

Division 70: Environment and Conservation, \$184 768 000 —

Ms L.L. Baker, Chairman.

Dr G.G. Jacobs, Minister for Water representing the Minister for Environment.

Mr K.J. McNamara, Director General.

Mr R.P. Atkins, Acting Deputy Director General, Environment.

Mr J.R. Sharp, Deputy Director General, Parks and Conservation.

Dr J.C. Byrne, Director, Corporate Services.

Ms A. Fergusson-Stewart, Principal Policy Adviser, Office of the Minister for Water.

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

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

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. For the purpose of following up the provision of this information, I ask the minister to clearly indicate to the committee which supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the Committee Clerk by Friday, 5 June 2009, so that members may read it before the report and third reading stages. If the supplementary information cannot be provided within that time, written advice is required of the day by which the information will be made available. Details in relation to supplementary information have been provided to both members and advisers and accordingly I ask the minister to cooperate with those requirements.

I caution members that if the minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice with the Clerk's office. Only supplementary information that the minister agrees to provide will be sought by Friday, 5 June 2009. It will also greatly assist Hansard if, when referring to the program statements volumes or the consolidated account estimates, members give the page number, item, program and amount in preface to their question.

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

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIRMAN: The member for Rockingham.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I refer to pages 887 and 895 of the *Budget Statements*. It is obvious that there is a significant reduction in appropriations to the environment portfolio that is well above the three per cent cuts. If my reading is correct, the minister plans to make up some of that difference from an increase in the landfill levy. I have a range of questions arising from this but, firstly, am I correct? Secondly, what does this mean for total overall spending on the environment portfolio; is there a cut in spending or does the minister plan to make up the total shortfall with allocations from the landfill levy? Those are my first two questions.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I thank the member for Rockingham. The estimated actual total appropriations provided to deliver services in 2008-09 was \$201 501 000. The total appropriation provided to deliver services —

Mr M. McGOWAN: Is that in 2009-10?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: — in the 2009-10 budget estimate is \$171 835 000. Therefore, there has been a reduction. I refer to the director general for some of the detail of those appropriations and the member's reference to the landfill levy.

Mr K.J. McNamara: In response to that question, in essence, the short answer is yes. There is a projected increase in the landfill levy revenue of \$39 million and an offset in reduction in the appropriation of \$39 million; therefore, the net effect is zero, but it has changed from an appropriation to use of the revenue. In total, as shown on page 887, a comparison of the estimated actual expenditure for 2008-09 and the estimate for 2009-10 shows an increase from \$292.7 million to \$308.5 million. The increase derives from a number of factors, including the

Chairman; Mr Mark McGowan; Dr Graham Jacobs; Mr Peter Abetz; Mr David Templeman; Ms Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Ian Blayney; Mr Chris Tallentire; Ms Margaret Quirk

election commitment funding shown at the bottom of page 887, and a projected increase in other grants and revenue to the department. There are some offsetting smaller reductions, but overall there is that increase from \$292 million to \$308 million.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Returning to the landfill levy, according to what the director general just said, the totality of the landfill levy will be going into the cost of services for the agency. I understand that is correct. Therefore, does that mean that none of the landfill levy will go into programs, which it was designed for, to deal with waste issues in particular, and to provide alternative ways and means of dealing with waste problems?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: Currently, funds from the landfill levy go into the waste avoidance and resource recovery account, which is administered by the Waste Authority, with funds restricted to waste management purposes. Under the changes, the Department of Environment and Conservation will administer the WARR account and only a portion of the funds will be allocated to waste management activities, with the balance of funds supporting broader environment and conservation functions.

Mr M. McGOWAN: What proportion?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: At present, about \$13 million specifically goes to waste management and that will not diminish.

Mr M. McGOWAN: What proportion of the levy will be spent on waste and what proportion of the levy will go to the operational costs of the department and other programs?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: At the moment, \$13 million goes to waste. There is \$39 million from the levy and, obviously, \$13 million is one-third of \$39 million. I will pass the question over to the director general for the details, instead of him whispering in my ear.

Mr K.J. McNamara: The current year's projected revenue from the landfill levy is in the order of \$13 million. Obviously, the year is not over yet, but it is in the order of \$13 million. The increase is projected to produce an additional \$39 million, taking the total to \$52 million on a whole-year basis. The minister has made it quite clear that the amount to remain allocated to the waste function will not diminish from that \$13 million. Should we achieve more than \$52 million revenue next year or in the future, the minister will determine the proportional allocation of any growth above the \$52 million across waste and other functions.

[7.10 pm]

Mr M. McGOWAN: Can the minister advise whether he has legal advice as to whether this is possible under the existing law that creates the waste levy? I understand that the waste levy was designed to be spent on waste abatement and waste programs. I need to know whether it is to be spent on other things because we need to amend existing law to enable that to happen.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I refer the question to Mr Atkins.

Mr R.P. Atkins: Yes, the member is correct. The Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Levy Act 2007 stipulates that the levy revenue can be used only for waste management and recycling purposes. The minister intends introducing an amendment bill to Parliament to amend that provision to enable the levy to be used also for broader environment and conservation purposes.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Therefore, the department's entire budget is contingent upon another piece of legislation, other than the budget, passing through the house?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: Not the entire budget. In order for this particular component referred to by the member for Rockingham to happen, legislative change is needed.

Mr P. ABETZ: I have an associated question.

The CHAIRMAN: Certainly, member for Southern River.

Mr P. ABETZ: Obviously, a big portion of the increase in the landfill levy will have to be raised by local government because of the landfill component. In my electorate, the Southern Metropolitan Regional Council composts waste, but 40 per cent goes to landfill because there is no other way of disposing of it at this point. That will be reflected in council rates. Can the minister give some indication of what percentage of that \$39 million, or whatever it was, is estimated will be raised by local government from ratepayers as opposed to industrial waste dumpers such as builders paying extra tip fees?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I refer the question to Mr Atkins.

Mr R.P. Atkins: The fee increase raises the inert landfill levy from \$3 per cubic metre to \$12 per cubic metre, and the fee for putrescible wastes from \$7 per tonne to \$28 per tonne. This is expected to increase the cost of the average householder's kerbside collection service by approximately \$24 per year. The increased cost to the standard trailer load of household waste equates to \$5 or \$10 per trailer load; it obviously depends upon the size

Chairman; Mr Mark McGowan; Dr Graham Jacobs; Mr Peter Abetz; Mr David Templeman; Ms Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Ian Blayney; Mr Chris Tallentire; Ms Margaret Quirk

of the trailer. A substantial amount of the total levy will be paid by the commercial sector for commercial, industrial, construction and demolition waste. I do not have the figures to hand for the proportion that will be paid by the commercial sector as opposed to the municipal sector.

