

**Division 15: Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development — Services 1 to 7, Regional Development; Agriculture and Food; Fisheries \$332 734 000 —**

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Mr D.T. Punch, Minister for Regional Development; Fisheries; representing Minister for Agriculture and Food.

Ms H. Brayford, Director General.

Mr P. Isaachsen, Deputy Director General, Industry and Economic Development.

Ms M. Carbon, Deputy Director General, Sustainability and Biosecurity.

Ms C. McConnell, Deputy Director General, Primary Industries Development.

Ms L. Williamson, Chief Financial Officer.

Mr B. Mezzatesta, Executive Director, Operations and Compliance.

Mr P. Gregson, Manager, Funds Management.

Mr C. Berger, Chief Executive Officer, Kimberley Development Commission.

Ms M. Teede, Chief Executive Officer, South West Development Commission.

Ms N. Monks, Chief Executive Officer, Great Southern Development Commission.

Dr R. Fletcher, Executive Director, Fisheries and Agriculture Resource Management.

Mr M. Keogh, Chief of Staff, Minister for Agriculture and Food.

Mr T. Palmer, Chief of Staff, Minister for Regional Development.

Mr A. Skinner, Senior Policy Adviser, Minister for Regional Development.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 2 June 2023. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

**Ms M. BEARD:** My question relates to page 222 of budget paper No 2. Under details of controlled grants and subsidies is an amount listed for the Carnarvon One Mile jetty of \$4.5 million. Can the minister explain what has already been delivered under the \$3.2 million for 2022–23? What stage will the \$4.5 million that is allocated for this financial year take the project to?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** State funding of \$4.5 million, which was \$1.3 million in 2021–22 and \$3.2 million in 2022–23, was provided to the Gascoyne Development Commission for the restoration of 450 metres of the Carnarvon One Mile jetty. That project is yet to commence, and the commitment of \$4.5 million was based on a very early estimate of construction-only costs. The GDC has negotiated a joint delivery model with the Department of Transport, which will undertake the refurbishment of the jetty to a length still to be determined, as the original sum was insufficient to deliver the whole project. Funding will be reallocated to the Department of Transport post-budget, and the GDC is working with the Carnarvon Heritage Group, which has the jetty licence in perpetuity, to undertake works around the heritage precinct to ensure that the area is revitalised in anticipation of increased visitor numbers once the project is complete. It will be a great project for Carnarvon.

**Ms M. BEARD:** The funding will be shifted back to the Department of Transport, and it will work with the heritage committee. Is that the understanding?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Thank you, member. Yes, that is correct. The Department of Transport has the skills and expertise to undertake those work, so it will undertake that project.

**Ms M. BEARD:** I refer to page 222, the line item for “Carnarvon Flood Mitigation Works—Stage Two”. I wonder whether the minister could give some indication of the works that were undertaken for the \$2.325 million last year. I notice there is no allocation for this year. I wonder whether he has an explanation of whether further works are to be undertaken and where the funding might come from if mitigation works were needed following other disasters.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Royalties for regions funding of \$2.828 million was approved for the construction of four levees to protect the town, the horticultural district and surrounds from repeated severe flooding and to ensure the economic future of the town. Ongoing negotiations regarding levee ownership are in the process of being resolved, and that will enable contracts for urgent remediation works to be delivered. The \$2.325 million was carried over from 2021–22 into 2022–23 as part of the bilateral budget process.

**Ms M. BEARD:** If there was another flood—let us hope there is not—is there any funding anywhere else for remedial work if that needed to happen?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I will ask Mr Isaachsen to provide a response.

**Mr P. Isaachsen:** The funding that is listed in the details of controlled grants and subsidies is some funding that was used by Water Corporation to undertake the remedial works. At this stage, that is the only funding that is committed to the Carnarvon levees.

**Ms M. BEARD:** I refer to page 209, budget paper No 2, and the west coast demersal scalefish recovery plan and recovery support package. I wonder what will be delivered against that \$5.435 million package. Could we have any supplementary information on a breakdown of programs or what that program might provide?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The \$5.47 million is for enhanced monitoring, research and digital recording technology, with a focus on the recreational sector. It was something that Recfishwest and the Western Australian Fishing Industry Council were seeking. There was general agreement throughout the fishing sector that that would be a very good thing to do, so we are doing it.

**Ms M. BEARD:** What number of FTE or headcount would be attributed to that program?

[3.10 pm]

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** There are a total of seven FTE across the \$1 million package, which would be attributed across various components of the package.

**Ms M. BEARD:** Will there be a reprioritisation of where Fisheries staff will be located? I will give some basis to my question. With the changes north of Kalbarri and Shark Bay, that area has seen a significant increase in the number of boats and people fishing. Will there be a reprioritisation of the number of Fisheries staff allocated to those areas to cater for that increase?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The allocation of resources by the department is based on risk assessment. My understanding is that there has been a full complement of staff in those areas north of Carnarvon and there is a new boat in that area. I will ask Mr Mezzatesta to give the member some more detail.

**Mr B. Mezzatesta:** In terms of FTEs specifically in the midwest and Gascoyne, we are currently recruiting for an education officer position that will supplement the officers. Obviously, we currently have compliance officers up there, and we expect that that should be sufficient when we consider the totality of resources we have in the midwest and Gascoyne.

**Ms M. BEARD:** Just to get it clear, are the Fisheries FTEs on the ground who check who is catching what fish a different set of FTEs to the people who are monitoring the programs in place, or is the same group of people doing it across the board?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Mr Mezzatesta.

**Mr B. Mezzatesta:** If I explain a little of how the organisation is structured, that might assist. The compliance area, which is my area of responsibility, has uniformed officers who provide enforcement and education services. They are not always out trying to infringe people or prosecute people. They provide an education service. We are supplementing that resource with the additional education officer. Their focus will be very much on education and making sure that people are aware of the rules that are in place and why they are in place, and will assist them to comply. The research and monitoring activity related to fish stocks is handled by a separate group, and I imagine resources in that separate group will focus specifically on the west coast demersal issue.

**Ms M. BEARD:** I refer to paragraph 2.3 on page 218. The amount of \$13.6 million is held as a provision for future royalties for regions projects. Have the projects that the future funds will be allocated to been identified, and will they be covered with the same FTEs? What is the process to allocate the funds? Is it through the Expenditure Review Committee or is it a new policy proposal or decision of the department and the Minister for Regional Development about what projects and how that happens?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** It is simply a provision for future royalties for regions projects.

**Ms M. BEARD:** I refer to page 219 of budget paper No 2 volume 1. Under “Works in Progress” is the line item “Wild Dog Action Plan”. I note that there is \$1 million each year going forward. Is this for on-the-ground support

and resourcing? After the significant investment and focus on wild dog management, I wonder whether there is a risk that the \$1 million allocation and the gains that we have made could be lost.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I will ask Ms Carbon to respond to that.

**Ms M. Carbon:** This funding is for the currently agreed wild dog action plan. Next year, in 2024, the department will start working on a proposal for the next iteration of the wild dog action plan for consideration by government, which will be designed to ensure that we do not, as the member said, lose any of the gains we have lost through that program to date. That wild dog action plan funds a number of initiatives such as maintenance and upgrade of the state barrier fence. It provides some funding towards the Esperance extension of the state barrier fence. It also funds wild dog neutering programs in regional and remote communities and it funds research and development as well. It does a number of things. As I said, we will need to start considering the next iteration of that plan to ensure that that work continues. Those plans are generally approved for a four-year term.

**Ms M. BEARD:** Recognised biosecurity groups strategically target pests when they access government managed land, which I understand involves the joint management authority due to native title. I understand that has not been negotiated beyond six months. Seeing as future baiting activities are still being negotiated, how will that investment in the state barrier fence work within the short time period that they have?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I will ask Ms Carbon to respond.

**Ms M. Carbon:** Assuming I understood the member's question correctly, there is funding under the wild dog action plan that goes to recognised biosecurity groups, specifically to employ licensed pest management technicians to undertake wild dog control on government managed land. That is agreed for the life of the current program—that is, the wild dog action plan.

**Ms M. BEARD:** I just want to clarify the life of that plan. Is that six months or will that be extended? I understood there was a six-month memorandum of understanding, unless that is not correct.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The plan currently ends in 2025.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to page 219, which has the headings “Works in Progress”, “Completed Works” and “New Works”, and then the bottom section, “Funded By” has the line item “Provision for Future Royalties for Regions Projects”. Can the minister explain the background of that particular fund? Is that just allocated royalties for regions that has now found a home, or is it a provision that Treasury has set aside for the department? How does that operate?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** That is an administrative account. It is an allocation for future projects, as has mainly been the practice throughout the history of royalties for regions, I think.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** It was just a question, minister; there was nothing loaded in it.

I refer to page 209, and under “Spending Changes” and “Ongoing Initiatives” is the line item “Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007—Declared Pest Control Activities”. There is \$1.64 million for this year and similar sorts of expenditures into the future. Can the minister explain whether this money is going to the recognised biosecurity groups, or is it going to another place? If the minister can answer that, I might ask a few follow-up questions about it.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** It is going to the recognised biosecurity groups.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** In terms of the pest control activities of the RBGs, is the minister aware that there have been some issues in those groups gaining access to crown land, meaning they cannot carry out activities on certain crown land now? Some of my RBGs have reported to me that they can no longer go onto the pastoral estate or reserves et cetera. Is the minister aware of that? Has there been any discussion about how to control the animals?

[3.20 pm]

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I will defer to Ms Carbon.

