

Division 53: Fisheries, \$56 298 000 —

Mr N.W. Morton, Chairman.

Dr K.D. Hames, Minister for Health representing the Minister for Fisheries.

Mr S. Smith, Director General.

Ms H. Brayford, Deputy Director General.

Mr B. Mezzatesta, Executive Director, Regional Services.

Mr P. Robinson, Chief Financial Officer.

Dr R. Fletcher, Executive Director, Research.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIRMAN: The first question is from the member for Bassendean.

Mr D.J. KELLY: I refer to page 589, "Total Cost of Services". In the 2013–14 budget, the total cost of services was \$88 million and the estimated actual for 2013–14 was \$95 million. What is the reason for the overspend?

[Ms W.M. Duncan took the chair.]

Dr K.D. HAMES: The director general.

Mr S. Smith: The Department of Fisheries had services to deliver that exceeded the budgeted amount, so the government has recognised that and has given the department an additional appropriation for the coming year and in the forward years. I can go through the explanation for those services, if the member would like.

Mr D.J. KELLY: That would be great.

Mr S. Smith: The department has been looking to deliver a range of services for some years now. Those services go back some years in fact. I know that when I started with the department in 2008, some funds had been reallocated from an appropriation to fisheries officers that had been used for other purposes to cover what would have otherwise been a deficit. Over the subsequent years, the department has looked to address that money and make sure that fisheries officers are recruited—and they have been. That culminated in the deficit over the past year, and, as I say, the government has addressed that through a cash injection to the department and the increased appropriation.

Dr K.D. HAMES: Mr Smith is saying that \$95 million is a re-basing of the department's budget for services provided.

Mr S. Smith: Correct.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Were any of those resources in the \$95 million spent on the shark drum line policy; and, if so, how much?

Dr K.D. HAMES: The director general.

Mr S. Smith: Some of the funds would have been spent on the shark drum line policy. I understand the Premier mentioned earlier this week in Parliament that the total of the drum line policy has been in the order of \$1.2 million. The contractor for the south west cost in the order of \$600 000. The balance is expected to come from the Department of Fisheries; that is the sort of figure we are talking about. The department is still in discussion with the Department of the Premier and Cabinet about the level of compensation payable. We have not yet resolved what amount will be paid to our department, but it is in that order. We are expecting the amount to be in that order, and that reflects the cost of the services that we have provided.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Is the minister saying that for the summer that has just passed, the actual cost to the fisheries department for those resources was in the order of \$600 000?

Mr S. Smith: Correct.

Mr B.S. WYATT: In respect of the 2014–15 budget, what has been the assumption for the Department of Fisheries' spend on the shark mitigation strategy?

Dr K.D. HAMES: The answer is that that will depend on whether approval is given to continue with that. As the member for Victoria Park knows, the government has made an application to the commonwealth for that to occur.

Mr B.S. WYATT: Can the minister confirm that the budget for 2014–15 has no allocation for the shark mitigation strategy?

Dr K.D. HAMES: That is correct.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Can the government provide any independent research to show that the shark drum line policy has in fact made our beaches safer?

Mr S. Smith: I might refer this question to the head of our research division. There is research evidence that suggests that drum lines are effective in other jurisdictions around the world. That information has been released publicly. Some research has been conducted into the potential application of drum lines in Western Australia. The report was also available publicly. I think it was Professor Daryl McPhee from Bond University who prepared that work. There is some information that has arisen from the trial that has been conducted that has also been released by our department.

Dr R. Fletcher: The report that was done by Professor McPhee started off with a statement that shark control programs are generally considered to have improved the safety of people in the water, so I guess that was his conclusion from his assessment of other shark programs that have occurred around the world. There are more details in that report, but a number of published studies have suggested that those programs have improved the safety of people in those areas.

Mr D.J. KELLY: My understanding is that the conclusion in the Bond University study was that Professor McPhee did not recommend that this state adopt either drum lines or nets. Is that the only research that the department is referring to? If there is other research, can the department specify what that is?

Dr R. Fletcher: Professor McPhee actually went through the other studies. His conclusions were not necessarily based on the efficacy of the drum lines potentially mitigating the risk; it was based more on his holistic assessment of the total cost and the total effectiveness, particularly of nets rather than drum lines. The focus of the study was mostly on nets; it contained some discussion about drum lines, but it was mostly focussed on netting—and most of his concerns related to the bycatch associated with netting.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Putting aside the Bond study—I know that one—the minister referred to other studies. Can the department be specific about which studies it is talking about so that the public can be satisfied that there is some basis for the government's policy?

