. This is the bit that goes back to the definition in the question that was asked at the time. If we were to do it, we would need to go back and ascertain the person who was answering the question, what particular strategic asset planning definition they used to come up with that number and then go through that same methodology and apply it today to come up with a similar quantitative number. But again, it is a rather arbitrary and almost academic response. I think I mentioned in one of the prior estimates sessions that the answer for how many vehicles we have that are unserviceable, non-functional and non-operational is zero. We have zero in our fleet because of the regular checks that we do, literally at the start and end of every shift.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I hear what Mr Leach is saying. How many vehicles have been scheduled to be replaced in 2024–25 and is there a breakdown of that information?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** I would be very happy to provide that information. I actually prepared because I saw that the member was in the chamber. I have gone through and highlighted some of the ones that might be of interest to him, and some others. We will go through it now that Mr Leach has explained what an urban pumper is for us all. These vehicles are all slated for delivery in 2024–25. Kalgoorlie will receive an urban pumper type 1, Busselton and Carnarvon will receive an urban pumper type 2 and Katanning, Kojonup and Ravensthorpe will receive an urban pumper type 3. I am just picking examples here. Australind, Esperance, Goomalling, Katanning, Kojonup, Lancelin, Narrogin, Northam, Port Hedland, Quairading, Toodyay, Hope Valley, Geraldton and Kalgoorlie will receive light tankers. There will be a general rescue utility vehicle at Bruce Rock, Bremer Bay, Coral Bay and Morawa, by way of example. The member can see that that is a significant asset rollout over the next 12 months.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Is the parliamentary secretary able to supply that by supplementary information?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** I can keep reading for the member, if he prefers.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** How many are roughly on there? Is it in the dozens or hundreds?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** I can give the member a definitive answer: there are 123 appliances on the list.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I know that 62 vehicles were identified in last year's budget to be replaced in 2023–24. I assume that might be something similar to that particular number. Does the minister actually have a total?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** It is 123.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Okay. I think I will leave it at that.

**Mr M. HUGHES:** My question is about the criteria that are applied to the replacement of urban pumpers and the observations that I have made to the parliamentary secretary regarding the Kalamunda Volunteer Fire and Rescue Service. On the face of it, the volunteer fire and rescue service's urban pumper was so many years old. I think it was provided at the time when Hon Michelle Roberts was the responsible minister. The number of kilometres that piece of equipment covers in any one year is quite small by comparison, despite the age. I just want to echo that despite the fact that it was lobbying me again for those changes at the recent annual dinner, it really is a question of making sure that every vehicle that is on the road is serviceable, up to scratch and capable of carrying out the functions it is there for. I just wanted to re-emphasise that. That is all.

**The CHAIR:** New question, member for Roe—member for Cottesloe.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I thought I was being shunned there!

I refer to budget paper No 2 on page 157 and the heading "Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies". The line item "Severe Tropical Cyclone Seroja" is five lines from the bottom. There is a total there of around \$41 million of funding. I was intrigued to see that funding continue into 2024–25 and 2025–26. I was interested in what that funding was for. Before the parliamentary secretary provides that answer, I am also very interested in her opening statement on volunteers, with the indulgence of the chair.

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** My opening statement on Wear Orange Wednesday? Is that correct? By way of recognition of our State Emergency Service volunteers, today is WOW day. It is obviously marked by the wearing of orange. I am very pleased to see the sea of orange in the chamber this evening. This is an annual day of recognition to say thank you to all of our State Emergency Service volunteers. I am sure a lot of us have those volunteers in our electorates.

I just want to acknowledge that buildings and landmarks across Western Australia, including Parliament House this evening, are lit up orange in recognition of the contribution that our SES volunteers make. In addition to that, regional centres, including Albany, Kalgoorlie, Broome and Kununurra are also lit up for this particularly important day.

I just want to acknowledge that over the last year, nearly 2 000 SES volunteers have devoted more than 32 600 hours responding to incidents across the state, including most recently the destructive Bunbury tornado on 10 May. On behalf of everybody in the chamber, who I hope I can speak for, I recognise the volunteers who play an incredibly important role.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Thank you, parliamentary secretary. I will go back to the severe tropical cyclone Seroja funding, which continues out in the next budget and the year after. I am intrigued about what that line item is for.

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** In 2021, the commonwealth and state governments announced several funding packages to support the recovery of communities impacted by severe tropical cyclone Seroja under the commonwealth–state joint disaster recovery funding arrangements. The state-led recovery services concluded on 30 June 2023, with the management of ongoing recovery activities transitioned to local government. This occurred in line with the closure of the local recovery hubs and the conclusion of several recovery programs.

The state and federal governments acknowledge that communities impacted by cyclone Seroja experienced slow progress with restoration, repairs and resilience works due to factors outside of their control, particularly within the Shire of Northampton. In response, four severe tropical cyclone Seroja recovery grant programs were extended until 31 December 2024 to allow more time for those works to be completed.

Additionally, the jointly funded clean-up program remains open to financially support the Shire of Northampton to progress with the clean-up and repairs of the foreshore. A dedicated Department of Fire and Emergency Services grants team including a midwest based regional grants support officer continues to provide support to grant applicants.

In July 2023, the state government also made available \$9.2 million to eligible local governments impacted by the cyclone to support local recovery initiatives. Of the funding, \$8 million was disbursed from the tropical cyclone Seroja local government resilience fund, with grants of up to \$500 000 to help local governments undertake works to improve the resilience of evacuation facilities and other community infrastructure.

I am happy to see whether the acting commissioner would like to add any extra detail to that.

[8.20 pm]

**Ms M. Pexton:** As outlined by the parliamentary secretary, the member will recall that cyclone Seroja struck, unfortunately, eight weeks after the Wooroloo bushfire and also during a time when COVID was quite prominent in our communities. With the regional location, 16 local governments were impacted by that cyclone and there were significant delays for rebuilds. We extended the two programs that have been indicated through to December 2024 as a response to the needs of those communities. It would have been very unfair for us to shut the door on that. We have worked very closely with the commonwealth government.