**Ms M. Carbon:** The department is certainly aware that there have been some challenges for some recognised biosecurity groups in recent months in gaining access to some land to undertake pest control and wild dog control in particular. By and large, this is related to crown land that is under the management of the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions but has been transferred to native title. Therefore, there is a requirement for the RBGs plus any other local group that wishes to undertake activity on that land to work with the traditional landowners to ensure that any work undertaken will meet their needs. As I understand it, a number of RBG's are currently working through the process of accessing that land to undertake pest control.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Are they working through those issues because of a fundamental disagreement about the nature of the wild dog and whether those groups that are now in control of that land actually wish to carry out a reduction in the numbers of the wild dogs because of a difference of culture?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** This signals the reality that people have to talk with the traditional owners about the uses on land. Those conversations are in progress, and people on both sides are learning how to negotiate in good faith and achieve outcomes. Therefore, the question of what the expectations are on that land really has to be referred to the traditional owners.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I am sorry. I could not quite hear the minister's comment at the end.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Working through the uses of the land is a conversation to be had with the traditional owners.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Is it the place of the individual biosecurity groups to have that conversation, or is it the place of the department to have that conversation across the whole of the state?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I will ask Ms Carbon to respond to that.

**Ms M. Carbon:** As with any activity that is undertaken on land with common management, multiple players are involved. The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development certainly plays a role in the broader discussion around pest management needs and how to best manage the impact of pests like wild dogs on agricultural activities. The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions is also involved in those conversations as it transitions land tenure over to Indigenous groups. The department is certainly talking about access more broadly with the groups, the individual recognised biosecurity groups and any other community groups that undertake pest control, because there are multiple other groups, such as natural resource management groups, that undertake pest control work and they need to engage in discussions with landholders.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** When the land passes to the Aboriginal group relevant to the area, do the responsibilities under the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act bind them as well as other groups or are they exempt from the provisions of the BAM act?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I am advised that the answer is yes. As a landholder, they would be bound by it.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 219 and works in progress, Katanning research facility and, in the completed works just a few lines down, Katanning sheep transition. Can someone explain to me whether those are two different projects? Is one the climate change facility and the other one DPIRD? Can someone run through the line-up there for me?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I will ask Ms McConnell to address that question.

**Ms C. McConnell:** Katanning research station has been set up as a carbon-neutral station. That is the program that we have in play. We have also previously been looking at improving our sheep feed facilities and getting a better understanding of transitioning sheep into new climates and how that might operate. The new funding is around some of the methane recording. We are looking at trying to record the amount of methane coming out of sheep so we can look at the impact of different feed types and how that may change with the methane production as well as the different genetics that go with the different strains of sheep. Therefore, yes, it is a continuation of that expenditure.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Will those projects be wrapped up basically by the end of this calendar year, as in the extra funding required?

**Ms C. McConnell:** For the current projects, yes, but then, depending on where the research goes, there may be ongoing projects.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Have we had any initial results from the methane measuring and the like, which the previous minister was very interested in?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Ms McConnell.

**Ms C. McConnell:** From the methane, not yet. The units are very new, so we are just starting in that space, and tracking that will take several years. I cannot report anything to the member today, but it is in progress.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** On page 222 there is a list of controlled grants and subsidies and half a dozen up from the bottom is funding for the Royal Agricultural Society of Western Australia. I assume that was funding towards the admissions or some sort of help for people to attend the show. Was any assistance asked for and not granted? I note that there are no further allocations under this line item.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** There was \$4 million approved to support the staging of the 2021 and 2022 royal shows. The initial grant payment of \$2 million was paid in 2021–22, with the remaining \$2 million to be paid in 2022–23. Further assistance is under consideration.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Had there been any discussions around the possibility of further funding for the show or was that never contemplated?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I am advised that yes, there have been further discussions.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** But not successful ones?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** This is still under consideration. That is the process of discussion. One discusses an outcome and arrives at a conclusion. There is no conclusion yet.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 209 and the implementation of the sheep and goat electronic identification program. As I did not make any progress during the Western Australian Meat Industry Authority hearing, I would like to further develop that questioning now. What did the \$3.4 million listed for last year achieve?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I am advised that was for pilot work and testing, but I will ask Ms Brayford to give the member some more detail.

[3.30 pm]

**Ms H. Brayford:** I can confirm that the \$3.4 million was initial funding to support some pilot work and testing for the implementation of the electronic tagging of sheep and goats across Western Australia. It is part of the need for traceability in the event of an emergency disease outbreak such as foot-and-mouth disease, which none of us wants but we need to prepare for. The initial funding was around getting some initial testing of tags and some work on infrastructure to support those tags. Dr Carbon may have something to add if I have missed anything, but that is what the initial \$3.4 million was for.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** As I stated previously, given my concern about the government's position on live export and that it has basically overseen the demise of the merino sheep industry in Western Australia due to a lack of support, does the minister expect that the government will get value for money for this \$22.2 million in funding? The critical mass of the merino sheep flock is somewhere between 13 million and 14 million, but numbers are dropping rapidly due to federal Labor government decisions, as we know. Is the minister concerned that the government will not get a return on its investment of \$22.2 million?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I love long questions. They take up a lot of time. The first part of the member's question remains a hypothetical, and I have already mentioned that.

The answer to the second part of the member's question is: this state budget is value for money. We have delivered a fantastic budget for Western Australia. We have continued to deliver a surplus that we are reinvesting into Western Australia. We are reducing state debt and creating a great economic climate for the agricultural sector and other sectors. Therefore, yes, I believe it is value for money. The member described hypothetical scenarios that have not occurred yet.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Would the minister describe the demise of the WA merino sheep flock as creating a great economic climate for agriculture in WA?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I am advised that there has not been a demise of the merino sheep flock.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I can assure the minister that given recent developments and lack of support from his government, there has been a demise in the number of sheep being mated and carried due to the fact farmers are putting in more crops. That is my perspective.

A further question is: will there be an opportunity for the likes of the Muchea Livestock Centre and the Katanning Regional Sheep Saleyards to apply for grants to implement the infrastructure required for the electronic ID system because I understand it will be about \$1 million-plus for each saleyard?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I am advised that there will be an opportunity for them to apply for grants.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** When will that opportunity arise? Will it be very shortly?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I will ask Dr Carbon to respond.

**Ms M. Carbon:** Under the current program in delivery—that is, the \$3.4 million program for this financial year—there is a process in place looking at providing grants for the supply chain to start to retrofit critical infrastructure. The focus at this point is on fitting infrastructure that will help us to test the supply chain so that when we launch into the next part of the program—that is, the full three-year program—we would have already done some testing and will be better able to target that program. The details of the program, including the tag incentive payment program to ensure the cost of tags is lowered for producers and another supply chain grant program to allow us to retrofit and test infrastructure as well as some portable scanning equipment, will be developed in consultation with our sheep and goat advisory committee to ensure that industry views are included.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** If I were in the shoes of the average sheep producer, I would expect that there would be funding to subsidise the actual sheep tags, and perhaps some detail can be provided on that. Will there be any funding for sheep producers for other infrastructure such as reading or drafting equipment or the like?

**Ms M. Carbon:** Certainly, for the tags themselves, there is the tag incentive payment scheme. The current pilot program of that is discounting the cost of registered National Livestock Identification System electronic ID tags by 75¢ per tag. That is already underway as a pilot. Once that pilot has finished, it will be assessed and the new tag

incentive payment scheme will be rolled out. For things like scanning infrastructure, yes, some funding has been set aside for that. It is the portable equipment grants that I referred to for scanning infrastructure. Details on how many of those will be covered under that program and where that will be targeted are still being developed in terms of planning for that new program.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I return to the director general's earlier comment on the \$3.4 million and FMD and lumpy skin disease and the like. We have not heard much lately about FMD and the status, or the situation, in Bali. What is the minister's status update on that?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I will ask Dr Carbon to provide an update for the member.

**Ms M. Carbon:** Both foot-and-mouth disease and lumpy skin disease are still present in Indonesia. It is expected that Indonesia will declare those diseases endemic, which means it will not be eradicating those diseases but, instead, will be undertaking ongoing containment and management. The threat to Western Australia of those diseases plus multiple other emergency animal diseases nationally remains heightened. As a result, the department is prioritising preparedness work for a potential outbreak of those diseases. One of the elements that we are focusing on is traceability and identification, and the sheep and goat electronic ID program is a key part of delivering that.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to page 222 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the details of controlled grants and subsidies. I am looking at the second-last line item, "Grower Group Alliance". I note that there has been support for the Grower Group Alliance for a number of years, but it appears that there is nothing in the forward estimates beyond 2025. Has a decision been made to not fund the Grower Group Alliance going forward or have there yet to be discussions? What is the department's intention in its support for the Grower Group Alliance after 2025?

[3.40 pm]

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** That should not be interpreted as not funding the group. It is a matter of ongoing negotiations, as I am advised.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 209 and the line item "Marine Parks Compliant Services". There is funding for 2022–23 and similar funding for 2023–24, but there is nothing in the forward estimates. Can the minister provide an explanation for this considering the increasing number of marine parks that appear to be a part of this government's mantra?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** That item refers to the contract between the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development and Parks Australia for the supply of fisheries-compliant services within the commonwealth's Australian Marine Parks network in Western Australia. An increase in DPIRD's expenditure limit of \$484 000 in 2022–23 and \$489 000 in 2023–24 was approved during the 2022–23 midyear review process to reflect the increase of four dedicated FTEs to service that agreement. It relates to commonwealth waters.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to page 219 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and the line item "Geraldton Marine Finfish Nursery Facility". As we know, that project is not going ahead. Can the minister provide some details about why this project fell over? What is the reason for the withdrawal of the proponent?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** As I indicated in previous discussions about the Geraldton kingfish nursery, that project will proceed when there is an agreed offtake agreement with a kingfish producer. Negotiations were in place with Huon, which was interested in undertaking large-scale yellowtail kingfish development in the Geraldton area. The discussions with Huon have indicated that it will be moving down the pathway, subject to final due diligence, of a pilot program for yellowtail kingfish in relatively small quantities, and those small quantities can be adequately serviced by our Fremantle Marine Fish Hatchery. The intent is to continue to support Huon over the next three to four years until it reaches the point at which it makes the determination to go large scale. I anticipate that a decision to go large-scale will take a number of years to implement. This will be an ongoing process with Huon in terms of a partnership and looking at what its needs are, and how and in what manner the government may assist.