Mr S. Smith: I understand some studies have been conducted—I think it is the Springer study; I am looking to Dr Fletcher here—in regard to, I think, Brazil and South Africa, but I defer to Dr Fletcher.

Dr R. Fletcher: The main published study that indicates a substantial benefit is from South Africa.

Dr K.D. HAMES: Does Dr Fletcher know the name of the study?

Dr R. Fletcher: I can provide it. I can look it up here as it is in the references, but it is actually referenced in the Bond study.

Mr D.J. KELLY: I want the department to be specific. This is obviously a very important public policy issue. The government says it is saving people's lives. If research shows it is doing that, I think people are entitled to some specificity on it.

[5.10 pm]

Dr K.D. HAMES: We are having a quick look, but the understanding is that the member has access to the Bond study and the research is referenced in the Bond study. It is easy for the member to go to the Bond study and look up the reference himself.

Mr P. PAPALIA: It is related to the claim being made by the minister.

The CHAIRMAN: Order, member for Warnbro! The minister is speaking.

Dr K.D. HAMES: Indeed it is, but we have just heard that the member is looking for a study, and that study is referred to in the study he has already read.

Dr R. Fletcher: It is Dudley, 1997, which is referenced in the Bond study.

Dr K.D. HAMES: There we go.

Mr D.J. KELLY: The research was done in 1997?

The CHAIRMAN: Order, member! It is Dudley, 1997. That is the name of the author of the paper.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Is that the totality of the research?

Dr R. Fletcher: That is the totality of published studies. It is one of the published studies; there are potentially others in there.

Mr Dave Kelly; Dr Kim Hames; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Paul Papalia; Chairman; Mr Sean L'Estrange

Mr B.S. WYATT: I refer to page 589, which relates to the line of inquiry we have been pursuing. How many overtime hours did fisheries staff work to perform duties related to the drum line policy; and what was the cost of that overtime, if any?

Mr B. Mezzatesta: I will need to answer that as supplementary information. I do not have that detail.

Dr K.D. HAMES: Can the member redefine the question?

Mr B.S. WYATT: I will read it again: how many overtime hours did fisheries staff work to perform duties related to the drum line policy; and what was that cost? I have a final question that the minister might be able to confirm by nodding his head: presumably, that is part of the \$600 000 that the director general referred to a minute ago?

Dr K.D. HAMES: Yes. The supplementary information required is as read by the member. We will provide information about the number of overtime hours worked by the Department of Fisheries in managing the drum line policy and the cost associated with that. Is that a public figure?

Mr S. Smith: The actual compensation costs that will be paid to us have not yet been finalised.

Dr K.D. HAMES: That has not been determined, so we will provide supplementary information about the number of overtime hours.

[*Supplementary Information No A53.*]

Mr D.J. KELLY: The information sought is not the compensation that the Department of Fisheries received from another department for the work done, it is how many hours were worked and what they cost, which is different. It might cost X and the department might get compensation of X plus Y, but we do not want to know what the compensation is; we want to know what the actual hours were and their cost.

Mr S. Smith: I understand that question and we will provide that figure. The reason it has not yet been finalised is that there is still some discussion about what things should legitimately be ascribed to being part of the drum line policy as opposed to other shark mitigation measures we are responsible for. It is pretty clear with fisheries officers out there checking the drum lines that the work is related to that policy, but it is not so clear for some of our policy staff who may be working on documents that relate to shark mitigation and whether that relates to the drum line policy or other shark hazard work. That is the nature of the discussions at the moment.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I refer to the second dot point regarding the fatal shark attacks and the shark mitigation policy under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency” on page 590 of the *Budget Statements*. A little earlier there was reference to the studies referred to in the Bond University report, which I understand is a great research paper. Did anyone from the department look at those references and ascertain whether the techniques employed in Brazil and South Africa bear any relationship to the technique employed here by the department?

Mr S. Smith: I am not sure that these questions should actually be directed to our department. I presume the member is referring to the government’s decision to implement the drum line policy. That decision was the result of a review conducted by ministerial staff with support from our department and the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, and this policy is actually one of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. I would expect that department would have taken into account quite a wide range of factors and evidence in deciding to implement the policy, but we are not necessarily privy to that information.

Dr K.D. HAMES: I just point out further that this decision was made through cabinet at the recommendation of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. It sought advice from various groups, including this department, so if members ask questions of this department, it can answer for only its involvement in developing that policy, not for the policy in total. For specific questions on that, the Premier and his department need to be asked.