The figures we see for the next two years are there to ensure that the grants that were made available for eligible applicants, particularly home owners and the local government, which had both Northampton and Kalbarri requiring remediation, can still fulfil those obligations and have access to that funding.



**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Are there any grants that people are still eligible to apply for or is this fulfilling commitments that have already been made? Is it just extending the funding to enable things to be constructed using the resources that are available?

**Ms M. Pexton:** That is a good question. The disaster recovery funding arrangements are through a reimbursement model. All the applications have been received. It genuinely is just about ensuring that those applicants have time for the works to be completed. Once they have provided that evidence to the grants team that the parliamentary secretary outlined, we will reimburse them. The money is made available for those reimbursement costs as deemed eligible.

**Mr S.N. AUBREY:** I refer to page 461 and the heading “Bushfire Mitigation Branch”. I want to ask the parliamentary secretary about the status of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services’ rollout of 2024 bushfire awareness campaign; and how has it improved community safety?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** I thank the member for the question because community safety education plays a significant role in managing community safety. The 2024 bushfire awareness campaign has been successful in enhancing community preparedness and resilience. With the threat of a severe bushfire season in 2023–24 that will run longer than usual, the campaign set out to increase the community awareness of their bushfire risk. With 93 per cent of WA being bushfire prone, it was important that the community was made aware that it takes only 15 minutes to prepare a bushfire plan that could save their lives.

I spoke to members of my community and encouraged them all to be part of that planning for themselves and their families and I happened to call, unbeknownst to me at the time, a volunteer firefighter and I tried to explain to him it was very important that he prepare a bushfire plan for him and his family. He explained that he was well aware of the risks, and it was a very interesting conversation.

A record number of bushfire plans have been completed, with 6 181 plans completed during the campaign, more than three times the number completed the previous year. The My Bushfire Plan WA app helps users make the critical choice of leaving early or staying to defend and has important prompts, including what to do with pets and what is needed to evacuate, and ensures everyone in the household knows the plan and their role within that plan. Bushfire plans include comprehensive strategies for fire prevention, evacuation procedures and communication protocols tailored to each person’s specific needs and risks.

Through proactive engagement and education, the Department of Fire and Emergency Services continues to empower residents to make sure that they have the knowledge and resources to mitigate the impacts of bushfires and safeguard their own lives and property.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to the bushfire mitigation branch and the breakdown further down the page. The line item “Grain Harvest—Aerial Fire Suppression” has \$1.912 million in 2024–25 and then nothing in the forward estimates. Can the parliamentary secretary provide an explanation of that?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** Sorry; was it page 461? Sorry, member; I was thinking about my volunteer bush firefighter that I was trying to advise on bushfire plans. I was slightly distracted.

The Western Australian grain industry is a major contributor, as the member well knows, to the agrifood sector and the Australian economy. WA produces, on average, 18 million tonnes of grains—cereals, oilseeds and pulses—each year. Grain exports generate more than \$5.9 billion on a five-year average for the WA economy each year, making it the largest agricultural sector in the state, as the member knows.

The grain harvest aerial fleet initiative is instrumental in protecting regional communities, farming assets and grain production. Crop fires are often sparked by machinery or lightning and when combined with dangerous wind conditions, they can escalate very quickly. Two strike teams, each consisting of two 802 single-engine air tankers and one Air Attack fixed-wing aircraft, are based in the grain-growing regions to boost firefighting capability during the hottest stretch of the harvest. The Department of Fire and Emergency Services undertakes a capability assessment that assists in identifying the appropriate level of aerial suppression resource allocation to address the predicted bushfire risk on any given day. By strategically basing the aircraft in the areas where the risk is, response times are reduced and regional communities and harvest are better protected. The two strike teams are moved to different operating bases throughout the midwest, Gascoyne, wheatbelt and great southern regions as the harvest progresses or if response to active fires require it. The four identified operating bases are Geraldton, Cunderdin, Narrogin and Esperance.

The program is funded by the Department of Fire and Emergency Services with support from the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions and the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development.

I am very happy to ask the commissioner if she would like to provide any further information that I may not have covered.

**Ms M. Pexton:** I am going to defer to Deputy Commissioner Waters for some further operational information.

**Mr C. Waters:** I thank the member for the question. If the member remembers, initially this was a trial back in the 2021–22 fire season when the first record harvest was forecast by the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development. We did the trial initially in the 2021–22 fire season. That was then funded by reprioritising

funding from the mitigation activity fund through the Rural Fire Division. We extended the trial into the 2022–23 fire season year based on a significant 20-million-tonne forecast harvest period. Obviously, for the forward estimates for the next year, 2023–24, again, \$1.23 million was funded similarly through the mitigation activity fund emergency service levy reprioritisation. Additionally, the Expenditure Review Committee has approved additional funding this year and that is going to be funded through reprioritisation of the mitigation activity fund.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I have heard a lot of talk about the grain crop and what has happened in the past, but there is no money in the out years. To me, this is one of the most important elements of bushfire mitigation. I know that down towards Esperance and the like it is very important. It is important right throughout the whole grain belt regardless. Is there any explanation, parliamentary secretary?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** There is currently no funding for the grain harvest strategy beyond 2024–25. Acknowledging the incredible response that was provided, all I can say is that at this point in time, there is no funding beyond 2024–25.

[8.30 pm]

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

I will ask a fresh question. I refer to page 450 and the emergency rescue helicopter service under the heading “Ongoing Initiatives”. There is \$18.6 million in additional spending over the forward estimates. Can the parliamentary secretary outline what this spending relates to? It is obviously an increase, but what will it be providing?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** The Department of Fire and Emergency Services remains dedicated to enhancing Western Australia’s aerial emergency services capability. The state government’s recent investments totalling nearly \$27 million, as the member has noted, have significantly upgraded and strengthened the existing service. The emergency rescue helicopter service is based strategically to efficiently cover regional area bases in Jandakot and Bunbury. Fuel caches are strategically located for extended missions. The strategic bases in Bunbury and Jandakot provide coverage for about 91 per cent of Western Australia’s population without the necessity of refuelling stops. I understand there is additional information that I will ask the commissioner to provide.