In relation to the work we are currently doing with Huon, there is a \$600 000 commitment to address the parasite liver fluke, which has been a key consideration in its business modelling for yellowtail kingfish. We will continue to work on those issues and other parasite issues with Huon to arrive at a position at which it feels confident to undertake the initial trials. As I said, we will support those trials through our existing nursery operations in Fremantle. At some point in the future, a finfish nursery in Geraldton may well be revisited if that is the demand requirements that the state and Huon come to an agreement on based on a large-scale project. At this point, there is no large-scale project in sight; it is simply small-scale trials, and they can be serviced adequately from our existing infrastructure.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Does Huon still have residual rights to ground at the Abrolhos Islands?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Yes, it does.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** So, it has not walked away from the proposed area and that area has not been available to any other proponent.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** No, it has not. I am delighted to advise the member that I spent this morning talking with the CEO of Huon about its plans and what opportunities exist. It has been a difficult process. Of course, Huon changed hands just over a year ago after protracted negotiations, and there were COVID impacts. Therefore, in terms of its business planning, it had to attend to significant issues in its business. The CEO of Huon advises me that it has undertaken market due diligence and investigated management options for the various parasites. It is at a point at which it is feeling more confident about proceeding with a pilot program, which will include operations on the lease areas at the Abrolhos.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Is there capacity for another operator to establish in that area?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** No, there is not. That area is allocated to Huon, and Huon is the most promising prospect at this point. We have not been approached by any other proponents about the area.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Can the minister advise whether there is an end date to the time when Huon will retain the right to the area?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I have not committed to an end date in committing to action; it is an ongoing process that is being done in good faith. We are working together to achieve an outcome in which we can have a trial yellowtail kingfish operation at the Abrolhos.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Given that area is committed to Huon, will the Abrolhos Islands feature in the government's yet to be developed aquaculture plan, which is also a part of this budget?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I do not think it is a yet to be developed aquaculture plan. We are working on a number of fronts across three aquaculture zones. I am very pleased with the work that this government is doing in the aquaculture space. It is a very difficult industry to establish; it has very high up-front capital costs and there is a long period in generating a return on the investment. But we are continuing to work with a number of proponents right around the state, and we have committed to supporting the industry in this budget.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I refer to page 219, works in progress, and page 218, asset investment program. I note there is a significant investment of \$64.2 million for the Pilbara hydrogen hub. What I do not see in the list of intended capital investments across the forward estimates is any investment in the Oakajee hub. My understanding—it was announced a couple of years ago—is that Oakajee was going to be the prime location in the state for hydrogen exports. Is there a plan to invest in an equivalent hub at Oakajee?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The Oakajee project is being managed by the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation so the member would need to refer those questions to JTISI.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** The Pilbara one is in the budget, but not Oakajee.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Yes.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 219, COVID-19 response, and specifically the line item "Hillarys Facilities Upgrade". Given that we are discussing regional development and agriculture, what was the Hillarys facilities upgrade?

[3.50 pm]

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The upgrade of DPIRD facilities in Hillarys is to enable the production of tropical and local species of rock oysters and scallops to stimulate investment, support industry growth and create additional jobs as part of our ongoing commitment to our aquaculture plan.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Very good, minister. As part of the government's commitment to aquaculture, is there any further funding in the out years? I cannot see anything there.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** That upgrade project has been completed; that is why there would not be anything reflected in the out years for the upgrade.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I will ask a new question if I can.

**The CHAIR:** You certainly can.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 209 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. About two-thirds of the way down the spending changes table is the item "Mira Mar Landslide—Phase Three". The estimated actual figure for 2022–23 is \$749 000. Then in budget paper No 3, under "Royalties for Regions Expenditure", we have \$500 000 in 2022–23 and \$200 000 in 2023–24. According to my calculations, only \$200 000 is allocated in this budget year. Can the minister explain the interplay of all these various figures and what they provide?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I am delighted to have at long last received a question from the member for Roe on Mira Mar. I have been waiting with bated breath each question time and the question has not come! I refer once again to that article, I think in the *Albany Advertiser*, in which the member said: "I will fight for Mira Mar. I'll be asking questions in question time and estimates." The member will be very pleased to be able to advise people down there that here we are in estimates and at long last the question has come.

This is a very serious issue for the people who have lost homes and those who are still living in that area. I acknowledge the work of the Great Southern Development Commission and its CEO in getting to a position in which we can understand the remediation requirements for that landslip so that we can try to stabilise the land and work with affected landowners. I have been delighted with the contribution that the local member, Rebecca Stephens, has made as well. The member for Albany has been talking with residents and trying to get a very clear picture about the options as they see them and the pathway forward.

The funding that has been allocated has been to arrive at a situation in which we can, first, understand what the stabilisation requirements are; and, secondly, undertake small-scale works with the approval of landholders to try to minimise impacts as the slip continues to move slowly forward. Additional work is now happening to quantify the costs associated with the option to stabilise and provide drainage systems in that landslip. Further discussions have taken place with the owners on the report received on that matter to determine their views going forward. That information will come to me shortly and the government will then make a decision about the pathway forward.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I would also like to compliment the CEO of the Great Southern Development Commission on the interaction with those landholders, because there has not been a great deal from other areas. Some communication is very important, so I want to recognise the CEO of the development commission, who is here today.

The repair work that is going to happen shortly, as the minister implied, could be jeopardised by rain at any time. We saw the 234-page report, I think it was, that detailed some drainage works et cetera. Can the minister detail if and when that is going to happen to alleviate further slide from encroaching into the backyards of the people at the bottom of the slope?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I have authorised the use of some of those existing funds to undertake any small-scale works that can be done without risking further slippage. It is an unstable area, so we have to be very careful with what is undertaken. Those works can take place only with the approval of the landowners. It is not state government land, it is not public land, it is privately owned land. We recognise that there is a public interest in trying to address a reduction in the immediate risk until we get to a point at which we can quantify exactly what is required, what the costs will be and what the various parties' obligations or commitments might be, recognising that this land is in private ownership. We are committed to working through a solution. We have worked and talked with the landholders. We will do what we can to get to a point at which we will have something concrete to put on the table and discuss as a pathway going forward with the Albany city council and landholders, given the multiple stakeholder interests. It is a complicated issue. The issue around the instability of that landslip is not lost on me, the government or local stakeholders. We will continue to work to arrive at a solution or a pathway forward as soon as we possibly can.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Firstly, my understanding is that the landholders have given permission, because they want that repair or remediation work to be done as soon as possible, given that winter is approaching. As the minister knows, there is a lot of clay on that slope, which makes it very difficult for machinery and the like. I can only impress on the minister the sense of urgency that is required to do those remediation works. As I said, as far as I am aware, the permission of landholders has already been granted. Is there a real push from the GSDC or the department to get that work done over the next few days or week or two?

[Mrs L.A. Munday took the chair.]

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** As I said, it is a very unstable landform. The GSDC and the local member are working diligently with the landholders. We will do what we need to do and what we have agreement to do in regard to any small-scale immediate works that will help to stabilise the slip. Ultimately, the works to permanently stabilise the slip will be very, very significant and there will be some risk associated with them. There needs to be a full understanding of the costs and the risks, and how those works might be carried out by a civil contractor. We will then be in a position to move forward in terms of how we implement that.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** We have broken through the two-year barrier. We have had the homes of two landholders demolished. Three other households live at the bottom of the slope and they are basically concerned that the clay is coming into their backyards. How much longer does the minister anticipate that they will wait before a compensation package might appear?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I think it is really poor form to make a political issue of these circumstances. People have been working solidly to arrive at a position. We have not looked at who is at fault in relation to this. The studies that have taken place have been no-fault studies. Everybody is committed to finding a pathway forward that best fits the needs of those landholders and arrives at a situation in which that landform is stabilised. The City of Albany has an interest and the landholders have an interest. The state government has stepped in to provide support to find a pathway forward. That is the work that we will do. It is not work that can be completed overnight. Significant work has been done on measuring the distribution of groundwater over variations such as the seasonality of the year. It is not something that we can just rush into and make a decision on and hope that it is the right decision. Whatever happens in that area is very significant for the landholders who are directly affected, and the fact that it is a moving



landslip has implications for other landholders in the area. Everybody is committed to finding a pathway forward. I think the report that has been released is a very significant piece of work and helps to educate us about what the remediation requirements might be. As I have indicated, we are working diligently to get to the next stage of where to go from here.

[4.00 pm]

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** The minister alluded to the actual cause of the landslip. Many other blocks in Albany have a steeper landscape. My suggestion would be that the Water Corporation could be a potential cause because the fact is that there was a Water Corp pipe at the top of the hill that was cut off and the Water Corp walked away.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** On a point of order, the member is going into a subjective assessment about who might be responsible and who might be the person who would take it on.

**The CHAIR:** Minister, you can choose not to answer the question.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** In response to that, I am not making a subjective response. I have photos of Water Corp PVC pipes from 1989 that were used at that location. I am saying that there is a potential cause. Two landholders had their houses wiped out. They have been demolished. It is now two years down the track. Will we be waiting for another two years? Can the minister give these landholders some sort of time frame?

