



# Parliamentary Debates

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A

Thursday, 23 May 2024



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## ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A

The meeting commenced at 9.00 am.

### **Division 14: Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation — Services 1 to 3, State and Industry Development, Jobs and Trade —**

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Mr R.H. Cook, Premier; Minister for State and Industry Development, Jobs and Trade.

Ms R. Brown, Director General.

Dr P. Gorey, Deputy Director General, Resources and Project Facilitation.

Mr T. Marney, Coordinator General.

Mr R. Sansalone, Chief Financial Officer.

Ms S. Spencer, Deputy Director General, Strategy and International Engagement.

Mr S. Dawson, Executive Director, Resource and Infrastructure Agreements Division, Resources and Project Facilitation.

Mr A. Sutton, Executive Director, Energy Transition Strategies Division, Resources and Project Facilitation.

Ms L. Dawson, Deputy Director General, Industry, Science and Innovation.

Ms M. Shimmin, Program Director, Global Attraction and Engagement, Corporate Communications.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

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

I give the call to the member for Cottesloe.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I go to ongoing initiatives on page 194 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. In the 2023–24 budget, \$2 million was allocated to the Western Australian LNG Jobs Taskforce but that does not appear in the ongoing initiatives table. What has happened to that program? Why has it disappeared?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** The Western Australian LNG Jobs Taskforce continues apace and is a really important opportunity for us to engage with industry leaders in the LNG space. As the member would be aware, it involves very senior members of the LNG industry meeting with me as the chair. Underneath that, we have a secretariat at officer level undertaking some of the lion's share of the work. It is very, very successful and we are keen to keep moving forward with it. It provides us with an invaluable opportunity to gain insights into how we continue to support that industry.

I will ask Ms Brown to provide the member with some details about where it sits within the budget.

**Ms R. Brown:** As the Premier said, the Western Australian LNG Jobs Taskforce remains a very important initiative, with very strong collaboration between state government and industry, such that the resourcing dedicated to supporting the taskforce is within the agency's overall budget. The line item identified on page 194 is really about where there is increased boost funding, but we have ensured that ongoing funding to support the taskforce is within our overall budget and also we are progressing key initiatives out of the taskforce, including the partnership with the Centre of Decommissioning Australia, through which we work. Obviously, decommissioning is an important initiative and opportunity for Western Australia. There was also some work led in 2023 by the taskforce on carbon capture, usage and storage, and there is resourcing allocated to progressing the action plan agreed by the taskforce last year.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** The Australian Energy Market Operator's *2023 Western Australia gas statement of opportunities* indicates that we are forecasting significant gas shortfalls for the state, and that is of particular concern for industry in the state. Is that taskforce really achieving the goals that were set out for it? I assume that one of those key goals was to ensure that we had adequate gas supply, particularly for industry in the south west of the state.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I thank the member. AEMO obviously provides us with important insights for planning and understanding what we need to continue to do to ensure that we manage the energy security of the community. I caution the member about AEMO because its work is not based upon future finds and gas reserve production, so in some respects the AEMO reports are about a point in time rather than an extrapolation of what might change in terms of supply and demand. As the member says, it provides us with an important planning opportunity. We continue to work with all members of the industry on our domestic gas reservation policies and understanding what the opportunities might be to enhance domestic gas availability. As the member would be aware, it was initially the Carpenter government that introduced domestic gas reservation policy, and then the McGowan government doubled down on it to continue to make sure that Western Australians have a good supply of gas. At the end of the day, it is Western Australians' gas, so we should benefit from it. We need to continue to remind industry of that and make sure that we have sufficient supplies of gas both for industry and the retail consumer.

As the member would be aware, the WA Parliament's Economics and Industry Standing Committee is doing significant work at the moment in relation to the domestic gas policy, and it tabled its interim report of its inquiry in February. We need to continue to monitor the situation, and working with industry leaders is obviously an important part of making sure that they can support the Western Australian community by having policies that support their work. I might ask Dr Gorey to provide further comment and give some additional information.

**Dr P. Gorey:** As the Premier and the director general said, as we have gone through the last few years, the LNG taskforce has been working very closely with industry to ensure that the support the government and agencies like the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation can bring to it is focused on what the immediate pressures are in the industry. In consultation with industry, we have developed three priority areas. They are in regards to decommissioning—supporting a decommissioning pipeline for local business—and that is being delivered to a large degree by the Centre of Decommissioning Australia, which is a national arrangement housed here in Western Australia; decarbonisation of the LNG industry; and skills. Those are the three focus areas that industry and government decided were the best and most efficient use of time that we have at the moment to really make a difference in the medium term for that industry.

[9.10 am]

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** There were comments in the media very recently that I believe were attributed to Ms Meg O'Neill, the CEO of Woodside, saying that regulatory barriers or hurdles were a major issue for the development of new gas projects. Is that taskforce looking at regulatory barriers? I appreciate there are regulatory barriers in the hands of the Premier's federal colleagues, but I assume there are some issues at the state level. Is the taskforce identifying and considering ways to reduce the time taken to get regulatory approvals at the state level as well?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** Not specifically, member, but that obviously comes within the opportunities in front of us when all members of the industry are before us and there is a range of topics to talk about. Primarily, as Dr Gorey says, it is about how the industry is structured going forward, as opposed to the regulatory regime in which it works. It is an opportunity to touch on those points when we come together. I think it is fair to say that the industry believes that it is well supported in Western Australia when it comes to regulatory oversight, and it welcomes our objective of continuing to refine those and make sure that they continue to be fit for purpose. As the member says, particularly with offshore gas, there is a significant interaction with the federal regime. I might ask Dr Gorey to provide further detail of the specifics around that.

**Dr P. Gorey:** Thank you, Premier and chair. We have been able to place the LNG taskforce administration within the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation structurally quite close to the other parts of JTSI that work on approvals reform. Although, as the Premier said, the work program does not lead on that, we are able to monitor the reforms and changes happening across the other regulators. For instance, the recent legislation passed by Parliament for carbon capture and storage is something that the LNG taskforce administration within JTSI is able to support, monitor and perhaps provide advice on as it goes through. However, those actual reforms are very much led by the regulators at the time. We monitor that and can do a lot of that work with our in-house support for approvals reform.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** In the area of decommissioning, the government has done good work in progressing the legislation to make sure we have regulatory and legal enablers for that. Is there good coordination between the push to decommission, which is obviously critically important for the state, and the high likelihood now that a lot of the exhausted gas wells could, in fact, be ideal for storage? If we are going to partial decommissioning, how do we make sure that they are useful for that purpose in the future?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** The member is absolutely correct. It is a great opportunity for us. I think the industry estimates for decommissioning is that there will be about \$18 billion worth of activity over the next 20 years. That represents

a huge opportunity for Western Australia. I am really pleased that we are able to take the national lead on decommissioning work. The beauty of decommissioning is that there is no time line, right? Someone just needs to get the oil rigs and infrastructure to queue up; they are not going anywhere otherwise. It is an opportunity to steadily ramp up industry rather than having to do something right now to seize the day. The member is absolutely right; the decommissioning represents a huge opportunity around the next iteration of the oil and gas industry, which is CCS. I had meetings just yesterday with international LNG interests, which are all looking to Australia, and Western Australia in particular, to provide a key part of their industry going forward. As the member says, there are obviously gas voids that we can utilise, but we also have other geotechnical voids that lend themselves significantly towards the opportunities around carbon capture, utilisation and storage. I will ask Dr Gorey to provide the finer details of what the member is asking.

**Dr P. Gorey:** As the Premier said, as we have producing fields going to end of life, we support work, particularly through the Centre of Decommissioning Australia, to look at the connection between infrastructure—above-ground infrastructure pipes, wellheads and so forth—and the value of those depleted fields for storage. Some work is clearly being done in the offshore area, but also onshore. I point to our colleagues at the Department of Energy, Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety who have also been regulating some of the options in the northern Perth basin for those depleted fields. As the member will be aware, injecting CO<sub>2</sub> into a depleted field is quite a different arrangement from injecting into a saline aquifer. Through the work that JTSI is able to do, with decommissioning being a target industry through diversification, it is aligning our partner agencies to give some focus and attention to making sure that they can regulate for this testing. We are seeing that more now. We see that in the case of the Barrow Island injection. We are now close to 10 million tonnes of equivalent CO<sub>2</sub> being injected into that. We are seeing a lot more attention for those depleted fields in the northern Perth basin and in the Carnarvon basin that the federal government is looking at as well. We are seeing a fair bit of interest from companies, and that connection of working with CODA will certainly help with that.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** We dealt with port authorities and the decommissioning issue last night in this chamber. One issue apparent in this state is the constraint on the ports. My understanding is that the decommissioning activity requires an interface between the offshore and the onshore. Is there coordination and discussion between the focus on decommissioning and the need to make sure that we develop parallel adequate port facilities? Is it going to be particularly in the north of the midwest and the north of the state?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I might ask Dr Gorey to provide a more concise answer than I could.

**Dr P. Gorey:** Yes, there is. We work fairly closely with the Department of Transport and, through it, with the port authorities. We have some decommissioning activities already happening across the state, which is brilliant. Looking to support the government's arrangements for those ports really makes sense for the port authorities, so we are working with them to try to make sure that there is absolute clarity around how those governance arrangements work. To some degree, normalising those across the state is what both we and the Department of Transport are seeking.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I have further questions on this matter. The Premier spoke before about the domestic gas situation and the domestic gas policy. I think he said that the Australian Energy Market Operator is probably not correct in its prediction of a shortfall because it is not taking out fresh supplies.

**Ms J.J. SHAW:** That is not what he said. We heard what he said.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Excuse me!

In regard to that, I note that the interim report of the Economics and Industry Standing Committee states that there is a credible risk of a substantial gas supply shortfall in the near term and continuing for most of the decade. My question is around the Perth basin. At the moment, we know that Mitsui & Co has been building a plant in that area. I think some of that gas is actually allowed to go elsewhere, other than for export into the domestic market. What future does the Premier see for the Perth basin? Is allowing the export of LNG or equivalent from there to somewhere else—however the trade-off is engineered—still something that the government supports?

[9.20 am]

**Mr R.H. COOK:** The member for Swan Hills is quite right; I did not say that. I said that the member needs to understand the actual data that the Australian Energy Market Operator uses and that can inform the extent to which he bases his decisions on its reports. We also need to understand that there will be a potential shortfall in domestic gas if we do not continue to make sure that we take every opportunity to ensure the domestic gas policy is fit for purpose. One of the constraints around that is the people who have the permits for Perth basin reservations actually bringing it on tap or producing the gas that comes from that reservation and providing that to the domestic gas market. One school of thought that has been put to the government says that they need to benefit from the higher prices that they get from export in order to make investment decisions in the early stages to bring those reserves onstream. Another school of thought says that is rubbish and they do not need those sorts of incentives because there are plenty of domestic gas customers who are prepared to pay a decent price or, if necessary, a premium in order to make that gas more commercial.

At the moment, we are working to understand the commerciality and economics of that. We are working with all our gas producers and customers to understand whether any alterations need to be made to the domestic gas policy. As I have said in public before, 100 per cent of zero is zero. There is no point in standing behind a domestic gas policy that does not ultimately benefit the people of Western Australia if it means that that gas does not get brought to market. We are continuing to do that work at the moment. We have a commercial consultant who is engaging with all the onshore gas producers and undertaking a commercial analysis of onshore gas projects to help inform the policy position on exemptions to the existing onshore gas export ban. We are continuing to leverage the expertise of the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation's gas market consultant to support the delivery of the policy position on that. We are also leveraging the expertise of an energy market consultancy to provide insights and analysis into the WA domestic market, which will support the government in the administration of the policy and delivery of the policy priorities.

As the member would be aware, a current parliamentary inquiry is looking into the domestic gas policy. That committee is due to deliver its final report and, because of its extensive work with stakeholders, that report might provide us with further insights. We are continuing to look at all the information in front of us, particularly working on our onshore producers to understand their needs so that we can continue to benefit from those reserves.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** At the LNG development in Gladstone in Queensland, we see various gas plants sitting side by side that compete for what was a little bit less gas coming on than perhaps was first thought when those plants were built. In the Perth basin, if we have a plant that is substantially developed at this point but not quite complete, as in Mitsui's case, is there a case for encouraging the greater utilisation of that plant rather than building another one so that they are only within a few kilometres of each other? I think there is one on the other side of Mingenew and one is between Mingenew and Dongara, but they are not dramatically different from each other, and then Strike Energy has another one at Erregulla, I think. Within a fairly small patch of ground, there are three finds and a plant that is nearly developed. Is there a way of encouraging greater utilisation of what has already been developed or are there any regulatory issues that might prevent that from happening?

Is that something that the Premier's department might look at in terms of future direction? I am not trying to tell private business how it should do its job, but if it is forced down a particular path because of circumstance, maybe that could be looked at as an alternative.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** Once they start to prove up those reserves through further exploration drilling, I think we will see a more nuanced approach to how they tap those reserves and process the gas that comes from them. I think the member is right. There will be a push within the industry to understand where they can build economies of scale, particularly around the Perth basin, and where they can share resources. From that perspective, there is a way to go as they start to understand better the potential of those reserves. I am going to seek some guidance from Dr Gorey on the regulatory arrangements that the member raised.

**Dr P. Gorey:** As the Premier said, as the Waitsia production facility continues to go from construction to commissioning and becoming operational, the advice we hear from industry is that it is looking at better efficiency of infrastructure that has already been built or is coming online. As the Premier said, as definition drilling occurs and as our resource becomes properly defined, that will crystallise.

Another option might sit out there for those very low yielding fields that might have small standalone production plants. It might still be economically beneficial for those small production plants to be based at the field rather than having connection infrastructure into a facility like Waitsia, depending on its difference. We suggest that market forces would deal with a lot of those decisions.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Is there no regulatory issue with tolling gas through different supplies into one particular plant that the Premier is aware of?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I will refer to Mr Dawson.

**Mr S. Dawson:** We understand that the intention of developing a 250-terajoule-a-day facility for the Waitsia project was that it would eventually provide an opportunity for third-party tolling of additional gas from Perth basin projects. That was part of the consideration that government undertook in considering the export allowance that was given to the Waitsia project, allowing the government to underwrite a large enough facility that would ultimately provide third-party access to smaller projects. To the point around some of the comments from Perth basin producers that are struggling to find finance, when there is access to third-party infrastructure to process gas and get it into the pipeline, getting a project up and running becomes a much easier proposition from an investment perspective than building a greenfield plant. The government's intention with the way in which it structured its deal with Waitsia around the export exemption that it received was that that processing facility would be utilised by third parties. We continue to receive positive updates from both sides of the market in terms of the attractive opportunity that will present, particularly as the export exemption for the Waitsia project comes to an end.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Further to the discussion around whether that gas is intended for the domestic market, as a way of getting gas to the market, would the government consider those requests that have been made to export more gas from the Perth basin?

[9.30 am]

**Mr R.H. COOK:** Absolutely. That is why we are undertaking this inquiry at the moment. I should say that I lean less towards the idea that we should allow for further gas to be exported. I think we need to test the proposition and whether it impacts on the commerciality of bringing that gas to the domestic market. We have spoken to a range of customers who think that there is plenty of demand and capability of paying a reasonable price for that gas. We are testing those propositions through the study within the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation at the moment. That will inform whether we need to make any adjustments to the domestic gas reservation policies.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to “Investment Attraction Fund” under ongoing initiatives on page 194, which has a \$2 million estimated actual from this year with a budget of \$50 million next year, \$30 million the year after and \$30 million the year after that—in total, \$112 million. Is that the total sum of the commitment to the investment attraction fund?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** At the midyear review, we provided an additional \$110 million for the investment attraction fund. From that perspective, we are continuing to work through that current allocation. Obviously, the importance of the investment attraction fund is that it allows us to target those industries that are part of our Diversify WA strategy. In that context, we have confirmed funding through that \$110 million midyear review allocation to include \$20 million to support the defence industry, \$7.2 million to attract United Kingdom-based Founders Factory to establish a startup incubator in WA and \$6 million for a grant to Arose to support stage 2 of its Moon to Mars initiative: Trailblazer program.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** It that for this current year?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** That is correct, yes. I ask the director general to provide further details about the current allocation.

**Ms R. Brown:** Thank you, Premier. In total, funding of \$395 million has been allocated to the fund through a series of funding through the midyear review and budget processes. To date, in addition to what the Premier has outlined as part of round 1 for the investment attraction fund, \$156 million has been committed to support industry-led proposals. That was part of the inaugural grant round and essentially covered the eight priority sectors of Diversify WA. As an agency, we have been working with each of those proponents and each of those projects, which, in addition to the eight priority sectors, go across a whole range of parts of the state, which is really terrific.

As part of that further allocation, the department is currently working through round 2, which is \$60 million, and has been allocated for projects related to new energy industries. We are in that process now and have received a substantial number of applications for that round. It is very much about ensuring that not only will these projects assist in diversifying and decarbonising key industries within the state and grow local jobs, but also we support those particular projects to scale up their operations in Western Australia.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Could the Premier give me an idea of how many applications that is split across? Are people getting multiple millions of dollars or are we talking hundreds of thousands of dollars? What is the scale that the department is trying to achieve?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I will ask the director general to answer that.

**Ms R. Brown:** The first round enabled 41 projects to be funded, mostly at the upper limit at which the first round was set, which was approximately \$5 million. Some were set at the lower level depending upon their own request for funding and the contribution to the project itself, so it was anywhere between half a million dollars and \$5 million. That first round was also about encouraging projects that were well progressed, but had other funding sources. The state’s contribution would be looked at in the context of whether that also matched other commonwealth contribution, other corporate funding or their own funding in that process. The \$5 million was not looked at in isolation as the only funding source; it was generally an additional part of some broader funding that the project would have. That was very much about ensuring that those projects had a greater sense of success in their next stage.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The fund is there presumably to stimulate new areas or new investments in the state. How will the effectiveness of that program be measured going further forward?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** Ms Brown.

**Ms R. Brown:** The overall fund is designed around the objectives of diversifying the state’s industry. All the objectives come back to whether we can measure that it is about growing a new industry or scaling up a particular industry and, importantly, local jobs. The overall fund is designed with that element. Each grant round has a series of criteria that are signed off by the Minister for State and Industry Development, Jobs and Trade, and that criteria is what is published for applicants. In the first round, they went through a two-stage process to demonstrate against that criteria, based on an assessment undertaken by the advisory board. Funding that was allocated would then be distributed to those projects and proponents. The financial assistance agreement is structured around them meeting those milestones, which are currently being tracked by the agency. That is really important because we can then demonstrate back to the fund’s overall objectives whether it is about growing a new industry, scaling up something that has already been successful or is very much about jobs, and, in many instances, local jobs in the regions as well.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The footnote to the table says —

This spending is either partly or fully funded by the transfer of appropriation from Primary Industries and Regional Development.

Is it either partly or fully funded by that transfer, for a start? That is ambiguous. I would like to know how much is coming from regional development. Is that royalties for regions money that is funding that program?

**Ms J.J. SHAW:** Investing in the regions—heaven forbid!

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I am asking a question, member.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I can confirm that in 2023–24, to supplement funding to a recipient of the inaugural round of the fund, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development transferred \$2 million from the fisheries research and development special purpose account under the Treasurer's delegated authority to JTSI to bring the funding to that recipient to a total of \$5 million.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The transfer from the fisheries development—I think the Premier called it a fund?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** The fisheries research and development special purpose account.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** That would be the money that is built up from professional fishing contributions to the department, I imagine. Is that money linked somehow to a marine or seafood round to ensure that the money is going to where it was intended when it was collected?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I can certainly confirm that it was not part of a dedicated fisheries round of funding. There was an opportunity for a grant to a specific recipient to be augmented from the fisheries research and development special purpose account. That would have been an opportunity that was identified by that department to be part of that grant process to achieve outcomes or objectives within their particular frame.

[9.40 am]

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I presume that was the \$2 million for the initial application, but going forward it is \$50 million, \$30 million and \$30 million. From where is that money sourced? Is it coming from the same department, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** No. I will provide further information that has come to hand: JTSI has received a \$2 million contribution from the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development towards Tassal Operations Pty Ltd's project, which was approved for \$3 million through the fund's inaugural round. A financial assistance agreement has been executed for a total of \$5 million for that specific project. The answer to the member's question is no.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Is that the only allocation from DPIRD?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** That is right.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** This is probably a simple question to answer: Where are these allocations listed? Where is the transparency on those so that we can see where the money has been allocated and what fraction it is of the total investment?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I will ask the director general to provide details.

**Ms R. Brown:** For the first round, a series of announcements would have been made regarding each of the allocations. For that round, they are now all on the JTSI website and are publicly available.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** In terms of the regional focus, I am on record in this chamber and elsewhere as recognising the government's investment in Collie; I think the diversification strategy has been done very well. It is almost unique for a regional community. We have the traditional industrial areas of Karratha, the Kwinana industrial area and the like; however, is there a clear focus on developing other regional communities such as Geraldton, Albany and other bigger communities that have established infrastructure and workforce but are not seeing the same sort of focus that Collie is seeing?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I do not have specific details, but I know that opportunities to fund diversification-based industries in regional areas is very much part of the investment attraction fund approach. It might be best if I let the director general provide further details and that might give the member a sense and understanding of the proportionality of the allocations.

**Ms R. Brown:** Overall, as part of the investment attraction fund, the team, through the advisory board, have looked at how assistance to those projects, particularly in the regions, can not only diversify and grow industry, but also complement other industry development. The member mentioned the Western Trade Coast and Kwinana. With regard to other roles the department undertakes, particularly around support for strategic industrial areas, we are heavily invested in looking at the activation of those strategic industrial areas of the midwest, the Pilbara, the south west and the goldfields to leverage broader industry development. The investment attraction fund, along with other funds, is complementary to how we ensure that we are able to see that as an overall picture for each of those regions, including the midwest.



**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I do not think I am giving away any great secrets by saying that in my previous life, my employer had a senior manager whose full-time job was to get money out of government. I think that is a fair description of the job role, and the manager was very successful at that. We see this at the moment. I do not think there is a company that does not look at government as a potential source of revenue, whether it needs it or not. What process does the department use to filter out where it puts the money? I appreciate that there will be some risk component to it. For example, is Infrastructure Western Australia engaged in the process? Ultimately, it is assessing the value to the state on top of its other objectives.

**Ms R. Brown:** For the investment attraction fund, as the member said, evaluation is critical. Up-front design of the program aligned to broader government objectives of diversification and decarbonisation, and industry growth and jobs are important as part of that up-front design. There is decision-making around the allocation of funding to the construction of the financial assistance agreements that those particular industries would report against or those projects and proponents—and we have an overall evaluation framework for the fund. We have been working over the past year on an overall evaluation framework for the various funding that JTSI has responsibility for assessing and distributing to industry proponents. It is a very clear part of what we do.

As we broaden and support the delivery of the government's agenda around leveraging strategic industrial areas and the supporting infrastructure, Infrastructure WA plays a very critical role, particularly with its work to date in some of the longer term planning across the state, and also its capability and role in business cases for large-scale developments that would be delivered through other agencies. Infrastructure WA is part of our broader network of agencies that we engage and work with.

**Ms J.J. SHAW:** On a point of clarification, when the government designs initiatives such as the investment attraction fund, does it view it as a source of revenue, as the member for Cottesloe says, for the businesses involved or does it approach the design of these things as investment in terms of the provision of capital or assisting these industries to develop? Rather than being just a revenue source, is it actually about enabling infrastructure and industries to develop as part of the overall diversification strategy?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** The member for Swan Hills is quite right. These businesses are targeted for either taking it to the next step, as in commercialising and bringing onstream production facilities or moving from research and development through to pilot programs, or lifting their scale. Really, we are intervening in the life of that business to make sure that the effectiveness of our funds leads to a new business activity. Obviously, the whole purpose of the fund is to make sure that we target those diversification industries. The companies in question put to us how they will use those moneys in order to take themselves to the next level. It might be bringing the production process to Western Australia. It might be taking a research and development idea from lab to pilot or it might be taking a pilot to scale-based production. We look for the most effectiveness in relation to those moneys, because this is precious money. It is important that when we use it, we do it in a way that brings change.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Not to rise the incitement of the member for Swan Hills, but I want to make it clear that I am in no way saying that companies simply take the money and put it in their pockets; I am sure they direct it to the purpose that they state to government. I have great faith in our corporate sector in doing that. I am not sure it requires a comment from the Premier!

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I will answer it fulsomely! These moneys are spent in a strategic way. It is about realising new opportunities, not just for this company, but for the benefits that flow to the Western Australian economy and the creation of Western Australian jobs. A great example of this is where we can assist companies to access new supply chains and, therefore, realise a whole new range of customers that they can access, particularly in relation to defence. Members will be aware that we are at a crucial point in realising that economic opportunities that will come from the AUKUS agreement and the significant uplift that will come from those supply chains. If we are going to assist those companies to be ready for that opportunity, we have to assist them now so that they can be business-ready for when those supply chain opportunities come in. We see it in the US. The production, maintenance or sustainment of something like a nuclear submarine is a significant piece of work. It is also about assisting companies that might already be operating beautifully in one market or servicing one part of industry to take advantage of new opportunities in other parts of their industry.

[9.50 am]

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I note in budget paper No 2, page 194, the line item, "Election Commitment—Wind Turbine Manufacturing Initiative", on which \$8 million has been spent. Could the Premier outline what has been achieved with that expenditure of money?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I am just having trouble seeing it.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** It is "Election Commitment—Wind Turbine Manufacturing Initiative". It is about the tenth line item under "Ongoing Initiatives".

**Mr R.H. COOK:** Obviously, under the wind turbine manufacturing initiative, the government has repurposed funding to provide industry support to enhance the capacity and capability of WA businesses to participate in wind energy chains.

An independent feasibility study has been undertaken through the initiative and it has identified opportunities for local participation in manufacturing, operation and maintenance of wind farm componentry. With demand for renewable energy supply through the state's electricity network set to grow significantly, unlocking further opportunities for local participation, manufacturing and servicing, could support job creation and play a key role in the state's clean energy transition.