**Ms M. Pexton:** I will defer to Deputy Commissioner Waters.

**Mr C. Waters:** Thank you. The emergency rescue helicopter service, as the parliamentary secretary stated, is based at Jandakot and Bunbury. We have additional fuel caches strategically located to extend missions if required. The emergency rescue helicopter service is positioned effectively and efficiently to respond to just over 91 per cent of the WA population from those areas. The strategic bases in Bunbury and Jandakot, as I said, provide coverage and that is without any requirement to refuel at the time. There have been significant increases since it was introduced back in 2003. We enhanced the equipment on the helicopters in 2010. We introduced night vision capability in 2015. We introduced the Bunbury helicopter service in 2016. We introduced a third technical backup helicopter in 2018. We anticipate bringing on the first of the new Leonardo AW139 helicopters into service in July this year.

The capability of the new helicopters will increase the range from the current 400 kilometres straight range up to 700 kilometres. The speed of the new helicopters will be 39 per cent faster than the old helicopters. Helicopters can be forward based in other regions during large-scale incidents as required. We saw those deployed during the Carnarvon and Kimberley floods and in response to cyclone Seroja. We sent them up to Exmouth for the total solar eclipse earlier in the year. The service finished its 10 000<sup>th</sup> mission on 24 April, which was fantastic. It was sponsored by RAC WA, funded by the state government and managed by the department.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I take it that we are not adding a further helicopter. We are not going from two to three. This funding is for the upgraded high-standard faster variety. Will we retain two helicopters with the ability to cover more than 91 per cent of the area, or will they still retain around 91 per cent?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** My understanding is that there are two, but a third additional helicopter is available to be deployed. I will defer to the commissioner on that.

**Ms M. Pexton:** I will defer back to Deputy Commissioner Waters.

**Mr C. Waters:** Increased costing around the contracts and increased costing of the supplementary provisions of the clinical paramedics increase the amount.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I note the Chief Health Officer’s inquiry into aeromedical services identified significant under-resourcing of rotary-wing capacity in WA. Does the state government intend to address this concern, and can the parliamentary secretary identify any line items in the budget that will address that matter?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** The Minister for Health is the minister responsible for that inquiry, so that is a question to be directed back to the Minister for Health.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I refer to paragraph 1, “Community Awareness, Education and Information Services”, on page 453 of budget paper No 2. I assume the metric in the table below is, in terms of an efficiency indicator, \$15.27 per household in the state. The number of full-time equivalent employees who are providing that service has gone from 33 in 2022–23 to 43 in 2023–24 and then it reduces to 38 in 2024–25. Can the parliamentary secretary outline what that service provides and why we have seen a reduction in FTE for that service?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** The note on page 453 states —

The increase between the 2023-24 Budget and both the 2023-24 Estimated Actual and the 2024-25 Budget Target is primarily due to wages growth in line with the current enterprise bargaining award agreements, cost escalations for service contracts, and additional expenditure of approximately \$2 million per annum over the forward estimates period for the Next Generation Emergency WA project. The increase in income correlates with the increase in the Total Cost of Service.

As to the efficiency indicators, I will defer to the commissioner.

**Ms M. Pexton:** I will defer to our chief finance officer for clarity on that.

**Ms G. Camarda:** Sorry, was the question in relation to the FTE?

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** It was a multi-pronged question to confuse the CFO through the parliamentary secretary. I was asking what service is provided for that amount, and why we are seeing a reduction in the FTE for that service. The cost is going up, and I think the parliamentary secretary has explained that in part, but the FTEs are decreasing for that service.

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** I can probably answer the portion of the question the member asked about what the service provides. In terms of community awareness, education and information services, it is about getting information into the community before an incident and providing emergency hazard information during an incident. It uses channels like social media, call centres and television and radio interviews to ensure the community is aware of preventable and natural hazards and support their ability to make choices about the actions that they take. As to the second part of the member's question, I will defer to the commissioner.

**Ms M. Pexton:** I will speak to some of the projects that the parliamentary secretary has outlined. Noting the activities undertaken, we have a significant number of projects that are currently funded to support those. One good example is the EmergencyWA upgrade and our next generation warning systems. Some of those FTEs are wrapped in that project funding. I think some of the reduction that the member might see is because of the way the FTE is funded in this financial year. It does not necessarily mean that we have fewer people undertaking that activity, it is more in terms of projects that have come online to deliver those activities.

[8.40 pm]

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I understood that the fire brigade, or the fire emergency services, has had a program to identify fire bugs and then to have some sort of education program that is quite specific for at-risk individuals. I am not quite sure of the right terminology. Is that part of that services web or is that something completely different within the fire service?

**Ms M. Pexton:** Please correct me if I am wrong, but I think the member is referring to our Juvenile and Family Fire Awareness Program. The FTE for that remains as it always has. We also run that program with associated volunteers and firefighters, which enables that program to be delivered as very much a place-based model whereby the central FTE train those individuals who have come on board to deliver these with our families and our juveniles. Those FTE may not be included as an FTE because of the volunteering nature of those roles. Yes, that program is still in existence.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I want to clarify that I am not suggesting that all juveniles are fire bugs. But I wondered whether there was a bespoke program. The commissioner has answered the question.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 455, "Fixed Repeater Tower (Esperance)" under "Works In Progress". My recollection is that this is one of the recommendations out of the review of the tragic Esperance fire. Could I have an update on the situation with that fixed repeater tower, noting that it is in the 2024–25 budget year?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** I knew the member would be interested in this item. I am very pleased to let the member know that funding for the construction of the new repeater tower in the Esperance region was approved in 2022–23. There have been delays in securing a suitable site for that tower. Alternative solutions are being considered, including using Starlink satellite technology to facilitate emergency communications in the area. There is a carryover of \$355 000 that was approved in the 2023–24 budget to 2024–25 to allow the Starlink solution to be explored.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Given that Starlink has only just been rolled out in a lot of agricultural areas, is the parliamentary secretary confident that we will have the continuity and the coverage that is needed for the repeater tower?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** I will defer that one to the commissioner. I have a personal opinion on that, but we will not explore that today!