**The CHAIR:** Member for Roe, I think we need to address the budget in terms of a line item. If you could address your question to a line item.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 209, the line item “Mira Mar Landslide—Phase Three” and the allocation of \$749 000. The compensation issue needs to be addressed. I am curious about what compensation plans the Minister for Regional Development or, if it was the Water Corporation, the Minister for Water, has for these landholders.

**The CHAIR:** Minister, do you have anything to add?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I hope the member never gets into government. It is an appalling line of questioning. Attributing fault without any evidence whatsoever is particularly poor. The development commission and the local member have worked with the local landholders on the issues that need to be addressed to find a pathway forward. I have said to the member in this chamber that we will continue to work expediently with those landholders and with the City of Albany to find the pathway forward, and we will continue to do that. It does the member no good to come in here and act outraged that it has been two years with no action when in fact there has been. The member has sat in the other place and not asked me a single question on this issue since I have been the minister. I think it is an appalling line of questioning and I do not intend to answer any further questions on it. I have given the member my answer.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I am looking at the details of controlled grants and subsidies table on page 223. Near the end of that table is the line item “University of Western Australia Wave Energy Research Centre”, which received \$500 000 last year and will receive \$250 000 this year. Can the minister outline what that has delivered for the taxpayers of Western Australia?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** It is an investment in the future. That is what it is delivering. It is a research project that is actively examining a wave climate zone and the opportunities for generating energy from waves. I was very pleased to visit the centre recently and look at the modelling and the education work it does with local school groups and community organisations and the proposal it has to develop a pilot site that can be scaled up. The project is a collaboration between the University of Western Australia, Marine Energy Research Australia and the Blue Economy Cooperative Research Centre. It aims to confirm the suitability of King George Sound as a test site in Albany for wave energy devices by deploying a reduced scale wave attenuator, known as a moored multimodal multibody, or M4 for short. It aims to progress the assessment of Albany as the first commercial ocean wave energy market demonstration site in the Southern Hemisphere. I would recommend that the member visit the site. It is a very interesting location and is part of global research into the potential use of wave energy. The modelling that has been done and the scale models that have been produced look very interesting.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Has the department sought any further funding for wave energy studies or projects in Albany?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** No additional funding has been requested. That work is ongoing and it is funded for this period for a particular purpose, but it is a research project.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Will there be a report from the department that will outline the benefits that Western Australia has received from the nearly six years of expenditure on wave energy in Albany?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I am very sure that the universities will provide a research report at the end of their research. That is normally what universities do.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Will the department be seeking such a report?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The department would receive that research report from the researchers. The researchers are undertaking the research, and they will report on the research. We would report on the outcomes of that research, which will mean receiving the report and looking at opportunities to further contribute to our net zero target.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I refer to the line items “Climate Action Fund—Climate Adaptation” and “Watersmart Farms—Phase Two—Industry Growth” on page 208. Can the minister detail what is involved with or what is planned for that future expenditure?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I would like to ask Ms McConnell to respond to that.

**Ms C. McConnell:** As the member would be aware, phase 1 was very much an investigation into desalination technology and whether there is an opportunity to use reverse osmosis processes to firm up water supplies for regional areas that lack water. That investigation will extend to a pilot program across a number of regional areas where businesses are saying that this is a critical requirement for them from a water point of view. It is taking it from a test to pilot-scale installations. It will also try to roll out some of the guidance that business managers on the ground will need to put that technology on their property, such as farms and local businesses. It will provide guidance on which sites and what type of technology to choose. There is a variety of reverse osmosis machines out there. That will give both farmers and our small business owners who want to use that process more confidence in investing in it. That is the premise of phase 2.

[4.10 pm]

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Will any assistance be given to farmers to purchase that technology? Will any subsidy be provided to assist farmers to droughtproof their property through the installation of reverse osmosis equipment?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I defer to Ms McConnell.

**Ms C. McConnell:** At this stage, we are investigating how that adoption will roll out before we make a decision about whether there will be grants to support the best adoption.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Where is that test work being carried out?

**Ms C. McConnell:** There are a number of sites in the wheatbelt and one close to York. They have happened through the great southern and the wheatbelt predominantly.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 219 of budget paper No 2 and the line item about three quarters of the way down, “New Works”, specifically truck wash down facilities. Given our biosecurity arrangements with foot-and-mouth disease and lumpy skin disease, can we have an update on the progress and location of these truck wash down facilities?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** There will be one proposed wash down facility in the north and one in the south of the state to address those emerging threats of foot-and-mouth disease and lumpy skin disease. The assessments on options are continuing, having regard to biosecurity needs and industry activity.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Sorry, can the minister provide the locations again?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** One will be in the north and one will be in the south of the state, but the assessment is still taking place. Precise locations will be determined based on biosecurity needs and industry activity.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** My understanding is that the industry has been calling for four wash down facilities and at this stage we will potentially have two—one in the north and one in the south. Is that the closest we can come to any information on the locations?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I am going to ask for Ms Carbon to address in more detail the biosecurity assessments and needs and that might help to arrive at a clearer answer for the member.

**Ms M. Carbon:** From a biosecurity perspective, it is important to make the point that the truck wash down facilities that we are looking at are not primarily around a biosecurity response or managing biosecurity risk. They play a part in that, but they are more around industry resilience and recovery in the event of a biosecurity emergency. It is around assisting producers to access processing facilities for livestock—where they can move them, for example, for slaughter and processing to sell them to a meat market. They are the sorts of considerations that we need to take into account. We are looking at the highest risk industries and where in the supply chain we can best provide that resilience and risk mitigation by contributing to a wash down facility.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I am still on truck wash down facilities and refer to page 220. I note under the statement of financial position that the fifth item, at the end, talks about truck wash down facilities for \$1.2 million, which has been deferred. Is that part of the program that we have just been talking about or is that a future facility? Is another facility planned that will use that \$1.2 million?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I am advised it is the same program.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I return to page 209 and the continuation of the table “Spending Changes” from the previous page, specifically the line item “Severe Tropical Cyclone Seroja—Assistance Package”. An amount of \$23 974 000 has

been provided for 2022–23 and \$2 195 000 for this budget period, with both figures in brackets. Can the minister enlighten me as to what those figures represent?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** It is essentially due to a low uptake of the grants program, but I will ask Mr Isaachsen to give the Leader of the Opposition more detail.

**Mr P. Isaachsen:** The primary producer recovery grant was originally estimated at \$26.4 million for 2022–23. As the minister just highlighted, due to a low uptake of grants, the forecast was reduced to \$4.7 million over 2022–23 and 2023–24, so those numbers in brackets are, rather, a reduction to \$4.7 million. That low uptake comes despite the state government’s decision in October last year to extend the time frame for the recovery grant program by 12 months to 30 June this year for applications and to 30 June next year to complete the eligible works. As at the close of business at the end of the last month, we had paid \$465 000 under category B to 29 primary producers and \$2 254 000 under category C to 111 primary producers.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Given that such a forecast was achieved in terms of grants, has the department undertaken any sort of review of the appropriateness of the criteria and the methodology? Has it had discussions with other government agencies, such as the Department of the Premier and Cabinet or the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, around the need to perhaps modify those criteria into the future?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I am advised that it was not a criteria issue; it was simply the level of demand and the fact that private insurance covered a lot of the losses. I am not sure that any further detail can be provided to the member. Does the member have anything more specific to add?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Is the answer: no, there is not going to be a review of the process and the appropriateness of the offer made for support in that area?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** There is no evidence that the criteria were inappropriate for those grant schemes, but I will ask Mr Isaachsen whether there is any additional information.

**Mr P. Isaachsen:** I will add to the minister’s comments. This funding comes through the disaster recovery funding arrangements. They are national arrangements and the categories and the criteria are set on a national basis. Any changes would need to be worked through the federal jurisdictional process.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I am well aware of the process, but these things cannot be formed in a vacuum. In the face of what was then the largest allocation we have had for total funding—over \$100 million in total, all this government’s responsibility—it would seem that some lessons need to be learnt by the authorities. I would have thought that a discussion arising from this government’s now learnt experience through this event would be valuable in reshaping or reforming some of those criteria into the future. Will any review be undertaken of the department’s actions and the appropriateness of that criteria?

[4.20 pm]

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** As Mr Isaachsen has explained, these are national guidelines. There is always a review of recovery processes in any disaster situation to see whether lessons can be learnt and how things can be improved. In this instance, the general expectation is that where there is private insurance, private insurance will cover losses. I think it is a credit to both governments that the combined governments made available funds that could be tapped into so that funding was not a constraint, but private insurance has picked this up, and I have received no indication that there is a problem with the guidelines.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I turn to the details of controlled grants and subsidies on page 223, and the rural, regional and remote network. This is not a trick question. I just want to understand because there are a couple of different figures here. It goes from \$150 000 last year to \$350 000 this year and \$200 000 next year. It is then \$150 000 for the year after. My question is really in two parts. Can the minister explain the variations up and down in the program? It is explained as a spending change on page 209, but that does not actually explain why there are different amounts in every year.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The variation is essentially related to a number of initiatives with timing differences across those estimates. That is why there is a variation in the amount of funds, but I will ask Mr Isaachsen whether he would like to give any detail.