Mr M. McGOWAN: The waste levy was designed on the basis that it would ramp up slowly over time so that householders and businesses got used to the increased cost, thereby preventing an increase in illegal dumping. It appears to me that a fourfold increase in one year will lead to a massive cost increase per household and business. In light of that, would it not be reasonable to expect a huge increase in the amount of illegal dumping—of which a great deal already goes on—because of the massive increase in waste costs per household and business on the waste that is currently dumped? My question is: will the cost increase result in an increase in illegal dumping?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: By way of a little background, the Minister for Environment requested the Waste Authority to recommend increased landfill levies as a means to reduce the amount of waste going to landfill sites and thereby increase the amount of recycling in Western Australia, particularly in the case of inert construction and demolition waste. Consistent with this reform, the government has as part of stage 1 of the economic audit process endorsed the increase. The government recognises that the levy increase may be seen to encourage some unscrupulous individuals to illegally dump their waste in beautiful forests, parks, rivers or wherever. To strongly deter dumping, the Minister for Environment proposes a new offence of illegal dumping with substantial fines. The fines for illegal dumping are currently limited to \$1 000 under the Litter Act when a charge of polluting cannot be supported under the Environmental Protection Act. I am advised that the government's commitment to strengthen the monitoring and compliance programs will increase the capacity for the Department of Environment and Conservation to deliver thorough and timely investigations to ensure a response to any illegal activity.

The CHAIRMAN: I believe the member for Mandurah has a question.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I think we are probably asking about the same subject.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am very keen to ask a question but will defer to the member for Rockingham.

The CHAIRMAN: Member for Rockingham, please continue with your line of questioning.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I have one more question. The minister referred to inert waste, saying that part of the increase in the levy is a price mechanism designed to encourage recycling and so forth. That was of course predicated on the levy being spent on initiatives to encourage recycling and waste management to reuse whatever sort of waste is dumped. Of course, the levy will be used not for that purpose but for ordinary operational purposes of the department. Is the minister not increasing the levy and therefore encouraging additional dumping and at the same time not spending the additional levy moneys raised to put in place recycling facility initiatives such as those found in other states? I suppose my question is more of a statement to be passed to the director general: is there not a strong likelihood that these measures will cause an explosion in the amount of illegal dumping of both inert and non-inert waste in Western Australia?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: An enormous amount of construction or inert waste is dumped in landfill—a significant amount. The minister talked to me yesterday about the significant amount of inert waste that goes to landfill. Trying to encourage a recycling industry and a recycling of that inert waste is important. It is not only about putrescible waste and stating that an increased levy will cause increased illegal dumping; it is about the levy on inert waste trying to encourage recycling of that waste without it being directed to a significant amount of landfill. That is a challenge as well.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I refer to page 89 of the *Budget Statements*. No matter how the minister tries to dress this up, this is the proverbial dead cat on the lawn.

The CHAIRMAN: Is the member referring to page 89?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am referring to page 89. No matter how the minister tries to dress this up, this is the proverbial dead cat on the lawn, and the fact is the changes that have been made in this budget —

The CHAIRMAN: Member for Mandurah, can we please sort out the page number.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I refer to page 889.

The CHAIRMAN: Is the member referring to page 895?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am referring to the third dot point from the bottom of page 889.

This government is using a mechanism via the WARR act and the landfill levy to prop up the Department of Environment and Conservation's operations because it has slashed its budget. What is the justification for using the landfill levy for programs other than those specified in the act? This cannot be dressed up in any other way than robbing Peter to pay Paul. Simply, that is happening here. If that is the case, and funding to the waste

Chairman; Mr Mark McGowan; Dr Graham Jacobs; Mr Peter Abetz; Mr David Templeman; Ms Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Ian Blayney; Mr Chris Tallentire; Ms Margaret Quirk

management board is not being increased through the levy because it is being hived off into the department, thereby resulting in increases in illegal dumping, where in the budget are the funds for the additional officers required to police illegal dumping in Western Australia? This is a stinking cat of a decision. The minister must admit that this is an appalling measure by this minister to prop up the Department of Environment and Conservation's operations. What is the justification for using the landfill levy?

[7.20 pm]

Dr G.G. JACOBS: As I have said, one of the justifications was to try to increase the recycling of waste. As we know, levies are one way to do that. The levy will contribute to the management of waste. I recognise that not all of it will go to the management of waste and that some of it will go to other associated environmental considerations.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Be honest; it goes into the department's other operations that have nothing to do with the intention of the landfill levy. That is the reality. The minister cannot dress this up in any way other than to admit that. The government is increasing the landfill levy and is hiving off most of the cream to prop up the department's other operations. That is the reality. No matter how the minister tries to dress this up, he will fail because what he is doing is glaringly obvious.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: All I can do is reiterate what I have said. I will ask the director general to provide more detail. We have found that the low levies have been a major contributor to the low rates of recycling in Western Australia compared with other jurisdictions. For instance, in New South Wales, 65 per cent of its construction and demolition waste is recycled, whereas we recycle less than 20 per cent.

Mr K.J. McNamara: I will not elaborate on the policy decision that has been made on the budget process by the government.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It is a dead cat.

Mr K.J. McNamara: I will not comment on that. The points that I will make about inspection and so on are that the department has a statewide staff of 1 970 people who are widely distributed across the state, and include park rangers and other people who are out and about and are part of the state's eyes and ears to deal with illegal dumping. We have more than 100 environmental inspectors with full powers under the Environmental Protection Act. Under "Major Policy Decisions" and "Election Commitments" on page 887 of the *Budget Statements*, there is an extra \$1 million a year for environmental monitoring and compliance, which will be used to employ eight extra staff who will be scattered across regional areas and will work in our environmental enforcement unit. Although I do not have a universal knowledge of the waste levies of other jurisdictions in Australia, at the very least, I know that in New South Wales, where the landfill levy rates are higher than those in Western Australia, the money is paid into the consolidated account to Treasury. Some of that money is returned to be spent on waste functions and some of it is used for a broad range of environmental and conservation purposes, as well as for general Treasury revenue.

Mr M. McGOWAN: The point remains that there will be an explosion in the amount of illegal dumping that takes place when this measure is brought in, if the measure passes through the house. This is separate legislation from the budget legislation. The minister is pinning his budget on separate legislation. We will always vote in favour of the budget, but that is separate legislation from this legislation, and I would be very surprised if it were supported by the opposition. The other point I will make is that the minister said that he would crack down on illegal dumping by introducing higher penalties and so on and so forth. The director general said that the government had nearly 2 000 staff around the state. If the government is to crack down on illegal dumping, I would like to know what the government's record is thus far. How many prosecutions have been conducted and convictions secured for illegal dumping in Western Australia over the past four years?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I do not have those figures to hand but I reiterate that illegal dumping is dealt with by the very unsatisfactory Litter Act, which does not have any teeth to deal with the issue of illegal dumping. As I have said previously, we must attend to that by introducing legislation.

Mr M. McGOWAN: It is not about the teeth; it is about the number of prosecutions and convictions the government has secured. That will be relevant when determining how effective a crackdown will be because we need to know the record of the agency in pursuing these matters. Can either the director general or the minister provide that information by way of supplementary information?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: We do not have those figures but we are happy to take the question on notice and provide the last four years of figures.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I seek to obtain that information as supplementary information.

Chairman; Mr Mark McGowan; Dr Graham Jacobs; Mr Peter Abetz; Mr David Templeman; Ms Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Ian Blayney; Mr Chris Tallentire; Ms Margaret Quirk

The CHAIRMAN: Is the minister happy to provide that as supplementary information?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: A supplementary question has some guidelines attached to it.

Mr M. McGOWAN: The minister will have 10 days to provide that information. I am asking for that information to be provided by way of supplementary information but I also ask the minister to tell us the ballpark figure of how many prosecutions and convictions the government has launched.

The CHAIRMAN: Will the minister repeat the information that he will provide so I can allocate a supplementary information number?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: If the member is asking for this rather extensive information, we will need more than two days to provide it. That is all I am saying.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I would not be surprised if the director general knew the figure. He is very knowledgeable.