I think a lot of people have envisaged that the construction or the development of large-scale wind farms is an exercise in importation—simply bringing componentries from other countries. Certainly in the early days, we can see some of the more technical aspects of a wind turbine and the need to access technology and gain insights from other countries. But we should not lose sight of the fact that a wind turbine is a foundation, cabling, the pillar, the blades and, of course, the turbine. There is huge opportunity in both the construction and maintenance of wind turbines. I have always thought, for instance, that blades would be manufactured overseas. I have spoken to one proponent recently that is very much of the view that we can manufacture blades in WA, significantly moving further up the value of that supply chain.

I ask the director general to provide further comments on other allocations or use of that initiative fund.

**Ms R. Brown:** It is a really, really important initiative and an opportunity, through the energy transition and decarbonisation, to invest in local industry to see the benefits of a growing wind energy industry here in Western Australia. This funding is very much about being able to work with small to medium industry to leverage other operators into the state to grow the benefits here of advanced manufacturing and componentry that will come with the importance of broadening the wind industry into other important industries. This obviously complements broader planning around infrastructure and strategic industrial areas to support that. It is very complementary in terms of the opportunity for local industry.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** My understanding is that four or five manufacturers globally dominate the entire wind farm market and a very high percentage comes out of China. The Premier identified that perhaps there are some niche opportunities for WA to participate, but the director general touched on an area that I think is of great concern to a good many people who are looking at the renewable energy debate—that is, what happens to these facilities once they reach end of life. We already have some facilities reaching end of life. I was looking at the hydrogen facility in Onslow and I think two or three out of four of the wind turbines are all pretty well at end of life and they are struggling to go on.

My understanding is that recycling all the metal components of wind turbines is pretty straightforward. That is traditional scrap whether it is aluminium, steel, copper or brass or whatever it is. However, the blades are very difficult to recycle. Also, the bases of these turbines contain enormous volumes of concrete and steel. I wonder whether there is some focus on that. Certainly, the bases will have to stay in paddocks, which I think would be highly undesirable given the number of wind turbines we are likely to see. Is there a focus on that? Again, this matter generates a lot of controversy for people who are anti-renewables—that is, the blades can only be buried. It may be economic to bring those blades onshore when we build a new facility, but I doubt very much that anyone is going to export those blades offshore for recycling.

Is there a focus on looking specifically at that issue of recycling? Western Australia, as we all know, is the pre-eminent place in Australia for wind energy and solar energy, for that matter. We are likely to have a lot of them. Is there a focus on that second part of renewables, which is: what do we do with the old gear?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I think there are huge opportunities around being part of not only the front end of these sorts of industries but also the back end with recycling. Recycling of batteries is going to be a big opportunity for us into the future. I think a smart entrepreneur would be looking to build some capability and capacity to enter that market sooner rather than later, as we see some of the earlier EVs and hybrid vehicles starting to come off market. My understanding is that a lot of the batteries now can be completely stripped down and recycled.

We see a significant evolution in the technology and the engineering which goes into wind turbines. Often, we will find a wind turbine at end of life cannot be repurposed or re-used because the technology has outstripped it. We see some wind turbines at the moment that are huge and we can really take advantage of the technologies in them. That leads, of course, to a discussion about how that might feed into the work that the Centre of Decommissioning Australia is doing. I might ask the director general to provide some comment on that.

**Ms R. Brown:** Yes, looking at whole of life cycle of these projects is really critical. I think the work that CODA is leading in decommissioning oil and gas assets is really important. We are seeing a growth in the decommissioning of Defence assets. I think the benefit for Western Australia is that through many, many years of being a leader in the energy sector, our partnerships—particularly with Europe and Norway, where they are further progressed on wind energy—are really important in that transference of learnings and what we as a jurisdiction can leverage in decommissioning in a range of areas. Each year, we have AOG Energy in Perth, which is an annual conference and trade show that is very much focused on the energy sector and all elements and opportunity for industry. Many of the key industry players in Europe and Norway come down to Perth. We are seeing greater interest from both those contacts and contacts over east in terms of industry wanting to grow their presence in Western Australia around all elements of decommissioning. It is an important aspect, and we are keen to support the growth of local industry and take learnings from other jurisdictions that have gone well before us.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Premier, if we could move on to strategic industrial areas, I refer to the bottom of page 194, “Major Projects, Infrastructure and Project Ready Land”. Paragraph 3.1 refers to supporting the delivery of infrastructure required to activate SIAs. There is mention of \$500 million. I think the Premier will recall an earlier debate in this chamber about the majority of that money being allocated to out years. To start the discussion, could the Premier outline the allocation of the \$500 million and the years that that money is allocated for?

[10.00 am]

**Mr R.H. COOK:** The \$500 million strategic industries fund is an important opportunity. Western Australia is in the fight of its life. We have to be competitive to be able to attract renewable energy projects in particular, but all manner of industrial proponents to invest in WA. If we are going to be successful, we need a plug-and-play model to ensure that our strategic industrial areas are ready for proponents. It is about pipes, wires and roads. It is about making sure that the lead time for proponents making investment decisions to be able to access land is as short as possible. There is a scramble at the moment. The \$500 million fund is a really important way for us to get job-creating and renewable energy projects in strategic industrial areas. We are talking about Maitland, Boodarie and Onslow. Oakajee is obviously an important one. There are the industrial areas of Kalgoorlie and Kemerton; there are strategic industrial areas in Collie as well, such as Shotts, Coolangatta and so on.

If we are going to realise the economic opportunities that come from that, we have to invest now. They have to be ready for when the proponents want them. The activation activities enabled by this investment will maximise the likelihood that those projects will proceed to development. A separate \$160 million lease incentive scheme, which we announced in November 2023, will incentivise and support key projects to establish operations in targeted SIAs. We look at the aggressive work of other state governments, particularly Queensland, to attract proponents to their industrial areas. We have to match that. We have to be ready to go, particularly if we are going to realise the goals and objectives of our economic diversification and decarbonisation strategies of Diversify WA and Future State.

To support economic diversification through the activation of these areas, the \$500 million fund will touch upon the following allocations: \$125 million to expand the strategic industrial area that the member and I know as “the strip” and looking at Latitude 32 and the opportunities there; approximately \$20 million to assist DevelopmentWA with its work; \$20 million for planning activities in the goldfields, south west and so on; \$20 million to establish a program management office; \$1 million for a feasibility study into the replication of the Australian Marine Complex common-user facility; and around \$314 million beyond the forward estimates for future SIA initiatives, including work to facilitate BP’s transformation, H2Kwinana and the Murchison green hydrogen project. There are so many opportunities everywhere, and we need to make sure that the government’s investment matches and facilitates the private investment that will come with those projects. We need to be ahead of the game.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I want to dig in on a couple of those. I know the Premier has a keen interest in the area and he knows I do too. I absolutely support the expansion of the heavy industrial area into Latitude 32. I think that is absolutely critical and I have a great concern that the ad hoc allocation of land in that area to light industry could mitigate the use of that land for heavy industry, but that is not the principal point of my question. I understand that most or all of the land on Latitude 32 is owned by government. I appreciate that there are some private market gardens and the like to the east of that. Is that a reallocation of ownership within government in terms of the cost, or is it, in fact, purchasing additional land for that area?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** The member would be surprised by how little the government owns of Latitude 32. I struggle to use the word hotchpotch, but it is certainly a —

**Ms J.J. SHAW:** Patchwork.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** — patchwork. Thank you very much, member for Swan Hills. It is a patchwork of different tenure and different ownership regimes. As the member knows, Latitude 32 was originally intended to be a general industrial area that would support and service heavy industry in the strategic industrial area of the Western Trade Coast or the Global Advanced Industries Hub. I have just been informed that there are about six separate owners across Latitude 32, but there are opportunities to develop it through both the private sector and the government sector.

Essentially, the Global Advanced Industries Hub work identified parts of Latitude 32 that could be converted from a GIA to an SIA. That would free up more land for proponents looking to come to the Global Advanced Industries Hub or Western Trade Coast. The member is right; we need to make sure that we allocate this land very carefully. It is done through the Industrial Lands Panel. Proponents will approach government either through DevelopmentWA, the primary owner of the land, or through JTSI to seek an allocation of land in Kwinana or the surrounds.

We will assess it against what we believe are the strategic interests of the Western Trade Coast, which is to develop it as an advanced manufacturing hub focusing specifically on battery energy and battery precursor product manufacturing. It will be allocated on that basis. The Industrial Lands Panel is made up of the Minister for Lands and Minister for State and Industry Development, Jobs and Trade, and we will receive advice about that and then provide authority for the departments to allocate the lease to a particular proponent. The member is right; it is a constrained site nowadays. We have to make sure we have the highest value use of that land, and diverting part

of Latitude 32 from a GIA to an SIA represents an opportunity to add to that overall industrial estate and find other important available land. I will pause for a moment, by throwing it to the director general, to see whether there is anything I have left out.

**Ms R. Brown:** Thank you, Premier. It is a very important initiative, and certainly the funding and the work to date demonstrates the government's commitment to address the longstanding issue of land availability raised by many industry stakeholders over a long period of consultation. Over the last couple of years, the department has worked closely with all tiers of government, with industry and with local representatives around the broader planning and vision for the Western Trade Coast and the opportunity, as part of diversification and decarbonisation, to focus on key industries around renewables, battery and critical minerals and, of course, shipbuilding and sustainment. The work around Latitude 32 is a critical first step towards enabling expansion of that industrial land and supporting current and future heavy industrial projects in the region.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Congratulations for doing that. I will not give the director general brickbats. It is critically important to that area. As the Premier knows more than anyone, there is a conjunction of coastal access, a fabulously skilled workforce and, of course, massive synergies that come from having all of those industries together.

I know the Premier is aware, but I doubt that most people in the state have an idea of the contribution of that small area to the wellbeing of the whole state. It has produced something around \$16 billion already. There is clearly an opportunity to substantially increase the contribution to state product.

[10.10 am]

**Mr R.H. COOK:** Just that small estate represents around one per cent of the country's gross domestic product. It is a significant piece of industrial development.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I think it is one of those untold great stories. Maybe it is not untold, but perhaps it is unheard.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** It is unappreciated.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** That is it. It is something that we should continue to champion.

However, that was not the point of my further question. With the chair's indulgence, I refer to the strategic industrial areas. The Premier knows that a favourite one of mine, and the member for Moore, is the strategic industrial area of Oakajee. I understand just from conversations that it is important —

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I would not say it is my favourite.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Go on—the member likes it!

From our other conversations, I understand that the member for Swan Hills has been tasked with using her great ability to really focus on the development of that area. However, I have expressed in this chamber before that I have a great concern. I know that six proponents have been identified that are keen to use that area. We know that area is probably unique globally in the sense of having access to the world's premium renewable energy resources while also being an enormously liveable area. It is a beautiful area to live in climatically and geographically and there is a significant opportunity to grow that community and workforce.

However, the fact is that Oakajee is an overgrown sheep paddock. I think the entrance road was graded a year ago or something, and that is about all that has happened. I have not spoken to all the proponents in that area, but I have spoken to some. They have said that they are obviously very keen to develop in that area, especially with renewable energy projects. However, downstream renewable energy projects are typically at the margins of economic feasibility. Making a business case is very hard. If proponents are required to pay up-front for the critical infrastructure, for example, the 33-kilovolt powerline from Three Springs and others, like water, communications and gas, that will make it very difficult to make their projects viable.

I will say that I may be sometimes critical of government largess for industry. I do not think I have done that too much. However, I think it is an entirely appropriate role for government to build that critical enabling infrastructure and then recover those expenses over the longer term at an affordable rate. As I said, I appreciate that the Premier is looking at this again, but is the government looking to make a commitment? Obviously, the government will tie in its federal colleagues—I see that they are putting money around it. Will the government really fast-track that? My great concern with Oakajee is that it is not five years away; it is 10 or 15 years away from actually making the enormous contribution to the state that it could.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I remember that about 20 years ago, it was 10 years away. It always has been a difficult project to land. I think we are at a point in time now when we have all the preconditions for Oakajee to realise its potential, particularly, as the member said, through renewable energy work. I thank him for acknowledging the member for Swan Hills' work as my parliamentary secretary to continue to grow and provide momentum for the Oakajee work.

In some respects, some parts of strategic industrial areas are pretty unglamorous. It is about working out what the transport and the power corridors are and things like that. In the first instance, we are allocating \$20 million towards the construction of the Oakajee access road. That is just a starting point. We accept that there will continue to need to be a lot of work done there.

I understand that we have recently established an industry reference group on Oakajee. That group is responsible for informing the coordinator general about the needs for that strategic industrial area to assist the companies that the member talked about—that is, companies that have aspirations or have already been allocated land—to be able to see the developments and assistance that they need. I might ask the director general or Mr Marney to make some more comments on the work that is going on at Oakajee.

**Ms R. Brown:** I want to assure the member that we have done an enormous amount of work around the future planning, not just of the strategic industrial area of Oakajee, but also in the broader region to more generally leverage the opportunities that will come through economic diversification and decarbonisation. That includes working with our other government agency colleagues. It has been a dedicated area of focus in the department. As the Premier said, there has more recently been a focus on working with industry. That has been really critical and is something that the coordinator general can add to further.

**Mr T. Marney:** The member is perfectly accurate in indicating that these areas are really of greatest value and prospect only when there is a reasonable expectation that the plug-and-play elements are going to be put in place. I admit to being an Oakajee cynic over the past two and a half-plus decades. We have to demonstrate that there is real commitment here. With the government's demonstration of genuine commitment will come the commitment of private proponents for some of the incredibly important economic, social and environmental projects, as the member said. Those projects may not stack up as particularly financially attractively at the moment without some of those levers in place.

In demonstrating that commitment, the award for the tender for the 800 metres of road is due in June. Construction on that road is due for completion in June next year. As I mentioned, as a longstanding cynic, to me that is a significant sign that something is actually happening in Oakajee. For starters, people will actually be able to get to it. That is a really important step forward. At the same time, the government has allocated, and we are overseeing the expenditure of, around \$6 million to various elements of planning, engineering and feasibility studies to unlock the next components of infrastructure to enable the activation of Oakajee.

Again, as the member pointed out, we need access to land and corridors. Doing that work in a way that anticipates the need for development over the next 10 or 15 years, as flagged by the member, but is also economically responsible and viable now, is part of what we are doing at the moment. That involves understanding the feasibility and scalability of different infrastructure components, whether that is the provision of water, power or, indeed, corridors. How do we allow for enough development over time while utilising what is needed now to do what is required for the next five to 10 years? That work is ongoing at the moment. It covers all the key elements of, if you like, the factors of production: water, power, gas, and transport infrastructure from a port and road perspective.

There is also substantial work going on, in terms of the primary input of land access, into cultural heritage assessments. That is led at the moment by DevelopmentWA, with substantial investment on archaeological surveys and the like. It is a sensitive area for the traditional custodians and we must respect that. Substantial work is happening to understand what is possible and reasonable. The next bit is deciding what is necessary to get things rolling? Those are the core kernels of infrastructure that we are planning now in order to grow whatever capacity is required into the future. Understanding those kernels of infrastructure is where we are at the moment. The planning work that will occur within the economic development group in the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation will then focus on the critical pathway of infrastructure for proponents and the interdependencies across the different components of infrastructure. Once we know that, we need to stand back and see it as a program of work rather than bits of stuff government does. This is where the coordinator bit comes in, in understanding what that program of work is within Oakajee and—going to the member's earlier points—Western Trade Coast, Maitland, Boodarie and all those activations to understand the priorities. We have finite resources in not just a financial sense but also capability, raw materials, production capacity, construction capacity and that sort of thing. We need to look at a program of work not only within Oakajee but also across all strategic industrial areas, and to understand what private proponents are doing in terms of their investments as well. That is a long way of saying that we have to coordinate the hell out of this, because there is a lot of going on and a lot of prioritisation is required. At the moment, we are in the discovery phase of understanding what industry requires across all those areas. Then we need to prioritise and understand those interdependencies and sequence over time. That work is happening for Oakajee but also more broadly across strategic industrial areas and the activities of the department as a whole.

[10.20 am]

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I appreciate a lot of work is going on at the moment in relation to understanding this. Does the government have any view on when we can expect to see proponents starting to build footings and get going on constructing those new industries?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** At Oakajee specifically?

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** At Oakajee specifically, yes.

**Mr T. Marney:** At this point, they are waiting for us. Essentially, they cannot commit to any sort of timeframes without knowing when certain of those plug-in points will be available. That is a critical iterative process with

proponents to understand what they need, what capacities, what that will grow to over time and when they need it. There is a little bit to work through in all of that. Not surprisingly, and notwithstanding the member's earlier comments about commercial responsibility and the greater good thereof, some proponents are more aggressive and optimistic than reality would play out. Part of the process is flushing that out and getting realistic timeframes as opposed to the ambitious commercial aspirations that might exist.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** What will the Oakajee road provide access to? Is it to a finite point into the estate? Is it through the estate? What is actually being constructed?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** As the member would be aware, that was part of an earlier commitment of about \$7.5 million for the access road. We realised pretty early in the piece that \$7.5 million would not pay for much. We are trying to make sure that people can access Oakajee in an appropriate way through the corridors that have been established. I will ask Mr Marney to provide further details on where the road lands in terms of Oakajee itself.

**Mr T. Marney:** The road itself may seem fairly straightforward. It is only 800 metres of blacktop, which is about the same length as the dragstrip at Kwinana. It is not huge. The issue is the complexity of future provision within that road corridor. That is where the work and the expense has gone. The issue is also making sure that we get that planning and provisioning right now so that we do not have inefficient investment down the track. That explains the timeframe and the cost associated with the road. My understanding is that the road will essentially go to the gate of the estate. There is no road activity within the strategic industrial area at this point because we will not know quite what the capacity and corridor requirements are within the estate until we do that more detailed planning work, and that is the \$6 million investment that is currently underway. That is the long and the short of the short road.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** How much land has been designated or allocated to particular proponents in the estate, if any?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** From memory, I think about six tenants have been allocated land at Oakajee. We are working with those tenants on what their needs are. They make up the substantial proportion of the strategic industrial area reference group at Oakajee. In addition, those tenants will be eligible for the \$160 million incentive scheme to assist them to be further motivated about when they can get onto the land. Mr Marney, do you have anything to add to that?

**Mr T. Marney:** Yes, the Premier is right. We have about six proponents that are currently working through an option-to-lease phase of negotiations. That process is about shoring up their spatial requirements within the estate. We are working through that at the moment. Obviously, it is rare earth, in the sense that it is a finite area, and we want to make sure that we optimise the utilisation of every inch of that space. We go through a due diligence process to assess the articulated requirement to ensure that it is genuine. There is some testing of that through the negotiation process. As I said, it is all ongoing at the moment.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Has any firm commitment been made on any of the land? Are there still options available for further uses and for industry to come forward?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** Is the member asking if there are other areas yet to be allocated for other proponents that might want to get access to Oakajee?

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

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I might ask Mr Marney to clarify.

**Mr T. Marney:** Yes, there is still some space left. We are happy to have discussions with proponents. As always, with a finite resource, the aim is to optimise its utilisation. We are very keen to understand what additional opportunities might exist for proponents in the area, whether it is perceived that they have space or not. We are very open to exploring that and ensuring that we optimise the opportunity presented by the unique resource that is the Oakajee strategic industrial area.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I have a further question on strategic industrial estates. In this case, it is not Oakajee but Kemerton. A coordinator general has been appointed, and I understand that part of that role is to identify the barriers and what needs to be done to develop those estates. Is there any plan for further infrastructure to go into the Kemerton estate? Kemerton does not have rail and has very limited communications throughout the estate. I do not think NBN is available and there is even not much in the way of mobile signals. What plans are there, if any, for further development there to ensure that we see some use taken up of that area as well?

[10.30 am]

**Ms R. Brown:** The Kemerton strategic industrial area is an important one in the south west, in the state and in the nation because of its location and some of the key industry players there. As part of that broader planning being led by the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation, understanding Kemerton in relation to the south west and its supporting infrastructure has been a key area of focus, and as we work to set up the strategic industries fund and work with other key government agencies, Kemerton will be one of the areas we continue to focus on, both leading on key planning and coordination and working with proponents. As part of that, the Kemerton strategic environmental assessment is a key priority that is being progressed to provide a streamlined environmental approvals

pathway for proponents seeking to expand or establish projects in the Kemerton SIA. Going to the coordinator general's comments, that will also give us a greater understanding of some of the key next steps for the ongoing management and implementation of broader activities for the Kemerton SIA, including other infrastructure requirements associated with it.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I think Kemerton is a classic case in point. It is what we call a strategic industrial area, but a proponent going there would have to undertake environmental assessments, native title—maybe not native title; I am not sure of the tenure there, but there would be a whole range of stuff. They might think, “Hang on, you call it an industrial park, so why do we have to undertake all this work?” I believe that as a government we should be undertaking that preliminary work for proponents so they have as few hurdles or obstacles to their investment as possible.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** On the issue of native title in some of the areas, which the Premier raised, Kemerton and Oakajee are both subject to final agreements with either the Noongar or the southern Yamatji people. In the case of Oakajee, I think the Yamatji Southern Regional Corporation has some ongoing involvement with that site. Can the Premier explain what interactions the department has with southern Yamatji to ensure it is involved in the discussion going forward?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I am not familiar with the southern Yamatji agreement, although I am fairly familiar with the south west agreement, so I suspect that native title in relation to Kemerton has been resolved, although there may be cultural heritage issues that need to be identified or resolved. I am not familiar with Oakajee, so I might get the director general to make some comments.

**Ms R. Brown:** Part of the Indigenous land use agreement is around revenue sharing with the Yamatji people in terms of future benefits from Oakajee. Led by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation is participating in the implementation of the ILUA as part of the partnership discussions happening with the Yamatji Southern Regional Corporation, and working in the region with other government agencies to ensure that all our work engages with the relevant traditional owner groups so we are meeting not just the requirements of the ILUA but the broader intent.

**Ms J.J. SHAW:** I wonder whether the Premier could comment on the importance of this program of work in terms of providing proponents with certainty but also attracting inbound capital investment into energy transition. This SIA work is complex and we have talked about the need for positive signals into markets and helping the trillions of green dollars floating in the economy find their home in Western Australia. I wonder whether the Premier can comment on how important the work being done on SIAs is, not just to help proponents but also to help some of the capital find its way into Western Australia.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** It is important to note that we are not just looking for opportunities that come from private sector investment; we are looking forward to opportunities that come from the biggest single disruption to our economic lives in a couple of generations, which is the transition to renewable energy. Particularly in areas such as the Pilbara, we are looking to see what investments we can attract once we change the business model by which energy costs fall to almost zero and the opportunities to process minerals and ores onshore become much more commercial. For instance, at the moment we are looking at proponents producing green or blue ammonia, but also looking to process minerals to create hot briquettes or green steel. We cannot underestimate the impact that that will have on our economy, both in terms of onshoring of mineral processing, the creation of jobs and the significant reduction we will see in emissions as part of the refining and manufacturing process. This is a huge opportunity, not just for us, but the globe, as we look to be a green steel production powerhouse, at the risk of overusing that term. The \$500 million strategic industries fund will identify the common-user and enabling infrastructure that we need across all the strategic industrial areas, and that will unleash a huge amount of private capital that will then be attracted to those areas.

Just looking at POSCO alone, there are billions of dollars of investment in that one project. This is a really important opportunity for us. The SIAs will continue to play an important role in our economic future, because we will continue to make sure that as an economy we can move away from simply extraction and shipment of ores to their extraction and processing to create precursor products such as green steel. If we can get this right through this strong investment pathway, particularly the strategic industries fund, we will unleash a significant amount of private investment that will create thousands upon thousands of Western Australian jobs, and we will continue to make sure that manufacturing is created here in Western Australia.

That is why I have been making such important public statements about the Liberal Party's position on not supporting the production tax credit. It represents an affront to not only everyone who wants to see our economy decarbonise, but also Western Australians who want to see things made here. In the media in the lead-up to his speech at the National Press Club, Angus Taylor literally said he did not care whether this stuff gets made in Korea, Japan or the United States because they are allies. I do; I believe these are economic opportunities for Western Australians and this should be about creating Western Australian jobs. Peter Dutton and the Liberal Party have essentially turned their backs on Western Australia, which is why I call his position anti-Western Australian. He is essentially

saying that he wants to keep Western Australia as a mining town, and not a manufacturing precinct. There are so many opportunities through renewable energy, to bring processing and manufacturing onshore in Western Australia, and I am completely gobsmacked, and I feel betrayed by the Liberal Party, that it would take such a position on the production tax credits.

**Ms J.J. SHAW:** Just to that point, I turn to the importance of a team Australia approach, having the commonwealth and the state governments aligned and the announcements made by the federal Labor government about supporting industry development and production credits. The policies that the Premier has outlined not only function to attract inbound capital investment but also provide access to commonwealth funding opportunities for diversification and growth. Could the Premier discuss the importance of alignment between commonwealth and state governments in this regard and also the importance of the Canberra office being set up to that end, enabling us to advocate for opportunities like this?

[10.40 am]

**Mr R.H. COOK:** There is team Australia and team WA, and team WA is part of team Australia. We want to make sure our voices are heard in Canberra. Obviously, our Canberra strategy is starting to have effect because people are starting to notice that there is a greater presence of advocates and government representatives from Western Australia. That is important, because as the commonwealth government starts to move through the national reconstruction fund and starts to look at the modern manufacturing strategy program and policies, we want Western Australians to be the beneficiaries of that. We need to make sure that the commonwealth is in lockstep with Western Australia. We have Madeleine King and other key ministers from Western Australia who get it and understand the importance of creating these opportunities in WA. It is great to have the commonwealth supporting us in this way. In the US, they do not have this problem. All sides of government support the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022. We see the huge flight of capital to the US and the economic uplift as a result of the Inflation Reduction Act. That is an example of a government deliberately inserting itself in the investment pathways to make sure that it can attract and direct capital for its own strategic purposes, yet in Australia, we have these extraordinary commentaries—mostly from economists, I might say—stating that we should not pick winners or get involved in these sorts of aggressive investment-attracting strategies.

**Ms J.J. SHAW:** We have to be one of the last advanced industrial democracies to wrap our heads around this. It seems like every other advanced industrialised economy gets it and the importance of us all aligning, working together and co-investing. What is the barrier?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I think the member for Cottesloe gets it.