Mr D.J. KELLY: I refer to “Enforcement and Education” on page 592. During this financial year, how many boat safety checks have been performed by fisheries officers; and can the numbers be provided by region? How does this compare with the same period last year? Would any staff who would normally undertake that work have been diverted to the drum line policy?

Mr B. Mezzatesta: I may have to answer aspects of this question as supplementary information, because I do not have any of those details. I do not carry the details of the number of checks done. We probably will not finalise them until the end of the year, but we can do an interim assessment of where we are at.

Dr K.D. HAMES: The member has asked a detailed and convoluted question, which is quite legitimate, but I suggest he puts it on notice.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Why can it not be given to us as supplementary information?

Dr K.D. HAMES: Because the information is not ready yet and we have a time line. Given that it will be ready shortly and as we are nearly at the end of the financial year, I do not think it is necessary to get the department pulling figures out earlier than that. We are happy to take that question on notice.

Mr D.J. KELLY: I will put part of the question on notice, but the part of the question about whether any staff who normally perform this work were diverted to the drum line policy should be able to be answered.

Dr K.D. HAMES: Director general.

Mr S. Smith: I will start the answer and perhaps defer to Mr Mezzatesta after. The drum line policy predominantly involved fisheries officers who would have otherwise largely conducted work in the metropolitan area on recreational fishing and also, as I understand it, some work in regard to the rock lobster commercial fishery. Mr Mezzatesta may be able to elaborate.

Mr B. Mezzatesta: I agree with the director general's assessment. The only thing I would add is that some officers were redeployed from the midwest region, so I would expect our statistics for the metropolitan area and the midwest, predominantly in recreational fishing, to be reduced. The aggregate effort applied to the drum line program comprises about two per cent of our total compliance resourcing, so that is the sort of impact I expect it to have.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Therefore, it would be expected, certainly because the resources were diverted from the midwest, that there would have been some decrease in the number of safety checks done this financial year?

Mr B. Mezzatesta: Safety checks are predominantly done in the metropolitan area, so I would expect the metropolitan employees utilised in the program to impact on the marine safety checks.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Does "impact" mean an increase or a decrease?

Mr B. Mezzatesta: I would have thought it would be a reduction. If people are taken out and they are not doing the work, there will be a slight reduction.

Dr K.D. HAMES: Just to clarify that, Mr Mezzatesta is saying that he expects there would be a mild reduction in safety inspections as a result of that policy, but recognising the fact, as he said, that it is two per cent of the resources.

[5.20 pm]

Mr P. PAPALIA: The Chairman just let the minister speak on the same subject.

The CHAIRMAN: The minister was clarifying his officer's response.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Where did the two per cent observation come from?

Dr K.D. HAMES: It came from Mr Mezzatesta.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I know, but did Mr Mezzatesta just pluck it out of the atmosphere or did he draw that from some statistical analysis he has done?

Dr K.D. HAMES: I defer to Mr Mezzatesta.

Mr B. Mezzatesta: I have certainly not plucked that number out of the air. We consumed the equivalent of three full-time equivalents on the drum line program. I have about 120 fisheries and marine officers within my division, so three people out of 120 gives me that number.

Mr P. PAPALIA: How many patrol vessels does the department have?

The CHAIRMAN: Order, member! Has Mr Mezzatesta completed his answer?

Mr B. Mezzatesta: I have, thank you.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I refer to page 590 of budget paper No 2. The third dot point relates to the department undertaking the assessment of fisheries under the Marine Stewardship Council. What is involved in third party certification for commercial fisheries, and why is the state investing in this initiative?

Dr K.D. HAMES: I will hand over to the director.

Mr S. Smith: The government has decided to support Marine Stewardship Council certification for all commercial fisheries in Western Australia, which means up to 47 fisheries will go through the process. The process will give the community and consumers of the product, whether in Australia or elsewhere, confidence that the fish they purchase from Western Australia comes from a sustainable source that is very well managed. They do not have to take the word of the department or the industry; they can take the word of an independent third party assessor that has the support of environmental groups based on standards set independently and go back to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. So far in Western Australia we have