**Mr P. Isaachsen:** The arrangement we have come to with the RRR network is for it to slowly reduce its reliance on state government funding. The expectation is that it will seek to increase its other sources of income, so we have tapered down the government funding over time. As a result, we have also reduced our expectations of it over time because we are working on the premise that it will find other sources of income and can choose to do what it likes with that.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I am looking at page 218, paragraph 2.6, and \$7.4 million for a 20-metre vessel to safely service the Buccaneer Archipelago and the north Kimberley coast. Has planning commenced for a similar vessel and resources for compliance for the proposed 1 000 kilometres of the south coast marine park?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** No.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Given the proposed south coast marine park has 1 000 kilometres of coast, does the minister see the potential for planning for a similar vessel?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Once we have a plan, we will look at the resourcing implications, but we do not have a plan at this point.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** The minister or certain departments are in the throes of consulting at the moment, and the minister will be implementing the south coast marine park regardless of what any members of the public or whoever thinks. Surely, the minister must have some forward planning for a vessel for that 1 000-kilometre stretch of coastline.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** We have existing resources at Esperance. The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions is leading the development of the marine park. In the near future, there will be a public comment period based on plans that the department will publish. Once that public comment period has closed, the government will make decisions about the marine park and its boundaries, and that will predicate a plan for any additional supports, services or alterations in the work that DPIRD does in that area.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Is it true that the minister's department is having trouble with DBCA in relation to the purported consultation that is going on at the moment?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Once again, I think the member is responding to just rumour. The two departments are departments of government; they work together. DBCA receives Department of Fisheries advice. That has been through the community reference committee process. There are differences of views in the CRC process, but that will culminate in a set of plans that will go out for further public comment for three months, as I understand it. The government will receive that public comment, and that will lead to further decisions from government.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Is the minister comfortable that the public in Esperance and other locations along the south coast have had their thoughts taken on board through this consultation process? Is he confident that the process has been transparent and useful to the public down that way?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I am finding difficulty relating that to a line item in the budget and the financial statements of government because the member is asking for an opinion, once again. The DBCA is the lead agency for the development of marine parks. Minister Whitby is responsible for consultation, so if the member has questions about the consultation process and community engagement, I suggest he directs them to the appropriate budgetary process.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I refer to budget paper No 2, division 15, part 4, pages 208 and 209. This is again a question of omission. The minister would know that Busselton Margaret River Airport now has interstate flights coming into it, and the council believes that the airport still requires significant upgrades. Obviously, regional tourism is a very important part of regional development, but I cannot see anything in this budget or in the forward estimates. In fact, I have done a search of the entire budget, lest the minister refer me to another minister. There is nothing in the entire budget about any funding in the forward estimates now or in the Busselton airport forward estimates. I wonder whether the minister has any plans to consider that matter and have further discussions with the council?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Can the member point me to the line item he is referring to?

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** It is the spending changes table, which has no reference at all to Busselton airport. I wonder whether that is a deliberate omission or whether the minister, in fact, intends to spend money at that airport.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Busselton airport is not reflected in spending changes, so it is not a line item. If the member wants to ask me a question in question time about Busselton airport, I would be delighted to answer it.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I would have the member for Vasse fighting me!

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Budget paper No 3 has the royalties for regions expenditure outline in the *Economic and fiscal outlook*.

**The CHAIR:** Sorry—which page?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I was about to say on page 215. The Western Australian agricultural supply chain improvements program has three years of funding for a total of \$18 million. Is the minister currently in discussions with the Department of Transport around stage 1 of this program? Have there been any further discussions about future funding through royalties for regions for what is known as the ASCI program?

[4.30 pm]

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The agricultural supply chain improvements program provides investment in freight infrastructure to optimise supply chain efficiencies, improve road safety and community amenity, and move greater volumes of grain by rail. I note that a previous government privatised our rail system. It does this by seeking to lower freight costs and improve supply chain capacity from farm gate to port. That can leverage investment in freight infrastructure, aimed to service other regional commodities, which can underpin the viability of rail freight services. The project is linked to the grain freight upgrades project and work is progressing for the 11 rail sidings, with funding agreements

either signed or in negotiation. Early planning and designs are underway. I will ask Mr Isaachsen if he would like to provide any detail in relation to the member's question.

**Mr P. Isaachsen:** I have nothing further to add.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** There is nothing further to add.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Paragraph 8 on page 210 of budget paper No 2, volume 1 refers to fit-for-purpose modern legislation in relation to the Animal Welfare Act, Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act et cetera. Does the minister have time lines for industry engagement and consultation?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Can I clarify which specific act the member was referring to? Was it the Animal Welfare Act?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** The Animal Welfare Act, the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007, and the Aquatic Resources Act is also mentioned.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The member is specifically asking about Animal Welfare Act and the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** That is right. What are the time lines for legislation industry engagement et cetera?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** In relation to the Animal Welfare Act, we are delivering on the outcomes and recommendations of the review and expect to introduce a bill to Parliament later in 2023. The review of the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act is well progressed and is focusing on ensuring WA can respond to the ever increasing pressures on our biosecurity system and maintain access to domestic and international markets.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Will there be consultation throughout the year prior to the legislation being presented?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I will ask Ms Brayford to respond.

**Ms H. Brayford:** Yes, there will be consultation as the matters progress, particularly for the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act. A review is underway as we speak. A series of public consultation is being undertaken, and further is happening pretty soon, I think. We will seek broad comment on some of the independent panel's considerations around that act, which will then go to the Minister for Agriculture and Food for consideration and for the government response, which will be later this year.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I refer to budget paper No 2, page 209, under "New Initiatives" and the line item "Green Steel—Collie Electric Arc Furnace Steel Mill" for one-and-a-bit million dollars. Could the minister please provide information about what is proposed for the expenditure?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Can I ask the member to repeat the essence of his question?

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** On page 209 in the table is the line item "Green Steel—Collie Electric Arc Furnace Steel Mill". What is proposed for the expenditure proposed this year? I could not find that in continuing matters, so I assume it is a recent initiative.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** That is an allocation from the Collie industry attraction and development fund for the Collie electric arc furnace steel mill bankable feasibility study. Green Steel WA is planning to develop the electric arc furnace steel mini mill in Collie, and it will process local scrap steel to produce reinforcing bars for local consumption and export. It has completed a pre-feasibility study, which the company believes indicates a strong value case for the project, to take the proposal to full bankability.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Is the government anticipating that it will provide any further capital for that project or is this the end of the government's involvement in terms of the feasibility study?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** This is a feasibility study leading to a bankable outcome. Proponents are always welcome to talk to government about whatever form of support they might need, whether it is infrastructure, regulatory or financial. Depending on the outcomes of that feasibility study, I am sure that Green Steel WA will be talking with government.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to paragraph 9 on page 210, about commercial, recreational and charter fishing. It states —

The Department continues to undertake monitoring, assessment, management and compliance activities to ensure the long-term sustainability ...

What packages does the government have available, or will be making available, to compensate those affected by the demersal changes?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** As I have previously indicated, there is a \$10 million package for the demersal scale fish adjustment program to respond to that. That incorporates a range of actions for education and compliance matters in relation to voluntary fishing adjustment schemes and assistance for charter boat operators.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The minister mentioned charter boat operators. What direct assistance or thought is about enabling them to continue on in their business? One of my operators has told me that he will have to drop from 100 charters per annum to 20 because of the changes that have been imposed, which will obviously make his business completely

unviable. What is the thought of revisiting the situation for charter operators in terms of a dedicated part of the quota or some sort of an understanding of what this actually means? It is, I think, 52 operators up and down the coast who will be dramatically affected by these changes.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The west coast demersal issue is a very challenging situation because it is a fish in recovery. Significant businesses have established themselves on the back of a fish that is in recovery. When I say it is in recovery, it does not mean to say that it is necessarily recovering. It actually needs management action to ensure its future sustainability, which is a primary obligation I have under the act. The changes that were brought into place were to ensure that there would be sufficient fish for future generations. I acknowledge up front that that was a very tough decision and it has very significant impacts on the commercial sector and the broader business sector, including charters and tackle shops and the like, that has developed on the back of a very popular fish. I acknowledge that.

[4.40 pm]

The benchmark reduction tonnage of 50 per cent was recommended to me by industry and was consistent with the harvest strategy. A component within the adjustment package proposes a total tonnage of 20 tonnes for the charter boat industry, and that proposal, based on consultation with the charter boat sector, is to move to a tag system allocation based on the charter boat's prior history. Therefore, the more a business has been dependent and reliant on and has utilised the demersal resource, the greater access it will get to fishing tags. We recognise that the tag amounts are far less than those charter boat operators would like, but it is consistent with trying to achieve the best outcome to ensure the sustainability of the fish into the future.

There is a \$500 000 diversification scheme, which aims to provide grants to charter fishing licence holders and to help diversify marine tourism experiences. That package has just gone out to the charter operators. There is \$226 000 dedicated to the charter sector management reform program, which includes the implementation of a charter quota tag system.

We recognise that some operators will decide to move out of demersal, and if they have received tags based on their catch history, we will enable them to trade those tags and perhaps concentrate more on the charter boat sector. However, that is a decision for industry. I also note that a number of operators have moved out of the demersal area and into other areas and others have diversified and are making use of the pelagic opportunities associated with the voluntary fishing adjustment scheme.