The CHAIRMAN: Can we confirm the information that the minister will provide? Is the minister happy to give this information?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: That depends on whether the director general can provide that information. If he cannot, and he is happy to provide it as supplementary information, we will be happy to do that.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I am happy to ask for it as supplementary information. I would like information on the number of prosecutions and successful convictions for illegal dumping over the past four years.

[*Supplementary Information No A31.*]

Mr M. McGOWAN: If the director general has something to add, I would like to hear that as well.

Mr K.J. McNamara: As general policy and practice, we have enforcement roles under a range of statutes, including the Environmental Protection Act, the Litter Act and also the Conservation and Land Management Act and other statutes. We have an enforcement and prosecutions policy. We prosecute people, major corporations, state entities and private citizens. When it is appropriate, we will do that, and we will continue to do so. Quite a large number of infringement notices are issued for littering, but that is at the lower end of the scale rather than what the member might term "illegal dumping". Beyond that, I do not have the figures at hand to give a precise answer to the question.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Not even a ballpark figure? I would be very surprised if it were more than five.

Mr P. ABETZ: I refer to the environmental community grants program on page 887 under "Major Policy Decisions" and "Election Commitments". Can the minister advise us about the current status of the program and of the sorts of groups that are likely to benefit from it?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I thank the member for Southern River. The \$6 million to establish the new environmental community grants program comprises \$1.5 million in the first year and \$1.5 million for each of the out years. The government has committed to establishing a \$6 million environmental community grant program and on 22 December 2008, cabinet endorsed the commencement of the program in 2009-10. Funding for that is available in seven categories: biodiversity conservation; sustainable catchment management; fauna rescue and rehabilitation; nature appreciation; natural areas; regional parks; and Bush Forever sites. The Department of Health will provide an additional \$30 000 through the Fiona Stanley Hospital project to provide support for major conservation and environmental organisations; and the protection of high-value areas by landholders on private land. Newspaper advertisements inviting applications for funding ran in *The West Australian* and regional and metropolitan newspapers on 28 February this year. The Minister for Environment also wrote directly to an extensive mailing list of potential applicants to advise them of the new program. Applications closed on 1 May this year. The program has been administered by the Department of Environment and Conservation with existing staff. A recommendation for grants will be provided to the Minister for Environment for approval by early June. Letters notifying applicants whether their grants have been successful are scheduled to be sent out in mid-June. Grants will range up to \$30 000. Volunteer community groups and individuals do a remarkable job in caring for the environment and I am pleased to support them through this major initiative.

[7.30 pm]

Mr P. ABETZ: Is any funding available for local government under that scheme to deal with the costs associated with Bush Forever sites under its care?

Chairman; Mr Mark McGowan; Dr Graham Jacobs; Mr Peter Abetz; Mr David Templeman; Ms Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Ian Blayney; Mr Chris Tallentire; Ms Margaret Quirk

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I will refer this to the director general. There is an allocation under the regional parks and Bush Forever sites of \$180 000, including the extra \$30 000 from the Department of Health.

Mr K.J. McNamara: In addition to the specific regional parks and Bush Forever category and some of the broader categories of biodiversity, catchment management and so on, there is an explicit commitment in the government's environmental election policy that eligibility for the grants program will extend to local government.

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: I have some questions about the coordination of the response to climate change on page 894.

The CHAIRMAN: I ask the member to speak up a little.

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: I am a very softly spoken person. Perhaps I had modulated my voice as a reflection of the modestness of the allocation in the budget for the response to climate change. I note that the budget has gone down. The figure was a bit over \$15 million in last year's budget. We spent only one-third of that last year. Next year's budget is down to \$11 million. I wish to ask a series of questions about this. Do we see the problem of climate change abating? Is that why we are reducing the amount of money allocated to climate change? Is there something that has not been shared with the rest of the scientific community about climate change, perhaps that it is all okay and we are on the path to recovery? Could the minister explain which portions of this budget are low emissions energy development funding; that is, what are the LEED grants? Although the LEED scheme has survived for 2009-10, can the minister tell us whether there is provision in the forward estimates beyond 2009-10 for continuation of LEED funding?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I wish to reassure the member that we have not given up the campaign about the impact of climate change. The member already knows about the major achievements.

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: Where would I find those? Where are they listed?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: We cannot put everything in the budget.

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: There are no major achievements at all. There is no list of achievements, let alone major achievements.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I ask the member to hear me out. The achievements were for 2008-09. These were things that the Labor Party started when it was in government, including the climate change adaptation strategy for Western Australia, the continued implementation of phase 3 of the Indian Ocean climate initiative —

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: The minister is reading out the achievements from last year's budget; I am looking at this year's budget. They were achievements from 2007-08.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: We completed round 2 of the LEED fund and we conducted round 3 of the LEED fund. We continue to develop the climate change adaptation strategies, so we have not reduced our efforts or given up. We continue to implement phase 3 of the Indian Ocean climate initiative and the government's adaptation programs. I will ask the director general to give more specific details about the spend.

Mr K.J. McNamara: The question relating to page 894 relates to the difference between the 2008-09 estimated actual and the figure for the 2009-10 budget. This essentially relates to the cash flow of the low emissions energy development fund expenditure. As to the question about the continuation of the LEED fund, page 897 of the budget papers shows the LEED fund allocation across the years from 2009-10 through to 2012-13 as amounts of \$7.9 million, \$8.8 million, \$8.8 million and \$6.7 million respectively. The minister has already referred to the work that commenced on the development of a climate change adaptation strategy and the continuation of the Indian Ocean climate initiative. Other major areas of work have been attended to and are ongoing. There is a lot of activity at the national level. Our department, like others, has been heavily involved in Council of Australian Governments processes, looking at climate change issues and the development of the carbon pollution reduction scheme. It is also important to note that investment in climate change is not restricted to our department and our portfolio. There is a lot of activity in a range of portfolios, including agriculture, planning and infrastructure, forest products, fisheries, the Treasury department with the emissions trading unit and so on. The major activities currently and in the immediate future will be delivering on the government's election commitment to develop and implement a climate change adaptation strategy.

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: Did the adviser say that that was a commitment?

Mr K.J. McNamara: There was an explicit commitment in the government's election policy on the environment to develop a climate change adaptation strategy for Western Australia.

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: If we go back to last year's budget, which the minister was obviously referring to earlier, in 2008-09 the department was going to be busying itself preparing a draft adaptation framework for

Chairman; Mr Mark McGowan; Dr Graham Jacobs; Mr Peter Abetz; Mr David Templeman; Ms Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Ian Blayney; Mr Chris Tallentire; Ms Margaret Quirk

Western Australia. Presumably, that is the same body of work that the department is talking about doing as part of the election commitment of the new government. Is that the same body of work? They are both adaptation frameworks.

Mr K.J. McNamara: At the last election the incoming government had a commitment to a climate change adaptation strategy. There are some features in that strategy that are not a straight continuation of the work that was already in train on climate change. There will be a focus on adaptation, but also mitigation, in the development of that strategy. We expect that that will go through public processes later this year and during next year. It has not rolled out into those public processes as yet.

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: So no document has yet been produced on the adaptation framework?

Mr K.J. McNamara: That is correct. There has been no document produced that gives effect or starts to give effect to the commitment to a new climate change adaptation strategy.