**Ms M. Pexton:** Thank you, parliamentary secretary. I will defer to Patrick Leach to comment.

**Mr P. Leach:** We acknowledge the critical role telecommunications play in community safety and emergency response efforts across the state. It appears nationally in pretty much every single after-action incident report or inquiry et cetera. It is a vexed issue in emergency services, especially in the regions. There is exponential growth and reliance on data communications and information systems, and that partly goes to the projects we discussed earlier in terms of the next generation WA improvements. We are hoping to get a lot more information out through

digital networks. Part of the issue with telecommunications in the regions is that often, as we have experienced in the state, these events themselves, be it a storm, cyclone or bushfire, actually damage the terrestrial-based infrastructure. That terrestrial-based infrastructure may be both mobile network operators like cell towers or mobile phone towers. Even if the mobile phone towers themselves are not damaged, it may well be energy infrastructure that is damaged. When the energy runs out, batteries run out and backup fuel supplies like diesel are difficult to replace, so telecommunications go out.

One of the solutions that we have been investing in a lot and exploring a lot is the low-earth orbit technology across a range of areas and scenarios. As with all technology, it has its pros and it has its limitations. One of the pros of low-earth orbit technology is that now it is basically accessible anywhere across Western Australia and the jurisdictions that we cover, which is roughly 2.5 million square kilometres of land. People often forget about the marine rescue people. We also cover about 1.5 million square kilometres of ocean. That is about four million square kilometres in total. We have that accessibility via low-earth orbit technology. We are actively exploring its suitability. It gets rid of a lot of impediments like topography and terrain, which are often the issue with point-to-point technology. It obviously gets rid of the mobile phone limitations. Telecommunication providers do not have infrastructure across the entire state of Western Australia, and the further out you go from dense populations, the lower the coverage becomes until it eventually becomes zero.

We have been experimenting with low-earth orbit technology as have other government agencies. It is working really successfully. I will give one of the limitations. If there are significantly dense atmospheric conditions like thick cloud, thick storms or lightning, there may be some interference. But, as I said, all technologies have their pros and cons, so we are exploring it. In terms of the Esperance scenario, we have tested low-earth orbit technology there. We have already deployed it across a number of use cases. We have re-enabled both other government agency telecommunications through our DFES low-earth orbit infrastructure, and we have also enabled community reconnection of telecommunications. At this point, it is still limited to pilots and trials.

One of the other digital programs that we are working on is the emergency services digital strategy. This will explore, pilot and trial exactly those types of technologies. The community has a higher expectation of service delivery. The community's tolerance, even during times of emergency, for lack of communications, has become increasingly lower. The more we move to digital technology for information provision, the more that telecommunication becomes important. We are actively exploring it. It works in the environment around Esperance, so it is just a question now of building up the model and getting the infrastructure and then rolling it out.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** This was one of the main recommendations of that review. The department is looking at alternatives, as has been alluded to. I seek the parliamentary secretary's reassurance that it is the absolute commitment of the department that there will be a repeater tower in place, hopefully some time in the next few months or this year, regardless of the technology that is required to maximise the efficiency.

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** I absolutely acknowledge how important it is to the community in Esperance. It remains a priority for the government and, I am daring to speak on behalf of the commissioner, I understand it is certainly our priority for DFES to deliver this for your community—absolutely.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I am hopeful that I can ask a question about page 452, item 3, "Delivery of Frontline Services Before, During and After Incidents" under "Service Summary" in relation to the C130 Hercules water bomber. As I understand it, this was leased last December and has been leased from time to time for its capacity to build containment lines. Can the parliamentary secretary provide an update on the usage of that equipment and the length of its lease arrangements?

[8.50 pm]

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** In response to your question, it is obviously an incredibly important asset for Western Australia and the government has made a significant investment into this. Unfortunately—we can say this when we work in fire and emergency services—we know it is needed, and several times this summer I was watching it on the flight radar doing its best work across the southern part of the state. I just wanted to say that in recognition of how important it is.

The Department of Fire and Emergency Services is responsible for the biggest emergency management jurisdiction in the Southern Hemisphere. That is an incredible feat for the agency. To address the fire risk over such a vast area, \$11 million over four years has been committed to contract a dedicated large air tanker to be permanently part of the seasonal aerial firefighting fleet. The contract to secure the LAT will be in place from 1 December to 28 February each year during the state's high-threat southern bushfire season. The large air tanker is based at Busselton Margaret River Airport during the most vulnerable times of the year. It is the second year that the dedicated LAT has been contracted exclusively for Western Australia. The state previously relied on the national large air tanker aircraft. Obviously, time is of the essence when responding to the very large emergencies that the LAT has been able to provide support for. I am happy to pass to the commissioner to see whether there is any further information.

**Ms M. Pexton:** I am going to pass to Deputy Commissioner Waters for his operational knowledge on this matter.

**Mr C. Waters:** Although the confirmed dates are from 1 December to 28 February, we actually brought the large air tanker on around four weeks earlier this year to combat the significant increased risk in fire behaviour and the deficit in soil moisture, specifically in the south west land division. On the back end of that contract, we extended it out two or three times in two-week intervals to the end of April. We could not extend it any further because it had other contracts in the Northern Hemisphere to which it had to respond. Over the course of its use, the WA large air tanker did 59 drops totalling just under 750 000 litres of either suppressant or retardant at 19 significant incidents. We also requested and were able to get the New South Wales large air tanker across to WA on a number of occasions to assist during those blow-up days and when we had elevated fire risks. At the time, New South Wales was dealing with floods and other significant rainfall, so it was an opportune time to get that tanker across to compensate for the extended and high risk that we had.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Just on a point of clarification, were the leasing arrangements relaxed in that situation to enable the lease to be extended to April and did that come at an additional cost to the government? Were we leasing an additional large air tanker from New South Wales as well?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** I will refer that question to the commissioner.