completed the pre-assessment for all commercial fisheries in the north of the state and in the Gascoyne region. The fisheries in the south and the west are about to undergo that process, and the West Coast Rock Lobster Fishery already has full assessment. A number of other fisheries are soon to go into the full assessment process. The government will fund the full cost of the applications for both pre-assessment and full assessment for all the commercial fisheries, plus the initial annual audit for those fisheries. This process provides some benefits to the state as well as to the fisheries. It provides marketing and promotional opportunities for the community. It also provides reassurance on the quality and sustainability of stocks, and supermarkets in Australia have also said, as they have in Europe and North America, that they will only stock fish from sustainable sources. All the supermarkets will automatically accept the Marine Stewardship Council as the standard. Some duplication potentially exists between the state and commonwealth in approvals for fisheries to be exporters. If a fishery wants to export product, it needs approval from the commonwealth under the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. However, we are in discussions with the commonwealth on this matter and whether a fishery that already has MSC certification can be exempt from that requirement, recognising that the MSC standard is at least as good as the national standard under the EPBC Act.

Dr K.D. HAMES: Opposition members, we have 35 minutes left and the Aboriginal Affairs division to go. Does the opposition wish to spend time —

Mr B.S. WYATT: I do, but if there are more dorothy dixers it may impact how we go.

Dr K.D. HAMES: I think that will probably do it, really. When do members opposite want to start on the next division?

Mr B.S. WYATT: We could spend 50–50 of the last hour on each division, but we will see how we go here with a couple of these questions.

Dr K.D. HAMES: Can members opposite let us know when they want to move on?

The CHAIRMAN: Do members want to continue with division 53 and Fisheries?

Dr K.D. HAMES: It is no problem for us; we will do whatever members opposite want to do.

Mr B.S. WYATT: Thank you. I refer to the second dot point on page 590. The minister is aware of the trial of the Eco Shark Barrier at Coogee Beach. The City of Cockburn has sought funding from the state government to continue with that barrier for the next three years. Is it the view of the department that the shark barrier has been a successful strategy, and is the government considering that funding request for the Eco Shark Barrier?

Mr S. Smith: Our department is not involved in that trial in any way, and the funding for another trial of shark enclosures that was supported by the government in the south west was provided through the Office of Science, which is in the Premier's portfolio. We have not had involvement in that trial, so I have no view to put forward to the member.

Dr K.D. HAMES: Presumably it would be hard to tell how well a shark barrier is working unless we actually have a shark trying to get through it, and then would we have had the shark there without the barrier in the first place?

Mr D.J. KELLY: There are similar issues with the drum line. Bingo! The minister is on our side of the chamber.

The CHAIRMAN: The minister has the floor.

Dr K.D. HAMES: Clearly, trying to provide an evaluation would be difficult, but I think there is general support for the concept of having those shark barriers. I am not aware whether the Premier is planning to contribute towards the cost, as was reported in today's paper. The member will need to ask the Premier.

Mr B.S. WYATT: I have a supplementary question then: is it the view of the department that the barrier in the south west, to which the director general referred, was successful?

Dr K.D. HAMES: A long-term assessment would be required to determine if it is successful. How successful have the nets and hooks been in Queensland? We can only look at those statistics, and I gather there have been zero deaths in Queensland. Is that a result of the drum lines and nets in Queensland? How do we tell, other than through a long-term assessment of shark deaths? We have seen the pattern of shark deaths in Western Australia. The numbers were fairly static for a long period, but in recent years they have increased significantly. If we move forward and get a significant reduction in the number of deaths, that would be a reasonable indication, but I imagine that we could never specifically prove that that action had made the difference. If we get a significant reduction in shark deaths in this state, we will take that as a reasonable indication that the policy has been successful.

Mr D.J. KELLY: The minister might want to check his statistics. He just said there were zero deaths in Queensland.

Dr K.D. HAMES: I said I think there have been zero.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Since the drum lines were introduced in Queensland, there have been more than a dozen deaths in Queensland, including one at a beach at which the drum lines were in place. The minister might want to check with his advisers before he makes those blatant statements.

Dr K.D. HAMES: My officers seem surprised by the member's comments, but I am sure they will have a look into it.

The CHAIRMAN: Further to the comment by the member for Victoria Park about dorothy dixers —

Dr K.D. HAMES: Excuse me, Chairman. Can I just make one more brief comment on that last statistic? I will ask my research officer to comment.

Dr R. Fletcher: It also comes down to whether the attacks or deaths have also occurred at beaches where the drum lines or the other shark mitigation processes were in place. Often a lot of statistics do not differentiate between the state versus the places where the actual mitigation programs have been in place; so in New South Wales in particular there is a difference between the beaches where there have been nets versus New South Wales, so we have to be careful about how the statistics are used.