**Ms J.J. SHAW:** Yes, indeed, he does.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** He understands the important role that the government plays in making sure that industry is aligned with government policy and continues to grow and attract investment. The thought that we should sit back and just watch it all unfold around us, hoping that capital will come to Western Australia as if by magic, is a complete loser strategy. It is gobsmacking that Peter Dutton and the Liberals would say, “We’re not interested in the production tax credits because we’re quite happy for all these jobs to go overseas.”

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

**The CHAIR:** The member for Moore, welcome back!

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Let us return to the budget here.

**The CHAIR:** Hang on; that is normally what I say!

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to page 200 and the service area “Project Facilitation”. One of the key activities of the department includes negotiating and coordinating state agreements for large energy and mineral projects. Is the use of state agreements still something that the department follows? I hear from industry and others that that is no longer the path that is offered to them. Could the Premier explain the role of state agreements in the department’s current thinking and whether he sees them being utilised in the future?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** It is a great question. State agreements have been an important part of enabling government to support industries to open up, particularly in places like the Pilbara and so on, where we see complex projects, usually involving a mine, a railway line, an access road and a port. Bringing all those elements together in a single piece of legislation enables the government to undertake these complex projects. As the regulatory regimes that sit over these projects start to evolve and become more nuanced, less clunky legislation is needed for a specific project, and we can lean more heavily upon the regulatory framework that applies right across all these industries. I think it is fair to say that people’s thinking around state agreements has evolved and that we do not need to rely on them as heavily as we have in the past. However, they are still an effective way to manage both the complexity of these projects and the way that they change. A state agreement area might sit over a whole range of different tenements, some of which are yet to be developed but will be looking to be developed into the future as part of the overall project life. It provides government with a way to manage these things in a very long term way, albeit they



are a fairly clunky vehicle. In terms of the departmental or broader government perspective on whether we will rely as heavily on state agreements or other regulatory frameworks into the future, I will invite the director general or Dr Gorey to provide more details.

**Ms R. Brown:** Thank you, Premier. Yes, I think state agreements have been a very important historical aspect of Western Australia and the development of the Pilbara, as the Premier has outlined. As the regulatory framework has evolved—certainly, there were earlier comments around the ability to leverage common-user infrastructure—the need to explore state agreements has reduced, but the state agreements currently in place and how they are leveraged into the future still remain a very core aspect of the department’s work.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** Dr Gorey.

**Dr P. Gorey:** Thank you very much, Premier and chair. That is absolutely the case. For administrative relief within the agency and for the officers supporting and providing advice to proponents, one of the things that we are very keen on doing is providing confidence, certainty and consistency with the approval process that companies may need to go through. The normal laws of the land offer that to a large degree. In the first instance, if a particular project is having problems with the approval process, our first go-to is to see whether there can be an improvement in the approval regulatory system that applies to everybody. In that way, all proponents to that type of sector or development can benefit over time, rather than going to an individual state agreement act solution for them. For instance, last year, the government responded to large renewable projects and the potential capture through the approval process of formal assessment under part IV of the Environmental Protection Act versus land granting. The solution that the government went to was a broad exemption under section 6 of the EP act for a type of characteristic of proposal so that any of the projects that go through for renewables are not captured in that way. We see that although the advice is always there, state agreement acts can be, and certainly will be, available for future privately owned railways because of the nature of the legislation. Our first go-to point is whether we can improve the regulatory system that exists for everybody so that everybody benefits, not that one project that is in front of us.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** How is this change in view, in not wanting to go down a state agreement path so much but wanting to change the general landscape, being received by industry? People are saying to me that they are frustrated that the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation does not seem to be assisting them with their individual project. Before, a proponent may have felt that there was a concentration on their concerns, but now they feel that there is not that same level of engagement. I am talking about industry people who might already have several state agreements. How is this being received by and communicated with industry? Is the Premier looking at the effectiveness of moving away from that framework, which has served the state well for many years?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I do not get that specific feedback. The feedback I get is that individual proponents or project leaders are really satisfied with the way that they are assisted by JTSI. The member will see on page 198 of budget paper No 2 that the key performance indicator targets for satisfaction with the leadership and facilitation that JTSI provides are met every year. Ultimately, it is a matter of horses for courses. If a project needs a state agreement because of its particular nature, I am sure that would be considered. I think it is more that we want to be able to create flexibility for the proponent and the government for any particular project. We utilise the regulatory regime or framework available to us to meet the needs of that specific project, rather than having a government position about how much we will use state agreements. I might ask the director general to provide further comment.

[10.50 am]

**Ms R. Brown:** The Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation takes very seriously its role in facilitating industry development and key projects across the state more generally. We continue to play a critical role in administering the lead-agency framework that ensures that key projects continue to get dedicated case management by JTSI. We have a dedicated team that supports state agreements, particularly as they remain and will continue to be an important part of the state’s history. We have a dedicated team that has dedicated relationships with the key industry players in those state agreements, but across all our areas that work with industry, our role in providing that case management and facilitation is really critical. We also play a critical role in supporting state government, including with industry, to find solutions, particularly within the state development portfolio, that are important to industry growth.

It is fair to say that we have been able to enhance our services over the last 12 months, including the importance of focusing on green energy projects and how we work with our colleagues to ensure that we have the right environment set for approvals around those projects. That has enabled us to provide greater support across the sector and for government and industry in terms of approvals reform more generally.

We take very seriously feedback from industry. We have an annual stakeholder engagement survey. I engage with industry generally. It is also fair to say that from some of the comments made today that there is an enormous amount of interest in Western Australia from existing proponents seeking to expand, new proponents wishing to come here and new proponents wishing to move into new industry. The volume of work is not something that we are short of.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** In terms of moving away from the state agreement framework and facilitating statewide work specifically with the green energy portfolio, what has been done, if anything, through JTSI with the planning

frameworks across the state? Local governments tell me their concerns about their ability to manage some of the new industries—Oakajee being a case in point—in terms of the surrounding landscapes. It is possible that matters might be taken out of the local government’s hands by the state development assessment unit’s processes et cetera. What is the department doing to facilitate that? I point also to the failure of Infinite Green Energy to get a plant approved in the Shire of Northampton because of some problems with the statutory planning framework. What is happening to make sure that the local government sector is onside with this type of change?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** It is a fairly technical question, but a good one. I might hand it to the director general and her team to answer.

**Ms R. Brown:** I might start with a good example that is the work over the last two years on the Western Trade Coast region. We have had a dedicated team working closely with industry, the commonwealth, the three local governments and, importantly, our colleagues in the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage. Having a broader plan around infrastructure and other development aligned into the planning frameworks with the relevant local governments and with the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage has been an important aspect of that.

Similarly, we have started to apply those learnings to other regions. We had an opportunity to do that at the end of last year in Geraldton in the midwest. Similarly, through the Industrial Land Steering Committee, of which I am the chair and which JTSI supports, we had the opportunity with member agencies, including the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage and our colleagues in DevelopmentWA, to also meet with the local government. There is a strong acknowledgement that to maximise regional development, a broader government will need to work with those local governments to ensure that we meet industry’s requirements. Going forward, it will also require the department, under the coordinator general and with the economic development group, to get some of those macro planning settings right and to ensure that we are able to engage with industry, our partner agencies and local governments so that state government gets the best advice.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I invite Mr Marney to make a comment.

**Mr T. Marney:** The member mentioned a specific project—I will not repeat the name—that is a really good example of some of the complexities we are dealing with at the moment that we did not have five years ago. Some of the regulatory and legislative settings in place did not anticipate the sort of industry developments that we are now experiencing or the land uses that will flow with that. The example the member raised is a very clear case in point in that regard.

The government has invested in total, I think, over \$50 million in various reforms in the approvals space, a very small component of which has gone into the coordinator general role. Part of that role is to address specific areas in which the complexity is such that the existing legislative and regulatory settings do not apply easily and cause the sorts of frustrations that the member has highlighted. The project in question has been escalated to the office of the coordinator general and we are working through some of its key issues, which can be addressed in different ways. We are looking for the optimal solution for the proponent, the local community and the diversification of the state’s economy and we will work through those unanticipated complexities that exist.

That investment by government will go to some of those key issues that the member raised in terms of the tensions with industry. It also means that some of the issues arising out of state agreement conversations and the various engagements with industry and proponents can be addressed at a more systemic level across government. This will be done by working more closely across agencies and aligning systems, processes and practices to ensure that proponents have a clear, visible, transparent and accountable—in terms of not only public servants, but also proponents—pathway through to the resolution of issues, the assessment of proposals and, ultimately, the consideration of various forms of approvals.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I was going to suggest that we could do a follow-up question, but maybe it is a fresh question so I will leave it.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I have a further question just to clarify something. I know that the Premier is very aware of the issues around state agreements, but I note from my own industrial experience that if a massive multibillion-dollar investment is being made into an industry that will have an operational life of probably 40 or 50 years, one reason companies like a state agreement is that they can go to their financiers with an act of Parliament that specifies very clearly the rights and responsibilities on both sides. When the banks look at that, they say, “Yes, we understand the full scope or the liability and what we are taking on.” In the absence of a state agreement, the companies are more subject to the vagaries of policy change. As time goes on, that makes it a riskier long-term investment. If I understood the Premier correctly, he said that state agreements are on the table, but otherwise we might go down the path of normal regulatory approvals. Is there in fact a policy direction to get away from state agreements, or is it simply a case of horses for courses, and if a company expresses the strong importance of the state agreement, the government will not actively try to discourage it from that path?

[11.00 am]

**Mr R.H. COOK:** My understanding is that it is more the latter. It has not been a deliberate government decision to not do state agreements anymore; it is really about what is the most efficient way that we can facilitate investment

and how we do that. The member is quite right. Indeed, the member worked under a state agreement when he was at Alcoa. I do not know the name of the state agreement, but I know that it finishes with “1969”. It has provided long-term certainty, which, as the member said, facilitates significant investments, particularly around capital, which will last for 20 or 30 years.

The downside of that is that the world moves on, of course, and one of the things that we have been trying to do with Alcoa, which has been really good about this, is contemporise the oversight and regulation of its activities to make sure that it is more reflective of what we would expect nowadays, for instance, in relation to environmental protections and things of that nature. From that point of view, there is opportunity to provide both certainty and flexibility. As I reiterated in my earlier response, this is about what works and what is most effective in this specific case.

By way of finishing up, I was going to ask if we could consider a 10-minute break. Given that we are two hours in, that would be lovely.

**The CHAIR:** I think everyone is in agreement. The committee will now take a short break and we will recommence at 11.10 am.

*Meeting suspended from 11.01 to 11.14 am*

[Ms M.M. Quirk took the chair.]

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Just to reinforce that issue around state agreements, as the Premier mentioned the case of Alcoa, I make it very clear that I am not a spokesperson for Alcoa at all.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** We know that, member. It was just a point of reference.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** It can speak for itself, very effectively. Nevertheless, I know some the history of that organisation, having worked there for quite a period. In the case of that industry, and I suspect this will be the case for some of the new industries that we are seeing now, Alcoa commenced involvement in that project in the —

**The CHAIR:** Member, brave new regime. Questions, please.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I know; I am just leading into the question, thank you, chair.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** He was on a roll!

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Alcoa commenced that project in the early 1960s. It did not return a penny of investment to the United States until 1986. I think that is typical.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** It goes to the point the member was making about how state agreements facilitate really long-term investment.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Yes, I guess it was just reinforcing that confirmation from the Premier that there is no policy position on this one way or the other: it is horses for courses, and the government will meet those agreements as it considers is most effective.

**The CHAIR:** Premier, there was not a question there, so I do not know whether you need to answer.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I was asking him to reinforce his policy!

**The CHAIR:** It seemed rhetorical to me.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** We have had a very collegiate process here so far, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Well, I am sorry; it has all changed now!

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** It feels as though there is a tough new regime in order now!

**The CHAIR:** I do not want to be the one to hear opposition complaints that you did not get enough questions in. The member for Moore.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I will be much more succinct.

I refer to project facilitation on page 200 of budget paper No 2. We have been talking with the coordinator general on a number of issues, but perhaps we could talk about the coordinator general and the role instead. Can the Premier explain exactly what resources the coordinator general is being provided and how the role fits within both the department and government more widely?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I ask the director general to provide those details.

**Ms R. Brown:** The coordinator general role was announced and established by the government at the end of last year in response to a couple of key emerging opportunities across state government. The discussion this morning was very much around the importance of a strong and coordinated approach to leveraging strategic industrial areas and the benefits that would come from a much more deliberate and coordinated approach to land assembly and infrastructure planning to broader enabling industry development, whether it be the heavy industry linkages to general industry and opportunities for advanced manufacturing and jobs, in the regions or in the Western Trade Coast. That aspect of the coordinator general role is critical and one that has been strengthened through the budget process with the establishment of the strategic industries fund, and also funding for the establishment of a dedicated project

management office that will operate out of JTSI through the coordinator general and work closely with the key government agencies that will be involved. Some of them are around infrastructure and some are around land assembly and coordinating necessary environmental approvals or native title. The strategic industrial areas division within the department now comes under the coordinator general. In addition, the existing team has been delivering on the Global Advanced Industries Hub and focusing on how we ensure that the Western Trade Coast, which is already a global leading industrial ecosystem, transforms over the next 10 to 20 years. That team and that broader coordination and approach across government agencies, but opportunities for industry development also, comes under the coordinator general. That team will focus more broadly, in months and years to come, on that broader economic coordination piece out into various regional areas.

[11.20 am]

The government has allocated additional funding in this budget process to strengthen the coordination role in the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation to drive existing approvals reform and leverage some of the work that came out of the Vogel–McFerran review at the end of last year, particularly around environmental approvals, but more broadly other opportunities to streamline and ensure that we have a contemporary fit-for-purpose approvals framework in Western Australia. That includes some of the existing Streamline offices that were in Treasury and other agencies; they are now also coordinated through that role.

Lastly, the role provides support to the Minister for Tourism and the tourism investment cabinet subcommittee to ensure that tourism projects, in the regions and some of the larger projects, also get the necessary attention and coordination through the approvals process. It is very much about supporting existing functions in a much more strategic and coordinated way. I am happy to pause there and see if the coordinator-general wanted to add anything.

**The CHAIR:** I think there were some aspects of the first question that were not addressed, so you have probably got a further question, member for Moore.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Yes. Each of those three areas that the director general has spoken about are probably very laudable on their own. To roll them all into one role and for that person to then head a unit seems to be already pulling things in three different directions. My question is: when this role was being developed, was consideration ever given to confine it more tightly to ensuring that approvals were done in a more coordinated way, for instance? There have been a number of other approaches to do that through Streamline WA and others. I had discussions on this issue, through the minister, with the director general of the Department of Energy, Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety, who had been tasked with similar roles in the past. Was there consideration around just coordinating the approvals process, for a start?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** Primarily, the role of coordinator-general is in response to feedback from industry proponents on how they believe their issues can be better dealt with. One of the issues they talked about was that they have so much work to do across so many different agencies and departments, they are essentially looking for some guidance and leadership on how they can get assistance to undertake that work.

I will ask the director general to make a further comment on the details of the role.

**Ms R. Brown:** I think what is really important in bringing those areas together—to support the member’s comments—is around ensuring that we have a very strong focus on approvals reform and continue to work with the regulatory agencies that are a big part of that journey. We know from proponents that, particularly in this phase of economic growth with diversification, decarbonisation and renewables activities, they are looking for support with not only navigating and working through the approvals framework but also having support and understanding on how to access strategic industrial areas and the necessary infrastructure. We are working as an agency, as are our partner public sector agencies, with proponents who want to know not only what support they will get through the approvals process, but also how they will navigate the necessary access to strategic industrial areas or other supporting infrastructure.

I think what is important around the coordinator-general role is that it will increasingly provide reporting to cabinet on projects in Western Australia, whether they be in tourism or the resources sector, and ensure that those projects are getting the support that they need to make necessary decisions, particularly in the lead-up to a financial investment decision and also through the construction phase. It is about bringing together what project proponents are looking for and it is very much also looking at some of the successes that Queensland has had through a similar model.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Clearly, the role, as has been outlined, has a very similar description to some of the service provision areas of the department. What does having a person classified as coordinator-general bring to the role that the whole of the department does not seem to have been able to encapsulate already?

**Ms R. Brown:** The department, as has the state, has seen and understood the significance of this period of economic growth; there has been an increase in the volume of projects and interest in Western Australia over the last two years post the pandemic. We have seen the change and the growing interest in energy transition. The volume of projects that we have been working with is valued in excess of \$150 billion. In the next phase of the department, it is important that we continue to maintain that dedicated focus on case management and project facilitation.

Working with existing holders of state agreements is a very important focus. We are supporting other major projects with dedicated case management. The Premier has talked about POSCO but we also support key projects such as Perdaman and many others, including in the green energy space. We will continue to provide those case management facilitation services.

The coordinator-general brings greater support around some of those key enablers that are going to be important for economic growth, including the important focus on strategic industrial areas and supporting infrastructure. We need to ensure that we can also coordinate the complementary requirements around approvals reform and those key projects coming together. Those functions within the agency remain really complementary to this period of incredible economic growth and opportunity. Really, it is just a recognition of how we continue to meet the requirements of industry as a key agency to supporting the state government's economic development agenda.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I might invite Mr Marney to make further comment.

**Mr T. Marney:** I thank the member for the interview questions for the role of coordinator-general! What is common across government agencies—as the member knows, I have worked across a few—is that people are incredibly hardworking and I acknowledge the hard work of public servants, including within JTSI and get very, very immersed in their work but can essentially go down a mine shaft. Part of the advantage of the coordinator-general role is to have someone who is not in the day to day, but watching things move across the agency and coordinating them across the agency, and doing that same role across various government agencies. It is someone who is standing back from the busy-ness of the day to day and essentially watching and optimising the pathways for various things that government does in economic development and diversification so that our people's time and effort is as productive as it can be, the experience from the proponent is as effective as it can be and the implementation of the legislation and regulations set by Parliament is as effective and efficient as it can be.

Although it could be seen that there are very many moving parts to be involved in, I think the art or the challenge of the coordinator-general role is to stand back from that and provide that oversight and direction and clarity and to cut through issues where there is a necessity to do so.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I think the Premier, or it might have been the director general, mentioned that the coordinator-general reports to cabinet. Can the Premier explain the reporting mechanism for the coordinator? Who does he inform and what is the mechanism?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** Sure. My understanding is the coordinator reports to the director general as part of the functions of the department.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Having reported to the director general, does that then feed into the cabinet process or where does it go if information needs to be given to the whole of government?

[11.30 am]

**Mr R.H. COOK:** Ultimately, all decisions of all activities of government are reported to cabinet as a matter of course, and they facilitate the decisions of cabinet. We continue to monitor the progress of our project coordination and approval reform process and the coordinator general is an important part of that. The position reports to cabinet through the director general in that context. I defer to Mr Marney.

**Mr T. Marney:** Thank you. Part of the role in the implementation of this model is the establishment of the program management office, which the director general alluded to. Part of that initiative is to elevate the visibility, transparency and accountability of all those functions within the agency, across agencies, external to the public and also to government, to inform decision-making of cabinet. It is a major part of this initiative and I think the major reason why we are where we are is because over time there is blurring of those elements of visibility, transparency and accountability with respect to those processes. The reporting structure through to government is absolutely essential to ensure that cabinet has the information it needs to take the decisions that it needs to take. That is a crucial part of the process. Although the reporting is to the director general, clearly there are well-articulated expectations to the director general in terms of performance of the department. The role of the coordinator general is articulated as part of that and, ultimately, as we would expect for any senior public servant, the role has some accountability directly to ministers. It is not a reporting arrangement, but an accountability, which again is consistent with elevating visibility, transparency and accountability for performance.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I can see the general lay of where it intends to go; however, if the information does not progress out of JTSI to the whole of government, it will not achieve anything. What is the anticipation of the Premier in terms of other areas of government for cooperation and coordination? It is not about direction so much as a suggestion of what may be required to enhance performance in making approvals or facilitating outcomes.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** As Mr Marney observed, people in departments work hard every day. Their heads are down and they are focused on the work that they are doing. There might be an officer in the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation doing budget work around water. There might be someone else in the EPA. There are people in mines working with tenures and so on. Ultimately, we want them to be able to lift their heads up occasionally and talk to each other in different agencies to make sure that they are coordinating and dealing with the priorities

of the government of the day. Sometimes we need someone to bring that work together and make sure that everyone understands the agenda and the priorities, while helping people to work together better to produce outcomes. The coordinator general role has already been very effective in raising awareness of that. I will refer to the director general to complement that.

**The CHAIR:** I am conscious of the time, but all right. Director general.

**Ms R. Brown:** Thank you. To the member's question, probably a couple of aspects are important. As part of that, we have an established industrial land steering committee; the director general chairs that. That involves a whole range of government agencies. As the coordinator general has alluded to, the establishment of a dedicated program management office will ensure the delivery of the strategic industries fund. The growth of SIAs will ensure that there is tight reporting through the industrial lands steering committee through to the Premier in terms of that responsibility. Reporting will also go through to other ministers around the roles of their agencies. The work to lead the approvals reform and ensure that projects are supported through the approvals regime will be reported through myself to the Premier and Treasurer.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** The Premier may have partially answered this, but the opportunity to knock heads together—I remember back in my former life —

**The CHAIR:** No trip down memory lane, please—only questions.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I am allowed to give a background to the question.

**The CHAIR:** No, you are not.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Yes, I am, chair.

At the Western Trade Coast there was a conflict between the heads of the various departments. My observation was that folk were determined that nothing would happen. There was a lack of an ability to knock heads together. I wonder, Premier, is part of this role—I do not know about knocking heads together—along the lines that the Leader of the Opposition talked about, about identifying when there are departmental barriers that may be more territorial than real and that we get a common approach from government on a particular issue?

**The CHAIR:** Premier, *Hansard* tends not to reflect the metaphorical, so I take it that the member for Cottesloe does not mean physically knocking heads together.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I am not sure whether the chair knows the coordinator general. He is known for getting animated at times!

The Western Trade Coast is a classic case in point. It is one of the reasons why we had the Western Trade Coast ministerial taskforce, which was about bringing everyone together who has an interest in the strategic industrial areas. In that case it was tenants, local government authorities, government agencies and making sure that they all work together to produce a coordinated and focused outcome. Similarly, that is the sort of approach and outcomes we are looking for from the coordinator general. It provides opportunities to identify blockages and understand whether those blockages are, as the member said, simply about defending territory or if they are material issues that need to be addressed. I think it is a positive opportunity for us as a government to continue to play a more constructive role in supporting industry.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I have a quick question. On page 205, under industry development in the details of controlled grants and subsidies, there is a heading "Orbital Corporation Limited" with a \$4.5 million spend in 2022–23 and another budgeted amount of nearly \$2.5 million this year. Can the Premier outline what that funding is for?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** In 1989, the WA government provided a 25-year interest-free loan of \$19 million to Sarich Technologies Ltd, which is now known as Orbital Corporation Ltd. In 2021 the government and Orbital agreed to convert the remainder of the loan into a grant upon Orbital meeting certain conditions and milestones. Up until December 2023, Orbital has met four loan repayment instalments, providing evidence of achievements of performance milestones that exceed the value of the loan repayments for those instalments. That provides credit towards future instalments. Orbital is a local company and the government wants to continue to support local companies, particularly Orbital, which had, at the time of its inception in 1989, cutting-edge technology around international combustion engines. I have subsequent information if that is helpful.

Between 2010 and 2018, Orbital Corporation Ltd met its repayment obligations, reducing the outstanding loan to \$9 986 384. In 2019, Orbital sought a deferral of repayments to allow it to expand operations and build production facilities in the United States. In 2021, with repayments due to recommence, Orbital sought further assistance to allow the expansion of production facilities in Western Australia. The government offered to make the loan convertible if Orbital developed a UAV engine manufacturing facility. A deed of variation including loan conversion milestones and measures was signed on 26 July 2021 and subsequently executed by Orbital.

[11.40 am]

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Wow. That is quite an issue. I have not heard of that.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** Does the member remember the show *The Inventors*? I remember watching the episode when Ralph Sarich came up with the orbital engine. The suggestion was that it would change the whole world of automated engineering.

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** Someone asked him what colours were coming.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I do remember that member on the panel.

It is fascinating. Even though there have been significant changes via the ongoing refinement of that technology, it never really realised its ambition of being that single disruptor. I think that is because a lot of the other large vehicle manufacturers started to buy the technology and shelve it to basically entrench existing practices. I often wondered what would have happened if we had seen that wholesale transplanting of the internal combustion engines as they existed at the time with the orbital technology. A bit of a philosophical chat there.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** For fear of angering the chair, I will not talk about the orbital engine at all.

**The CHAIR:** I will not say how I literally could not give my shares away.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** The spin-off technology was fantastic.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** That is right. My understanding is that the real outcome is all the spin-off technologies and insights that the original invention provided.

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** They should bring back *The New Inventors*. That was —

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I would like it.

**The CHAIR:** Talk amongst yourselves, members.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** There is a program called *Innovation Nation*.

**Ms R. Brown:** It is on Sunday afternoon.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I will come back to the topic.

**Mr D.J. Kelly** interjected.

**The CHAIR:** Member for Bassendean!

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Not to interrupt my esteemed colleague, I will come back to budget paper No 2, at the bottom of page 194, paragraph 3.1, about the \$500 million strategic industries fund. Part of the discussion we had on that a little earlier was about where some of that money would be allocated, which was for purchasing land, setting up a group and so on. However, the majority of that money is allocated in the out years beyond the forward estimates. Is that simply because the Premier is not quite sure how that fund will be allocated at this stage and he will bring that money back into the forward estimates once he is aware of that, or is that money not intended to be spent in the forward estimates? It is a major initiative around the strategic industrial areas, but most of the money is allocated beyond the forward estimates.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** While we rediscover the briefing note from earlier, my understanding is that the money is being earmarked or we understand what we are going to use it for, but that the proponents are not ready for that. It will not be ready until outside the forward estimates.