**Ms M. Pexton:** I am going to refer it to Deputy Commissioner Waters.

**Mr C. Waters:** We had opportunities to extend the large air tanker contract. The contractor requires seven days' notice to extend. The difficulty comes when they have other contractual arrangements in place with other jurisdictions and countries so that we cannot extend after a certain time. We can also request the national large air tanker, which was the one that we brought across from New South Wales, and we pick up the operating cost for that aircraft as well.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I was going to suggest, for the sake of all of us, that we take a short comfort break given that we have been in the chamber for almost two hours.

**The CHAIR:** Parliamentary secretary, we have a question on division 29 and we have four other divisions with an hour and a bit to go.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** We have no further questions on this division.

**The CHAIR:** Then do we want to finish off this section?

**Mr P.C. TINLEY:** It is entirely in the hands of the opposition, but if we are finished with this division and you want to move on, why do we not take a break at this point?

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** We are happy for the chair to close this division.

**The CHAIR:** We will finish the division and have a 10-minute break.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

*Meeting suspended from 8.55 to 9.05 pm*

### **Division 3: Department of the Premier and Cabinet — Service 5, Innovation and the Digital Economy —**

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Ms J.L. Hanns, Parliamentary Secretary representing the Minister for Innovation and the Digital Economy.

Ms E. Roper, Director General.

Mr G. Italiano, Government Chief Information Officer.

Mr C. Patterson, Director, Corporate Services.

Ms N. Kacperek, Chief Data Officer.

Mr P. Bouhla, Chief Information Security Officer

Mr A. Degli Esposti, Chief Technology Officer.

Mr J. Petersen, Chief Digital Officer.

Ms I. Deng, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 31 May 2024. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

I give the call to the Leader of the Liberal Party.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to digital transformation on page 60 of the *Budget statements*, and paragraph 2 about the ServiceWA app. Given that the app is readily used to claim government payments and assistance, how many users in WA are currently registered on the app as at today, 22 May?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** Obviously the ServiceWA app has been incredibly successful. The most up-to-date information I have is that as at 19 May there are 1 600 779 users, with a total of 1 613 132 downloads of the ServiceWA app in Western Australia.

**Ms L. METTAM:** What future features are expected to be rolled onto the app?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** The member may already be aware that the ServiceWA app already includes the Emergency WA functionality, weather station information, online licence search, offers—the WA student assistance payment appeared in the ServiceWA app—FuelWatch, SharkSmart and, my favourite, the unclaimed money function, because I found some money that I was owed. I suggest that everyone check that! It is a highly successful platform. It obviously commenced with the COVID check-in system and supported that process. I have mentioned how many downloads there have been as at 19 May. The approved expenditure for the department in this budget is \$9.9 million. The department has been allocated \$7.7 million over four years to develop the functionality and storage capacity of ServiceWA, with a further \$2.2 million in capital expenditure provided over the same period to deliver the project. I guess the key part of this funding is that it includes the delivery of an International Organization for Standardization-compliant digital wallet. The development of the wallet will provide a secure foundational capability for the app to hold myriad different government-issued credentials. Some of those credentials could be trades permits, white cards, working with children checks, digital proof of age cards or digital Seniors Cards. The ServiceWA whole-of-government platform is provided by the Office of Digital Government, and individual agencies will potentially be able to build functionality within that platform. For example, the Department of Energy, Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety would be the agency responsible for electrical licences and the Department of Communities would have working with children checks.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Is WA looking at introducing a digital driver's licence similar to other states?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** As I said, the ServiceWA app will provide the functionality for a number of government agencies. The decisions about what might be included would be up to the individual agencies.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I refer to government policy management of the digital economy on page 66 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. During the Treasury briefing I was fascinated to hear that Treasury, because it has no faith in its fellow agencies, is setting up its own IT oversight group that will oversee all of the software purchases, development or whatever in other departments. The reason I was intrigued by that was I knew this session was coming up, and I would have thought that this is the government policy management for the digital economy, and it is providing strategic advice and the like. I would have thought that that was the function under this part of government. I am wondering: is the Treasury unit a duplication or a turf war? What is the difference between the two units? Treasury is putting some significant resources into it, and it appears to me to be an unnecessary duplication of services. I am not asking the parliamentary secretary to comment on whether she thinks it is necessary or unnecessary; rather, what is the difference between this function and what the parliamentary secretary understands is the new Treasury function?

[9.10 pm]

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** I will refer that to the director general.

**Ms E. Roper:** I will not be baited to have a dig at my central agency colleagues, but it is true that both the Department of Treasury and the Department of the Premier and Cabinet have a role in assessing submissions to the digital capability fund. Our team is focused more on the technology aspects; Treasury is more focused on the financial aspects of the proposals, so there are legitimately two roles to be played in that, and we work very collaboratively in that exercise with Treasury. I will get Mr Greg Italiano to further expand on that.

**Mr G. Italiano:** Yes, I can expand on the director general's response. There are two broad categories of work that we undertake with the Department of Treasury, with the first being the assessment of submissions that we receive for funding under the digital capability fund. As members can well imagine, there are various aspects to assessing those submissions. It is the case that Treasury has the relevant skills and knowledge to apply to the assessment of those. I think the process would not work as well if it were not the case that Treasury were involved in the assessment of those proposals, so that is one aspect of it. The second is that given we now have a very significant number of projects that have been funded by the digital capability fund since its inception, we have a range of assurance activities we undertake with the sector to monitor and undertake work to look at the health of projects if there is an indication that some of those projects are not proceeding as well as they might. Treasury also plays a role in the assurance framework that we have in place for those projects and, again, it is very useful when government

receives advice on these matters. The advice covers both our perspective and Treasury's perspective on these matters, and that, I think, is an efficient and effective way of dealing with the question. In my view, it is not a turf war, member, but rather an effective collaboration in which the skills of both agencies are brought to bear.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Although Treasury might be able to assist with actuarial skills, I would have thought that when it comes to the desirability or otherwise of departments heading down a certain path, this department would be the computing experts in that and in all the aspects that relate to that. The resources that are going to Treasury are substantial, including computing expertise. I am wondering why we need that. I understand the actuarial aspect of it, but Treasury already does that. Quite why we would need to duplicate computing expertise in Treasury bemuses me. Does the parliamentary secretary have any comment on why we would need to duplicate computing expertise across the two departments?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** At the risk of repeating ourselves, I am very happy to defer to the director general.