Dr K.D. HAMES: The suggestion is, I presume, that if the figure we have is zero, there may well be zero deaths where drum lines and/or nets are in place, compared with other beaches in Queensland where that might not be the case. But we will go and look at—

Mr D.J. KELLY: So is the minister clarifying his comment? Is he accepting that there have in fact been deaths in Queensland, and that there has been one death at a beach where the drum lines are in place? Does the minister accept that that is the truth?

Dr K.D. HAMES: No; that is what the member told me. I am just saying—

Mr D.J. KELLY: I am just asking the minister. He made the statement that there were zero deaths in Queensland.

Dr K.D. HAMES: That is the advice I was given.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Point of order, Chairman. It appears that the minister is being badgered, and this discussion is not through the Chair.

The CHAIRMAN: I think we have probably exhausted this line of questioning. Before I go on to the next question, I will respond to the member for Victoria Park's comment about dorothy dixers. We have had six questions so far with only one from the government, so we have not been overwhelmed with dorothy dixers. The member for Bassendean has the call.

[5.30 pm]

Mr D.J. KELLY: I refer to page 593, under the heading "Asset Investment Program", and the line item "Information Systems Development". What is the status of the FishEye project? How much is being spent on it? How many fisheries now have access to it? Has it achieved full functionality, and were there any problems with the implementation of the program?

Mr S. Smith: The FishEye program for the rock lobster fishery has been rolled out in full. The budget for it was in the order of \$11.4 million, if I recall correctly, of which industry has committed to fund half of the capital cost over 10 years commencing from 1 July of this year. The repayments from industry will only apply to those fisheries to which FishEye is delivering services. At this stage, it would be rock lobster in the first instance, which represents well over 70 per cent of the value of all commercial fisheries in Western Australia. A tender is in train for the services for the other quota-based fisheries, so they should be operating over the coming months. The other fisheries will follow based on priorities for both the department and for the industry.

The total original budget of \$11.4 million has been exhausted. Having said that, a couple of additional items were introduced into the project during its operation. For instance, \$600 000 was given to the industry's representative bodies to assist them in consulting with their members to provide input into the process, and also to help communicate the outcomes from the process. That was not part of the original budget. We have also added functionality, which was not planned, to the rock lobster system at the request of fishers, which goes above what was expected. The full amount has already been expended, but there are a couple of items that were not part of the original budget. Given that the system itself has already been built—the vast majority of it—the last stage is really the interface for the fishers to use to access the system. Although the original budget has been spent, that additional money I have referred to should be largely sufficient to cover the remaining fisheries.

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I suspect we will end up being several hundred thousand dollars overspent for the entire project, which, for an IT project of this scale and complexity, running over multiple years, I think is probably a reasonable outcome and one that the industry is familiar with and seems to be prepared to accept.

The CHAIRMAN: Before I give the call to the member for Bassendean: the statement that was read out at the beginning referred to questions and answers being short and to the point. We will make more progress if we do that. Thanks, member for Bassendean.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Sure, thank you very much. The director general said that the payments from industry will begin on 1 July this year. Does that mean that the industry has agreed to begin payments from that date; and, if so, how much will it pay? Secondly, when does he believe FishEye will be accessible to all remaining fisheries?

Mr S. Smith: Industry members have been provided with written confirmation that they will pay their contributions from 1 July this year, and we have agreed with them that it would only be fisheries that are receiving the services that they are accessible to. In the case of rock lobster, that will be in the next financial year. For other fisheries, it will depend upon whether the service is being delivered to their fishery. Otherwise, they will not be making any payment.

Mr D.J. KELLY: I have one more question. I refer to page 595, “Income Statement”, namely “Cost of Services”, the heading “Employee benefits”. Why are employee benefits in 2017–18, as a percentage change from the previous year, significantly below CPI?

Mr S. Smith: I will get Mr Robinson to elaborate, if he is aware, but I expect that would be due to the completion of some programs that are not funded beyond 2016–17.

Mr P. Robinson: That is correct.

Mr D.J. KELLY: What are those programs?

Mr P. Robinson: We need to take that one as a supplementary. We generally provide very detailed movements —

Mr D.J. KELLY: A supplementary is fine.

Mr P. Robinson: Sorry, we provide detailed movements in our statements, particularly for the budget estimate year; so I do not have it on me.

Dr K.D. HAMES: We will provide, as supplementary information, the reason for the growth in the 2017–18 budget compared with the 2016–17 budget being less than CPI.

[*Supplementary Information No A54.*]

The appropriation was recommended.