The final allocation was \$314 million beyond the forward estimates for future SIA initiatives, including \$110 million to support BP Developments Australia Ltd H2Kwinana project and Murchison's green hydrogen project, which are two of the six shortlisted projects for the Australian government's Hydrogen Headstart program. If they are successful in accessing the Hydrogen Headstart program funding, they will obviously need those dollars. I am waiting for people to nod furiously as I say this: they needed to actually indicate that as part of their application for the Headstart program, even though that money will not be required to go outside the forward estimates if they are successful.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I return to page 205 and the details of controlled grants and subsidies. There is an amount of money for a project called the call centre and back office processing scheme, which has \$2.58 million assigned to it in the 2024–25 budget, with just over \$12 million across the next two years. What is that call centre and back office processing scheme about?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** The government established the call centre and back office processing scheme in 2020 and has administered two competitive grant rounds to create jobs and expand the capacity of the CCBOP sector in Western Australia. The member may recognise the year 2020 and what was going on at that time. It was all about trying to focus on local jobs. Of the grant funding, four companies have been awarded a total of \$12.2 million under the scheme. Outcomes to date include the creation of 510 jobs in Western Australia and the establishment of a dedicated CCBOP facility in the Peel region. A further 320 jobs are expected to be created between now and June 2026 as the funding recipients progress their great plans, bringing the total jobs created to 830.

Due to current CCBOP market conditions causing delays in milestone achievements for some funding recipients, the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation anticipates an underspend of \$1.5 million in 2023–24,

which has been re-cash flowed to 2024–25. CCBOP operators employ high quantities of new entrants into the labour market, particularly those requiring flexible working arrangements. Furthermore, the sector is increasing its adoption of digital technologies to improve operator productivity, which will impact the number of people they will need to employ.

This is about understanding the potential that call centres represent for local employment. It has been successful over the years. I remember an early iteration of this with the first forest agreement. That created call centre opportunities for people in Bridgetown. It still operates today and forms part of the call centre activity that people would receive or be involved in when they ring up charities and things of that nature. It is quite an effective local job-creating project.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Just over \$19 million over those many years is provided for those 800 jobs. Does the Premier consider that a success?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** Yes, I do, in the sense that not only does it create numbers of jobs, but it creates jobs in areas that tend to see a shrinkage, not expansion, of the labour market. As I said, we have previously been able to establish these things in places like Bridgetown. The member will notice that one iteration of this is the creation of jobs in the Peel region. That is not an area where we see a lot of long-term employment opportunities, particularly at an entry level. From that point of view, it strikes me as a particularly good way to create jobs.

Of course, it all goes to the issue of enhancing the range of activities that we have in our economy. Otherwise these jobs would be created in places like Melbourne and Sydney and so on. People in Western Australia would be serviced by people based over there, rather than opportunities being provided for people in Western Australia.

[11.50 am]

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** In 2025–26, \$7.7 million was put in that program. Is there a special reason why there is an uplift in that particular year, given that the Premier spent \$1.4 million in the current year?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I can confirm for the member that much of that money has been allocated but is pegged against payment milestones. Those milestones may not occur until those particular years. The member raised the \$7.751 million in 2025–26. That money may be, and probably has been, totally allocated against those grants but will not be expended because they are subject to financial assistance agreement milestones that do not fall until then.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I return to the bottom of page 194 and the state's strategic industrial areas. We had a discussion before about the Western Trade Coast area. One of the proposals that was championed by industry was to make that whole area, effectively, a development authority or the like. At the moment, that area is spread across three councils. My assessment is that the City of Kwinana is extremely industry focused and is cooperative, but the other two councils are perhaps less so. In any case, having to deal with three councils for that area can lead to conflict. Also, the interests of the industrial area are quite separate and different from the interests of running a community and residential area. Has any thought been given to amalgamating the Rockingham industrial area, the Kwinana industrial area and the Australian Marine Complex, with the expansion into Latitude 32, into its own separate authority? It seems that that would make an enormous amount of sense, allow a real focus and separate community council issues away from managing this massive industrial precinct.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** That is certainly one of those issues that we discussed in my ministerial taskforce on the Western Trade Coast area. I remember that the Barnett government looked to legislate to this effect. I mentioned earlier that one of the really good things about the ministerial taskforce is that it brought everyone into the room and allowed them to identify opportunities to coordinate, cooperate and collaborate. Pleasingly, the local government authorities saw that opportunity as well. It will not surprise the member to hear that under the leadership of the City of Kwinana, each of the councils sat down to dovetail all their processes into a single consistent planning regime. Regardless of which council dealt with it, the proponent knew that it would be dealt with in the same way right across the Western Trade Coast. That is an extraordinary outcome. It was great to see the cooperation between the councils, and we were able to celebrate that in September last year by way of a media opportunity.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I have a further question on that particular area. The discussion before was about the enormous potential for marine industries. One of the key enablers for the marine industries in that area is to have a suitable drydock facility for nuclear submarines to come into. I understand that is part of the national agreement on AUKUS as well. Will that facility progress; and, if so, when can we expect and anticipate that to commence?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I will ask the director general or one of her team to provide more technical information. In broad terms, it remains a project funded by the commonwealth. As the member knows, the commonwealth is doing a significant amount of work at the moment on understanding its needs under the defence strategic review and with activities that take place under AUKUS. My understanding is that it is still an open question, but it has committed to respond to us in the short term in terms of the if, when and how.

**Ms R. Brown:** I re-emphasise that we have been doing the broader planning for the Western Trade Coast for the last two years in the context of understanding the commonwealth government's aspirations around the Australian Marine Complex and the Henderson area more generally around defence, whether it be in terms of shipbuilding or



sustainment activities. The AUKUS announcement has brought a focus on nuclear-powered submarines. Our broader planning has been undertaken in the context of knowing that the AMC and the common-user facility will be very important. As part of the budget process, funding has been allocated to us to look at future plans for the AMC and the CUF, very much around understanding what non-defence industry is there so that, should the commonwealth progress on its intentions to create a defence precinct, we are well placed as a jurisdiction to support their aspirations and the important transition for non-defence industry. We have regular engagement with the Department of Defence in many forms and have over the last couple of years. As the Premier said, its final intentions for the AMC and the CUF have not yet been made clear to the state or the public, but we are well positioned to continue to work with it.

**Mr S. Dawson:** As the Premier and director general have articulated, we have been working with the commonwealth for a number of years on its requirements for shipbuilding and sustainment into the future. Then the AUKUS announcement came, and that created other considerations for what might be set up in Western Australia. The start of that is setting up a Submarine Rotational Force—West, which will occur at HMAS *Stirling*. That development is certainly underway at the moment through the commonwealth and its spend program. There are still decisions to be undertaken around the drydock. A body of work is afoot that the commonwealth is undertaking, and the state is supporting what those requirements would look like and the associated infrastructure needs. That all feeds into, and is happening alongside, the work with the Western Trade Coast, the Global Advanced Industries Hub and other work we are doing on the AMC as well. It is important that we know how we optimise that into the future. It is a very collaborative process, but we are still waiting for decisions from the commonwealth.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I am no expert on this topic, but it has been put to me by a federal colleague that this a bit of a chicken-and-egg situation. If the state was not making its commitment to this project, it could not go ahead. In fact, that was the barrier. I do not know the veracity of that assertion, but just to be clear, is the commonwealth waiting for the state to make decisions in this matter, or is it indeed the case that this is just a joint discussion and the state is cooperating fully in meeting the expectations of the commonwealth in terms of the state's role?

**The CHAIR:** Premier, there are three questions there, but I am sure the Premier can manoeuvre them.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** In technical terms, yes, we are waiting for the commonwealth to come back to us. The second way the member described it more broadly characterises the relationship, that is, we are working with the commonwealth around these things. The Australian Marine Complex at Henderson has a whole range of different players and providers. We are working with the commonwealth in terms of working out what its needs are in that area more broadly, but also specifically in terms of the enablers that will make that happen. I do not think it is because the commonwealth is waiting for us to respond. I met with the Deputy Prime Minister about a month ago. I made it very clear that we are very bullish and very ready to go the moment the commonwealth pushes the button.

[12 noon]

**Ms R. Brown:** I think it has been important in the context that the state has consistently shared with the commonwealth—all agencies—the work around the planning of the Western Trade Coast, and more recently the government's investment in the activation of Latitude 32, which is obviously critical to the commonwealth's aspirations for that region, but also getting on with the planning around Australian Marine Complex and the potential relocation of the common-user facility. We have been doing all the things we need to do to be ready for when the commonwealth can articulate what it wants there.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** There is a scheduled date for the home porting of the older American nuclear submarines before Australia's nuclear submarines can possibly be built and commissioned. Is the drydock facility essential for that home porting, which I believe has a hard date on it, or is that not required for it to occur?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I understand that the first iteration of the relationship will be about maintenance and sustainment, which will primarily take place at *Stirling*, and there will be more permanent arrangements in place following that. If I may, I know the director general and Ms Dawson have much more insight into this stuff.

**Ms R. Brown:** The ability to home port nuclear submarines has significant implications for Henderson, the AMC and the CUF. They are probably the key elements that the state is now waiting on to understand from the commonwealth. I will hand to Ms Dawson.

**Ms L. Dawson:** The decision we are waiting on is around the depot-level maintenance—so, the Submarine Rotational Force—West is in water maintenance. Drydock is required for when the vessel is taken out and put into the drydock. The decision on depot-level maintenance and its location is yet to be made. We want to secure it in WA, and I think Western Australia has done all the things through the government to make sure we are well advanced and ready to go for when that decision is undertaken. The commonwealth needed to do some further work around environmental studies, geotechnical studies and all sorts of studies to make and inform that final decision.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** On page 196 of the *Budget statements* there is an issue highlighted under global marketing, with \$12.3 million earmarked to continue global marketing efforts to drive awareness of WA, attract international students, promote investment opportunities in Western Australia et cetera. What will the \$12.3 million enable, and what programs will be funded by it?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** Through the 2024–25 state budget, the government has committed \$7.142 million to continue the state’s global campaign to market WA’s capabilities and opportunities and connect with overseas audiences, governments and industries. This builds on the success of the global campaign to date, which has reached more than 125 million people in 12 markets since July 2023, driving awareness of Western Australia and engaging with prospective investors, international students and skilled workers. It was launched as part of the Reconnect WA package. The global campaign has supported 44 missions in 27 different markets, and been activated through trade and investment initiatives across our global network.

The success of the global campaign to build awareness of and drive interest in Western Australia is measured across media, website metrics, consumer research and outcomes from trade and investment activities. Funding has been allocated for one year for ongoing creative development, paid media activity in established and emerging priority markets, and research and evaluation. A primary focus of the global campaign in 2024–25 is to inform future market strategies. The global campaign strategy, including market selection, audience identification and campaign timing, is aligned to Diversify WA, the Future State Western Australian invest and trade plan, market outlooks, trade and relevant government strategies in consultation with Invest and Trade WA and Tourism WA. The global campaign will be delivered through the continuation of five existing full-time equivalents, supporting campaign administration, optimisation and evaluation, and stakeholder management across government and partner agencies.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The Premier mentioned that one of those areas was international students. If a key aim of the state is to attract international students here, I wonder why we have set targets that are quite low. Under the outcomes and key effectiveness indicators on page 198, which show outcomes, Western Australia’s share of Australia’s international student enrolment in 2022–23 was seven per cent, yet the target set in the following budget was 6.5 per cent. We actually managed to achieve 7.4 per cent, and, again, the budget is set at the same level as it already is. There does not appear to be an ambition to raise the percentages beyond what is already there. Are we seeking just to maintain the level of international students and keep the same courses full or is there a genuine desire to grow the sector?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** In some respects, this is outside my portfolio, so perhaps I should not be wading into Minister Templeman’s area. International education is regulated by the commonwealth, subject to migration settings and things of that nature. The other aspect of that is that we are still waiting for the full return of the international student market, particularly the Chinese international student market. There is a great level of uncertainty at the moment about the total market to be captured and our share of it. An example of that uncertainty is that the Indian international student market was our eleventh largest market for international students in 2019, and today it is our fifth largest, so there has been a significant shift in this whole sector in the post-COVID world. I think these numbers will bounce around for a little while to come, but I note that Minister Templeman in earlier estimates hearings talked about his desire to work with the commonwealth to make sure that Western Australia continued to receive a growing proportion of that market, despite the recent public announcement to limit international students by asking universities to accommodate them on campus rather than placing further pressure on local housing markets.

**The CHAIR:** You are right, Premier; there was extensive questioning of Minister Templeman on this issue.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** Right; thank you, chair.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I go to my favourite page of the *Budget statements*, page 194.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** Everything happens on 194!

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** It has a lot on it!

The table on that page shows almost \$50 million allocated to the Pilbara hydrogen hub. Can the Premier outline what is proposed for that expenditure?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** The government is leading the establishment of hubs that stimulate demand and facilitate the production of clean hydrogen for domestic and key export markets. The Pilbara hydrogen hub will comprise a proposed hydrogen and ammonia pipeline, a clean energy training and research institute, road and intersection upgrades to facilitate the import of clean energy equipment and investment in future hub expansion studies. It is obviously an important step forward for Western Australia becoming a global centre for hydrogen production, use, export and scale. The Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation is working with the commonwealth for the implementation of the commonwealth’s clean energy hubs implementation program in Western Australia.

In December 2023, JTSI signed the grant agreement that provides for a matched amount of \$70 million each in funding from the commonwealth and the state to implement the \$140 million Pilbara hydrogen hub project. The project provides the opportunity for government to demonstrate the ongoing fair and thorough engagement with Aboriginal people and to provide support, investigate and deliver long-term successful outcomes and properly consider the land use and cultural impact as part of the clean energy transition. The \$14 955 500 in the 2024–25 financial year is expected funding to be received from the Australia government, and that money is to be passed on to the Pilbara Ports Authority for port upgrades.

[12.10 pm]

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** The Premier mentioned that that is part of a \$140 million package. What other works is the government planning to fund? I am not sure I heard clearly whether that was for the Pilbara hydrogen hub exclusively or for hydrogen hubs across the state.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** It exists specifically for the Pilbara hydrogen hub and it contains four component activities. Part A is a hydrogen and/or ammonia pipeline between Maitland and the Burrup Peninsula to assist with decarbonising existing industry on the Burrup. Part B is the development of a clean energy training and research institute across Karratha and Port Hedland to develop a clean energy taskforce locally. Part C of this work is the Lumsden Point road infrastructure upgrades to support the import of renewable energy equipment. Part D is a hydrogen hub expansion study to consider broader infrastructure requirements.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Given the substantial investment being made in that area, does the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation have a permanent on-ground presence in Karratha or is that activity managed out of Perth?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I will ask the director general to answer that question.

**Ms R. Brown:** We do not have a permanent presence in the Pilbara. We do in other regional areas, but we work very closely with the Pilbara Development Commission and all development commissions. However, our key contact would be through the CEO of the Pilbara Development Commission. We also work closely with the Pilbara Ports Authority, which has a presence in the Pilbara and Perth. We are very close to our key partner agencies that are on the ground in the regions.

**The CHAIR:** While the member for Moore contemplates his question, I welcome the students from North Morley Primary School.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Investment and trade is an area of focus on page 196, and paragraph 10 refers to Invest and Trade WA's overseas office network. It also refers to establishing a new investment and trade commissioner in Singapore. Can the Premier give me an idea of the average cost of each of the offices located overseas and how much the new office being established in Singapore will cost?

**The CHAIR:** That might be a little diffuse for the Premier to answer, but the member can also ask further questions if necessary.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** There might be an average cost per office, but it will probably be pretty unhelpful because the circumstances of each area change significantly. For instance, the office in London is based in Australia House, and Australia has probably owned that since shortly after colonial times. No, that is not true. They had an office across the road from Australia House back in the 1980s. The office in Singapore—which is already established, by the way—would have an entirely different cost profile associated with it. I will ask the director general to make some comments shortly, if I may. However, I will confirm for the meeting today that we have just established a second trade office in China, in Hangzhou in the Zhejiang Province, as part of our ongoing efforts to expose and promote Western Australian industry to that important part of the region. Zhejiang is our sister state in China. Having an office there in addition to the Shanghai office represents an important opportunity to continue to promote Western Australian industry and seek to facilitate strong investment and trade with China. I will hand over to the director general.

**Ms R. Brown:** Thank you, Premier. The funding in this year's budget, as the Premier outlined, enables the establishment of a dedicated commissioner in Singapore. This is very much in response to the significant growth and opportunity for Western Australia in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations region. The trade commissioner position in Singapore would complement the trade commissioner position that already exists in Jakarta. The funding in the budget enables us to meet the costs of having the additional commissioner. The costs associated with the Singapore office are part of the existing budget that the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation already has. I think it is also important to note that, as part of the state government's presence in the ASEAN region, we have been able, through the model, to expand our presence with new locations in Ho Chi Min City, Kuala Lumpur and Manila, while continuing to service other important markets in all the key export areas and investment opportunities for Western Australia. It is a very strong and important market, close in proximity with significant population growth.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The Premier mentioned the London office. I take it that is the Agent General being referred to?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** That is correct. Yes.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** As I understand it, that is a statutory position and not the same as a normal trade office. Does it operate the same as other trade offices, or does it have any different roles?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** It is an interesting point, member. The actual legislation that establishes the Agent General position does not mention the words "Western Australia", because it predates the establishment of the Western Australian state. It is one of our oldest acts of Parliament. As a result of that, the Agent General role in the UK is hardwired into its systems of government because it has been established for such a long period of time. Under our current

configuration, it is part of our Invest and Trade WA international network. The Agent General undertakes the role of a trade commissioner. This role is a pretty special case in point. I will use the word “quasi-diplomatic”, which is probably clumsy language because it is not a sovereign office, although sometimes we wonder.

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** We are not a country yet!

**Mr R.H. COOK:** Yes, we are getting there. It has an important role to play as part of the overall presence of Australia in UK life. The director general has one point to add to that.

**Ms R. Brown:** I think it is important to add that although the Agent General has a position established in statute, the office, its staff and the network in which they operate, including as part of Invest and Trade WA and the JTSI broader network, come within the broader remit consistent with the other overseas offices.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Since the UK was severed from the European Union, has there been any thought of further representation in Europe itself rather than on an island a few kilometres offshore from the mainland?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** Great question. We have established the Frankfurt office. I think I announced that midway through last year or the year before. That program is ongoing. I think we can see a point in time in the future when we will ultimately land a free trade agreement with the EU and there will be other more enhanced activity in our relationship with Europe. Maybe there will come a point when the roles are separated, but at the moment, the Agent General is responsible for representing Invest and Trade WA in both the UK and Europe.

[12.20 pm]

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I take it that the Frankfurt office is less resourced than the London office. The Premier mentioned a possible free trade agreement in times to come, but surely trade is still possible between the nations within the European bloc and Australia without a free trade agreement. Why would we wait for a free trade agreement before further reinforcing that office?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** It is not a question of waiting for a free trade agreement. If there were a free trade agreement, there would be even more activity, potentially leading to an enhancement of our invest and trade network in the United Kingdom and Europe. The establishment of the Frankfurt office was important to acknowledge the strong relationship that we have with Germany, particularly in advanced manufacturing in the oil and gas sector. From that perspective, we will continue to look for opportunities as appropriate and as needed right across that market.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Paragraph 10 on page 196 finishes with a discussion on the negotiations around free trade agreements. What role does the department and the Premier have in any such discussions?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I can certainly speak to my experience with the UK free trade agreement and the advanced discussions on the European Union free trade agreement. The commonwealth liaises with the Western Australian government across a range of things that it is contemplating under those free trade agreements. It checks in with us on whether any of the outcomes of those negotiations are a matter of material importance for us. One of the key things that the commonwealth talks about in free trade agreements is tariffs—the low-hanging fruit—but also opportunities and approvals for foreign investment in the other market. In Western Australia, we have laws that govern the way in which someone accesses, for instance, our minerals and resources. The commonwealth will come to us to understand whether its negotiation terms might impact us, and I assume it replicates that with every other state in Australia.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** There has been recent public commentary about the Agent General and what appeared to be unbelievably generous holiday provisions in his package whereby the Agent General, in short order, had two holidays with his partner to the United States and spent many tens of thousands of dollars to do that. I am unaware of any other employment arrangement that would allow that.

**The CHAIR:** Member, this is not about you giving information. This is about asking the Premier a question. Can you just pose a question?

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Premier, who is responsible for negotiating, if you like, or establishing the conditions under which the Agent General is employed?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** The Agent General is an important role in which the government invests significant resources to make sure that we achieve good outcomes in what is our longest established and most reliable market. The Agent General represents WA in the UK and works to attract business investment and grow trade opportunities for WA businesses in the UK, European and Israeli markets. We want to attract the very best people to that particular role. The current Agent General, Mr Langoulant, has decades of experience across the public, private and not-for-profit sectors and considerable experience undertaking government reviews. As I said, UK and Europe remain key markets for the continued diversification of the state’s economy.

Mr Langoulant began in his role in October 2021. He continues to do important work for us and has a range of delegations associated with his appointment. With the chair’s permission, I will ask the director general or one of her team to go into the details of the contract, because I want to be careful to not say the wrong thing at the wrong time.

**Ms R. Brown:** The first comment is that the department has input into the contracts of each of the trade and investment commissioners and the Agent General, and it is the responsibility of the commissioner to progress those contracts. It is not unique to have a clause in a contract around enabling a return to Perth. Many aspects of our contracts are modelled on research into other jurisdictions, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Austrade. We consistently look to benchmark against what other jurisdiction do to look after—dare I say it—staff in the market. The ability to have a provision in contracts for either a holiday or a return to Perth is pretty standard. We look after all the contracts. In regard to the Agent General, because it is a statutory ministerial appointment, the agency has a responsibility to inform the relevant minister of the nature of that contract. We very much look across the contracts of all our commissioners and the Agent General to benchmark, where we can, against other jurisdictions and other arrangements, and reflect those often-changing in-market conditions as well. We have seen some very rapid changes, particularly in the UK office, but we know that some inflationary changes will impact on some of our other offices.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I am aware that contracts for expats may involve a return-to-home provision. I am not aware of any arrangement whereby expats are entitled to take first-class taxpayer-paid trips to another country for a holiday—two in short order, in this case—staying in high-class accommodation. As I say, I accept the return-to-home provision, but do any other contracts for the state’s overseas officers include the ability to take paid holidays in addition to the return-to-home provisions in their contract?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I will ask the director general to answer.

**Ms R. Brown:** The provision in the Agent General’s contract provides an option to utilise that allocated funding—dare I say it—for that return to Perth for holiday-type purposes.

**Ms S. Spencer:** The other investment and trade commissioners have an annual leave flight entitlement for a return home, but if they choose to not return home and take that annual leave entitlement elsewhere, they are eligible to take it to another country.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** How many other officers are entitled to do that?

**Ms S. Spencer:** So the investment —

**The CHAIR:** The Premier can respond. Please wait for the call, Ms Spencer.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I defer to Ms Spencer.

**Ms S. Spencer:** All the investment and trade commissioners have an allowance within their contracts to allow them to take annual leave and return home, and if they do not return home, they can use it in another jurisdiction.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Does that entitlement include the ability to book first-class air travel and luxury hotels when they arrive that is paid for by the taxpayers of Western Australia? Is there some limitation on that? In my former life, I was never allowed to take a first-class trip —

**The CHAIR:** Member, we are not interested in your experience.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Of course you are.

**The CHAIR:** We are interested in you asking the Premier a question about his responsibilities under this portfolio.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I know that secretly you are.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I will refer that to Ms Spencer.

**Ms S. Spencer:** The investment and trade commissioners are not entitled to business class travel as part of their contract, with the exception of one secondment arrangement. Ms Monks was entitled to business class travel as part of her role as the CEO of the Great Southern Development Commission. Given that it is a secondment model, her entitlements have been matched, but as level 9 senior executive service officers, none of the investment and trade commissioners is entitled to business class travel.

[12.30 pm]

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Why is the Agent General allowed to take first-class travel when surely the norm would be that business-class travel would be adequate for someone in that position?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** Ms Spencer.

**Ms S. Spencer:** He is not entitled to first-class travel; he travels business class.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** My understanding from the media reports was that it was first-class travel. I am happy to be corrected, but was it not first-class travel, and the Agent General took business class to the United States?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** Ms Spencer.

**Ms S. Spencer:** Correct.

**The CHAIR:** Before I call the member for Swan Hills, I welcome the students from the Australian Islamic College.

**Ms J.J. SHAW:** I refer to page 195 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and paragraph 6 of the significant issues under the heading “Industry Development”. Could the Premier give an update on the government’s efforts to support the development of the critical minerals sector in Western Australia?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I thank the member. This is an incredibly important piece of work by the government. Yesterday, I launched the WA battery and critical minerals strategy refresh, which outlines key activities to support further development of the state’s industry. The original strategy was launched in 2019. Members might ask why we are already refreshing the battery strategy in 2024. In 2019, the value of our critical minerals production was around \$6 billion. Today, it is over \$22 billion. Since 2015, we have seen over \$9 billion in investment in the critical minerals sector. It is a rapidly changing and evolving part of our industry, and it is clearly important that we make sure that the strategies that drive that continue to be contemporised to meet the current place that the industry is up to. The strategy will help guide future investment as the state pushes to become what I believe we can become, which is a major global player in downstream processing of critical minerals.

I am often pulled up by commentators who say, “Surely we’re not in a position to create batteries in Western Australia; that will always take place in China or big jurisdictions like India, Japan and the US.” My response is yes, we absolutely can. I do not think there will ever be a gigafactory location in Western Australia, but we have the capacity to really drive ourselves up the value chain of battery manufacturing. Currently, we are offshoring a lot of spodumene as part of our lithium industry, with 50 per cent of the global supply of lithium coming from Western Australia. We want to add value to that, and that is why there is the development of Tianqi Lithium Energy Australia’s lithium hydroxide plant in Kwinana and the Albemarle lithium hydroxide plant in Kemerton outside Bunbury, and now Covalent Lithium is developing its facility in Kwinana as well. We are really seeing our whole industry drive itself up the battery manufacture supply chain. We could develop, construct, manufacture and deliver niche batteries, particularly batteries that can service small and isolated communities. That is one of our competitive advantages; we know how to do that. Think of the tens of thousands of small villages around Indonesia, a country that needs to decarbonise. There is a huge opportunity for us to develop these small-scale battery banks to service small communities. The strategy is a really important part of making sure we realise those opportunities.