**Ms E. Roper:** I probably do not have anything more to add, but I will give Greg Italiano a shot.

**Mr G. Italiano:** That is very kind, director general! I would say a couple of things about this. Firstly, it is certainly not the case that Treasury is exercising—to use the words of the member—computing knowledge. We certainly have the technical expertise when it comes to information architecture and programs and the like. It is increasingly the case that we think of ICT projects as still being about the technology—that is rarely the case, although the technology is important. Technology now is a broad enabler of change. It is a way in which agencies are responding to demand challenges, the need for data and the need for better services. Secondly, I want to make a point about disconnecting business acumen, technology and service delivery. All these things now come together in the way that we deploy solutions, so it is very, very important that these projects are assessed from a holistic point of view, and Treasury certainly has skills and capabilities to add that bit. I certainly do not expect, nor do I receive, advice on technology from my Treasury colleagues.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Not yet! Thank you, parliamentary secretary.

I refer to page 60. Under the significant issues impacting the agency, paragraph 3 refers to cybersecurity. The comment there is around the 24/7 coverage. Can the parliamentary secretary inform us of the number of cybersecurity attacks on government systems? Are we seeing an increase in the number of those attacks or is it a steady stream?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** It would be fair to say, member, that Western Australian organisations and, in fact, Australian organisations, both public and private, as well as Australian citizens, are facing unprecedented cybersecurity threats through scams, hacks and the like. Protecting government services is particularly important. Protecting systems and information from cyberthreats and misuse is a priority of the government. It is a key pillar of the *Digital strategy for the Western Australian government 2021–2025*. The department, through the Office of Digital Government, works in partnership with the WA public sector to improve cybersecurity resilience. I have to commend it on the work that has been done in this respect. As to the actual numbers of threats, I will refer to the director general.

**Ms E. Roper:** I will ask Greg Italiano to respond with the details.

[9.20 pm]

**Mr G. Italiano:** Just to provide further context, we do not use the term “attack”; we use the term “cyber incident”. The definition of an incident is one that requires some action to be taken by an agency and/or our security operations centre. We have had a mature security operations centre model in place now for about two years, so the numbers before that are probably not worth quoting because I think they would mislead in terms of their veracity. I would also like to add that we can see other influences on a number of incidents that we see. For example, last financial year we had 68 entities connected to our operations centre; we now have 88, so there are more connected entities. It is also the case that the way an operations centre works, incidents are detected by logs or pieces of data that the operations centre receives. Over time, we can fine-tune the data we receive so that we are receiving less information that we might have acted on in the past, but now do not have to because we have refined our automation rules.

To get to the incidents, looking at last financial year, from June 2022 to July 2023, our security operations centre recorded 12 332 incidents. From 27 June 2023 until 19 April 2024—just a couple of days ago—thus far we have received 8 621, so the numbers are coming in at a roughly similar level, but as I say, there can be reasons why those incidents are moving. Those are the numbers, to answer the question.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Are there any particular parts of government that are more subject to cyber incidents than others, or does it range broadly across the various government agencies?

**Mr G. Italiano:** We tend to think about it in the context of risk profile, and one of my favourite cyber terms is the “attack surface”, which is the number of applications and how large an agency network is, but also how attractive their data is in terms of whether it is valuable, so obviously we are talking about personally identifiable information, credentials and the like. We have identified nine government entities that we provide particular attention to in terms of their security planning and the work we do with them to lift their cyber maturity. Having declared those nine, I think I could probably remember most of them, but suffice it to say that they are the large agencies that you would expect—the Department of Health, the Western Australia Police Force, the Department of Training and Workforce

Development, the Department of Justice, the Department of Transport, Landgate and the like. Those are agencies that operate significant systems. We really worry about two things: one is interfering with the operations of government that would impact on critical services, and we also worry about the exfiltration of sensitive data and the compromising of that. Under our thinking, there are larger high-risk agencies, and that is where we apply our attention, in the main. But, I hasten to add, all agencies are potential targets and no part of government is immune from the threat of a cyber incident.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Do mobile phones present an increased threat to our network, or is that just part of the ongoing threat to the network that we had before? For example, my mobile phone is connected to the DPC mail service and whatever.

**The CHAIR:** Member, that is not really a budget-related question, but the parliamentary secretary can respond as she sees fit.

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** I checked with Mr Italiano and he is happy to respond to that question.

**Mr G. Italiano:** Any device that is connected to a network, mobile or otherwise, is a device that we need to have regard to in terms of security. Mobile devices are secured by various mobile device management rules and need their software to be updated and passwords to be protected, just like any other device. One of the things we talk about in cybersecurity is: you are only as strong as your weakest point, so if it is a mobile device or a third party provider or software as a service, wherever that weakness is, that is what we are concerned about.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Just further to that, is there currently a ban on TikTok for government employees, members of government or ministers? What is the current policy?

**The CHAIR:** Same again, parliamentary secretary?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** Again, it does not relate to a particular line item in the budget, but I am very happy if Mr Italiano would like to explain that to the member.

**The CHAIR:** Mr TikTok star!

**Mr G. Italiano:** Thank you, chair! In fact, this matter was raised in last year's estimates because not long before estimates last year, we had issued an alert to agencies that they should not permit TikTok to be installed on government devices unless in the case of an exemption. Exemptions have been applied for a very few; the chief information security officer vets those requests. There are agencies that legitimately use TikTok for information purposes to provide information to the community and the like and we have ways where we see the need to do that to secure and separate those devices in a way that we mitigate the threat from a security perspective, but the standing position is that TikTok is banned, and that followed a position taken by the commonwealth government prior to us going down that path.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

**Division 14: Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation — Services 3 and 4, Innovation and the Digital Economy —**

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Ms J.L. Hanns, Parliamentary Secretary representing the Minister for Innovation and the Digital Economy.