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: The department committed to completing a couple of other policies in 2008-09. What has happened to the sectoral emissions reduction strategy study, including the transport emissions reduction strategy? That was supposed to be completed in 2008-09.

[7.40 pm]

Dr G.G. JACOBS: The director general will provide some further detail.

The CHAIRMAN: What page number, member?

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: It is page 1073.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: That has gone off the radar!

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: This is what the department said it was funded to do, and I am asking whether that money has been spent on doing that work. The budget is in there; has that body of work been completed?

The CHAIRMAN: Let me just confirm that we are still on page 894, heading 7, “Coordinate the Response to Climate Change”.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: The Chairman mentioned another page number; is the member referring to the previous year’s budget?

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: I am saying that this is the body of work that was to be completed. Has that work been completed?

Mr K.J. McNamara: To my knowledge, the specific answer to that is no. Due to the change of government and the significant shift, of course, in national activity around climate change, the driving factors in the Office of Climate Change’s work in the financial year that we are now coming to the conclusion of—certainly since the change of government—has been oriented predominantly to early preparatory work for a climate change adaptation strategy in fulfilment of the government’s election commitment. But in terms of immediacy and workload and occupying people’s time—including my own—we have been dealing with the very intense Council of Australian Governments agenda around climate change, and the sequence through the development of the commonwealth emissions trading scheme; the white paper, the draft legislation and so on. There has been a very intense occupation of a great many people around Australia in contributing to and representing the state’s interests into that national agenda.

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: So the work on sectoral emissions stopped? Another major initiative was preparing a public discussion and policy paper for the application of a carbon price for state government decision making; that has not gone ahead?

Mr K.J. McNamara: I am not armed with specific answers to those questions because they are not matters that are highlighted in the budget papers before us. But I think certainly around carbon pricing, clearly the national agenda has taken precedence over state-based initiatives in that arena.

The CHAIRMAN: Does the member have a further question?

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: Yes, I have a further question. Can the minister advise us how many full-time equivalents were in this area of coordinating the response to climate change as at the beginning of the last financial year, and how many FTEs there are now?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: It has been drawn to my attention, member, that on page 894 of the *Budget Statements*, under the heading of “Employees (Full Time Equivalents), under the main heading of “Coordinate the Response to Climate Change” it states that in 2007-08 there were 17 FTEs; in 2008-09 there were 22 FTEs—actually that was budgeted—there was an estimate of 23.

Chairman; Mr Mark McGowan; Dr Graham Jacobs; Mr Peter Abetz; Mr David Templeman; Ms Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Ian Blayney; Mr Chris Tallentire; Ms Margaret Quirk

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: Which page is this on?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: It is on page 894 of the *Budget Statements*, under the heading “Coordinate the Response to Climate Change” and “Employees (Full Time Equivalents)”, and the answer is 23.

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: Okay.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: Minister, I refer to the Kimberley conservation strategy line item on page 887 of the *Budget Statements*. Will the minister update me on the status of the strategy, please?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: Is the question about funding of \$9 million to develop an integrated Kimberley science and conservation strategy, member for Geraldton?

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: Yes.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: The government’s election policy for the environment under protecting the Kimberley included a commitment of \$9 million to develop the integrated Kimberley science and conservation strategy. The Department of Environment and Conservation will lead the development of that implementation under the direction of the minister, and in conjunction with the Department of Industry and Resources through a consultative process with a full range of stakeholders, including the state government, local government, industry and community, including Indigenous communities. The cabinet has endorsed the commencement of the stakeholder consultation to provide input to the strategy. Following that consultation, a further submission will be made to cabinet for consideration. That submission will detail the outcome of the consultation and proposed expenditure of funding to implement the Kimberley science and conservation strategy.

The minister has also written to 50 stakeholders, inviting their views. What came out of that was that this is a high-value natural and cultural area deserving of protection. Practical initiatives to assist in preserving the region’s ecological integrity include partnerships between state government and local governments, priorities for further scientific research, and opportunities to further engage Indigenous people in conservation work and joint management of conservation areas. The next phase will involve public consultation via a series of forums in the Kimberley and in Perth.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I wish to return to the issue of the \$39 million that it is necessary to raise from the waste management landfill levy to meet the gap in the department’s budgeting. Minister, does that not act as a disincentive for the department to promote the reduction in waste, because the department becomes dependent on receiving \$39 million a year through the waste levy?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I thank the member for the question. As I have said before, the key objectives of the landfill levy were to create a disincentive to dispose of waste to landfill and also create a relative incentive for reusing and recycling, which I imagine that the member for Gosnells would be quite supportive of.

Mr M. McGOWAN: On the basis that the levy is spent on that.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: The landfill levy will generate revenue for waste management, as well as other environmental and conservation programs. Currently, the proceeds of the levy are used for waste management. These programs include grants to local government, industry and community, and the projects have been funded on the recommendations of the Waste Authority.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I have a further question.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I am not sure that I can add anything further.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Does the fact that \$39 million has been budgeted across the forward estimate years show that the government has not done any work to establish whether this will act as a disincentive to the proper disposal of waste—in fact the government is building a whole lot of financial planning around the assumption that it will receive \$39 million a year, and that there will not be any reduction at all in the levy collected?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: That will be an issue for the *Mid-year Review of Public Sector Finances*, which will show us how we are running with that. Compared with other states, the Western Australia levies are very low. In New South Wales, the waste environment levy is \$46.70 a tonne for both household and industry waste. In South Australia, the waste depot levy is \$24.20 a tonne. Western Australia’s rates are expected to be \$12 a cubic metre for inert waste, and \$28.

[7.50 pm]

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: The minister conceded earlier that there would be a risk of increased dumping. Do the government’s budget figures allow for additional inspectors and people to do clean-up operations, and where is that in the budget?

Chairman; Mr Mark McGowan; Dr Graham Jacobs; Mr Peter Abetz; Mr David Templeman; Ms Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Ian Blayney; Mr Chris Tallentire; Ms Margaret Quirk

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I think the director general has answered this question about adequate human resources to carry out that program.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I can see that the minister is having some difficulty in justifying this policy. There will be a \$156 million hole in the government's budget over four years if this legislation does not pass through Parliament. In any event, it is now the end of May. This budget will commence on 1 July this year. Therefore, my question is: when does the government plan to bring in the legislation to increase the levy and when is it expected that that legislation will pass through Parliament? Has the legislation been drafted? Is it in the drafting process or is it something that we might not deal with until next year?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: It would be fair to say that it is in draft form. Obviously, the legislation will be brought into Parliament as quickly as possible.

Mr M. McGOWAN: But not before 1 July—it cannot be.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: It is unlikely.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Therefore, the minister is admitting that there is a hole in the budget, unless the government is going to somehow make the legislation retrospective, which I do not think is possible.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I am not handling the legislation, but I suggest that we would do that as soon as possible.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Is it expected that the legislation will be passed some time in the second half of this year or the first half of next year? I am dubious that it will be, but, if it is passed, when does the minister expect that to happen?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I think I have answered that question twice, so I might give the director general a chance to add some more.

Mr K.J. McNamara: There are two elements to moving forward with the increase. One is that the regulations have to be amended to put in place the increase—that is, an amendment to the regulations, not to the act. The extra levy will be achieved by regulation. The Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Act needs to be amended to vary the purposes for which the revenue can be used. As the minister has said, that is currently in the drafting process. It is the minister's intent to bring it forward as quickly as possible. The measure that is necessary to achieve the increased revenue amount requires only regulation, not the passage of an amendment to the act.