The priority actions for the government, which have been outlined in the strategy, include creating a more efficient approvals system, planning and investing in common-user infrastructure, and targeted support for strategic important projects. A good example of the common-user infrastructure is in this budget. We set aside \$100 million for a critical minerals advance processing hub, which is about developing common-user infrastructure that all members of the industry can enjoy. The actions have been supported by several other key budget initiatives, such as the \$500 million strategic industry fund to help unlock our strategic industrial areas for critical minerals processing. We are already also carrying out a \$43.3 million reform to overhaul the environmental approvals system and improve government coordination and resourcing of approval agencies. As I said, we have our \$100 million contribution towards the \$200 million critical minerals advance processing hub. We are hopeful that the commonwealth will be part of that and make a further contribution of \$100 million for the full funding of that project.

Critical minerals are a centrepiece of our economic diversification story, and we are working to position our state as a major global leader in downstream processing. I was born and raised in Perth. I have watched Western Australian industry over many years and we have never been good at downstream processing. If we are developing renewable energy, which changes the business model for a lot of these downstream processing facilities or opportunities, I think now is the time to significantly add value to the products that we export. That means more jobs and more value for the Western Australian economy, which will continue to contribute to our prosperity.

As I said, we want to be a renewable energy powerhouse and an exporter of renewable energy to decarbonise not only our economy, but also the economies of South-East Asia and other major trading partner regions. The development of critical minerals is a key part of our contribution towards the global effort to reduce emissions and reduce the impact of climate change.

Here is something I prepared earlier. It is *Western Australia’s battery and critical minerals strategy 2024–2030*. This is an important refresh, because we want to continue to drive this industry and grow it in the coming decade.

**The CHAIR:** I think I will wait for the film, Premier.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** It is a very beautiful brochure.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** We were talking earlier about trade officers, and the member for Cottesloe asked about the conditions of employment for the Agent General.

**The CHAIR:** Page reference, please.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to page 196 and investment and trade. Can we turn to the situation with the Trade and Investment Commissioner for the India–Gulf Region? On 13 May, *The West Australian* reported that that commissioner had employed a family babysitter as an executive assistant and that a family member had been offered

a role as a chef at a special event. Does the Premier have concerns around those reports, and does he feel that it is appropriate to describe a babysitter as an executive assistant? If that is the case, have there been any investigations into the circumstances of those reports and what has been done?

**The CHAIR:** I will give the Premier the call, but there should have been a preliminary question to that: are those reports accurate? And then you can comment on it.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I appreciate the chair's guidance. Obviously, integrity in procurement in all government departments is absolutely central to good government. Our Invest and Trade WA officers, who are part of our international network, are no different. They are functions of the Western Australian government and it is appropriate and important that they undertake their work with the same levels of integrity that we expect in any part of the WA government. Yes, I saw those media reports. It was a fine piece of journalistic work! If the member read fully through that article, he would have seen the allegation outlining the appointment of those two particular people, one in an employment role and another as a contract. They were both identified very early on in the piece as a potential conflict for the individual in question—in this case, the trade commissioner. The department then undertook the appropriate measures that we would always take in the normal course of action. When there is a conflict of interest, or a perceived conflict of interest, we manage that and ensure that there is no tainting of the procurement process by virtue of that conflict of interest. I will ask the director general to provide further comments on that issue.

[12.40 pm]

**Ms R. Brown:** As the Premier stated, we take seriously the necessary support, policies and procedures for the operation of all our overseas office network. It is an important part of the state government's ability to operate in market and leverage outcomes for industry and Western Australia. Since the reopening of borders post the pandemic, we have seen an enormous amount of activity across all our offices. That includes ensuring that all offices have trained staff in the necessary policy and procedures and also that the Perth hub provides the necessary support and that any concerns that are raised around practices in our offices across the world are taken very seriously to ensure that there has been no breach of any of the relevant policies and procedures. I am satisfied that both matters raised in the article are not serious and that there is a relevant background to what has been undertaken. Particularly with regard to Ms Chowdhury's sister, it was a matter that was raised as an opportunity by Austrade, which similarly used her sister in market, and the commissioner raised it immediately with the Perth office and removed herself from any engagement or discussions on or selection of her sister for that role.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Prior to the employment of the executive assistant, is the Premier aware whether that person had ever been paid by the department for work?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I will hand that to Ms Spencer.

**Ms S. Spencer:** This individual was employed as a contractor, an interpreter, for a week during two concurrent investment and trade missions in India. The department paid that individual just over \$A500 for that service. There were two missions: one was the Speaker's mission and the other was an international education mission, which meant that the in-market team did not have enough individuals available for language translation. We were moving a significant number of delegates around market, so to be able to make sure that drivers were given correct directions and that logistics were managed, this individual was in our employ for that one week.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Was the individual known to the department and were the circumstances of the individual's employment as a babysitter known to the department?

**Ms S. Spencer:** Ms Chowdhury engaged this particular individual as a carer for her children—not a babysitter. One of her children has profound disability, so he provides services such as making sure that the child has effective medication administration, which is something that other care and support staff in her household are not able to do. We are aware that Nashid has paid for that out of her own income and that is not something for which the department has incurred costs.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Was there any declaration of a conflict of interest at any point during these engagements?

**Ms S. Spencer:** Yes, the human resources department was made aware of the connection and that was managed through the recruitment process in relation to the one-day-a-week backfill for the EA role on a temporary basis.

**Ms J.J. SHAW:** Premier, it sounds as though considerable steps have been taken to tighten up the way the overseas office network arrangements are administered.

**The CHAIR:** Question?

**Ms J.J. SHAW:** Yes, thank you, chair. Will the Premier please remind me what it was that occasioned the tightening up of the overseas office network arrangements and what steps have been taken to tighten things up? What was it that prompted the need to make such considerable improvements?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** As the member knows, a number of events were raised in the media with regard to the conduct of both trade commissioners, or overseas representatives as they were probably more generally referred to then,

and delegations that were travelling. We all saw the uncomfortable information that came out about a delegation of upper house members to Japan and, of course, an inquiry was held into the conduct of the Japan government representative at the time. That led to an extensive analysis and review of the overseas trade officers to make sure we understood that they were doing what we wanted them to do, which was to build trade and to attract investment into Western Australia. I am immensely proud of the work that has been done to improve the way we undertake the work we do. A key part of that has been, rather than utilising people who are predominantly at the end of their career —

**Ms J.J. SHAW:** Reward postings?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** — or maybe enjoying gin and tonics on the verandah of the Raffles or something like that, and treating these positions as more quasi-diplomatic outposts, we see them as important strategic workers inside the public sector to ensure that we get a strategic outcome. The work JTSI has done has significantly improved and tightened up on those things. Most of the trade commissioners are employed at non-senior executive service level 9 under the Public Sector CSA Agreement. A lot of those people are now working under a secondment model. They have been brought out of other parts of the public sector and provided with this rare and exciting opportunity to work for three years in market to continue to drive the show. Natasha Monks in the US is a classic example of that. She was chief executive officer of the Great Southern Development Commission and is now enjoying the role of trade commissioner for the Americas region. She is doing a fantastic job in an exciting and very important market.

Each of these now work to a strategic plan, rather than being simply people at large abroad. They are required to report to the team about inquiries and on investment and trade leads and report on the development of those leads into actual deals. Since it has been brought under this new regime, we have got significantly better at accountability and transparency and outcomes as a result of that process.

**Ms J.J. SHAW:** Like a proper business development framework.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** Indeed. I will ask Ms Spencer to provide the chamber with an indication of some of the statistics that underpin that work to really understand what the outcomes have been.

**Ms S. Spencer:** To support the Premier's point around the investment and trade leads, over the past three financial years, Invest and Trade Western Australia has serviced a total of 2 553 qualified investment and trade leads across a range of sectors aligned to Diversify WA. The priority sectors with the most qualified investment and trade leads included primary industries at 33 per cent, energy at 16 per cent and international education at 15 per cent, followed by mining equipment technology and services. That gives a sense of the importance of the overseas offices in achieving that industry diversification focus for the Western Australian government. The regions with the most investment and trade leads have so far been North-East Asia, where a hub has generated 33 per cent of total leads; the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Hub, with 31 per cent, which is a critical region for not just ourselves, but also the commonwealth government under its new South-East Asian engagement strategy; and the India-Gulf hub coming in at 18 per cent.

I think what is really important for the network to note is that this is not handing out business cards, attending a trade show or getting an introduction. We have a very rigorous process whereby we assess what becomes a qualified lead and how we service it appropriately. We have limited resources in servicing comparative to our state and territory colleagues, so we need to make sure that for each of those opportunities, there is a net economic benefit that is worth putting in that time, energy and effort to service it.

[12.50 pm]

**Mr R.H. COOK:** For clarity, perhaps Ms Spencer could provide a definition of a qualified trade lead.

**Ms S. Spencer:** A qualified trade lead is when we have done some active servicing of the investment lead or the trade lead. That will involve things such as due diligence—making sure that either the in-market team or the Perth hub has established the bona fides of the particular counterparty for the local Western Australian business that we are looking to link them with. We also assist in things such as market introduction to distributors. A lead or servicing for a trade lead would involve registration of that product within market and facilitating that process in market. For an investment lead, it can involve things such as famils, or inbound delegations to Western Australia, in which we show them particular land availability and we introduce them to other state government agencies with responsibility for approvals or industry proponents here. We have had a significant number of inbound delegations. Our servicing has involved 133 inbound delegations in the last year across a wide range of markets and industry sectors.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I refer to page 194 and my favourite table, at the top of that page. The estimated actual spend on the Collie coal rehabilitation assessment is \$250 000. Is the Premier able to inform me about the estimated rehabilitation cost for the Collie coalfields, given that it would appear on the current trajectory that, in the foreseeable future, those coalfields will be undergoing rehabilitation?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** A lot! No, it is not true. We appointed Preston Consulting to provide advice on the Collie coal basin rehabilitation matters in 2023–24. This advice will provide an understanding of the rehabilitation liabilities held by the operating coalmines in the Collie basin. These are private sector liabilities and the results of the report



are therefore going to be confidential in the context of that. But as the member can understand, this is a significant open-cut mine that has been developed over many years, so the costs associated with the mine rehabilitation will be significant.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Is the department aware of the example of the coalmines in former East Germany that, with the reunification of Germany, were assumed into West Germany and rehabilitated? That was effectively in a similar regulatory environment as we have, and massive landslide failures occurred.

**The CHAIR:** Question?

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** That is my question. Is the Premier aware of those?

**The CHAIR:** That is a yes or no answer, presumably.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** And that has meant the German government has had enormous rehabilitation costs.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I am not aware personally. I will ask the director general or Dr Gorey or Mr Dawson to talk about their awareness of it.

**The CHAIR:** Which one?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** Dr Gorey.

**Dr P. Gorey:** There are examples around the world of very, very good and quite poor mine site rehabilitation. The geotechnical stability of closed mine sites is one of the core issues. Across the state agencies, JTSI, the Department of Energy, Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety and the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation very much work together. The principles for mine closure, which have been in place now for many years within Western Australia, are around it being safe, stable, non-polluting and sustaining.

Stable means making sure that those designed landforms are geotechnically stable. That is one of the key issues and, to a large degree, it is one of the key drivers for the final landforms as well, simply because of that connection between making sure that the landforms themselves are stable and the costs associated with moving volumes around. Particularly on the member's question, but this is the same for all sites, the mine closure planning process in Western Australia is around, initially, a very clear understanding about what the end land use will be. That will drive both the cover and landform design.

The Department of Energy, Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety has within its workforce geotechnical engineers. They make themselves available to other agencies to provide that geotechnical advice. The same geotechnical engineers are providing advice on, for instance, tailing storage facility construction. Instability is a key risk for those as well. We are aware of the inherent risks that happen when constructing engineered landforms at the end of mine life. The way that that is mitigated for both the work that JTSI does and the work of other agencies is to utilise those geotechnical experts the state government has in the mine closure planning process up-front.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** What reach does the government or the geotechnical experts have into the detail of what is being proposed? The devil is always in the detail in these things and, ultimately, the state will be left carrying the can if these proposals are flawed.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I will get Dr Gorey to answer that.

**Dr P. Gorey:** Very closely, because in the case of the work we are doing with the Collie basin, we have networks across the government and DEMIRS is represented on those working groups, so we can feed straight into those geotechnical people.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** We will finish off on a positive one, Premier. The Western Australian industry participation strategy has —

**The CHAIR:** That is page 194, is it, member?

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** It is. It is in my favourite table! It has a bit over \$400 000 allocated in the next financial year and the out years. What is the purpose of that allocation of funding?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** The Western Australian Jobs Act 2017 and the WA industry participation strategy—WAIPS—have been independently reviewed, including consultation with agencies and suppliers. The budget allocation of \$1.439 million over four years is required to progress the priority resulting from that review. The review recommended a broadening of the scope of the WA jobs act and WAIPS to give greater specific focus to local participation in health and medical supplies, digital technology and innovation. Additionally, increased training and workshops are planned for agencies and suppliers. Further areas of enhancement include the streamlining of WAIPS outcomes reporting through the introduction of the under-development WAIPS portal and selective verification of WAIPS outcomes reporting.

The review found the operation and effectiveness of the WA jobs act and WAIPS have achieved significant outcomes in local employment, workforce skilling and levels of Western Australian participation. The latest data is that since October 2018, WAIPS supply has realised over 83 000 jobs, 6 400 apprenticeships and traineeships,

and 88 per cent local content. Over the same time, contracts valued at \$47 billion have been covered by WAIPS, with \$41.3 billion of this value retained within the state. I want to particularly commend the reviewers of the WA jobs act and the WAIPS process. They are now really laser-focused on making sure that we accrue great outcomes for local participation in the health and medical supplies industries. This is really important because we know we spend a lot of money on medical supplies and medical technology, and a lot of it is manufactured here in Western Australia. It is a great outcome.

**The CHAIR:** Premier, I need to interrupt you at this stage.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

*Meeting suspended from 1.00 to 2.00 pm*

[2.00 pm]

**Division 31: Corruption and Crime Commission —**

Mrs M.R. Marshall, Chair.

Mr J.R. Quigley, Attorney General.

Ms E. Johnson, Chief Executive.

Mr M. Squires, Chief Finance Officer.

Mr J. Lee, Principal Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

**The CHAIR:** The estimates committees will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* 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 be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

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

I remind the committee that we are dealing with division 31 and then division 44. We have a hard finish time of 3.00 pm, by which time both divisions will need to be moved if they have not yet already. I give the call to the Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to the service areas for the commission. I can see on page 472 that there have been budget allocations in the past for assessing all allegations of serious misconduct received, investigating allegations of serious misconduct and investigating unexplained wealth referrals. The current year, 2023–24, is the first year that that has been a standalone provision area. Is this the first year that that work has been carried out or is it the first year that it has become a reported area on its own?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** It is not the first year that the work has been carried out, but it is the first year that it has been allocated and set aside as a separate thing since the opening of the new hearing room for unexplained wealth.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Is that related to the change in the structure of the organisation, with an assistant commissioner brought on so that there can be concurrent hearings? Is that what that is about?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** The member will recall that we amended the legislation to provide for a deputy. The process for appointing the deputy is the same as for appointing the commissioner. It is done by the nominating committee. It goes to the Premier and then the Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission. That process is currently underway.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Has it occurred?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** It is in the process thereof. We do not yet have a final result, but it is in the process.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to page 474 and unexplained wealth referrals. There is an efficiency indicator of 80 per cent, which is pretty much in line with the investigation of allegations of serious misconduct, which is just above it in the table. What does that represent? If a full investigation has occurred, would the Attorney General expect that the criminal property confiscation proceedings would be initiated within 12 months? How is that measured, because that would be a year ahead? What is the time lag between the process of finding unexplained wealth and the following confiscation process?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Most of the unexplained wealth involves settlements. The target, not wanting to go to court and face public exposure, will settle.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** If a finding is made that, for example, John Quigley has \$5 million in properties in New South Wales that we did not know about and he cannot explain how he got it, does the commission automatically start a process that leads to the confiscation of that property? Is there another step on the way?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** There is that capacity; it involves a confiscation hearing. However, most targets do not want that exposure and so when presented with the inexplicable, they usually yield.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** For my understanding—because it is a novel concept, I think—which government body acts for the Crown in the negotiations? Is it the commission or is it another body?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** It is the commission, because those hearings are conducted in strictly confidential private hearings. The person is presented with that which is inexplicable and has the option of either denying and denying and denying or yielding and saying, “Well, you can have that.”

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** How can we be sure that the outcome is in the best interests of the state? For instance, if we go back to the example of the Attorney General and say that he has \$5 million and offers up \$500 000, and the commission says, “That’s easy. We’ll take that”, would that be an acceptable outcome? Who measures whether that is an acceptable outcome?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Ultimately, the commission when a settlement is offered. The member has to understand that these people have not been convicted of any offence. They have not been convicted; therefore, it is a matter of identifying the unexplained wealth and seeing what is available for seizure.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Is the conduct of those negotiations subject to oversight by the Parliamentary Inspector of the Corruption and Crime Commission?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** The settlements are usually volunteered by the target, but if someone were to make a complaint, it would obviously be investigated.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** My concern is not so much for the person who has the unexplained wealth. If there is unexplained wealth, clearly this mechanism has been put in place to discourage that. Supposing the person’s wealth has come about from perhaps selling methamphetamine at the train station, or whatever, surely the state would like to see all of that money come back. My concern is that there could be easy settlements rather than the best outcome for the state. That is also the most likely to deter people from future misconduct.

[2.10 pm]

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** May I respond by saying that if it was by selling methamphetamine at the station, they would be charged with drug trafficking. The Corruption and Crime Commission would make a referral if that evidence came to light during the hearing. This is aimed at people against whom there might not be any evidence of criminality, but they have the trappings of wealth without being able to explain it. That is a unique circumstance for seizure. They have the trappings of wealth with no evidence that they have committed an offence, but they cannot explain a legitimate source for their wealth.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Whether or not they gained it by selling drugs at the train station or some other way does not matter. Unexplained wealth is the issue.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Correct.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The holding of unexplained wealth in itself would lead to a situation in which there was a negotiation. Ultimately, though, what is it possible for the commission to do? If it was unsatisfied with the negotiations —

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** It would instruct the State Solicitor’s Office to initiate seizure proceedings in the Supreme Court.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Does the commission or the commissioner themselves have the power to instruct the solicitor to undertake that?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** They can undertake it themselves or instruct the State Solicitor. The CCC has a legal department. It can either instruct the State Solicitor or do it itself. In one sense, that is the pathway, but it has never happened. A businessman does not want to go to court and be publicly exposed.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I will go to page 474 and the area of unexplained wealth referrals that we were talking about. I am looking at the full-time equivalents. There are 38 people who work in that area. The total number of people who appear to be working in the organisation has grown by only six or seven people. There has been a reduction in the number of full-time equivalents in service area 2 from 105 to 77 and from 32 to 29 in service area 1. Most of the staff investigating unexplained wealth referrals have simply been shifted from another area of the commission. Does that then leave the commission in a situation in which service areas 1 and 2 will fall behind in the provision of assessments and investigations of allegations of serious misconduct?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** No. There was up-front funding for this particular service area. Before it became a discrete service area, the commission was doing it from within its own resources. The \$9 million of additional recurrent appropriation approved by the Expenditure Review Committee has now been reflected in the budget. A four-year

budget has been established, with \$12 million across the forward estimates. This funds accommodation, personnel, information and physical assets. The government approved recurrent funding for the commission's unexplained wealth function, commencing in 2023–24. The funding supports 16 additional FTEs across the commission, the majority of which are within the commission's operating and legal services directorate.

The tight employment market presents challenges, particularly in acquiring appropriately experienced forensic accountants. However, the majority of roles are currently filled and the commissioner has recently recruited a new director of investigations, who has been tasked with reviewing the internal government structure to ensure that the unexplained wealth function is performing at its optimum.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Those figures do not actually equate to what is in the budget document. The number of people being recruited is a different figure from what is here. I am not sure that has happened yet.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** That is because some of them were internally funded and were allocated to the unexplained wealth function.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Were they involved in the assessing of allegations of serious misconduct or in the investigations thereof? Were they in a back room doing something else?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I will just let the chief executive officer explain it.

**Ms E. Johnson:** We obtained funding for the 16 FTEs. Those positions are largely filled. Is the member referring to the differential in the figure of 38 in the budget paper? The chief finance officer can jump in if I get this incorrect. The total number of our FTE is divided amongst the three services. It obviously covers our overheads as well. The reduction from service 2 is due to the fact that those overheads now also have to be spread across the third service that we were not previously attributing FTE to before. As the member can see, it was not applicable in the previous financial year.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** According to the budget documents, in 2022–23, there were 32 FTEs in service area 1, with 105 in service area 2, which is 137 FTEs. In this current year, with a full complement, there will be 77, 38 and 29, for a total of 144 FTEs. That is a lift of only seven, not 16.

**Ms E. Johnson:** That is due to vacancies in the other areas of the commission, not against the unexplained wealth function.

**Ms C.M. TONKIN:** The Attorney General has talked about the resourcing of the functions. I refer to page 474, which is about the investigation of unexplained wealth referrals. Can the Attorney General please provide an update on how the Corruption and Crime Commission has performed on the unexplained wealth function?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** The unexplained wealth function is to remove the financial incentive to criminal activity, particularly organised crime, to disrupt and deter it and to reduce harm in the community. For the first time, a four-year budget has been established, with \$12 million in total across the forward estimates, which we have already discussed. As Ms Johnson just explained, that will fund accommodation, personnel, information and physical assets.

The government approved recurrent funding for the commission's unexplained wealth function commencing in the 2023–24 financial year. As we have said, the funding supports 16 FTEs across the commission, the majority of which are within the commission's operations and legal services directorate. The tight employment market has presented serious challenges, especially in acquiring appropriately experienced forensic accountants. However, the majority of roles are currently filled and the commissioner has recently recruited a new director of investigations, who has been tasked with reviewing the internal government structure to ensure that the unexplained wealth function is performing at its optimum.

The commissioner has noted an increase in the sophistication of target tradecraft and the complexity of investigations in this area, particularly of those suspected of being involved in organised crime. They have developed their systems. This has seen the investigations and legal teams work closely to review existing case holdings and refocus and develop new investigation strategies. As a consequence of this, it is likely that a number of lengthy, less fruitful investigations will come to a close this financial year—some of the low-hanging fruit has already been picked.

During the financial year, the commission obtained an unexplained wealth declaration of, for example, \$450 000 against Mr Ronald Whyte, the brother of Paul Whyte. That was unexplained wealth. Substantial commission resourcing has continued to be dedicated to matters linked to the offending of Mr Paul Whyte. The commission currently has a gross figure of approximately \$3.6 million in frozen assets.

[2.20 pm]

**Ms L. METTAM:** Apologies if I missed it, but how many unexplained wealth referrals were there in 2023–24?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** We have those statistics, but I would have to take that on notice.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Or as supplementary information?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Does the member want that on notice?

**Ms L. METTAM:** Could we have, as supplementary information, the number of referrals and the number that were substantiated or not substantiated for the last three years?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Attorney General, are you happy to provide that information?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** We are happy to provide, for the last three years, the number of referrals —

**Ms L. METTAM:** And the numbers that were substantiated or discontinued.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** What the member is really looking for is how much was seized.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Yes.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** It will include how much was seized over those years.

[*Supplementary Information No A27.*]

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to the outcomes and key efficiency indicators at the very top of page 473 of budget paper No 2. The number of allegations received in 2022–23 was 5 895, yet the budgeted figure for 2023–24 is 3 000 and the estimated actual is 3 000. Can the Attorney General explain the variance between what was experienced in 2022–23 and what was estimated and budgeted for in 2023–24 and beyond?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I will defer to Ms Johnson.

**Ms E. Johnson:** In this financial year, the measurement of that indicator was amended. Previously, the commission would receive a notification or report and then draw a number of allegations from that. What we have done in the last financial year is to align and simplify that to match the definition in our legislation, which defines allegations as a notification, report, referral or own proposition. This means, necessarily, that there are fewer because we are counting the number that come in the door rather than what we subsequently extract. We think that is a more objective measure of the reports that we are receiving. That explains the reduction.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Is any reduction in workload expected in the year?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** The answer is no.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** If that is the case and there is no reduction, how will the Corruption and Crime Commission manage to handle that, given that the number of staff looking at those original assessments and then carrying through any that are deemed to be worth investigating has fallen from 105 plus 32 to 77 plus 29? There has been a substantial fall in the number of people operating in those two areas.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Through Ms Johnson.

**Ms E. Johnson:** There has been no real reduction in the number of staff working in those areas. I think I sat here and described the same situation last year. We continue to experience significant vacancies in our assessment area. That is the area in which we struggle to both attract and retain staff. It is a challenging area to work in. The work has continued to grow in complexity. The time taken to complete assessments has extended due to body-worn camera footage and those sorts of things. We continue to look for ways to recruit people. We have rigorous security vetting processes. We are looking at ways to speed them up, because often when we take people through a process, by the time we have finished our vetting they have accepted another role. We also have the limit in the legislation about staff being appointed for five years only—all staff. As the member can imagine, that presents a challenge to people leaving either the private sector or the commonwealth government to join our agency. We are turning our mind to whether that could be something we seek amendment to in the review of our act. There are a number of different factors and levers that we are trying to address, but it is quite a complicated issue.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** We have in the *Budget statements* the number of people who made allegations or the number of allegations received and we can extrapolate from that the number investigated as serious misconduct. Are records kept; and, if so, could the Attorney General provide the number of people who, instead of being pushed into the serious misconduct path, were referred to the Public Sector Commission for inquiry under a more minor misconduct path?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I would have to refer that one to Ms Johnson.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** If it is in the annual report, that is fine.

**Ms E. Johnson:** I do not know that it is, member, but we could look at that as a supplementary question and provide it if the Attorney General agrees.

**The CHAIR:** Does the Attorney General agree to provide supplementary information?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Yes. The supplementary information to be provided will be on how many came through the door with an allegation and, of those, how many were referred on to the Public Sector Commission.