Ms R. Brown, Director General.

Ms L. Dawson, Deputy Director General.

Mr A. Dolling, Executive Director.

Mr R. Sansalone, Chief Financial Officer.

Ms K. Schaap, Director, Industry Development Division.

Mr J. Stokes, Senior Policy Adviser.

Ms I. Deng, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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Do we have any questions? The member for Vasse.

[9.30 pm]

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to page 195 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. Paragraph 7.3 on growing the state's science and innovation capabilities refers to co-investing in the Australian Remote Operations for Space and Earth. What is the relationship between AROSE and the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** The Australian Remote Operations for Space and Earth's headquarters operations 2022–26 has received \$4 million in funding. AROSE is based in Perth. It is an industry-led entity that transfers technology between the resources and space sectors. The state government's co-investment of \$4 million for AROSE's HQ operations is anticipated to leverage about \$7.4 million in cash and in-kind for the entity.

**Ms L. METTAM:** What was the process under which funding was allocated to AROSE?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** I refer that to the director general.

**Ms R. Brown:** It is a partnership arrangement under which we have entered into a grant agreement with AROSE, whereby other funding is leveraged through other partners, including universities in industry.

**Ms L. METTAM:** How many staff from the department work for AROSE?

**Ms R. Brown:** There are no employees of the department in AROSE.

**Ms L. METTAM:** How does it work that the deputy director general of industry, science and innovation is also a director for AROSE?

**Ms R. Brown:** Where state government agencies may have a partnership arrangement with an external entity, often positions on that board may be held by a state government representative. In this case, the deputy director general sits on the board of AROSE. That is important as a partnership-type arrangement. Any other matters relating to conflicts are managed internally in the department.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I assume that role happened after funding was obtained?

**Ms R. Brown:** Yes.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Is it an oversight role?

**Ms R. Brown:** The funding arrangement between the agency and AROSE has a condition that the state government through JTSI has a position on that board.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to page 196 and paragraph 7.5 on research and development commercialisation. Budget paper No 3 indicates that \$8.2 million has been allocated to establish Founders Factory for the purpose of supporting startups. However, division 14 in budget paper No 2 states that this is for working with Founders Factory. Can the parliamentary secretary clarify the discrepancy and whether the department is looking to establish a government-run Founders Factory, or is it working with the established organisation?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** To start with, it is important to understand that attracting the Founders Factory to Perth and to set up in Western Australia was a coup. It is the organisation's first entry into Australia. It is globally renowned for tech acceleration. An allocation of \$7.2 million was made to Founders Factory to enable it to locate within Western Australia, and the remainder was to establish and support Founders Factory within JTSI.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

**Division 21: WA Health — Medical Research —**

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Ms J.L. Hanns, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Medical Research.

Dr S. Bowen, Director General.

Ms A. Kelly, Deputy Director General.

Ms S. Webb, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

[9.40 pm]

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

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I give the call to the member for Vasse.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to page 310 and the significant issue at paragraph 25. It states —

The Government is committed to advancing Western Australia as a leader in medical research and innovation, with a dedicated focus on leveraging research findings ...

Can the parliamentary secretary explain what the government is doing to address the ongoing challenge of what has been called the “brain drain” that is occurring as medical researchers are going interstate and overseas?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** The government is absolutely committed to making sure that we not only train the best and brightest of academics around medical research in Western Australia, but also attract those people and make Western Australia an attractive destination to work and study. The government has undertaken a range of initiatives. The best example that I can probably provide to the member is the future health research and innovation fund. There are a range of programs and initiatives around the expenditure. The member will see those as line items in the budget.

The government has supported a significant number of programs over a period of time. The future health research and innovation fund particularly has a program to support early and mid-career researchers called the WA near-miss awards emerging leaders program. Since 2020–21, there have been a number of opportunities right through to this current budget cycle to support those people. The program is designed to support Western Australian researchers who narrowly missed out on a highly competitive National Health and Medical Research Council investigators grant. It increases their chance of winning a grant in a future selection round.

I will probably refer through the director general to Ms Kelly to outline some of those opportunities in Western Australia and to expand on the information I have provided.

**Ms A. Kelly:** The future health research and innovation fund has a number of programs and initiatives, as the parliamentary secretary has indicated. One of our key areas is to not only retain, but also bring back home some of our researchers who are international. We have a number of programs that assist with that. The parliamentary secretary has advised of some of them. Some of those funding arrangements are multi-year and involve grants to assist researchers at various stages of their careers to ensure that we can be competitive throughout the world and that we can increase the health and wellbeing of all Western Australians.

**Ms L. METTAM:** This question relates to the significant issue at paragraph 28 and the future health research and innovation fund. How many applicants applied for funding in the most recent round and how many of those applicants were successful or unsuccessful?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** I am very happy to provide the member with a couple of examples of successful programs. I will refer the member’s question about the specific numbers she is seeking. For example, seven grants were awarded under the WA cohort studies—operational support program in 2023–24. I will have to defer to Ms Kelly to get the acronym for Co-FPP.

**Ms A. Kelly:** It is the co-funding partnership program.

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** Thank you.

The cancer research projects grant scheme received \$2.5 million worth of funding in 2023–24. The FHRI fund enabling scheme awarded 11 grants, the research infrastructure support program awarded 19 in 2024 and the WA near-miss awards emerging leaders fellowships and grants program awarded 25. The member can see it is a significant number. I will refer to Ms Kelly for the specifics of the member’s question.

**Ms A. Kelly:** I will have to take that question on notice. I do not have the total number of applicants. They will vary from program to program. In some of our programs our grants are competitive and some are formula-based. The research infrastructure support program is a formula-based grant.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Can that be provided by way of supplementary information?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** Probably, if the member would like to provide it as a question on notice.