Mr M. McGOWAN: No, but any such regulation to increase the amount that was ultra vires the head legislation would be invalid; therefore, legislative backing would be required. The primary legislation would need to be amended before such regulations could be enforced; otherwise, they would not be enforceable. Any such levy collected would be ultra vires the head act and, therefore, illegal.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I will defer to the director general shortly, but, as the member has said, we are talking about a regulation to increase the levy. The levy is already in place. We will actually be increasing the levy by regulation. If the amount collected from the levy is to be put into a fund that is not just for waste management by a waste authority, obviously some legislation would be needed. Mr Atkins will add to that answer.

Mr R.P. Atkins: Section 4, I think, of the Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Levy Act provides for regulations to be created to strike the rate for the landfill levy. That legislation currently exists and those regulations can be gazetted at any time.

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: And disallowed at any time.

Mr R.P. Atkins: And disallowed at any time. That simply generates the revenue. As the minister pointed out, the WARR act needs to be amended to broaden the purpose, so they are separate actions.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Is Mr Atkins saying that the sum of money generated would sit in an account until such time as the head legislation was changed and the money was transferred to the department? Secondly, Mr Atkins said earlier that it was a \$24 increase per householder; did he mean \$24 per household or per householder?

Mr R.P. Atkins: Household.

Mr M. McGOWAN: The first part of my question remains. The money will be put into an account and transferred later; is that what is being said?

Mr R.P. Atkins: The legislation currently provides for regulations to allow the levy to be collected. That levy revenue then goes into what is called the WARR account, which is a separate, special account for it. The

Chairman; Mr Mark McGowan; Dr Graham Jacobs; Mr Peter Abetz; Mr David Templeman; Ms Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Ian Blayney; Mr Chris Tallentire; Ms Margaret Quirk

legislation currently allows for those moneys to be used only for waste management, resource recovery and recycling activities.

Mr M. McGOWAN: In other words, it will be a form of retrospective legislation, because it will authorise something that was not authorised at the time.

Mr R.P. Atkins: The current legislation authorises the revenue to be raised by way of landfill levies and for those revenues to be used for waste purposes. That is in the current legislation.

Mr M. McGOWAN: It strikes me as a high-risk, cobbled-together strategy if the government is going to make a regulation to increase the amount of money and then the money will be collected on the basis that at some time the government will change the legislation. Will that money be able to be spent on departmental purposes, or will the money that is collected in the next six months be able to be spent only on waste activities, and therefore the hole will still exist in the department's budget?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: My understanding is that until the WARR act is changed, that money would go into that fund and could be used only for waste management. When we bring in the legislation, which will be as soon as possible, and it is passed, obviously the moneys could then be transferred to the new fund.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Is that the moneys collected from that point or the moneys previously collected?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I would have thought it would be the moneys from the point that the regulations are changed.

Mr M. McGOWAN: The law needs to be changed.

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: That depends on what the change to the act says.

Mr M. McGOWAN: It is either retrospective or ultra vires; it is one or the other.

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: I refer to page 887. I am looking at the net amount appropriated for the department, which has obviously dropped quite considerably from \$202 million to \$171 million. That is a pretty massive drop. Can the minister tell me what will be the full-time equivalent reduction in the department to accommodate that very dramatic cut in the amount appropriated?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I am not sure that that reduction relates solely to the reduction in FTEs, but I will refer the question to the director general.

Mr K.J. McNamara: I will say what I said in response to an earlier question. Although the comparison between the \$202 million and the \$171 million on page 887 is the comparison that has been made, the actual total cost of services increases from \$292.7 million in 2008-09 to \$308.5 million in 2009-10.

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: That is when the landfill levy comes in.

Mr K.J. McNamara: The landfill levy is part of that. It is not the only change, of course; there are a number of others, including the election commitments at the bottom of the same page.

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: But they are less than the cuts that have been made. The additional amounts for election commitments in budget paper No 3 are substantially less. I am now looking at page 122 of budget paper No 3. There is an increment of maybe \$4 million, but the amount that has been cut more than exceeds the amount that has been added. Can the director general tell me what is happening with the FTEs?

[8.00 pm]

Mr K.J. McNamara: There are a range of pluses and minuses from one year to the next, including the efficiency dividend. The landfill levy side of things balances out because it is money in on one side and out on the other. There are a range of other changes, including a more realistic allowance for the grants and external funds that we receive.

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: More realistic meaning less—is that right?

Mr K.J. McNamara: No; more realistically upwards, because we have a track record of underestimating the external revenues that the department earns. We anticipate next year that those external revenues will be about \$135 million.

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: Where will those external revenues be from?

Mr K.J. McNamara: From a wide range: natural resource management funding, funding that is recouped from the Forest Products Commission, a range of grants and subsidies, the landfill levy, recreation income —

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: Could the director general —

The CHAIRMAN: I ask the member for Armadale to address her question to the minister.

Chairman; Mr Mark McGowan; Dr Graham Jacobs; Mr Peter Abetz; Mr David Templeman; Ms Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Ian Blayney; Mr Chris Tallentire; Ms Margaret Quirk

Mr K.J. McNamara: There is environmental regulation fee income; there are a wide range of sources. However, the question at the start was about full-time equivalent staff. Our current level of FTEs in the 2008-09 budget, from memory, is in the order of 1 944. The FTE level has been set and is on one of the budget pages.

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: Is it?

Mr K.J. McNamara: It is on a page later than page 887. I cannot say at the moment which page it is on. For the 2009-10 financial year it is 1 970 for the department.

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: It is therefore going up.

Mr K.J. McNamara: It goes up, and the net increase is a combination of an allowance for some decrease as a result of the three per cent efficiency dividend. It then increases as a result of the election commitments and the more —

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: So there is an increase in people as a result of the efficiency dividend.

Mr K.J. McNamara: No; FTEs have gone up from 1 944 to 1 970. The net increase is the result of a reduction to deal with the three per cent efficiency dividend and an increase across a combination of election commitments and the allowance for external revenues, but it is a net increase in the FTE level.

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: A net increase in FTEs. I ask by way of supplementary information for a list of expected revenues to the department, which the director general said he was expecting. Can the minister provide by way of supplementary information just what those increased revenues will be that the department is expecting? Obviously the appropriation from the consolidated account is less. I would like to see the contrast in each of these grant fundings or income fundings, what was budgeted for in 2008-09 and what the department is budgeting for in 2009-10.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I do not know whether it is the late hour, but that question seems to seek more information than we can probably give off the top of our heads. Perhaps we could provide that information to the member as supplementary information.

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: Yes, I am asking for it by way of supplementary information.

The CHAIRMAN: Will the minister accept the request for supplementary information?

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: It is basically listing all of these external sources of income, because the advice was that these have been substantially upgraded.

The CHAIRMAN: The minister has agreed to provide the answer by way of supplementary information.

[Supplementary Information No A32.]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I refer to page 889, “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”, and refer specifically to the second dot point, which refers to the department’s commitment to develop and implement recovery actions. The first sentence in that second dot point lists pest animals, weeds, dieback, salinity et cetera. What is the department’s allocation of funding to combat dieback in Western Australia?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: The second dot point refers to pest animals but then moves to the very important issue of dieback. Was the question from the member for Mandurah about the allocation to that particular part?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes. In the budget, what has the department allocated to combat dieback?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I do not have that specific information with me. I will defer to the director general.