[*Supplementary Information No A28.*]

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The Attorney General has referred in some of the answers to an increase in funds around unexplained wealth, yet when we look at the full picture of the three services together, we see on page 472 that the total cost was estimated to be \$32.595 million last year, it jumps up to \$34.227 million this year, but then there seems to be a decline in 2025–26. Can we get an understanding of why there is a decline—it is not a huge cliff—in the following year? Is there some cost to setting up the service? What is the reason for that?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Is the Leader of the Opposition talking about the total cost of services?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Yes, for those three service areas.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I wonder whether the chief financial officer could take that question, please.

[2.30 pm]

**Mr M. Squires:** In regard to the next year, 2024–25, we have additional funding through the streamlined budget process incentive funding of \$844 000 that uplifts our total cost of service. In the next year, the first out year in 2025–26, that funding has been removed subject to a further government decision and a continuance of that incentive funding, which contributes to that small decline.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I have a further question about what happens to allegations. The other question I forgot to ask is: of the allegations that are then investigated, is a record kept of what happens after the investigation—how many are dismissed and how many end up with a formal warning, sanction or some other action?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** This was reported on in the Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission report as tabled in this chamber. I do not have it with me at the moment.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I am not part of that joint standing committee.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** But the report was tabled and is available to the member.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Probably my mistake for not reading it.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to the relationship to government goals outlined on page 472 of the *Budget statements*. How many public authorities have put forth an allegation against an employee over the last financial year?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** How many public authorities have reported on their own employees?

**Ms L. METTAM:** Yes, have put forth an allegation.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Does the member mean an allegation that has passed assessment for investigation or just any allegation?

**Ms L. METTAM:** Let us have both; can we have both? How many allegations have been made against individuals and public authorities?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** We could not tell the member that this afternoon. We do not have the breakdown by agency. The estimated actual for 2023–24 is 3 000, but we do not have it broken down by agency.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Just to clarify, are they all allegations and are not substantiated?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** That is correct. I do not have them broken down by agency, member.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to page 472 of the *Budget statements* and under the heading “Relationship to Government Goals” is the government goal of safe, strong and fair communities and the desired outcome that integrity of the public sector continuously improves and the incidence of misconduct is reduced. In regard to that desired outcome, I refer to an article by Hamish Hastie published on WAtoday in March this year stating that the WA Corruption and Crime Commission boss who coordinated important networks resources had a three-year intimate relationship with a source. That does not strike me as being such a high standard of integrity. What measures were taken in the commission following the release of the report to ensure that its own processes were, shall we say, beyond reproach?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Several processes were reformed following that report, particularly those pertaining to officers who have personal contacts with targets, but I would rather that the chief executive officer, Ms Johnson, enumerate those, because although I know of several, I might miss one out.

**Ms E. Johnson:** Following the release of that report, as the member recalls, one recommendation was that the Corruption and Crime Commission undertake an internal review. The review is currently underway and it covers a range of issues, including governance, reporting mechanisms, leadership, culture and capability management. The human source unit in which this work was undertaken ceased its operations when this conduct became apparent in early 2023, and that area has not been conducting human source activities. We await the outcomes of the review, which is expected, and we are due to report to the joint standing committee by the end of September. We have made other changes internally to our governance structures and have established a specific team charged with looking at our governance risk management structure and applying more resources to it, as we await the outcome of the review. Mechanisms have already been put in place to stop that work and increase the oversight mechanisms over some of our other more sensitive operational capabilities.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** When the review is complete, who will it be made known to? Will it be made known to the Attorney General or the parliamentary inspector, or will it just be internalised within the CCC?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** It will be made known to the joint standing committee, so there will be parliamentary oversight of the recommendations of that report.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Would it then be up to the committee whether the review is released in full or only parts of it?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Correct. It may contain things to do with operational procedures and matters that we would not want widely published.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** When does the Attorney General anticipate that the review will be made available?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** The committee has requested that it be tabled by 30 September this year. The committee will report to Parliament after it has reviewed it.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Will the process be that the committee will report to Parliament and then the Attorney General will make a response—or what will happen?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** That is usually what happens. We have to put a response to tabled reports.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** It is due in September, so would that give the Attorney General enough time to respond before the final sitting of Parliament?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** As long as the committee gets on with this report.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

**Division 34: Parliamentary Inspector of the Corruption and Crime Commission —**

Mrs M.R. Marshall, Chair.

Mr J.R. Quigley, Attorney General.

Mr M. Zilko, SC, Parliamentary Inspector.

Mr R. Montilva, Acting Chief Finance Officer, Department of Justice.

Ms S. Burnside, Principal Adviser.

Mr J. Lee, Principal Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

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

I give the call to the Leader of the Opposition.

[2.40 pm]

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I will not waste any time. I refer to page 494 and the significant issue impacting the agency that the parliamentary inspector undertook two major reports. I referred to one of them in the previous hearing about the situation with the commission staff member, which was released in March of this year. There was another report of 27 November 2023 that had some rather strong language about a disagreement with the commission over some matters to do with the Craig Peacock situation. They are on the public record and I am sure people can read those; I will not go into the details of them so much. If we look at page 496 and the services and key efficiency indicators, we see that the budget is only gradually creeping up from \$746 000 to \$953 000 to perform these functions with two FTE operating. I assume one of them is the parliamentary inspector?

**Mr M. Zilko:** Yes.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The parliamentary inspector and one other officer are the entirety of the staff of the parliamentary inspector's office. Can the parliamentary inspector tell me just how stretched he was to be able to produce those two quite significant reports—or I can ask through the Attorney General? Could the Attorney General tell me just how stretched that office was to produce those two reports given that it perhaps has other matters that it needs to address throughout the year as part of its functions?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Certainly, but the member has raised two matters and they are quite different. In relation to the *Going rogue: Serious misconduct by a commission officer* report, the parliamentary inspector utilised forensic abilities at the Corruption and Crime Commission itself in private hearing rooms assisted by the Corruption and Crime Commissioner, but at all times overseen and supervised by the parliamentary inspector. He had the resources there. If I may, I will let Mr Zilko, the parliamentary inspector, explain further the review of the complaint brought by Mr Peacock.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Zilko.

**Mr M. Zilko:** Thank you, Attorney. Mr Love, I will deal with the Peacock matter first in time. Mr Peacock complained to me that he had been dealt with poorly, if we can use that term, in terms of the report made about him by the commission. I had to make some inquiries, and they are set out in my report. They involved contacting the Embassy of Japan in Australia, the Australian Taxation Office, the Consulate-General of Japan in Perth and so on. I also interviewed a few people whom I identified previously, being the previous trade commissioner from Western Australia and a previous New South Wales trade commissioner. That did not take a lot of my time. I was happy to do it myself, with the assistance of Ms Burnside. To get it done, I am pleased to say we worked to do what was needed. If we need to do a bit more, we do a bit more. I can honestly say that I did not feel at any stage that we were under stress insofar as an absence of support staff was concerned. If I had felt that, I would have contacted the Solicitor-General and asked him to make more people available. The Department of Justice provides all my accounting and IT requirements. If we have a problem with our computers, we ring up and seem to get streamlined service, which the member would probably not be surprised about. Somebody comes down immediately and sorts it out. Our auditing and all that sort of thing is also sorted out. That means Ms Burnside, who is a lawyer, too, by training, and I can concentrate entirely on, if you like, the nuts and bolts of complaints. It was not difficult to do.

In terms of the *Going rogue* report, I discussed with the commissioner the idea that he should undertake the investigatory process in the first instance. I could have done it. The member may recall that one of my predecessors, Mr Malcolm McCusker, KC, undertook an inquiry using his own resources, and so did Mr Steytler, KC, who is a former Court of Appeal judge. They undertook the process on their own account. On those occasions, both Mr McCusker and Mr Steytler employed external lawyers and briefed external counsel from the bar. I could have done that, but because a lot of forensic material was required to be examined, including reviewing thousands of phone calls, text messages and other types of messages, I decided that the best way forward was to let the commission do it. But I attended all the hearings and listened to all the evidence. In fact, I asked some questions myself. At the end of the inquiry, it was then handed over to me for the purpose of reporting to ensure that there was no conflict of interest at any stage by the commissioner, with him being both the employer of this officer and judging them at the same time. I had no sense that there was any contradiction of what he and I were doing. The commission cooperated fully with me. I could not have done it, I think, by engaging external solicitors and external counsel because I would still have had to go back to the commission to get its forensic material. It was only there, and there alone, that I could source what I needed. I could have engaged forensic accountants and asked them to go into the commission, but it would have created a longer and more cumbersome process. I think we worked fairly quickly in the sense that the officer was sacked in March 2023 and I was able to get that report out by March 2024. In fact, the commission completed its inquiry by November 2023. Between November and March, I was able to get my report out with their assistance. I was not under any stress. If I felt I was at any stage, I would be the first to ask the Solicitor-General for more resources.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** How does the Attorney General respond to requests from the parliamentary inspector for those extra resources? What is the process? The parliamentary inspector referred to potentially having hired other resources. Would that be an approach made to the Attorney and what is the process for his considering any extra resources required?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** The parliamentary inspector is an officer of this Parliament. If a person of that seniority approaches the Solicitor-General, I get a recommendation from the Solicitor-General and I would follow his recommendation. I am sure that the Solicitor-General would want the office to be functioning as this Parliament intended. There has never been a withholding of funds from either the commission upon request or from the parliamentary inspector. The member might recall from the previous discussion on the topic of unexplained wealth that the commissioner originally came to me and said, “It’s dormant. If you give me a little bit of resource, I can fire it up and make it almost self-funding and we can prove it up over a couple of years.” We now have it as service area 3. We have never withheld resourcing from either the CCC or the Office of the Parliamentary Inspector of the Corruption and Crime Commission.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** In regard to the matters we have just been discussing, I think the Attorney General said the CCC report or review that has been undertaken would go to the committee of oversight—namely, the review of *Going rogue*.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** The review of the human sources.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Yes. That was spoken about following that particular matter. Will that be reviewed by the parliamentary inspector as a matter of routine before it goes to committee or is there any process that involves the parliamentary inspector in that matter, because he had been involved in the undertaking of the original inquiry?



[2.50 pm]

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I will refer that to the Parliamentary Inspector of the Corruption and Crime Commission.

**Mr M. Zilko:** I think I can answer that. Firstly, I would like to clarify something. In my report, I recommended that the Corruption and Crime Commission undertake a review of what had gone wrong. Nobody can deny that it went badly wrong, but it was fixable, in my view. I think I said in the sixth paragraph in my report that I did not identify any systemic problems at the commission, but that this one had gone wrong. The commission has commenced an investigation into what occurred. It has halted all human-source activity until it is completed. My report requests that it table its investigation and findings with the Parliament. I assume that when the Attorney General refers to it going to the Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission, that is shorthand for it coming to the Parliament. I would expect the joint standing committee to table it in full. I do not think it would have any right to table bits and pieces of it. I expect it to go fully to the Parliament.

In answer to the member's specific question, I expect that the commission would confer with me before giving it to the joint standing committee so that I could be satisfied that what I had asked for had been completed. If there is any indication that it is not going to contact me, I will put my hand up and say, "I would like to be contacted." The deadline put by the joint standing committee on that is 30 September. I expect the Corruption and Crime Commissioner to see me shortly before that with what is expected to be the final report. If I do not hear from the commissioner, I will be in touch with him.

**The CHAIR:** A new question from the Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** It is sort of new and sort of old. We were talking before about the Corruption and Crime Commission's *Report on the WA commissioner in Japan*, and the fact that the Attorney General has made his views known to the commission. There was a difference in view on whether or not the commission had acted appropriately.

**The CHAIR:** Sorry, member. Can you draw us to a page for that?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I am sorry; I should be referring to the Attorney General.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, and can you draw us to a page for your question?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I am talking about the same area of integrity that I referred to before. I refer to the first paragraph under "Significant Issues Impacting the Agency" on page 494. It is the same issue; I thought we would break up the question. In terms of the commissioner's response in that report, does the Attorney General have any concerns about the fact that there seems to be a disagreement between the parliamentary inspector and the commission on the appropriateness of some of the matters, as outlined in that report?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** No, I do not. I think that the parliamentary inspector arrived objectively at his view. For example, the parliamentary inspector disagreed with the comments around the target evading taxation. The commissioner, on the other hand, as I understand it, took the view that it was not a crime. He did not find that there was tax evasion, so much as an issue of credibility in several of Mr Peacock's given answers. It is not unusual at law that, for example, an appeal court may take a different view from a trial judge as to a charge and then a jury. This is not unusual in our profession, but there was nothing in the parliamentary inspector's report that would require the government or the Parliament to seek some sort of further explanation from the CCC.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Does the Attorney General feel that that does not require any further action on his part?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** No, it does not. The main thing is that it all had to be ventilated and it has been. There is no action for the government to take. I should add that we got a lot of money back from Mr Peacock—hundreds of thousands.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to service 1, "Evaluation of the Effectiveness and Appropriateness of Corruption and Crime Commission Operations" on page 496. Does the Attorney General believe that the Corruption and Crime Commission has been operating appropriately?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Yes, I do. If the member is asking me whether it is my belief that the CCC has been acting appropriately, the answer is 100 per cent. I have been critical of the CCC—very critical of the CCC—under previous commissioners, but not all of them. I have not been shy, as a member of this chamber, in criticising when it was deserved. I do not have any criticism of the CCC at the moment. I think it is doing a sterling job.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to the line item on accommodation expenses in the second table on page 496. Can the Attorney General please outline what those accommodation expenses relate to? Are they part of a salary package?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I ask "Mr Rodolfo", the chief finance officer, to respond to the member please.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Montilva?

**Mr R. Montilva:** Yes, it is not a problem.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Sorry! I said "Mr Rodolfo". I used his Christian name because that is what I call him. It is Mr Montilva; I am so sorry.

**Mr R. Montilva:** Thank you. That line in the budget is for the rent that gets paid for office accommodation that is leased under a memorandum of understanding with the Department of Finance. That is the cost of the lease, and I believe it includes a car bay and a variety of outgoings such as cleaning, electricity and those sorts of things. It is a small office, so I do not expect those costs to increase.

**Ms L. METTAM:** What does the line item “Other expenses” include?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I ask Mr Montilva to ventilate that, please.

**Mr R. Montilva:** This service is more for incidentals such as copying, office utilities and the like. I will need to run a report to see the record of those costs, but it is usually for routine expenses, not salary costs.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Thank you.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

**Division 27: Justice — Services 1 to 7, Attorney General —**

Mrs M.R. Marshall, Chair.

Mr J.R. Quigley, Attorney General.

Ms K. Maj, Acting Director General.

Dr J. Byrne, Equal Opportunity Commissioner.

Ms J. Stampalia, Deputy Director General, Court and Tribunal Services.

Ms K. Kraszlan, Commissioner for Victims of Crime.

Ms G. Hill, Acting Deputy Director General, Strategic Reform.

Ms J. Kingston, Executive Director, Strategy and Engagement.

Mr T. Clark, Deputy Director General, Corporate Services.

Ms H. De Brito, Director, Legal Aid.

Ms Y. Zhou, Manager of Strategy, Budgeting and Reporting, Legal Aid.

Mr M. Hainsworth, Executive Director, Advisory Services.

Mr R. Montilva, Acting Executive Director, Finance.

Mr J. Lee, Principal Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

I give the call to the member for Vasse.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to page 423 and the government’s goals about safe, strong and fair communities. Why is there no funding in the budget for today’s announcement about the stop-and-search laws?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** The stop-and-search laws?

**Ms L. METTAM:** The knife laws that were announced today.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Firstly, no stop-and-search laws are being introduced. There is a proposal to introduce a law to enable police to wand people in designated areas to see whether they are carrying metal. That may then give rise to a reasonable suspicion, which could require a further search, such as turning out someone’s pockets. There is no funding in the budget because there is no law at this stage—only a proposal. The proposal will entail some officers having wands. We cannot put a line item in the budget for a law that does not exist. We have announced the intention. In any event, it will not be an expense borne by the Department of Justice. It will be a policing matter.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Given that the proposal is for these wands, surely that would be in the budget. The Attorney General stated that it would be a police matter. When the Attorney General referred to such matters in 2009, he was explicit that it would be in the province of the Attorney General. Why is there no reference to the proposed knife laws in the budget, whether under the Attorney General, the Department of Justice or another area?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I do not know what was said in 2009. That was to do with the Liberal government's failed attempt to introduce stop-and-search laws, which the conservative-controlled Legislative Council rejected. What is being proposed now —

**Ms L. METTAM:** But the Attorney General rejected it too.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** May I finish my answer, member? What is being proposed is an amendment to the Criminal Investigation Act, which is within the portfolio of the Minister for Police. I cannot go any further.

**Ms L. METTAM:** The Attorney General stated at the time that such laws would ordinarily be in the province of the Attorney General. Are we not looking at something very similar?

**Ms C.M. ROWE:** I have a point of order. Chair, this has nothing to do with the estimates that we are here to discuss today. There is no budget line item. The member is discussing a bill that is yet to come to Parliament.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. I think that is correct. I ask the member to move on to a new question.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Further —

**The CHAIR:** We need a line item to further discuss.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Can I confirm that in relation to safe, strong and fair communities, there is no reference to what was announced today?

**The CHAIR:** I think the Attorney General already answered that question, but I will give him an opportunity to respond, if he would like.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** What was announced yesterday will build a safer, stronger community—full stop.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Will we see the legislation this year in Parliament?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** The member will have to ask the Minister for Police.

**Ms C.M. ROWE:** I have a point of order.

**The CHAIR:** A point of order has to be heard in silence. Member for Belmont.

**Ms C.M. ROWE:** There is no line item that the member is referring to that is relevant to this session.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. I uphold that and ask the member to move on to a new question, please.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to page 422 and significant issue 9. During the family and domestic violence estimates hearing, the Minister for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence referred all questions regarding the tracking of perpetrators to this hearing. Why is there no funding for additional GPS ankle bracelets for perpetrators in either the FDV or the justice budget?

[3.10 pm]

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I will refer that to the acting director general.

**Ms K. Maj:** The legislation that is being worked on at the moment is in the Attorney General's portfolio. In addition to that, the department is preparing a funding submission for the associated costs. A lot of those sit outside that portfolio. The device is specifically for corrective services, but I can say that corrective services has sufficient devices and support services available at the moment to meet current demand. They are also arranged via a lease, so as soon as the submission is considered and funding is allocated, we will be able to scale that up. The submission will also cover associated costs, not just the devices. The member will recall from the evaluation that was tabled in Parliament last year that there were other components specifically around community supervision, services for victims and the like, as well as extra police. All of that will be considered in the funding submission. Until we have a draft bill, we cannot work out exactly the impact on resourcing. That is being done concurrently. My understanding is that the resourcing will be allocated and provided in time for the legislative reforms.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Can the Attorney General confirm that there will be additional costs? I guess that because it was left to this stage, there is no funding in the budget. Had the legislation been proposed sooner, it might have been included in the budget.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I am advised that the cost of leasing one of these devices—they are not purchased; they are leased—is the equivalent of about three cappuccinos a day. That is about \$20 a day. I remind the member that GPS tracking devices in these circumstances are an initiative of the Labor government. They had never been used before. When the member says that they had been thought of before, as the member knows, we had to introduce a trial and wait for the return of the results of that trial. When the trial was completed, I tabled the report in this Parliament and the member saw it. We then moved on to the implementation of laws in other areas to utilise this. If the member's question is designed to say that we are ill prepared or it has not been properly funded, she is barking up the wrong tree.

**Ms L. METTAM:** We have heard much from different ministers throughout the estimates process who have provided line items for funds that they anticipate spending. Given that this trial finished in 2023, there has been

a considerable amount of time since the trial started. I ask the question: why have we left this so late? Why is no funding allocated in this budget? It appears that it has not been a priority. The government has an understanding of the cost.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** The question is to me. The member's question was framed inaccurately. I will give it to her that she probably did not mean it and it was just slackness. However, when she said that the trial was completed in 2023, as I said to her in answer to questions in this chamber, there was another period after the trial had concluded for reporting, for compiling the report and for tabling in this chamber as soon as it was finished. We then made the decision that the trial had proven the equipment in circumstances of domestic violence tracking, so we put forward our proposal for a bill. There is no problem. It was all taken care of.

**Ms L. METTAM:** When can we expect to see the legislation in Parliament and why is there no reference to it in the budget?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Imminently.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Imminently. Is the Attorney General concerned about how slow he has been to —

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Slow? We have been like greased lightning, madam! The Liberals were here for eight years and did not use GPS tracking. People were absconding on bail and committing crimes. I am not going to have it that it was so slow. I am not going to truck this nonsense in the middle of estimates. We did a trial to see whether it could be used and used effectively. A report came in and we tabled it in Parliament as soon as it came in. We then went about the business of preparing legislation to introduce mandatory imprisonment for removing a tracking device. One rooster was charged with that just last week. The bill made the devices mandatory for people who had been convicted of family and domestic violence offences. We have acted with speed that leaves the conservatives in the dust. They did not do anything for eight years!

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** I take the Attorney General to page 424 of budget paper No 2 under “Outcomes and Key Effectiveness Indicators”. People who have experienced unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation have avenues for redress. The effectiveness indicator percentage of complaints finalised within 12 months has a footnote that states —

... the scope of complaints considered when calculating this indicator will include complaints where the Commissioner did not accept lodgement.

How many complaints are not accepted by the commissioner? How does this compare with complaints that are accepted? What are the reasons that complaints are not accepted? Why are they now being included in the number of complaints when calculating effectiveness and efficiency indicators?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Thank you, member. I defer to the Commissioner for Equal Opportunity. I made an oversight: each year in the estimates committee in the Department of Justice division, members ask questions relating to equal opportunities first because the commissioner has a Hansard reporter with him. I ask members to deal with the Equal Opportunity Commission at this point. It is a convenient time because the question has been asked.

[3.20 pm]

**Dr J. Byrne:** I want everyone to know that I am profoundly deaf. I can hear nothing at all. I have been totally deaf since I was a child. I would like to thank the committee and the chair for the accommodations made for my disability.

In response to the question, the Equal Opportunity Act 1984 requires complaints to be in writing. In 2021–22, the number of written complaints that were not accepted by the commission was 278, compared with 554 accepted complaints. In 2022–23, written complaints not accepted were 166, compared with 469 accepted. For the current financial year to 30 April, 148 written complaints were not accepted and 331 were accepted. Complaints are not accepted if they do not disclose unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation. The majority of complaints not accepted relate to bullying, which is not conduct covered by the Equal Opportunity Act unless it relates to a ground and area that is covered. For example, a complaint of sexual harassment that involves bullying will be accepted. A minority of complaints relate to conduct that is not unlawful under the current act, but the Law Reform Commission review of the act recommended that these should be unlawful under the new act.

The higher number of complaints in 2021–22 was a result of COVID complaints. The complaints were not accepted by the commission due to emergency measures that disallowed complaints against the vaccine mandates. A significant amount of work is often required by the commission before it declines to accept a complaint. More information is often required from the person who lodged the complaint, and often the commission's legal officers need to assess whether the complaint is within the scope of the act. If the complaint is not accepted, the complainant is advised about other complaint-handling bodies that may be able to accept and address the complaint.

In the past, written complaints not accepted have been classified as inquiries and included in the inquiries section of the annual report. Some written complaints not accepted are quite complex and quite contentious with the complainant. This was particularly the case with COVID complaints. The Law Reform Commission in its review of the Equal Opportunity Act commented on complaints not accepted. In view of these points, as Commissioner

for Equal Opportunity, I have asked the government to consider that accountability and transparency will be improved if written complaints not accepted are included in complaints when reporting on complaints in the annual report and in reporting on the efficiency and effectiveness indicators.

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Dr Byrne. Are there any other questions for the Commissioner for Equal Opportunity?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Are there any questions in the equal opportunity space?

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** One further question, Attorney. Could the commissioner perhaps outline the program of works for the next 12 months in terms of priorities for the commission and around reports being considered and the work it will turn its mind to?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I will refer to the commissioner if he heard the question sufficiently.

**Dr J. Byrne:** We are continuing our work on sexual harassment following the excellent work done by the *Enough is enough* report and the federal *Respect@work* report. I am on a national committee that is implementing some of those findings. I am not representing myself; I am representing the Australian Council of Human Rights Authorities. That remains a significant focus, and there are indications already that the number of complaints to the human rights bodies are declining, but it is not clear yet whether the decline is statistically significant. That is one of my major focuses. The other one is that the government has indicated that a new Equal Opportunity Act will come in some time after the next election if the government is re-elected. We are gearing up and working towards the education program. We have funds for that. We have people working on the new brochures and information sheets and information program for when that new act comes in.

**The CHAIR:** Are there any further questions for the Equal Opportunity Commissioner?

**Ms C.M. TONKIN:** I have a question through the Attorney General, of course. On page 425 of the budget papers, I note the Equal Opportunity Commission's indicator of timelines of complaints finalised. Noting the Equal Opportunity Commission transitioned to the Department of Justice several years ago, may I have an update on the outcome of the transition and any impact on the commission's ability to deliver its services?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Could I defer to the Commissioner for Equal Opportunity, please, Dr Byrne.

**Dr J. Byrne:** Thank you for the question. The Equal Opportunity Commission transitioned to the Department of Justice on 1 December 2020. This machinery-of-government change was initiated by me as commissioner to improve access to corporate services and reduce the risk of noncompliance with the many requirements placed on independent agencies. I am very grateful that the then director general and corporate services people accepted my request to join them. I am eternally grateful for that! The minister also supported that, too. The Equal Opportunity Commission was experiencing difficulty in providing its own payroll, finance services, information technology and procurement to its 20 staff and was seeking economies of scale from the transition. The transition has been successful. Among other things, the EOC no longer relies on its own legacy systems for managing complaints and it has a secure access to the Department of Justice integrated court management system. There is still one small legacy system for management of external training. A project is underway to transition this system to a product managed by the Department of Justice.