I recognise that it is a very difficult situation for those operators, but we have the \$10 million package and we have divided that as reasonably as we can to achieve a number of outcomes for the adjustment to the new allocations.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Is there provision in the funding for the buyback of professional licences? Has that occurred, or is that envisaged? Where is that sitting in terms of a discussion point?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** No, it is not envisaged for charter boat operators. There is a voluntary fishing adjustment scheme for the commercial sector to enable it to achieve its reductions. We have put in place an arrangement for industry diversification to look at the pelagic opportunities for the charter boat sector.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Have any professional licences, at this point, been sold off?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Sorry, is the member referring to the voluntary fishing adjustment scheme or the charter boat scheme?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I am talking about professional licences. Have any holders of those, at this point, considered a buyback?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** That scheme has not opened yet. It is in the process of being finalised, and then we will seek expressions of interest on a voluntary basis.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I refer to page 209 and the spending changes table, and the line item "Ex-Tropical Cyclone Ellie—Freight Assistance Package". There is obviously a reduction this year. Will that freight assistance package continue now that the level crossings are in place?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The answer to that is yes, it will continue. Further works for major roads access will not be completed until next year, so we anticipate that there will still be a requirement for that freight subsidy.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** How many applications for freight subsidies were refused? Perhaps the minister can provide just a rough proportion; I do not need exact numbers.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** To date, three were declined or withdrawn out of 138 applications.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** The minister said that the freight assistance package will continue into next year. It is likely that the bridge will take at least two years or more to build. Should there be funding in the forward estimates for further assistance?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** There is an allocation for that. To date, the total funds are probably less than we predicted would be taken up because we have found that people are accessing freight options. There may be some backlog in freight applications, but at this stage I am confident that that freight subsidy is meeting the needs of the Kimberley and the East Kimberley in particular. We will continue to keep it under consideration. The aim is to support those people through a very, very difficult time.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 223 and the regional telecommunications project continuation about halfway down the page. What is the breakdown for this project? I do not know whether the minister has driven the Albany Highway, especially between Armadale right through to Albany, but there are consistent areas of 30 or 40 kilometres with barely any coverage for mobile phones. Apart from providing a breakdown, does the Minister for Regional Development have something in line to improve the coverage for this important highway?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Is the member's question specifically about Albany Highway, because there are many locations?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I will start with the breakdown, if you like, and I will follow on to Albany Highway after that.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The regional mobile communications project provided \$40 million to complete 113 new mobile stations, and that is 100 per cent complete. The regional telecommunications project has provided \$85 million to fund 402 new and improved base stations, and that is 63 per cent complete. The state agricultural telecommunication infrastructure fund has committed \$19 million to deliver fixed wireless cover to more than half of the grain belt, and that is more than 51 per cent complete. The WA digital connectivity program committed \$11 million to the commonwealth regional connectivity program round 2 and is nine per cent complete.

If the member wants a list of all the projects, and there is a very long list, I have it. If the member wants to write to me about specific concerns along Albany Highway, I will ask the department to provide feedback on that.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Thank you. I would like to ask specifically about Albany Highway, given we have had several accidents there recently and there are a substantial number of areas without mobile coverage.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Ultimately, we are talking about what is a commonwealth responsibility for mobile phone coverage. I suggest that the member writes to me as a local member expressing his concern about particular locations and then I can request that the department provides advice to the member on that. We can take up those matters with the commonwealth as well.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Okay. I will take that on board. As it stands at the moment, are there any areas on the Albany Highway that the government is looking at that are part of the current forward projections?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I think the best thing the member can do is write to me expressing where the points of concern are. There are grant rounds open at the moment, and we can provide some advice back on the appropriate bodies that can apply for funding.

[4.50 pm]

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to page 208 of budget paper No 2 and the election commitments listed under "Spending Changes". There is an increase of \$200 000 this year for the Augusta childcare centre. Can the minister update us on the state of that centre, the likely completion date and the final cost?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I am delighted that the member has asked me this question. I want to acknowledge the member for Warren-Blackwood's incredible advocacy for the community of Augusta. Initially, she helped to formulate the original election commitment of \$100 000. When it became clear that the centre was not going to proceed because of other issues, she advocated strongly for it. I was able to join Minister Winton in Augusta to announce that a state-owned building has been secured for the purpose of establishing the childcare centre and a further \$200 000 has been allocated in the current budget towards transforming the vacant state-owned building into a fit-for-purpose facility. It is a long sought after day care service. I also want to acknowledge the board and the staff of the South West Development Commission for providing an additional \$50 000. Again, I think it is a very good investment in the Augusta community. The total in funding and financial assistance provided to the Augusta and Districts Community Childcare service is \$350 000. That project highlights the investment we are making to support safe, strong and fair communities for people no matter where they live. When we went down to the community to make those announcements, people were incredibly appreciative. As the member would know, when communities get a leg-up like that, they are very appreciative. I think the centre will make a world of difference to families in the Augusta area.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Following up on that question, the lack of adequate child care is probably the single greatest constraint on workforce participation across the state. Is there a broader program of funding for improving regional childcare facilities?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Which line item is the member referring to?

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** It was a further question. I was referring to the line item and asking whether the government is expanding that program to other areas, or is it just a single example?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** That was a specific election commitment. If the member wants to inquire more broadly about child care and the work the state is doing, particularly with the new federal government, I suggest the question is referred to the appropriate division.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 218 and paragraph 2.7 on the wild dog action plan and subparagraph 2.7.1 on \$3.8 million for the extension of the state barrier fence. When I was first elected in 2017, I think this was budgeted for the following year, and we are still grinding away. Can the minister give us an update on where we are at with that extension?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I thank the member. We were both in the class of 2017! I will defer this question to Dr Carbon.

**Ms M. Carbon:** The line item referred to is around the maintenance and replacement of the state barrier fence, which is being done under the wild dog action plan. That is around replacing very aged sections of the fence with appropriate wild dog fencing that includes a lap wire. That work is well progressed. I have notes here, but, from memory, around 300 kilometres have already been replaced and work on about 200 kilometres remains to be done. Once that final section is upgraded, it will mean that the entire state barrier fence is wild dog standard for the first time.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I understand that there are further native title issues with the land that the fence will go on. Can the minister update me on that at all?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Dr Carbon.

**Ms M. Carbon:** Yes. I think the member is referring to the Esperance extension of the state barrier fence, which is a separate project. The planned extension to the state barrier fence covers a number of different land tenures that are in a mosaic. Some of that land requires the negotiation of Indigenous land use agreements. Last year, the first of those agreements was registered and construction work is now underway on those sections of the fence. The remaining section is called section 3. It requires an Indigenous land use agreement, which the department is currently negotiating, but those negotiations are in the early stages.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** What is the prediction on those negotiations being completed to enable the completion of the fence?

**Ms M. Carbon:** As I said, those negotiations are quite early on. It is not possible at this stage to predict how they will go. However, I can say that the department is looking at all options for construction of the fence sections. Those options include a potential realignment to avoid the need to build on crown land. I would say that any environmental, heritage and Environmental Protection Authority approvals, for example, will still be required no matter where that fence alignment sits and all those options require significant time to be developed.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Therefore, we could have a situation in which the last section will need to be diverted onto landholders and it will be held up by the new Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act that we were talking to the minister about this morning. Is it a tier 1 or tier 2 activity that will require permission from the local Aboriginal cultural heritage group et cetera? We may end up moving from the frying pan into the fire.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I will ask Dr Carbon to respond.

**Ms M. Carbon:** There are two elements that the member referred to. One is the need for an Indigenous land use agreement when that fence alignment is on native title land. Irrespective of that, the member is correct that there will need to be negotiations and agreements with First Nations people in the area even if that fence is built on other land tenure. Yes, we will have to be cognisant of, and meet the requirements of, the new act when it comes in.

[5.00 pm]

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** With the ILUA already settled in relation to that fence, was that purely a settlement around the route the fence was taking or did it include payment of compensation as part of building that fence?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Dr Carbon.

**Ms M. Carbon:** I do not have the details of that with me, but I can confirm that it also included an agreement for tender for that work. One of the main aims of the Esperance extension project is to contribute to Aboriginal engagement and work in the area, so that group have tendered and are now undertaking that clearing and construction work.

**The CHAIR:** The minister and his adviser are requesting a 10-minute break. Are there going to be further questions?

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I have one more question. I am sure the minister will enjoy it! I refer to my favourite page and the spending changes and the future drought fund program extension about two-thirds down page 209. There is \$15.6 million this coming financial year, and then it trails off. Could the minister please explain the scope of that work?



**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The commonwealth future drought fund is a \$5 billion investment fund, with \$100 million each year allocated to drought-resilience programs designed to provide secure, continuous funding for drought-resilient initiatives to help Australian farms and communities prepare for the impacts of drought. Notional allocations of \$1.33 million to the regional drought resilience planning program and \$2.26 million to the farm business resilience program respectively were made to Western Australia based on the value of agricultural commodities produced, the number of farm businesses and the number of people employed in the sector in WA. Following the 2022 federal election, the new Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Hon Murray Watt, confirmed that total commonwealth funding for the extension of programs of \$10.096 million from 2022–23 to 2023–24 was approved. A total appropriation of \$10.096 million was also approved, representing the state’s contribution to the program.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Will that money be expended mostly on farms or will it be divided between farms and, for example, town dams and similar projects?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I will ask Ms McConnell to respond.

**Ms C. McConnell:** At the moment those discussions are still ongoing about where it will be spent, but we are looking at extending some of those regional drought-resilience plans to other regions. Farm business resilience training is in some other sectors, not just the farming sector. It might be aquaculture or agriculture, as well as pastoralists, and some consideration around some of the Aboriginal farming opportunities in more traditional areas, such as cut flowers, native sandalwood et cetera. They have not been finalised and there will need to be discussion with the commonwealth.

**The CHAIR:** Would we like to take a 10-minute break, unless there are any further questions?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Can we come back to the development commissions?

**The CHAIR:** Yes. We will take a 10-minute break and suspend until 5.15 pm.

*Meeting suspended from 5.04 to 5.13 pm*

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to page 210, budget paper No 2, volume 1, “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”, specifically paragraph 11, which states —

Flooding in the Fitzroy Valley caused by ex-Tropical Cyclone Ellie has had major social, environmental, and economic consequences for the Kimberley. The Department and the Kimberley Development Commission have a key role in supporting the region’s economic recovery, including the recovery of its primary industries.