**Ms L. METTAM:** How much has been allocated to the innovation seed fund? Did the parliamentary secretary mention that? How many grants have been awarded since its inception?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** In 2021–22, there were two separate grant processes—sorry, one was the seed innovation fund. In 2021–22, 17 grants were awarded; in 2022–23, nine grants were awarded; and in 2023–24, 11 grants were awarded.

**Ms L. METTAM:** We are running out of time. We will now go to the ChemCentre.

**The CHAIR:** The member for Scarborough had a question. Did the parliamentary secretary want to take it or are we getting a bit tight for time?

**Mr S.N. AUBREY:** I can ask a further question on that particular line item, unless the parliamentary secretary wants to give —

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** Sorry, member; I am happy for the opposition to have the opportunity.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

[9.50 pm]

**Division 32: Chemistry Centre (WA) —**

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Ms J.L. Hanns, Parliamentary Secretary representing the Minister for Science.

Ms L. Barbato, Acting Chief Executive Officer.

Ms B. Douglas, Director, Forensic Science.

Mr S. Anicic, Chief Financial Officer.

Mr J. Stokes, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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I give the call to the member for Vasse.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to page 480, “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”, paragraph 8, and the Chemistry Centre’s collaboration with the Western Australia Police Force and Royal Perth Hospital in studies around drink spiking. Is the Chemistry Centre witnessing a trend of more egregious drugs being used to spike drinks compared with what has been traditionally used?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** I will direct the question to the director for forensics.

**Ms B. Douglas:** We test for a broad range of substances that encounter newly emerging drugs that are seen in international and local markets, but we are not observing any particular trends in the types of drugs being detected and the overall detection rates in the drink spiking initiative.

**Ms L. METTAM:** There has not been an increase in the variety of drugs, but what is the measure of the increase in the use of drink spiking in the community?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** Testing commenced in August 2022, so there have been 260 cases to date. There has not been enough time to understand the results of that particular initiative or the trends, sorry.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I appreciate that the government has not had the opportunity to work out what the overall trends may be, but are there any plans to roll out services or implement a program in response to some of the initial findings as part of this program?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** The centre offers a very robust analysis of exactly what the member is talking about in terms of testing. The question around programs and initiatives really would fall under the jurisdiction of the police, so it would be up to the police as to what work they might want to do or what programs they might want to look into expanding.

**Ms L. METTAM:** In terms of the analysis and the 260 cases, what is the objective? Is it just to identify whether drink spiking has taken place or is further research being undertaken?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** I will defer that to the director of forensics.

**Ms B. Douglas:** The purpose behind the initiative was to provide a mechanism for people who suspect that they may have been subject to a drink spiking event to have a sample taken, particularly when it was not necessarily going to go down a normal criminal investigation path. That was the incentive behind the initiative. It is so people

could present at a police station, and have a sample taken and collected. It would be provided to us for analysis. It was more around understanding the prevalence of drink spiking and, if it is prevalent, the types of drugs used. The incentive behind the initiative was to be able to provide that opportunity to the community around having an avenue to have their suspicions or anything like that investigated further. It would then be referred back to police so our results would go back to police for them to further investigate with the complainant.

**Ms L. METTAM:** A final question: is this funding ongoing? How much is the funding for the program?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** I defer to the acting chief executive officer.

**Ms L. Barbato:** It forms part of the services that we provide to WA police. It is just part of a suite of services and cases that we test on behalf of police. It is scalable. Police have a memorandum of understanding with us and they increase their service demands as they take on different campaigns and directions depending on what their priorities are.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I said that was the last question, but there is one more. Is the ChemCentre meeting current demand or is there more it could provide?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** I would like to say, firstly, that the ChemCentre's toxicology scientists have provided WA police and hospital staff with kits to test a suitable sample to determine whether drink spiking has occurred. Testing kits are now also available 24/7 at all metropolitan and regional police stations across WA in an Australian-first initiative. As to further information on that question, I am happy to direct that to the director of forensic science.

**Ms B. Douglas:** In terms of the drink spiking initiative, yes, the laboratory is keeping up with demand. We provide early information back to the police investigators as intelligence and then follow up with more evidential reporting back to them. The laboratory is meeting the demands of that initiative, yes.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I am never saying "a further question" again! Is demand increasing? I know it is early days with 260 cases.

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** With respect, member, as the acting chief executive officer said previously, it is very early days for that program. Probably we would have some further data for the member this time next year in the estimates hearings.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** In a very brief *Readers Digest* fashion, clearly, given the time—parliamentary secretary, the four-year forensic research project aimed at developing the protein-based human identification procedure sounds very exciting. I wonder whether we could have a quick update of its progress. Is a test now available for police to use or is it still something that is being developed and improved by the centre?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** Given the time, I am happy for the acting chief executive officer to provide the response.

**Ms L. Barbato:** Thank you for the question. The government provided \$4.6 million over four years to develop this new forensic technique in WA, which provides rapid definitive human identification from single hair shafts. This has been undertaken with a number of universities and organisations—Edith Cowan University, Murdoch University, the Western Australia Police Force, PathWest, the University of California and Fiona Stanley Hospital. The project is on track and, by the end of 2025, we will move beyond the investigative and validation phase. By 2026, we expect to start using this technique on some preliminary cases. It is a very exciting project and our scientists are definitely very excited about the project in that it will allow for the WA community to open cold cases. It will support forensic testing of active cases and it will provide a new identification for disaster victims and missing persons. It provides very significant forensic advancements for the state and for the community and its IP will reside in WA, which will allow the commercialisation as a technique to be made available to other jurisdictions. This is very innovative, groundbreaking forensic science that the ChemCentre is embarking on and we are very proud to be able to do that here in WA.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, members. We have run out of time.

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** Can I say thank you very much to the advisers.

**The CHAIR:** Yes. Thank you, parliamentary secretary.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

*Committee adjourned at 10.00 pm*

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