The transition has eliminated many risks of system failure and noncompliance that were of concern when the EOC was a standalone agency and has facilitated significant improvement in productivity and job satisfaction. Productivity improvements have been applied to the public-facing functions by increasing staffing of the external training function and the conciliation function and has allowed us to gear up and get ready for the new act—so that we will not be seeking funding, at least initially, for that purpose. The transition has shown that an independent statutory office holder can remain fully independent in the performance of the statutory functions under relevant legislation, but does not require the cost and risk of being the CEO of a small independent agency. That risk, frankly, is really quite high.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Any more questions?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** May the Commissioner for Equal Opportunity be excused?

**The CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Thank you, members.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Dr Byrne. I call the member for Vasse.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to service 1, “Court and Tribunal Services”, on page 424. I note that the budget was \$464 million, but the estimated actual was \$42 million more. How can the Attorney General be confident that the forecast for 2024–25 will come in lower and fall in subsequent years when it increased so much last year?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** The increase in the total cost between the 2023–24 budget and the 2023–24 estimated actual of \$41 million is primarily due to the higher than expected criminal injuries compensation payments of \$38 million

and increased workers compensation insurance of \$4 million. The increase of \$41 million in the total cost between the 2023–24 budget and the 2024–25 budget year is primarily due to higher than expected criminal injuries compensation payments of \$13 million; increased costs of \$7 million for items including services and contracts due to cost and demand factors; \$2 million for accused cost grants in the courts of petty sessions; \$2 million for building rentals; \$1 million for court security and custodial services; and \$1 million for costs associated with the implementation of the new Criminal Law (Mental Impairment) Act 2023. Courts and tribunal services in particular are facing higher demand and numbers of complex multiple-accused trials. These big drug trials are resulting in increased service costs right across the department.

[3.30 pm]

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to the same page, 424, and the target for the time to trial for District Court cases. I note that the reason for the 2023–24 estimated actual being higher than the 2024–25 budget target is an ongoing increase in the demand for trials and pre-trial determinations and an increase in the number of multiple-accused trials and the complexity of cases. I imagine that these issues are not going away. Given that, how can the Attorney General ensure that the 2024–25 target will be achieved?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I will refer this to Ms Stampalia.

**Ms J. Stampalia:** As the member can see from the budget papers, the target is 32 weeks. We know that we are unlikely to meet the target in 2024–25 because we are operating at a projected number of 67 weeks in accordance with the budget papers. We are working very closely with the judiciary on how we manage listing practices within the courts to maximise the number of trials that can be dealt with. Given the complexities that were outlined in the variation explanation, it will remain a challenge.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Can the Attorney General explain what he means by the complexity?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Sorry?

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to the complexity and the challenges that are leading to longer times to trial. What sorts of complexities are we talking about that were not there before?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** One of the complexities is what the previous conservative government did with the David Malcom Justice Centre. It put all these courtrooms in, but the government of the day forbade criminal trials, family court trials or anything to do with persons. It can deal only with civil matters. We have this tower that could accommodate more trials if it were not for the silly lease that the previous government entered into that banned criminal trials being held there.

One of the complexities is that when there are trials involving homicide or drug trafficking offences that carry a life penalty, they have to be tried in the Supreme Court. The previous government did not think about this and did not provide any hearing rooms for the Supreme Court. On an ad hoc basis, it has to displace the District Court to have trials in the building. It is always hard to predict what that demand is going to be. We have a limited number of courts that can hold big trials. What I mean by “big trials” are those with multiple accused and multiple counsel. They cannot be held in little hearing rooms; they need the big hearing rooms. The Supreme Court has to sit in the District Court and bump the District Court. That is one of the complexities.

**Ms L. METTAM:** What is the Attorney General doing to address those complexities so that the target can be met?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I will deal with that. The complexity is the error made by the former government in building a huge courtroom in which it could not hold a criminal trial. The member will recall that about two budgets ago, there was an allocation for a business case for a new court building to see what we could do about this. The business case has been worked up and the department is looking at possible solutions on an ongoing basis.

**Ms L. METTAM:** When was the business case completed?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** It is before the cabinet at the moment for consideration.

**Ms L. METTAM:** We are in the second half of the year and are about to go into the winter recess. If this is such a big issue, is the funding in the budget?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** The funding for?

**Ms L. METTAM:** The funding for what the business case proposes as a solution to these significant issues. We are in the second half of the last year of this term.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** There are a number of potential solutions. They remain very confidential because there are landowners involved. They are commercial-in-confidence until the required processes are complete, including the cabinet processes. The member would appreciate the need for confidentiality around those. Work is underway and is funded by the allocation from before. It is a big problem for government.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Like the GPS trackers, will the Attorney General commit to this funding before the end of Parliament this year?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I am not prepared to say when cabinet will land upon a solution.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Are any other solutions being worked on to address these complex problems? We are talking about a significant reduction in the target.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Yes, there are other solutions. They are being led by our wonderful Chief Justice. He leads by example. He is a wonderful Chief Justice. Although he is the Chief Justice of Western Australia and sits in the Supreme Court, he allocates some of his time to do District Court trials to set an example for other judges of the Supreme Court to do District Court trials to try to work away at this time-to-trial issue.

I am sure the director of court services might have something to add on these matters. I turn to Ms Stampalia.

**Ms J. Stampalia:** I will just elaborate a little bit more on the complexity. Part of the complexity that comes from outside the Department of Justice is around offending and some of the technology presenting around alleged offending. The other element is police investigations, which bring a lot of extra features to the number of matters that are dealt with by the court, particularly around pre-trials. We are looking at innovative ways to work with others within the system.

The other things that the court has been doing relate to scheduling longer circuit sittings to maximise the possibilities in some of the regions and increasing the number of weeks when required in those particular locations. Over the last few years, when we know that a judicial officer is retiring, we have had support to advance the replacement and have an overlap of about six months. That assists in the resourcing for the court as well. As the Attorney General outlined, we also have other courts assisting to provide facilities. We also have two courts in Central Law Courts that are made available to the District Court for sittings. They have had a significant increase in usage in more recent times.

[3.40 pm]

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I might add that this government has been appointing so many judges to try to solve the problem where we have accommodation, we now have a lesser pool of senior counsel because so many seniors in the profession have now been appointed. That means that accused people may have selected their counsel but counsel might not be available that month. I have seen instances in which the court has refused to accommodate an appropriate accused getting senior counsel. That has led to dreadful messes and appeals and everything. The profession itself, at the upper levels, is being tested because we have appointed so many judicial officers.

**Ms L. METTAM:** How much additional funding has been allocated to ensure that this target is achieved? We are going from an actual of 67 weeks down to 32 weeks. The target is amongst these challenges. The Attorney General said there is a business case but there is no allocation of funding. The Attorney General has talked about a range of challenges. Is the Attorney General confident that the target will be achieved?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** No. Have a look at the previous year, member. The previous year was 69 weeks with a budget of 32 weeks and then it was 67 weeks with a budget of 32 weeks. That is a target that we ask the court to work towards achieving. We do not want to lift that up. We do not want Your Honours to think they have hit easy street or anything like that. I have to tell the member that the feedback I get from recently appointed judges who were barristers is that they did not anticipate that they would be working so hard, so continuously. The Chief Judge tries to get to this target by having rolling lists and double listing trials on the anticipation that one will fall through and the other one will be taken up. This causes a problem for not only the courts but also the next division, the Director of Public Prosecutions. They are thrashing themselves to try to get this work done. We are not going to lift the target. We have a target and we say, "Work harder."

**Ms L. METTAM:** I know the Attorney General cannot identify the site at this stage or confirm whether it will be before the end of the year, but can the Attorney General clarify what the business case is for? Is it for another court?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I have said publicly before that what this city needs is another building—a tower.

**Ms L. METTAM:** In the city?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Yes. It needs it. With the tower that we are locked into, we have the courts but we are not allowed to use them.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Excuse my ignorance here, but what is the anticipated value for this?

**Ms C.M. ROWE:** The member has not identified any line item.

**The CHAIR:** I think it is still relevant. I will allow the Attorney General to make up his mind about whether he will respond.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Was the question: have we anticipated what we need?

**Ms L. METTAM:** Yes. Is there an anticipation of the value of the additional infrastructure that will be required?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** No. There are so many different options to try to get the outcome that no, I cannot. That would be for cabinet consideration.

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** I take the Attorney General to the significant issues impacting the agency on page 422 of budget paper No 2. Paragraph 10 is about the Office of the Commissioner for Victims of Crime and the National Redress Scheme. In reference to sexual violence reform and the Law Reform Commission of Western Australia's *Project 113: Sexual offences: Final report*, could the Attorney General explain what the government is doing to improve outcomes for victim-survivors and to progress the 134 recommendations contained within the final report?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** The member might recall that it was only last week, on 15 May, that I tabled the Law Reform Commission's project 113 report to which the member referred. In February 2022, I asked the commission to review chapter XXXI of the Criminal Code Act Compilation Act 1913 as well as sections 186, 191 and 192 of the code, and to provide advice on possible amendments. The report made a total of 134 recommendations aimed at enhancing and updating sexual offence provisions in Western Australia so that they reflect community expectations regarding sexual offences. These recommendations were informed by consultation with a broad range of stakeholders, including legal and judicial stakeholders, other organisations and individuals, including victim-survivors. The commission's report provides a framework for legislating an affirmative action model of consent. Key recommendations include amending the definition of "consent", improving the directions given to juries in sexual assault trials, restructuring offences and increasing maximum penalties. The government has provided in-principle support to modernising Western Australia's laws on sexual offences and legislating an affirmative action consent model to better reflect community standards, support victim-survivors and deliver just outcomes. The Law Reform Commission of Western Australia recommends substantial amendments to the law that raise very complex issues that require careful consideration. Work has commenced to carefully consider each of the 134 recommendations in detail. Further consultation with stakeholders will need to be undertaken once the government arrives at draft laws in this area.

The reform of Western Australia's criminal laws is complemented by other important initiatives being implemented by the government to improve outcomes for victim-survivors of sexual offences. These include the development of a sexual violence prevention and response strategy that will take a whole-of-government approach to preventing and addressing the impact of sexual violence in the community and will guide prevention, intervention and service delivery. Another review, separate from project 113, is being undertaken by the Office of the Commissioner for Victims of Crime. The commissioner is leading a review into the experience of sexual violence victim-survivors in the criminal justice system. The review will examine the complete process, from a victim reporting an offence to the police through to the time the offender is released from custody—that is end to end, member. The experiences and needs of diverse groups of victim-survivors will be considered to identify opportunities for improvements in the system.

[3.50 pm]

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I am not sure where this goes, but I will give it a burl. I refer to services to government under outcomes, services and key performance information on page 423 of the *Budget statements*. My question is about the legislation governing the Corruption and Crime Commission, so the act, which I understand falls under the Department of Justice. Is there work being done on reviewing, updating or amending the CCC legislation?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Yes—within the department.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** How is that progressing?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** It is progressing well.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Are we likely to see it before the end of this term of Parliament?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I do not think so because it will then have to go to the committee. I think it will be a new committee.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** So is it highly unlikely that we will see any updated legislation for the CCC in the remainder of this parliamentary term?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Does the member mean the legislation or the review?

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I mean the legislation.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** No, the legislation book is full.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** So there will be no more legislation.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** There will be heaps more legislation, but I do not have the report to get the drafting instructions to get the legislation in. There is lots of legislation that the member will get to review before we both retire from this chamber.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I do not think there are enough days left!

Will the review be completed so the proposed changes can be made public prior to the end of this term?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** We are looking at updating and modernising the act. There will not be a review paper published. It is a review to see what we can do to update and modernise the act.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** When did that work start?



**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** It was sometime after Mr McKechnie came back, I believe. I cannot tell the member exactly when it started. It is a substantial body of work. I think it was after Mr McKechnie returned to the position.

**Ms M. BEARD:** The question I want to ask refers to page 421 of the *Budget statements*. I refer to the second last line item, “Temporary Regional Incentives”, which is obviously why it does not extend past 2025–26. Can the Attorney General give an explanation about what that relates to?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I have it. It is \$595 million and goes to \$598 million in 2024–25. The department will spend an additional \$1.2 million over 2023–24 and 2024–25 to fund temporary regional incentives relating to temporary regional attraction and retention incentives for specific occupational groups in the hard-to-fill regional locations. For an expanded answer and more information on regional incentives, I ask Mr Clark whether he can contribute and improve my answer.

**Mr T. Clark:** The regional incentives were designed to spend money to attract and retain people in those hard-to-fill places. The places we looked at and that have been funded are as follows. In Kalgoorlie, we have nurses, youth justice officers and courts and tribunal occupations. They are getting incentives of around \$13 000 a year. In Derby, there are some courts occupations. In Halls Creek and Kununurra, there are youth justice officers. In Roebourne, Karratha and South Hedland, there are some courts occupations. In Broome, there are some nurses and youth justice officers. In Geraldton, there are nurses, youth justice officers and courts and tribunal occupations. We have criteria for those payments, and they are single retention payments following 12 months of service. They are to be paid only to occupations that include client-facing service delivery functions. They are identified as a separate benefit, do not form part of the employee’s contract of employment and are not paid to employees on extended leave such as long service leave. They are paid on top of all other employment benefits.

**Ms M. BEARD:** Is it envisaged that this will need to be extended beyond the funding that has been provided in the budget? Is there a big uptake on the incentive scheme?

**Mr T. Clark:** We have the \$1.2 million funding. This is obviously designed to attract people to those areas. I think the government would look at whether there needs to be an extension, and it would be based on assessment. We went through quite a vigorous assessment of occupations for which we find it hard to attract and retain people. If there were an extension of that payment and extra money, we would go through exactly the same process and identify where we really need forward-facing, client-focused occupations with attraction and retention problems.

**Ms M. BEARD:** Is there a big uptake? Is the budget being exhausted or is the incentive not attracting people? Is it effective?

**Mr T. Clark:** The staff receiving these payments are extremely happy that they are receiving them. As far as we have seen, they have had a positive effect on staff we currently have. We are only part way through this program, so it would be something we identify and report back to government about. We have reporting requirements back to government. We will report back and at that point I would imagine we would know whether the program had been successful. As the member is aware, some jobs in regional areas are particularly hard to staff, especially in courts, and that has a big impact on the service provided. I expect these payments will be made and we would then be in position to assess whether we would go back to government and request that the program be extended. But we have only \$1.2 million at this stage.

**Ms M. BEARD:** The premise of my question is that some people have given me feedback that although they value the \$13 000, the cost of living in the locations they are going to is such that the payment is not enough of an incentive. Is there scope to look at changing that?

**Mr T. Clark:** As I said, it is really for government to make a decision once we have reviewed the process. However, there are a number of incentive payments for different groups of staff in regional areas either covered by the industrial agreements or district allowances, for instance, or certain regional incentives. For example, Government Regional Officers’ Housing is provided to people who work in the regions. There are other incentives and payments like travel payments. There are special payments for people to come back to the Perth metropolitan area if they need specialist medical treatment. As I said, we will have to see whether these payments have been successful. We are certainly aware that it is difficult to recruit people into certain regional jobs. We have been through a considerable time in which it has been difficult to recruit people generally, and there has been a relatively high turnover of staff because of the market we have had. As the member said, these payments have certainly been very welcome by the people who have received them.

*Meeting suspended from 3.59 to 4.09 pm*

[Ms M.M. Quirk took the chair.]

**The CHAIR:** Who has the call? The member for Belmont.

**Ms C.M. ROWE:** I refer to page 422 of the budget papers. It recognises the department’s focus on Closing the Gap outcomes. How does the successful long-running Aboriginal justice open days program, which we had recently in Belmont and were hugely successful, contribute to the Department of Justice’s responsibilities under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Yes. Could I ask my adviser Gina Hill to proffer an answer to the chamber?

**Ms G. Hill:** Aboriginal Justice open days promote access to government and non-government services for Aboriginal people who face difficulty in accessing or engaging with essential services. The open days program supports improved justice outcomes by helping vulnerable people with drivers' licences and outstanding fines and to access identity documents. This has resulted in a reduction in driving offences and fewer punitive actions taken due to outstanding fines and has assisted people to obtain documents, leading to improved education, employment and housing opportunities. This will have a tangible, positive impact on socio-economic outcomes, which will lead to lower rates of offending and assist the state government in progressing Closing the Gap targets and outcomes relating to education, employment, housing and, importantly, reduced rates of adult incarceration and young people in detention. Service providers that attend our open days include the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriage; the Sheriff's Office of WA; the Department of Transport; the WA Seniors Card Centre; Legal Aid WA and other community legal centres; Curtin Tax Clinic; the Australian Electoral Commission; regional and metropolitan TAFE campuses; Westpac remote banking services; and Services Australia. The positive results are that 9 601 individual outcomes have been achieved during the first three quarters of the 2023–24 financial year. It is anticipated that, to the end of this financial year, 139 open days will be delivered. Key outcomes achieved in the 2023–24 financial year up to and including 31 March include 2 935 people being in attendance, 682 WA photo ID card applications being processed, 730 birth certificates being produced and 53 people being assisted with interstate birth certificate applications. Just over \$2.2 million in fines were converted; about half a million fines were paid; 271 licence suspensions were lifted; 422 time-to-pay arrangements were approved; 118 stay of executions were approved; 29 contacts were made, importantly, with the Office of the Commissioner for Victims of Crime; 228 contacts were made with community legal providers, including assisting 54 extraordinary licence matters, unlocking opportunities for those individuals to employment and access to other important services; and 109 queries were fielded in which pending court matters were discussed with 20 individuals.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Thank you, Ms Hill.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to services to government found in the table under the headings "Relationship to Government Goals" and "Outcomes, Services and Key Performance Information" on page 423. Those services are also listed in the costs of services. I note the budget target is higher than the estimated actual, mainly due to additional staffing for the Parliamentary Counsel's Office to meet the government's legislative priorities, the establishment of parole support for victims of crime, and the commencement of consultation on legislative responses to coercive control and family and domestic violence initiatives.

**The CHAIR:** Member, are you still on page 423?

**Ms L. METTAM:** It is found on pages 423 and 426.

**The CHAIR:** Where are you reading from?

**Ms L. METTAM:** I am reading from the table on page 423 that outlines the services to government, and I am also reading the budget items as well.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** From which page was the member reading the budget items? I lost the question, I am sorry, member.

**The CHAIR:** I, too, am lost, Attorney General.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** The member referred me to page 423, but the figures are not there.

**The CHAIR:** Exactly! We need the page for the figures you mentioned.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Page 423 references the timely legislative drafting and publication of services. The other reference is found on page 426—I am just trying to find it; it relates to the overall budget. If someone else asks another question, I can look for it.

**The CHAIR:** The member for North West Central can ask a question.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** It is okay. I do not mind. I will wait.

**The CHAIR:** Go ahead, member.

**Ms M. BEARD:** I refer to the Office of the Commissioner for Victims of Crime in paragraph 10 under significant issues impacting the agency on page 422. It notes that —

As the Scheme progresses, the Office facilitates an increasing number of requests for the State to act as a funder of last resort.

I am interested to know by how much the numbers have increased.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I invite the Commissioner for Victims of Crime, Ms Kati Kraszlan, to answer the question.

**The CHAIR:** Mrs Kraszlan, we are referring to paragraph 10 on page 422. The member is asking about the increasing number of requests for the state to act as a funder of last resort. Is that correct?

**Ms K. Kraszlan:** That is correct. The National Redress Scheme made a change to the original funder of last resort arrangements. Previously, the state government had to have had an involvement with the organisation for the state to then act as funder of last resort. In the two-year review, there was a recommendation that that be expanded and the state take on a funder of last resort role for agencies and organisations when there was no involvement by a state government in the placement of the child in that area or organisation.

[4.20 pm]

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** Can the Attorney General give examples of what those institutions or organisations that are now picked up in that funder of last resort might be?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I defer to the Commissioner for Victims of Crime.

**Ms K. Kraszlan:** A good example of how the government has acted as funder of last resort sits with Fairbridge as an organisation. Initially, the commonwealth and state governments placed young children at Fairbridge and, with Fairbridge subsequently unable to access the scheme, the government acted as funder of last resort. There were, however, children who were sent to Fairbridge who were not state wards or child migrants, so the government has now taken on the funder of last resort role for those children. Finally, there was a group of children whose parents placed their child in Fairbridge. There was no government or organisation involvement and the government has now taken on a funder of last resort role for those children. It has also been the funder of last resort for a large number of missions across the state of Western Australia whereby the religious organisation that ran the mission is no longer in existence and the government did not place any children at the missions, but the government has now become the funder of last resort.

**Ms M. BEARD:** Does the commissioner have numbers on how many children this would be assisting?

**Ms K. Kraszlan:** No, we would not have numbers on children at each of them, because the commonwealth has a lot of the data. We could not provide the member with an accurate number.

**Ms L. METTAM:** New question.

**The CHAIR:** You have given up on the last question?

**Ms L. METTAM:** No, it is the same question, with page numbers. I refer to both page 423, which refers to services to government, and page 430, underneath the heading “Explanation of Significant Movements” where the first note states —

The ... Budget Target is higher than the 2023–24 Estimated Actual, which is higher than the 2023–24 Budget, mainly due to additional staffing for the Parliamentary Counsel’s Office to meet the Government’s legislative priorities, the establishment of parole support for victims of crime, and the commencement of consultation regarding legislative responses to coercive control and FDV initiatives.

Can the Attorney General explain what the update is in relation to the coercive control legislation and the government’s legislative priorities, given we are approaching the winter break for the last year of this term?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Did the member say before the winter break?

**Ms L. METTAM:** Before the end of the year. What are the legislative priorities?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** It had drafting priority OO, which means ASAP—exclamation, exclamation.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** How many of them are OO priority though?

**Ms L. METTAM:** When will coercive control legislation be introduced?

**Ms C.M. ROWE:** I have a point of order. What is the line item?

**The CHAIR:** The line item is on page 340.

**Ms C.M. ROWE:** But how does it relate to this question?

**The CHAIR:** Paragraph 1 talks about coercive control.

**Ms C.M. ROWE:** She is asking a question about legislation that is not even before Parliament.

**The CHAIR:** I will rule, member. Thank you very much. There is no point of order. The Attorney General was handling the answer quite well, I thought.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Certainly. Thank you very much, chair. Coercive control is a form of abuse that undermines a victim–survivor’s autonomy and capacity to resist or escape family violence because they are under that control. It can have a lasting impact upon survivors. The Office of the Commissioner for Victims of Crime conducted a consultation process through 2023 on the adequacies of existing measures and to improve outcomes. The report, *Legislative responses to coercive control in Western Australia: Discussion paper*, was submitted to me for consideration and then released in 2023. The government agreed to recommendations of the report including a definition of coercion and control into the Restraining Orders Act. The government has indicated a phased approach

to the introduction of any standalone criminal offence. The stakeholders made it absolutely clear that they did not want a standalone criminal offence at the outset, as the report identified. They wanted a staged approach so that there could be community education about what coercive control is.

The government will introduce coercive control as a criteria in the Restraining Orders Act to get a family and domestic violence order. If we can establish coercive control, like control of a bank account, or isolating them from their own family—I will not enumerate all the possibilities of coercive control—in the Restraining Orders Act, it will heighten awareness of perpetrators of coercive control—and it is not always the male in a relationship that exercises coercive control. It will heighten the community’s awareness of what coercive control is and, in the first instance, offer a civil remedy for it, being a violence restraining order. This has an OO priority. I will announce it from that chair as soon as I possibly can.

**Ms C.M. TONKIN:** I refer to page 422 and significant issue 10, which describes the role of the Office of the Commissioner for Victims of Crime, including providing access to counselling, psychological care and a direct personal response to the victims of crime. I understand the commissioner’s office also administers the homicide funeral assistance scheme. Can the Attorney General inform the house of the purpose of this scheme and advise how many grieving families have had funerals covered? Could the Attorney General further advise the amount that has been expended for this purpose since the scheme came into effect?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Certainly. Thank you for the question, member. When the then McGowan Labor government was elected in 2017, it was becoming clear that families who had lost loved ones as a result of serious crime faced a further burden by having to pay for the funeral. Grieving families were turning to loans, sadly crowdfunding or going into debt to put their loved ones to dignified rest. It was on that basis that as Attorney General, I decided to introduce the homicide funeral assistance scheme into Western Australia. The scheme applies to those Western Australian victims of crime who have lost a loved one through murder, manslaughter or unlawful assault causing death—the most serious crimes in our state’s criminal calendar. It is of particular benefit in the worst cases—thankfully rare—when there is more than one victim from the same family. Before the scheme was introduced, a grieving family would have to pay for the funeral costs up-front and then apply down the track to the Office of Criminal Injuries Compensation to be reimbursed. They would have to go in the queue of applications, so it might take some time. As part of the scheme, the Office of the Commissioner for Victims of Crime pays the funeral directors on behalf of eligible families to reduce the burden on them as they are grieving so that the administration of it is taken over by the commissioner. When the McGowan government launched the scheme in 2018, it contributed \$8 000 towards the cost of a respectful funeral for eligible families. Since then, and being conscious of the cost-of-living pressures, the Cook government boosted this amount to \$10 000 a funeral last year. I can advise the committee that the homicide funeral assistance scheme has paid for 132 funerals since it was launched in 2018 at a total cost of \$1 059 906. The homicide funeral assistance scheme is part of a package of support measures for families of homicide victims, run from the Office of the Commissioner for Victims of Crime. Other services include biological forensic cleaning of crime scenes so that families do not have to clean the house where a loved one was killed, and the payment of ambulance costs for victims of homicide. These measures aim to ensure that families are not further impacted by organising and paying for the services and that they are supported by the justice system at this most tragic moment in their life.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

[4.30 pm]

**Legal Aid Commission of Western Australia —**

Mrs M.R. Marshall, Chair.

Mr J.R. Quigley, Attorney General.

Ms H. De Brito, Director, Legal Aid.

Ms Y. Zhou, Manager of Strategy, Budgeting and Reporting.

Mr J. Lee, Principal Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

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

Are there any questions? The Leader of the Liberal Party.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to page 448 of volume 2 of budget paper No 2. Over the past 12 months, given increasing cost-of-living pressures, how much legal advice has been provided on mortgage hardship, credit law matters and debts such as strata title fees and council rates? Is the commission able to provide that information?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** That is a deep dive! I will refer that to the director of Legal Aid, Ms Helen De Brito.