I want to get an understanding of what work the department but, more especially, the Kimberley Development Commission, has been doing during this period and what role the Kimberley Development Commission sees itself having as part of the recovery process.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I acknowledge the work of the Kimberley Development Commission in assisting me with a very early visit post the flooding to meet with small businesses in the East Kimberley area and hear firsthand what impact the flood was likely to have on the tourism sector and freight issues. I was very pleased that it has been able to assist in providing advice on the quantities of freight that move through the East Kimberley area, the likely indicative costs of freight movement and the implications of formulating a freight assistance package, which it did. That freight assistance package was launched in February 2023 and backdated to 1 January and was jointly funded through the commonwealth–state Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements. The department is administering that package on behalf of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and DRFA WA. The development commission continues to provide advice to the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation, the Small Business Development Corporation and others supporting the recovery of tourism and business in the area and, importantly, make use of its widespread connections across industry to engage with industry and small business to develop local solutions and local ideas and put them into the recovery structure.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** What role does the Kimberley Development Commission play in feeding into the planning for the recovery beyond the immediate response? What might it identify as priorities for the region to recover, not just from the point of view of Fitzroy Crossing and the damage to roads et cetera, but also to ensure that the economy is able to get back on its feet and use whatever resources the state and commonwealth governments are going to spend to make sure there is good understanding of the local conditions by groups that are going in to provide some of those resources?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The commission provides a range of supports—information, advocacy, data, data analysis—that feed into the recovery process, which is coordinated by Robert Cossart, another development commission CEO. That informs the work of all those other agencies that have primary responsibility, whether it is DJTSI, Tourism WA within JTTSI, the Department of Transport and a number of other agencies. In terms of the recovery ecosystem, particularly of the economic ecosystem, DPIRD and KDC work closely to identify and address the issues. The principal issues to date have been in freight subsidies and tourism. I was up there last weekend and talked to a number of

people, including Aboriginal organisations. They were very appreciative of the work of the development commission and the state government in moving quickly to address those immediate needs, particularly around freight.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Does the development commission in the Kimberley have an ongoing role in tourism development or is that left entirely to other agencies?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Regional development commissions per se, including the Kimberley Development Commission, have a whole-of-government responsibility. Regional development is not confined to a particular topic; it has an interest in all sectors, whether it is tourism, agriculture or whatever. It works in partnership with relevant agencies to achieve outcomes locally for the region.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Is there a formal process of consultation or engagement between local governments in the Kimberley and the Kimberley Development Commission and has that been stepped up as a result of the recent flooding?

[5.20 pm]

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Development commissions talk frequently with local governments, and the Kimberley Development Commission is no exception. Again, I met with the local government in the East Kimberley when I was there and I will be going up to the West Kimberley this week. There is a very close relationship between the KDC and the Shire of Wyndham–East Kimberley.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** In the face of the needs of the Kimberley at the moment, is the development commission being provided with extra resources to enable it to carry out its role or does it have to undertake those duties at the expense of other functions that it might otherwise undertake?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The state government has resourced the recovery program quite significantly. The KDC certainly has not requested additional resources from me. It has been able to work with the information and networks that it has to advise government and influence the shape and nature of the recovery program. Advocating for their region is what development commissions do, member; they are very good at it.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The development commission does not employ staff; is that correct? It has only the CEO, who is a statutory officer of the commission. Is it correct that the rest of the staff are provided by the minister's department?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** With the exception of the CEO, staff are assigned by DPIRD to the development commissions. That enables the administration and back-office functions for those staff to be managed in a much more efficient way. However, those staff report on a day-to-day basis to the CEO of the development commission, and the CEO reports to the board.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** How many dedicated FTE are at the disposal of the Kimberley Development Commission, and how many were there before the current situation?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** There are 12 now and there were 12 then.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Okay. Are all those staff based in the region?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** They are based in the Kimberley region.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Where are they based in the region?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** There are staff in Broome and Kununurra.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** How many are in Broome and how are many in Kununurra?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** There are two vacancies. Three positions are occupied in Broome and seven in Kununurra.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** How long have there been unfilled vacancies in the development commission?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** There have been two vacancies since January 2023.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Did those vacancies occur before, during or after tropical cyclone Ellie?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I fail to see the relevance of that question. Vacancies are vacancies. The commission is doing everything it possibly can to fill those vacancies.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Given the extra workload of the commission at the moment, is the government offering any other support to the development commission to make up for that two FTE shortfall?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Yes. The commission has the support of the department, which is there to support development commissions in their day-to-day operations.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Does the commission have some sort of budget for its own use or to use at its discretion to run day-to-day activities and formulate plans for travel and other associated needs that it might face?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Can the Leader of the Opposition refer me to the line item that he is referring to?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I am referring to the significant issues impacting the department and the consequences of what we are talking about here—that is, the Kimberley Development Commission having a role in supporting the region’s economic recovery. It is a significant issue that the government has identified, and I am quizzing what resources the commission actually has to carry out those functions.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Is the member referring to item 11?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Yes, item 11 under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The Kimberley Development Commission has two budgets; one is for use by the CEO and the board, and the other is the operating budget for the commission that is managed by DPIRD on the commission’s behalf and which the commission accesses.

**The CHAIR:** Leader of the Opposition?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I thought there was some more advice coming from behind the minister, but there is not. I will continue in this vein around the Kimberley response. The minister said that the development commission is supporting the region’s economic recovery. Has some thought been given to the need for a region-wide economic plan for the Kimberley? Does such a plan exist; and, if not, is it something that the department envisions it might undertake? I note that in previous times there have been things like blueprints et cetera. Acknowledging the situation that the Kimberley has been in, what level of strategic planning or forward thinking is the department and/or the Kimberley Development Commission involved in to move forward from here in a planned way?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The Kimberley Development Commission does have a draft strategic plan. I am in discussions with the Kimberley Development Commission about updating that strategic plan to reflect the objectives that I have as an incoming minister and to match those to local needs identified by the board.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Does the strategic plan relate to the organisation or to the development of the region?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** It relates to the development of the region—the objectives that the government has for that region.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** When was that plan last updated?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The last draft strategy was publicly released in 2021.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Given recent events, does the minister envisage that that plan will be revisited any time soon?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** As I said, the plan is currently in draft format. I have been in discussions with the development commission about updating the objectives in that plan to reflect local needs and my objectives as an incoming minister.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** In regard to the future work of the development commission, will it need to submit to you, as minister, some sort of forward plan for its activities or will that largely be decided by the board and the CEO?

[5.30 pm]

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The development commission does that through the board. I have a view—I have always had this view—that development commissions are at the front end of regional development. It starts locally with a local understanding of the issues and the identification by the board about which critical issues are necessary to take the region forward. That comes up through the department to me and I review that. That is the process that is currently underway.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** In regard to the development commissions interacting with government, the minister’s department and other development commissions, what is the current structure for the reporting of the development commissions? Do they report to the minister directly, and only to the minister, or do they report to other bodies with which they are now integrated?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The CEO reports to the board of the development commission and the board of the development commission reports directly to me. There is no change in that process. The department is there to support the development commissions in their work and to coordinate the statewide programs and projects of major significance at the state level. The essence of regional development is at the local level, and that is the role of the development commissions and the boards.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Given the situation in the Kimberley and the rather late nature of some of the planning that would have had to go into the recovery process for the Kimberley, has any money been set aside under royalties for regions specifically for the Kimberley in a recovery sense?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** There is money in the budget from royalties for regions. We do not have the model that the previous government adopted, which was handing buckets of money across to the development commissions. We have a budgetary process in place and the discipline associated with that. Was the member’s question about the flooding?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Yes.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The freight assistance package is \$42 million through royalties for regions; the temporary accommodation package is \$33 million through royalties for regions; the clean-up programs will receive \$30 million; the industry and community development programs, which put people on the ground to help support local community recovery hubs, will receive \$9.238 million; and there is \$80 million for the emergency road recovery work. Those measures involve a number of agencies. This is a whole-of-government effort. The Kimberley Development Commission is a significant contributor in the economic recovery and it works in partnership with the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development and also with the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Given the demographics of the Kimberley, does the development commission have a dedicated officer or officers who deal directly with the remote communities in the Kimberley region?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** We cannot avoid that in the Kimberley. All the staff have a remit to work with remote communities, to varying extents and in various locations. I was in Warmun on the weekend and was very impressed with the staff member who knew all the community members very well, knew the issues and was able to step me through the important considerations of the Warmun community with the community.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I note that the minister was at the Warmun aged-care facility, which we both know was built several years ago. Can the minister relay to us what the plans are and what the minister has in mind for that facility?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I think that was built in the time of the previous government.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** That is my understanding.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** It did not have any federal funding associated with it. I met with members of the community and talked with them about their aspirations for the future of that building. We have also allocated some funding towards securing the building by putting a fence right around it to help make it more secure. The community is looking at options to replace the broken glass and for a general site clean-up. There is an engagement process with the community while it looks at what the options are for the best use of that building into the future, given that it is not compliant with contemporary aged-care standards. It is very unlikely to ever be used for aged-care purposes. There may well be other avenues to pursue in addressing the needs of older people in that community so that they do not necessarily have to relocate to Kununurra. That building is a considerable and very large asset. It is unfortunate that it has not been able to be used, but I think the community has some good ideas and we will work in whatever way we can to help the community achieve those outcomes.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Following on from the Leader of the Opposition's questions, are the Regional Development Council and the Western Australian Regional Development Trust fully operational, as they were prior to Labor forming government in 2017? Is the structure very similar?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** As I recall from my last years of experience on the development commission, the structure was that the Regional Development Council saw itself as the director and controller of the commissions under the guidance of the then chair. That is not the case now. The Regional Development Council is a forum for sharing information and understanding the important issues affecting each commission and how they aggregate important issues for regional Western Australians and the contribution that regional Western Australia makes to Western Australia. It is an opportunity to learn, to critically review and to share information. I am very pleased that the Regional Development Council has reinvited the CEOs to participate in those meetings. The member might recall that under the previous government that was no longer acceptable. We have changed that. In my view, that is excellent because it brings forward the experience and expertise of the board chairs who represent a wide variety of interests with the experience and operational expertise of the CEOs so that we get much better quality advice around the table of that forum.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Is it similar for the Western Australian Regional Development Trust?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Yes. Under the act, the regional development trust has primary responsibility to report on the expenditure of royalties for regions funding and any other matters that I refer to it. I recently appointed Mr David Caddy as chair. I think Mr David Caddy as chair of the Western Australian Planning Commission will bring enormous expertise to the trust in terms of understanding the broad landscape within which royalties for regions and regional development operates.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to the structure of general government on page 240 of the *Economic and fiscal outlook*. All the development commissions are listed there, including the Kimberley Development Commission, which we have just been talking about, and the Great Southern Development Commission, the South West Development Commission and so on.