Mr K.J. McNamara: The expenditure on dieback takes a variety of forms. For example, management planning for the management of parks, the protocols that apply to the management of timber harvesting by the Forest Products Commission, the way we go about landscape design for facilities and roads, the way we manage visitors, the way we exercise hygiene in our own operations and so on—these all contribute to the prevention or the mitigation of the spread and control of dieback, as indeed do many of our research programs and recovery actions. Therefore, dieback expenditure is a difficult thing to isolate and measure on its own because it is embroiled in many other actions that have multiple purposes. However, I can say that in addition to that, the budget for this financial year, 2008-09, for direct control of dieback is in the order of \$1.5 million to \$1.6 million; that is, phosphite spraying, work to contain the dieback infestation at Bell Track in Fitzgerald River National Park and other discrete actions specifically oriented to dieback. The budget for that is about \$1.5 million for the current year, and I expect around that level to be maintained for the next financial year.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I have a further question. The director general mentioned an important national park that has experienced extensive dieback concerns; that is, Fitzgerald River National Park. Given that the government has determined to build a road through Fitzgerald River National Park from Hopetoun through to

Chairman; Mr Mark McGowan; Dr Graham Jacobs; Mr Peter Abetz; Mr David Templeman; Ms Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Ian Blayney; Mr Chris Tallentire; Ms Margaret Quirk

Bremer Bay—I think that is the correct alignment—will this decision by the government not put at greater risk the potential spread of dieback through Fitzgerald River National Park, thus endangering the native flora in that jewel in the crown of the great southern region?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I thank the member for the question. That is actually fairly close to my heart, as the Fitzgerald River National Park is in my electorate. I suppose the government's position was to try to lessen the impact of the losses suffered due to the loss of 1 400 jobs at Ravensthorpe Nickel Operations, and that the boost to tourism in Hopetoun was an attempt to somehow backfill some of those losses with an increase in the potential for some tourist trade. The Premier indicated that he supported the broader policy of opening up the national park so that people could use it and enjoy it. However, the tourist road through Fitzgerald River National Park connecting Bremer Bay has been costed by Main Roads at around \$131 million with an estimated five-year construction timetable. There is a national park management plan that provides for upgrades of roads and facilities at either end of the park. It does not accommodate vehicle access through the central wilderness, which extends from the coast between Quoin Head and Fitzgerald Beach—a very beautiful part of the country. I suppose the important thing is that the proposal to seal a tourist road through Fitzgerald River National Park would be subject to economic and, particularly, environmental concerns being satisfactorily addressed. The threat from dieback is recognised as a key environmental issue for this proposal, and the member is correct in some of his concerns and they are concerns of mine, as well.

[8.10 pm]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The point of the question specifically asks, and the director general may be able to assist, whether the department's officers believe that the proposal for such a road increases the chances of the spread of dieback in that very important, pristine national park of Western Australia.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I refer that question to the director general.

Mr K.J. McNamara: The department is required by the Conservation and Land Management Act to manage the park in accordance with the approved management plan for the park. The approved management plan does not provide for a road to be constructed through that central core of the park between the two ends and close to the coast. The Premier and the government have made it very clear in their announcements on this issue that such a road would proceed from Bremer Bay to Hopetoun only after a thorough economic analysis and a full and careful environmental analysis. There is a \$20 million allocation to Main Roads' budget in this year's *Budget Statements*, and we are working with the federal government on this issue as well. It is proposed to proceed with some sealing of roads at either end of the park—that is, existing unsealed roads which are open all year round, but which must be closed when there is wet weather. That is disruptive to access, tourism, visitation and the visitor experience. But even more importantly, all-season roads—dirt roads that are to be sealed—will give an advantage for dieback control and protection of the park's values, enable better control over drainage and run-off and will avoid us having to bring in fill and gravel to fix roads that are not infrequently washed out by heavy rains in that part of the world. Therefore, for those roads that are open to traffic all year round, it is to the advantage of the dieback protection of the park to seal those roads.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I have one final question on dieback. I will not ask whether the minister has a preference, because that would be inappropriate; however, are we in Western Australia winning the fight against dieback? I preface that with: is the spread of dieback through our native vegetation in Western Australia increasing; and, if so, why do we have an allocation of only approximately \$1.5 million to \$1.6 million to combat it? There are two parts to my question. Is the spread of dieback through Western Australia's native vegetation increasing or decreasing? If it is spreading, why do we have a stagnant amount, it seems, of \$1.5 million to \$1.6 million to be spent across the department to combat this particular scourge?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: The director general is happy to make some comments.

Mr K.J. McNamara: Dieback is an insidious threat to the natural ecosystems and the native flora of south west Western Australia. When we talk about other threatening processes, such as feral animals, weeds, altered fire regimes, clearing and the like, there are concrete actions we can take to deal with those. They might take a lot of resources, but solutions are available that can be applied. Dieback is more insidious; it is a soil-borne pathogen that moves by root-to-root transfer underground, and it moves down slope without human assistance and animals move it around; therefore, it is insidious and inherently difficult to deal with.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Is it increasing?

Mr K.J. McNamara: The spread of dieback is continuing. I could not comment on the pace at which that is happening, but it continues to spread. We do our best, through some of the measures I referred to earlier, in management of logging, management of access, roading and controlling the way mining operations are carried

Chairman; Mr Mark McGowan; Dr Graham Jacobs; Mr Peter Abetz; Mr David Templeman; Ms Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Ian Blayney; Mr Chris Tallentire; Ms Margaret Quirk

out—there are all sorts of other measures to minimise that spread. There is the Centre for Phytophthora Science and Management at Murdoch University, and although I am not au fait with the detailed science of what it has been doing, I have had reported to me in recent times that not only is it making some encouraging findings in the control of dieback—which can be done with things like phosphite spraying and we do that—but also I think it is actually having some success in the eradication of dieback at specific sites. That is something I need to understand better and work out what its applicability might be, but that is scientific work that is in progress. There is not a magic bullet, but work is underway.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: In the available research, is there a scoped mapping of Western Australia's vegetation that shows where dieback exists and the extent to which it exists, which we could then use as a comparison with previous mapping initiatives? I am very interested in this matter and I am not trying to throw any blame at anybody. I simply want to know whether we are winning the battle against dieback because it seems to me that we are seeing dieback spread rapidly in some areas and appear in new areas. If we are going to have policy initiatives that are related to economic initiatives, such as the proposed road from Hopetoun to Bremer Bay—the minister has already admitted that with regard to increasing tourism—we need to have this information. That information needs to form part of the assessment by the environmental agencies of the viability of this road. I agree with sealing the road because I can understand the science of that and I absolutely agree that it is much better to have a sealed track than a gravel track. However, if it poses a major risk to our national parks and our native flora, we must have this data before we make a decision to whack a road through this jewel. I am asking, perhaps through supplementary information, whether the department can direct me to up-to-date research that could give me an answer.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: There is no way that would proceed without a full environmental assessment of the impact of the road on the Fitzgerald River National Park. For instance, although we talk about the road being sealed as a medicament in its way, because dieback is transferred, particularly in winter, through mud on tyres and whatever, we would assess how the construction—the actual physical building—of that road would impact on the spread of dieback. Those processes would be gone through very thoroughly before any process to implement this connecting road would be contemplated.

As far as the issue of the mapping is concerned, I know that some good work was done on mapping in the short period when I was shadow environment minister. Some good work is being done on mapping for particular areas where dieback is. These areas are highlighted by demarcations that indicate areas that are dieback-free and areas that possibly have dieback. The mapping of that gives us a risk assessment about the possibility of where we can transfer dieback and how we can control it. I will refer to the director general about some of that mapping to give the member more of an idea.

[8.20 pm]

Mr K.J. McNamara: There has been extensive mapping of dieback in south west Western Australia and there are all sorts of models that project the spread of dieback. We watch the Fitzgerald River National Park very closely. That is why we have spent several million dollars in recent years to contain the Bell Track infestation that we believe was introduced in the 1960s. We are trying to contain it to its mini-catchment and not infect the rest of the park. Our surveillance led us to detect the infestation at Sussetta River in the past couple of years. We are looking at taking action similar to that which we took at Bell Track to isolate and contain that infestation. More broadly, there is general vegetation and dieback mapping across the south west. However, the intense dieback mapping is usually carried out ahead of ground-disturbing operations such as mining and building roads and recreational facilities in our parks and forests, as well as logging and so on. I cannot recall the precise number of years, but if we were to, for example, create a logging coupe, we would not use dieback mapping from five or seven years earlier; it must be current. Therefore, it is not possible to say at any one point in time that we have a current map. A rolling program and set of maps are partly driven by what the proposed disturbances might be.

Mr P. ABETZ: I refer to the second dot point on page 889 regarding the threat to the state's biodiversity from pest animals, weeds and so on. What activities are being undertaken to counter those threats, particularly from pest animals and weeds? The cane toad is mentioned in a separate line. Can the minister provide some information on what is planned?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I thank the member for Southern River. That is the same section in which dieback is also mentioned. The pest animals referred to are essentially foxes, cats, goats, donkeys, pigs, wild dogs and camels, and the weeds are a threat because they compete with native species for the habitat. Feral animals can have a significant effect on the population of natural species, as the member would realise. The member may be aware of the Department of Environment and Conservation's Western Shield program, which was launched in the mid-1990s. Under that program, DEC baits nearly four million hectares of conservation land up to four times a year.

Chairman; Mr Mark McGowan; Dr Graham Jacobs; Mr Peter Abetz; Mr David Templeman; Ms Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Ian Blayney; Mr Chris Tallentire; Ms Margaret Quirk

The target species are the fox and, to a lesser degree, feral cats. That is largely because cats are extremely crafty creatures and there are only certain windows of opportunity when cats will take bait.

In the past few years, DEC has implemented a series of programs targeting pest animals and weeds through the biodiversity conservation initiative. The aim of the approach is to target areas that have weed and feral animal infestations and to control them before they become a problem and become unmanageable. DEC also has a remote area deployment program whereby a team of conservation employees from the south west undertake specific programs. Those projects include fencing, weed removal and feral predator control.

As to the question of cane toads, which is a serious threat to Western Australia, every effort is being made to continue the fight against the incursion of cane toads. During the election campaign, we committed \$1.2 million over four years to fund the Kimberley Toad Busters. It was given an initial allocation of \$339 000 in 2008-09. Further annual payments of \$300 000 will follow over the ensuing three years. This will fund field work by the Kimberley Toad Busters and provide it with financial certainty. Hon Donna Faragher and Minister Hames visited the Kimberley last year and saw the fantastic work that the volunteers were doing. The initiatives to tackle the scourge of cane toads, including distributing cane toad packs —

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Did she catch any cane toads?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: Yes, she did. We have photographic evidence of that.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: At what time of night did she do it?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I think she did an all-nighter. Cane toad disposal points have been set up in Kununurra, the DEC complex, the local veterinary centre and the Shire of Wyndham-East Kimberley. The government continues to fund scientific research to try to discover a possible biological control. The measures include \$850 000 to establish the Australian cane toad genome program through Professor Grant Morahan. Research is developing the possible use of a lungworm parasite as a toad-control agent. This research is being carried out by Professor Shine's group from the University of Sydney. We hope that there will soon be a biological control for this scourge. In the meantime, we will obviously continue to support the Kimberley Toad Busters and the good work it does to try to prevent the cane toads from spreading into Western Australia.

Mr P. ABETZ: The press reported recently that DEC had banned the use of Dettol. If those reports are correct, will that be a serious hindrance to the good work of the Kimberley Toad Busters?

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Banned from what? From being used on the toad?

Mr P. ABETZ: Yes.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I also read the press reports on that and wondered whether that would be an impediment in the fight against the incursion of the cane toads. I will refer that to the director general to provide more technical information.

Mr K.J. McNamara: The minister has released for public comment a draft cane toad strategy. When we adopt a final cane toad strategy for the state, we will have to reach agreement on the issue that has been raised. The variety of means that have been used across the country over several decades to kill cane toads attract quite a lot of comment. The fact is that the Animal Welfare Act is binding on the Crown. The department is obliged to comply with that act in its own operations and in the methods of cane toad control that it endorses. We have been holding discussions with the Department of Local Government and Regional Development, which administers the act, and with the Department of Agriculture and Food, which has considerable expertise in animal welfare issues. We are working through those issues. Work is going on in other jurisdictions with the full support of Western Australia and all other jurisdictions to address the issues of animal welfare in cane toad control. The Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority has not registered the active ingredient in Dettol for killing cane toads. I am obliged to have regard to the Animal Welfare Act and those sorts of regulations when advising the minister on a formal position to be adopted when we finalise the cane toad strategy later this year.

[8.30 pm]

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I refer the minister to the fourth bullet point on page 889 that deals with fire management. I have a couple of issues that I will deal with cognately because it may well save some time. The fourth dot point states —

The Department will continue to undertake an active fire management program ...

I just want to know what is meant by active.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I may refer to the director general for more detail, but I am advised that fire management is a branch of the regional services division. The fire management budget is spread across a range of programs,

Chairman; Mr Mark McGowan; Dr Graham Jacobs; Mr Peter Abetz; Mr David Templeman; Ms Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Ian Blayney; Mr Chris Tallentire; Ms Margaret Quirk

including nature conservation, parks and visitor services, and sustainable forest management. More than \$4 million is currently spent on responding to bushfires, and, according to the note I have here, any additional requirements are met by Treasury.

As part of its prescribed burning targets in fire management, DEC plans to carry out fuel hazard reduction burns over 200 000 hectares in its south west forest regions, and a further 900 000 hectares in its other regions, including the south coast; the mid-west; and the goldfields, Pilbara and Kimberley regions. Much of the burning in regions outside the south west forests is on unallocated crown land for which DEC has fire planning responsibilities. I suppose whether the prescribed burn targets are met is dependent upon some seasonal conditions. Members would be aware that this has been an incredibly dry autumn, and that it has not been possible to undertake a number of the planned prescribed burns.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I was interested to know whether the term “active” in front of the words “fire management” was a term of art or whether it had any specific technical meaning.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I refer to the director general for advice about further meanings, beyond those I have mentioned, ascribed to the term “active”.