**The CHAIR:** Could the member clarify where we are?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** It is on page 240 of budget paper No 3, the *Economic and fiscal outlook*. It is a list of organisations that comprise the general government sector, which, of course, is funded by the budget. In the context of the minister having just provided advice on the position of the Kimberley Development Commission's full-time staff et cetera,

would the minister be willing to provide, even by way of supplementary information, a list of the full-time equivalent persons who are devoted to each of the development commissions, including whether any vacancies exist at the moment?

[5.40 pm]

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Can I clarify which line item the member is referring to?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I am referring to the list of general government agencies on page 240 of the *Economic and fiscal outlook*.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Can I clarify with the chair if that reference is within the scope of this division?

**The CHAIR:** Can the Leader of the Opposition give us anything more specific?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to page 214 of budget paper No 2 and service area 2, “Corporate and Business Development Services Provided by the Department to Support Regional Development Commissions”. We could use that line item if you like to achieve the same outcome, and it is probably more specific. The table shows that there are 124 employees or full-time equivalents. Is that referring to the persons within the department who are devoted to those nine regional development commissions; and, if so, can the minister provide—if not now, by way of supplementary information—a list of the full-time equivalents for each of the development commissions, including any vacant positions?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I am advised that the information on staffing numbers is in the annual reports of the development commissions.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Do they outline the current situation?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The figures in the latest annual report would be as of the date of the annual report. People always get promoted, leave or relocate to another development commission, but as of those dates of the annual reports, that would be the number. That is the most expedient way to get that information.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** In terms of this service provision area, do each of the development commissions have an up-to-date strategic plan or are they all dated at the time of the turn of government?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** One of the great initiatives within the development commissions is that CEOs have come together to form the Western Australia Regional Development Alliance. They have been progressively looking at the issues of strategy for the regional development portfolio and for their development commissions. In answer to the member’s question, the current strategic plan of each of the development commissions would be at varying levels of development.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I will have to accept that I am not going to get much more information.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer again to page 209 and the Mira Mar landslide. While the CEO of the Great Southern Development Commission is available, would she be able to explain to us, through the minister, what interaction the commission has had with the landholders, both those that had buildings that were demolished and the three current landholders?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Numerous meetings, telephone calls and emails have been exchanged. There has been quite extensive engagement. I do not think it is reasonable to try to detail every single one of those, but there has been ongoing engagement right through the process.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Considering that we cannot locate any further funding in the budget for the victims of the landslide, does the minister foresee that the commission and the minister will come forward to those landholders with a compensation package and that they will have ongoing communication with them on a monthly or bi-monthly basis? Considering it has been two years since the landslide and there is nothing in the budget for next year, are we looking at waiting for that for four years?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Member, I have already answered this question and issues of compensation imply fault. At the moment the development commission and the local member for Albany have been talking with all the stakeholders on the basis of the outcome of a piece of work that details what needs to happen to stabilise that land area and what its potential future uses are. That advice to me is being formulated now and government will make decisions in response to that advice once it has had an opportunity to consider it.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Given that there is nothing in the budget and that those properties are potentially worth \$1.5 million to \$2 million and above, does the minister foresee an ex gratia payment being made? I can see no avenue in the budget to compensate those owners. We are talking about \$10 million to \$15 million for those five properties.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The report was received after the budget process. From the government’s point of view, it receives advice based on that report and on the engagement with the landholders, the City of Albany and any other relevant stakeholder. That advice will come to government and government will consider that advice and make decisions accordingly, as it does with many other matters.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Does the minister see a time frame by which those landholders could hopefully expect something, given that the minor repair job is potentially being done in the next few weeks? I assume that next summer, some sort of major repair work will be done on retaining walls et cetera. Is there any light on the horizon for those landholders?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The member is correct in that any works to stabilise that area on a long-term basis will have to occur during a dry spell. Summer periods provide an opportunity to engage with those works. As I have said to the member, the advice is yet to come to government. Once that advice is received, it will be considered by government. I am awaiting that advice. I understand that the commission talked very recently with people, as has the local member, and I am expecting that advice. Once I receive that advice, it will be considered within government.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I think I have just about moved off the development commissions. I refer to page 223 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the line item “Regional Centres Development Plan: Stage Two”. This plan will be terminated at the end of this year with no further allocations. Can the minister explain what that plan was about and its outcomes?

[5.50 pm]

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I am advised that those funds from the old regional centres development plans were not spent over successive financial years, so the funding was repurposed for the biosecurity communications campaign and truck wash-down facilities.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Going back to the development commission discussion we had earlier and referring to the Collie Futures fund and other various Collie projects listed on page 222, can the minister explain to us the interaction between the South West Development Commission, the minister’s department and the other arms of government on some of the plans and changes for Collie? What interactions has the development commission had?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I thank the member for the question. It is really heartening to get feedback nationally on the government’s just transition program for Collie and the work undertaken there. I acknowledge the member for Collie–Preston, who is in the room today and has been doing a terrific job helping her community adjust to and build a new future with the end of coal-based power generation. It has been a very comprehensive approach, and the South West Development Commission plays an important role in helping to support that process. There are a number of industry attraction funds, at both the small business and the major business ends. The South West Development Commission provides support, governance and administration support for the Collie industry attraction and development fund. Every now and then, the acronyms escape me! It also played a major role in developing the economic plan that has helped to guide the development of these programs for Collie’s transition.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Was the South West Development Commission specifically allocated staff or resources to enable it to participate in that arrangement?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Four staff were appointed to assist with that transition.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Are those four staff continuing as the transition continues or were they involved in the initial planning? What did their positions entail?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Those positions are funded through to 2026.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Are they doing planning and some level of implementation?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Yes, there is a great deal of implementation, as well as planning and looking at industry opportunities. It is a major transition program. The feedback I am getting from the Collie community is very positive about that transition program. It is a time of uncertainty for the future, and it is the first time anything has been undertaken nationally on this scale. Again, I commend the local member, who has been working diligently with her community to make sure that the transition program best meets the needs of the people of Collie moving into the future. It is a great town. The member should go to visit and see the mural on the dam, which is incredible and something to behold. I was there with the Premier, and we opened up the walkway across the dam wall. That was terrific and has long been called for. We walked through the town of Collie itself, which has murals and a sense of purpose. Some great small businesses are being supported. It is outstanding work. The member asked me about the work of the development commissions. There is a development commission working hand in hand with central government and local members to achieve great outcomes for the community.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I have a different question that refers to page 214 of the *Budget statements*, and corporate and business development services provided by the department to support regional development commissions and the FTEs involved. Does the South West Development Commission have a particular focus on tourism, given the importance of tourism in the south west? If so, how many officers are devoted to that effort?

**Extract from Hansard**

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B — Tuesday, 23 May 2023]

p121b-143a

Ms Merome Beard; Mr Donald Punch; Mr Shane Love; Mr Peter Rundle; Dr David Honey; Chair

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**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The staff assigned to the development commission work across a whole range of activities and portfolios. Some are geographically or locally focused, and others might have a particular speciality in an area. I seek some clarification.

Tourism WA has placed a position in the development commission to help support tourism. I take this opportunity to acknowledge someone who is very well loved and passed away a couple of years ago—Mark Exeter, who did terrific things in the tourism sector during his time with the development commission. I put on record my appreciation for Mark's contribution. The development commission also provides additional resources to support the tourism agenda, and it is a very significant industry sector for the south west.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Is the South West Development Commission one of the development commissions with a more up-to-date strategic plan and does it involve tourism?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Yes.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** They needed to replace the one with the previous CEO.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** They have one with more energy now.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The previous CEO was a very good CEO. He used to sit in this chamber providing excellent advice to his minister. Mind you, I still remember a commitment from Hon Brendon Grylls and Hon Mick Murray that the day Lake Kepwari opened, they were going to jump in there in their budgie smugglers and have a swim, and they never have done. Shame on them!

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** There is always hope. This is probably the last question from me. Does the strategy that has been advanced for tourism have expansion plans for the Busselton Margaret River Airport?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** This is like a circling shark question. It reminds me of the member for North West Central at a previous estimates hearing. As I said, the Busselton airport is something that I am very happy to answer questions about in question time. It is not a line item in this budget, but the development commission is in ongoing discussions with the City of Busselton about how that airport is functioning and its future opportunities. Having written the business case jointly with my colleagues at the time, and persuaded the then government that it should invest in it, I think it has been a good investment and has a great future.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Before we go, I thank all the people who have travelled from far to come today. Thank you.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

*Meeting suspended from 5.58 to 7.00 pm*