Mr K.J. McNamara: The term “active” has no technical meaning. It really just reinforces the fundamental importance of a program to which we give a high priority. In addition to what the minister has said, I advise that Department of Environment and Conservation expenditure on wildfire suppression this financial year will total in the vicinity of \$23 million. I have the year-to-date expenditure figures with me, but obviously there are a few weeks to go this financial year. We will spend close to \$7 million on prescribed burning this financial year. We have a whole range of other fire preparedness areas—planning, detection, roading, water points, aircraft, heavy equipment and the like. Our expenditure on those areas will be about \$13.6 million this financial year. The department has spent \$43 million on fire management in the year to date.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I thank the director general for his answer, but, minister, we might deal with the financial side in a minute.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: There is another aspect to “active”: I suppose the member is aware that DEC maintains a fleet of around 100 heavy-duty fire trucks, as well as a range of bulldozers and front-end loaders.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I am now, minister!

Dr G.G. JACOBS: That information was new to me. Those items are strategically located throughout the state. DEC also has a fleet of nine Champion Scout aircraft used for surveillance over the south west forests during the bushfire season. That equipment is part of DEC’s preparedness and may help the member understand the word “active”.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Before we get to the helicopters and other hardware, I want some issues clarified for my own information. I understand that DEC has responsibility for or jurisdiction over uncleared crown land and national parks, or does it have a broader responsibility in terms of fire prevention?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I will refer questions about much of the burning in regions outside the south west and the unallocated crown land for which DEC has fire planning responsibility to the director general.

Mr K.J. McNamara: The department is responsible for fire preparedness and wildfire suppression on CALM act lands; namely, the state’s national parks, nature reserves, conservation parks, state forests and other lands managed under the CALM act. That is about some 25-plus million hectares across the state. We have that responsibility except in gazetted fire districts. For example, for persons inside the Perth metropolitan area who visit one of our nature reserves such as Thomsons Lake, we do not have primary carriage of wildfire suppression at that lake; that rests with the Fire and Emergency Services Authority inside the gazetted fire district. On the 89 million hectares of unallocated crown land outside of town sites across the state—a land area bigger than New South Wales—we have, since 2003, been responsible for fire preparedness. The responsibility for wildfire response formally rests with local government authorities, but, as I am sure the member knows, cooperative response arrangements are in place right across the state.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Can the minister confirm whether the cooperative arrangements with, for example, FESA are through a memorandum of understanding, and has that MOU been updated recently?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I refer the question to the director general.

Mr K.J. McNamara: The operating framework is known as Westplan Wildfire. Regarding whether there is a document specifically called a memorandum of understanding subsidiary to that, I do not have the answer at hand. However, the arrangements are with both FESA and local governments, and operate under the well-established hazard management agency and state emergency committee frameworks through Westplan Wildfire.

Chairman; Mr Mark McGowan; Dr Graham Jacobs; Mr Peter Abetz; Mr David Templeman; Ms Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Ian Blayney; Mr Chris Tallentire; Ms Margaret Quirk

Ms M.M. QUIRK: A recent emergency management report by the Auditor General noted that bushfires do not have a specified hazard management agency. Why is that the case, and what measures are being taken by DEC to address that?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: Mr Chairman, I think that question would probably be better directed to the Minister for Emergency Services during the FESA estimates process.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I would if he was not on toilet breaks, minister.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: Sorry?

Ms M.M. QUIRK: We have just heard evidence, minister, that DEC is responsible for a large proportion of this state's bushfire response. Surely the director general of DEC would have a view about the appropriate arrangements of who should be the appropriate hazard management agency. This deals with resources and how they are deployed. It is clearly an issue for this committee.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I am not sure whether the director general has a view or whether it is relevant to this discussion. I am happy for him to provide his view if he would like to —

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I will not press him because I have further questions on some other matters. In the middle of last year, DEC received reports from a company called GHD Pty Ltd into a bushfire in Boorabin National Park. What was the purpose of the preparation of those reports?

[8.40 pm]

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I think the director general is happy to answer that question, though I am not sure that it necessarily fits the brief of budget estimates. I suppose if we are talking about managing fire to protect life, we could allow that.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: My question relates to the fourth dot point on page 889.

The CHAIRMAN: The minister has said that he will take the question. The director general will answer it.

Mr K.J. McNamara: The reason we engaged those reports is very straightforward. A couple of days before the new year at the end of 2007 there was a fire on Great Eastern Highway between Coolgardie and Southern Cross in which three people in trucks died. My department was responsible for managing that fire. Having been through that situation, it was obvious that the department needed to investigate what happened, not only internally, which we have done absolutely thoroughly, but also by engaging external experts to look into and report independently on every aspect of what happened in that fire. That is what we did. We did that to assist the police investigation and the forthcoming coronial inquiry.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Could the minister describe those two reports? I think the director general said that this is subject to a coronial inquiry. Coronial inquiries are not subject to the sub judice rule in this place. I draw the minister's attention to standing order 91. I might ask, as a matter of courtesy to the director general, whether a date has been set down for the coronial inquest.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I feel that this questioning has gone far enough. The director general has provided some information. We do not need to go into the depths of the coronial inquiry—when it will be held, when the results will be available and what he thinks about the possibility of where this is going. I just believe that, within the budget estimates process, an adequate answer has been given by the director general to this issue of fire and fire management.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: My question is about how resources are deployed. This is the one opportunity that is provided each year for an examination and scrutiny of how departments are managed, how resources are deployed, whether public moneys are spent on consultant reports, how those reports are used to ensure that there is greater efficiency or better procedures, whether occupational health and safety requirements are followed and so forth. It is all very much within the purview of an estimates inquiry. I understand that the director general is upset about this. However, we need to know what the department is doing with reports that were prepared with public money. I am conscious of not trespassing on sensitive information, but we need some general information about how those reports were used, because public money was spent, it was subject to a closed tender and none of this information has been available through any other means.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I am not sure that any further debate on this particular —

Ms M.M. QUIRK: This is not a debate; it is a question, and I request that the minister answer it.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: The member talks about the director general giving evidence of how to manage and protect life and property and the whole issue of fire management. I think he has given enough information to give the

Chairman; Mr Mark McGowan; Dr Graham Jacobs; Mr Peter Abetz; Mr David Templeman; Ms Alannah MacTiernan; Mr Ian Blayney; Mr Chris Tallentire; Ms Margaret Quirk

estimates committee a flavour and an indication of how that is done in the state of Western Australia. To go into more detail about this particular fire and sensitive matters of police investigation pending a coronial inquiry is not directly relevant to these budget points and these budget estimates. Details about this incident will be available in the fullness of time with the other processes. I do not think it is for the budget estimates process.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: We have had two bushfire seasons since the fire occurred. The public has a right to know. We need to be satisfied that all measures are being taken. I do not want to canvass this at length. If the minister had not raised an objection, I probably would have finished my questioning by now. I have three or four very simple questions to ask. I need to understand the processes. This relates directly to the resources, government expenditure and allocation of responsibility across agencies, all of which are very much within the scope of this inquiry and the estimates, and it is unacceptable that the minister is not prepared to answer the questions.

The CHAIRMAN: The minister has responded to the member for Girrawheen's question, although she may not like the answer. Quite a few members want to ask questions. I think we will move forward.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Before we do, I wish to raise a procedural matter. I have discussed this with the government members. Given that opposition and government members have no questions on part 18, Zoological Parks Authority, I propose that we allow Ms Susan Hunt and her staff to go home. In doing so, I remind people to join Zoo Friends. I need to renew my membership. It is a very, very good organisation. I thank the chief executive officer of the Perth Zoo and her staff for their attendance.

Further consideration of the division postponed.

[Continued below.]