**Ms H. De Brito:** I will need to take that question on notice to provide specific numbers.

**The CHAIR:** Technically speaking, the Attorney either provides supplementary information or the opposition has to formally ask for a question on notice.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** We will provide supplementary information. As I said, it is a deep dive into the databank.

**Ms L. METTAM:** It is a deep dive.

**The CHAIR:** Attorney General, can you indicate what you will be providing?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I will provide supplementary information into —

**Ms L. METTAM:** Could it be provided over the past two years, just to see what the growth in demand has been?

**The CHAIR:** Is the member after figures for the calendar or financial years?

**Ms L. METTAM:** Whatever is easier. The financial year will work.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** For the financial years 2022–23 and 2023–24?

**Ms L. METTAM:** Yes.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** In relation to legal advice for mortgage stress —

**Ms L. METTAM:** Yes, and credit law matters and debts, such as strata fees or council rates—so, relating to financial hardship.

**The CHAIR:** Is that too broad, Attorney General? We might get an indication from your adviser whether that is too broad or manageable.

**Ms H. De Brito:** I am confident that we can provide that information.

*[Supplementary Information No A29.]*

**Ms L. METTAM:** How many cases did Legal Aid take to trial over that two-year period?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Can I get clarification on that? The commission gives legal assistance to a number of jurisdictions—criminal trials in the Supreme Court, criminal trials in the District Court, trials in the Magistrates Court and some trials in the Family Court, especially by way of an independent children’s legal representative. There are four areas there. Does the member want just a global figure?

**Ms L. METTAM:** Can we have a breakdown over the past two years for those four areas?

**Ms H. De Brito:** The number of grants of aid that went to trial is something we could provide.

**The CHAIR:** Attorney, can you indicate what is the subject of the supplementary information?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** The supplementary information provided will be in relation to the number of grants of aid for trials in the Supreme, District, Magistrates and Family Courts in the financial years 2022–23 and 2023–24.

*[Supplementary Information No A30.]*

[4.40 pm]

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to page 448. Can the Attorney General update the record on how many staff are employed by Legal Aid and provide it, maybe by supplementary information, by role and FTE?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** By role?

**Ms L. METTAM:** Yes.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** There are so many roles. Would the member be satisfied with how many professional staff are on board as opposed to non-professional staff?

**Ms L. METTAM:** Yes.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I will provide that information. When I say professional, I mean legal staff versus non-legal staff. I will provide supplementary information on how many legal staff versus non-legal staff are employed at the Legal Aid Commission.

**Ms L. METTAM:** That sounds good.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Sorry, we might have that information. I defer to Ms De Brito.

**Ms H. De Brito:** For this financial year, we have 197 legal staff and 172 administrative staff. We also have paralegals, who are classified as legal staff. We have graduates, seven social workers and three community liaison and education officers, with a total FTE of 445.

**Ms M. BEARD:** Is there a breakdown between metro and regional available?

**Ms H. De Brito:** We do not have that breakdown.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Can a breakdown for the nine different offices be provided?

**Ms H. De Brito:** That number does fluctuate; however, I could provide the number of people delivering the services in the regions at a specific point in time.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Can we do that to, say, 31 March 2024?

**Ms L. METTAM:** That sounds reasonable. I have a final question.

**The CHAIR:** I am sorry. I have to allocate a number.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** We will provide the number of legal staff and non-legal staff in the nine regional offices as at 31 March 2024.

*[Supplementary Information No A31.]*

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

**The CHAIR:** Will that be a further question, member for Vasse?

**Ms L. METTAM:** It is a further question. How many volunteers does Legal Aid currently have?

**Ms H. De Brito:** Thank you. That is another number that fluctuates and it would be very difficult to provide the member with an accurate estimation at this point in time. Like the previous question, I could provide the member with the number of volunteers we had as at 31 March.

**The CHAIR:** Can the Attorney General repeat what he will be providing?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Supplementary information will be provided to show how many volunteers were with the Legal Aid Commission as at 31 March 2024. Is the member happy with that?

**Ms L. METTAM:** Yes.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Thank you.

*[Supplementary Information No A32.]*

**The CHAIR:** I suspect the member for North West Central will want them allocated as regional and metropolitan. Am I correct?

**Ms M. BEARD:** My further question is: Does the Attorney General have the number of vacancies in the regions? Are there any vacancies?

**The CHAIR:** That is a completely different question. Sorry, I wrongly anticipated.

**Ms H. De Brito:** Again, that is a question that requires a breakdown, office to office. Yes, we do have a number of vacancies in some of our regional offices. I would need to provide that information as at 31 March.

**Ms M. BEARD:** Is that possible?

**Ms H. De Brito:** Yes.

**Ms M. BEARD:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** We should move on.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Yes, we are all ready to move on from Legal Aid.

**The CHAIR:** That completes the examination of the Legal Aid Commission of Western Australia.

#### **Division 6: Western Australian Electoral Commission —**

Ms M.M. Quirk, Chair.

Mr J.R. Quigley, Minister for Electoral Affairs.

Mr R. Kennedy, Electoral Commissioner.

Ms C. Barron, Deputy Electoral Commissioner.

Mr G. Meyers, Director, Business Services.

Mr J. Lee, Principal Policy Adviser.

Ms K. McDougall, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

**The CHAIR:** The estimates committees will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof Hansard 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 be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

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

I give the call to the member for Central Wheatbelt.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I refer to page 90 and paragraph 4 under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”, which reads —  
Implementation of the *Electoral Amendment (Finance and Other Matters) Act 2023*, effective 1 July 2024, requires major changes including new services designed to make voting easier and additional regulatory functions concerning how-to-vote cards, election campaign workers and the funding and disclosure of election costs. The Commission will dedicate existing and new resources towards implementing these changes by March 2025.

[4.50 pm]

Given the delays in providing adequate advice and guidance, as was outlined last week in Parliament and by way of a letter from the state directors of the Labor Party, the Liberal Party, the Nationals WA and the Greens, on the introduction of the new online financial donation disclosure system, was it the government or the Western Australian Electoral Commission that underestimated the task and the resources required to deliver on this agenda?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** No.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** It is not a yes or no question, minister. Did the government or the Electoral Commission get it wrong?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** No one has got it wrong.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Can the minister then explain why the state directors of all four political parties, which would be the major stakeholders in the implementation of the new act about financial disclosure, have written to the Electoral Commission? It has been made public that they have had very little engagement and are very fearful that they are not going to have adequate time to do the work they need to do because there has not been any adequate advice provided at this point.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Guideline 1 has gone to all parties, which sets out in detail how they will comply with the legislation requiring them to give notice to the commission of donations. I think it is about a page and a half or two pages that sets out in detail exactly how the parties will do it, both by online disclosure or through emailing a template. Guideline 1 has informed that paper templates will be ready prior to June 14.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** When was guideline 1 provided to the stakeholders?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I think there were further meetings earlier this week. Then the commission, together with the State Solicitor’s Office, settled the guideline. It is all in hand.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** That guideline, that one to two pages of detail —

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** It is guideline 1. A number of guidelines will be issued.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Yes. It is 23 May and it comes into effect on 1 July. We have two pages of guidelines provided this week. Is that what the minister is saying?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I am saying that it is more than a page.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** God forbid we have detail on the most complex thing that the parties do!

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** No! It shows where to send the information on how to transmit it. All the act requires is for notice to be given to the commission. If a party member wants to walk in with a bit of signed paper and hand it over the counter, that is giving notice to the commission. The guideline sets out four pathways by which a notice can be given. It says that it can be emailed to an address in the form of the template. The template is just a simple form with a name, address and all of that. The commission will enter it all. It is not a problem. It will be all on time, all on budget.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** When was that guideline provided?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** As I said, it was provided earlier this week —

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Was it this week?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Hang on. Yes. It was provided earlier this week after the parties had the opportunity to meet with the commission not once, but twice, on Friday and then again on Monday. There was consultation about how the notice would be delivered to the commission. It is not rocket science.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Why has it taken until now, when the implementation of this disclosure system and all the other elements of the legislation need to be in place before the election? In particular, the disclosure needs to be in place for 1 July. There are other issues. The point is that the Electoral Commission might have its ducks in a line—I am not sure whether it does—but that information cannot just be given out —

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** It has a nice little line of quackers, beautiful!

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Why was this not started earlier? Why were these discussions, forms and disclosure advice not provided earlier? There is not much cross-party collaboration between the four organisations, but all four state directors wrote to the Electoral Commission to complain and raise their concerns about the fact that they were unclear on what their responsibilities would be. That cannot be considered acceptable by the minister.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I do not follow that. The responsibility of the parties is to provide notice of donation. It is not like filing a tax return or an application for legal aid or anything like that. Let us go through it. The name, address and the amount of donation is to be provided to the commission. What is the member's problem?

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** If it is so simple, why was it not done earlier and why did it require a \$44 000 consultant to hold a workshop to engage with the stakeholders? If it was so simple, why was it not done at the beginning of the year and why was a \$44 000 consultant used to engage with the group? The minister is simplifying something that is actually complex.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Hang on —

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** There is a \$44 000 consultant.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I reject the premise of the member's question. I do not see any complexity at all in advising the commission by forwarding an email recording a donation. The parties have been provided with the commission's email address. I do not follow the complexity.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Can the minister confirm that a consultant was employed by the Electoral Commission and can he confirm that \$44 000 was paid for the consultancy?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Yes.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Was that for a simple engagement to create a form? Does that sound like a good use of taxpayers' dollars?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** No!

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Can the minister refer the question? Can the minister explain what the \$44 000 was for?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Sure. Over time, there is an aspiration for integrated programs between parties and the commission so that there will not be the template form. They may be able to issue their receipt only and have that go straight to the commission. We have not got to that point yet. The commission wanted to find out what the optimum way is for the parties and what they see as entailing the least burden. That nuanced and sophisticated program to be enhanced is not provided for in the legislation. The requirement of the legislation is to just notify the commission of donations. It can be notified in bulk. I do not like this generic term, but some people have used a "data dump." That means sending an email that has a lot of attached donation forms.

The recording of those under individual names, as the parties have been told, is because Billy Brown might make a number of donations that have to be accumulated. Instead of putting that burden on the parties, the commission has said that all they have to do is to notify it and it will carry the weight and enter it. I understand that the parties were querying that at the time, so a guideline was issued—this is the simple way. Over time, something more nuanced that will still meet the requirements of the legislation will perhaps enable it to be done in a slicker way. I take the member to taxation, by way of analogy. A person can fill in their tax form and post it off. Their tax agent could probably just fill in some boxes online. The requirement is that people must report their income by a certain date. Here, the requirement is that the commission must be notified within seven days of a donation being received.

[5.00 pm]

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Outside the electoral term.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Before the writs are issued.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Then it is every day.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Then it will be on a daily basis, because we do not want someone like an eastern states miner coming in and doing a big dump seven days out from the election and neither the media nor the public knowing. When I said that, I was not talking about BHP or any of the respectables in Western Australia; I was talking about Mr Palmer.



**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I am aware. I have a further question.

**The CHAIR:** For the purposes of *Hansard*, the member for Central Wheatbelt cited a letter. Did you give a date for that, member?

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Do you need the reference?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Was this the letter to the commission?

**The CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** It was 10 May.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** It was written on 10 May. Just let me check for a moment. Within, say, 10 or 11 days, a complete guideline was sent. That was pretty slick! I bet you do not get that out of the other agencies—a total response in 10 days!

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Nice try, minister. The fact is that they had been trying to extract information from the Electoral Commission and that caused it to put it in writing. The turnaround time is not something to be getting gold stars on, in my view.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** But you knew.

**Ms C.M. ROWE:** This does not relate to the budget.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** It absolutely does; it is about the resourcing.

**The CHAIR:** It comes under the significant issues impacting the agency on page 90, member.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I have a further question. The Attorney General spoke about the parties being able to just submit a piece of paper or an email or whatever has been issued. How long will we have that system? Will we see the introduction, in the middle of an election period, of the online portal that was discussed or is that something that is in the never-never and we will have a hybrid system while we are trying to manage a new electoral redistribution? There are a lot of things going on here, Attorney General. There are parties with limited resources.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Certainly. We understand that a new system is coming in. Parties have statutory obligations under the new system and they are concerned that they properly discharge their obligations. If we go to the legislation and see what their obligation is, it is to provide a notice to the commission within seven days of receiving a donation. They can acquit that if, on one sheet of toilet paper, they write out the name and address of the donor and the amount, sign it and provide it to the commission.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Be careful what you wish for.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I do not wish for it; I expect some incompetents might try it. Parties will discharge their obligation as soon as they give notice to the commission within seven days of receiving a donation. The commission wants to help parties. As the member knows, the commission is not biased towards the government or any other party participating in an election—it is not. The commission has forecast that, over time, it wants to make it even easier for parties so that they do not have to get out their sheets of paper or print anything. That is not a requirement of the legislation; that is a requirement of a good agency—a top agency—that is trying to facilitate this process and ease the burden on all candidates in an election so that they can get on and concentrate on the contest of ideas going into an election and not be too burdened. The legislative obligation is merely to give notice, and that is on time, on track and on budget.

**The CHAIR:** Member, I will give someone else the call. I will give you the latitude to come back, but, given that we are getting the same answer repeated time and again, I wonder about the utility of that.

**Ms C.M. TONKIN:** What is the commission doing to improve engagement with groups that experience low enrolment, such as culturally and linguistically diverse people, Aboriginal people and people in regional areas?

**The CHAIR:** What is the page reference?

**Ms C.M. TONKIN:** It is page 90, sorry.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** That is a very important question. I refer to paragraph 3 under the significant issues impacting the agency on page 90. The commission is working closely with the Australian Electoral Commission, which is undertaking an Aboriginal engagement program to help inspire members of communities and towns to enrol ahead of the next state election. That work by the Australian Electoral Commission uplifted the number of regional, and especially Indigenous, people enrolled in the run-up to the referendum on constitutional reform. The commission hopes to employ local Aboriginal people to assist with its enrolment campaign. There was an increase in the number of Aboriginal people enrolled to vote as a result of the Western Australian Electoral Commission's own work, noting that it appointed two additional full-time employees, which means there is a team of four travelling around the state to try to uplift enrolment. The commission is developing a refreshed democracy ambassador program that will aim to employ culturally and linguistically diverse people to help with the engagement of this target audience. We will have people from that community going out and encouraging community members to participate in our democracy.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I am still on paragraph 4 under the significant issues impacting the agency in relation to the implementation of the Electoral Amendment (Finance and Other Matters) Act 2023. Is the Electoral Commission working through a program of works in terms of the major issues that need to be finalised and in place prior to March 2025? There will be new how-to-vote cards and systems for approval, and financial disclosure—a whole raft of things came in as a result of that legislation. Is that timelined and are there dates by when they need to be completed, and has that been shared with the state directors of the parties?

[5.10 pm]

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** No, we do not have stepped-out dates for each of those tasks, we have priorities that have to be attended to in order. The first one is to get the disclosure system instructions to all parties. Not only is the Western Australian Electoral Commission working on this, but there are two—not one—assigned solicitors at the State Solicitor’s Office dedicated to advising the commission on any issues of interpretation of the statutes and requirements that will produce the further guidelines as we roll them out.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Is there not a Gantt chart with that program of works so there are timeframes, resources allocated and appropriate time for consultation built into the process? Is it just a list of priorities indicating that X must be done before March 2025?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Each step has to be consulted on along the way, as was done with the disclosure procedures. We consulted with the parties and assured them that if they just transmitted the name, address and amount of the donation within seven days of receiving it, or daily during the campaign period, the commission would undertake the work of entering it. The commission may in due course develop a program that lightens its load by allowing the parties to enter information electronically. That is all a work in progress. In this climate, it is difficult because in IT people resign and then new IT people get hired. It will all be done on budget and on time.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Can the Attorney General clarify something? My recollection from the debate was that this would be an online portal and that it would be seamless, efficient and ready.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Yes, that is what we will get to.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I am not sure that there was any discussion about a hybrid system. I am fairly sure that this package of work was sold by saying there would be an online system for the parties. That was discussed in the context that they have smaller funding administrations and significant administrative burdens and that there is no administrative funding under the legislation. It was elected not to provide additional support to political parties to transition, and now we are talking about a paper-based system.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** No, we do not have to go there.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** The Attorney General is.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** That is the baseline. If Billy Bloggs, an independent candidate, is standing and does not even own a computer or an iPhone, he can, by a piece of paper, notify the commission and discharge the obligation under the legislation. In due course, other systems are always on the improve. It does not have to be done by a piece of paper. The party has to put in an annual return of donors, so it has to have a list of them; it has to have an annual return. We are not asking parties to do any more work. That annual return can be done on an Excel spreadsheet. Just by hitting the send button on that spreadsheet and sending it to the given email address, a party will have discharged its obligations under the act. There is nothing in the legislation that says, “You will, or you must, by online portal —

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** That is not what was said, Attorney General. In the discussion during the debate, it was very clear that there would be an online portal.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** There will be an online portal.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** It was not going to happen sometime in the never–never. I have a new question.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** We were talking about what would be required under the legislation, and what is required is that the party or candidates notify the commission within seven days of receiving the donation or gift, and that can be done in any of the ways in guideline 1.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I refer to the first service and key efficiency indicator on page 91 of the *Budget statements*, “Provision of Independent, Impartial and Efficient Electoral Services to Electors for Parliament and Other Electoral Clients”. That would cover the provision of services to local government. I am just clarifying that the Electoral Commission ran local government elections.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Not all of them, but the overwhelming majority.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** That is my first question. How many local governments requested the Electoral Commission to run their ordinary elections in 2023?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** For those numbers, I defer to the commissioner.

**Mr R. Kennedy:** There were 124.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Can the Attorney General provide a breakdown of the cost per council to run those elections?

**Mr R. Kennedy:** We can provide that by way of supplementary information.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** By way of supplementary information, we will provide the cost for each of the 124 local government authorities for which the vote was run by the Electoral Commission. That refers to the ordinary council elections held last October. It will be in relation to the local government elections held in October 2023.

*[Supplementary Information No A33.]*

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** How many local governments elected to purchase the software system that was made available at a cost of \$10 000, as was indicated in last year's estimates?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** It was \$2 000, not \$10 000.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** It was late when I was doing my notes last night, and I might have had a dyslexic moment. It looked to me like \$10 000.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** It was not done on a cost-recovery basis; it was \$2 000 per council.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** How many councils elected to purchase the software system?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I will have to provide that by way of further supplementary information, and the further supplementary information will be the number of local authorities that applied for the use of the software and paid for it for the 2023 local government elections.

**The CHAIR:** Does the member want names and the number of local authorities?

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Yes, I would like the names of the councils that did purchase it.

**The CHAIR:** Yes. Can the Attorney General just clarify that it is not just the number but also the identification of the particular councils?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** By council name?

**The CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Certainly.

*[Supplementary Information No A34.]*

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I understand that was the first time that the Electoral Commission ran local government elections en masse. Is the Attorney General aware, and I am sure he is, that a number of councils with a very small voter turnout held their elections on the Saturday, as they all did, and did not get the result until the Monday morning? I am a member of state Parliament. I have 22 000 or however many thousand electors in my electorate and I find out the result on the night, usually half an hour after the close of the writs. I am interested in the Attorney General's views about whether it is appropriate that volunteers have to wait a day and a half to find out whether they have been elected when sometimes only 150 to 200 votes have been counted.

[5.20 pm]

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Not a long wait, is it? For the Legislative Council, it takes ages. This new system with optional preferential voting was introduced in about 124 local government authorities. It was a new system. Everything had to be checked and double-checked to make sure there was no error. I realise when I have had local government people come along and say, "Oh, it was a squib of an election because we didn't have a celebration on the night. We had to wait until the Monday —

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I am not worried about the celebration. A volunteer has put up their hand to be a public servant.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** People who stand for Parliament put up their hand and they wait.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** We get paid, Attorney General.

**The CHAIR:** Order! Just one at a time.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Often they have to wait. This is optional preferential voting. I am not concerned that someone had a wait a day and a half for a correct vote.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Setting aside the Attorney General's views about the appropriateness of an individual having to wait —

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** A day.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** — the vote happened on a Saturday and most of my councils did not know the result until the Monday. Most of my councils cast between 100 and 200 votes. Please tell me if the system cannot cope with managing to run and hit a button and deal with 120 votes. What went wrong?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** The member is saying that her council has to take preference over all the other councils.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I have 28 councils and we can replicate that across regional Western Australia where we have multiple councils. Attorney General, it was not acceptable. Can the Attorney General give us an undertaking that when we get to the next election, the people who put their hands up for local government—it is already difficult to get them to put their hands up in voluntary roles—will at least have a system that will deliver them a result on the night? It is the only role that the Electoral Commission has.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Like the member, at the next local government election I will be sitting in front of the television, eating popcorn and watching the count. I cannot give an undertaking on what will happen in 2027.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Has a review of the election been undertaken because it was a new system?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I have not undertaken it. Obviously, after any election, the commission reviews how it went. Obviously, after every election, people look at how it could be improved. But I cannot sit here as the minister and give the member an undertaking that in 2027 we will get the vote on the night. There are 124 of these. It is not just a matter of pushing a button and 124 spit out on Saturday night. It is not possible in an optional preferential system.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** As part of that review, was there a discussion around resourcing and whether there were adequate resources?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Yes.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** My hearing is better than yours, Attorney General.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I am sorry, it is my rock ‘n’ roll ear. It is going a bit deaf.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** There was a review. What were the considerations of the Electoral Commission in relation to resourcing for when we get to the next election? Will additional resources be needed to make sure it is efficient?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Yes.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Is that something that the government has considered?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** That election has happened. The commission has looked at its capacity and said, “Yes, we will need to put in some extra resources at the next local government election.” The commission has not come to government yet and told us what that is because we have to get busy planning the new voting system for the WA Parliament. It will be done on time and on budget.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I refer to page 89. In the “Spending Changes” table, the first line under “Other” is “2024–25 Streamlined Budget Process Incentive Funding”. Can the Attorney General just explain to me what that is?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Sure. The streamlined budget process is incentive funding. It represents the incentive funding provided to the department for not submitting new budget submissions during the 2024–25 budget process.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** That begs the question: given the conversation we have just had around resources for local government elections and the upcoming state election, I wonder why the Electoral Commission would have elected to go for the incentive funding instead of asking for appropriate resources to get the new act in place and manage the changes that we will have with the upper house reform and the other matters that have been outlined under significant issues. It elected to take \$241 000. Why would it have done that?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Because when it runs an election, if the election costs more than the budgeted provision, the difference generally gets made up, so it can do that all within its resources. It did not have to go down that path. It could come back and say it needs it. It does not need it at the moment. Say it is given a million dollars and then the election costs a million and a half dollars, the government—the previous government used to do the same—goes back and makes up the difference. It is very hard to predict in advance. We have made it so there is sufficient funding within the commission to deliver all that is required to run a good election, and the lead-up to a good election, for March 2025.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** With all the challenges that are outlined in these budget papers and what we have discussed today—I am not talking about the actual physical running of an election, because those factors, as the Attorney General says, are unknown—the preparation for an election and for the new upper house, the management —

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Sorry, the new upper house —

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I refer to the new upper house arrangements. We will have reform in the upper house and all the new requirements to manage the political parties, the candidates and the changes in that system. A whole raft of challenges are listed on page 90, where it states —

... increased pressures in 2025 in an electoral environment characterised by ...

However, we have the same funding going forward without any requests for increased funding.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** That is not exactly right.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I am happy to be dissuaded.

[5.30 pm]

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I will give the member time to read her note in case she has another —

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** No, it is a different one. I can do two things at the same time, Attorney General. Keep going.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** The member is female. I can do only one at a time, so I will go to one item at a time.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I am listening.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** If I go to page 89, the third line is “Implementation and Ongoing Costs”. The implementation and ongoing costs represents funding to implement recent changes to the Electoral Act, primarily additional recurrent funding for five staff to implement and administer changes to the disclosure and transparency system of funding elections. It includes one finite FTE for 18 months to June 2025 to develop—listen to this one—and implement online disclosure systems. That person will be there until June 2025, after the election. Our enhanced disclosure, not required by the act—I emphasise not required by the act, which only requires a piece of paper, a signature, name and address, and donation amount—makes it easier and easier for the parties and candidates. The fulltime FTE will be there until June 2025 to develop and implement that system, which will be improved over time—and we will do that with the opposition. Not with the member, specifically, and I will not be there to do it, but with the parties. Also, if I go the line “Other” and the second item down from there, which we were just talking about.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Yes. The \$7.3 million.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** That \$7.3 million is additional funding to the department to conduct the 2025 state election because of the things that the member was talking about. All in all, without putting in an extra bid, the government is providing about \$8.572 million. That is not bad. That is very good, in fact.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** No, I am pleased to see it. I do not understand how that does not disqualify the Attorney General from getting the streamlined budget incentive funding.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** That is because they are not coming to us asking for money. We are looking at our act and saying this is what they will need. We will give them another \$8.5 million.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** The Attorney General has some very funny Economic and Expenditure Reform Committee processes. I am glad he is defending it and not me. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Any questions? The member for Bassendean.

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** My question is about an issue that will be very important at the next election, and very important for volunteers who might get involved in elections. I refer the Attorney General to page 89, the total appropriations, and the amount authorised by other statutes. Has there been implementation of the program to make toilets available to campaign workers? I note the new provisions under the act require the Australian Electoral Commission to ensure that campaigners have access to toilet facilities at places to vote to the extent practicable. Volunteers do not like to wait to use the toilet when they get involved in elections.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** The answer is yes. Toilets shall be provided wherever it is reasonably practicable. In some places out in the communities or somewhere, it is pretty hard to cart a toilet out there, actually. However, wherever it is reasonably practicable, we will get access to a toilet. The government has always said it is not right that the staff of the Electoral Commission at a polling place have access to toilet, but people handing out how-to-vote cards all day do not.

**The CHAIR:** Terrific sentiments. Minister, I think we can now leave that division.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

**Division 8: Commissioner for Children and Young People —**

Ms M.M. Quirk, Chair.

Mr J.R. Quigley, Attorney General.

Ms. J. McGowan-Jones, Commissioner.

Ms D. Fitzgerald, Director.

Mr. R. Montilva, Chief Financial Operator.

Mr J. Lee, Principal Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 31 May 2024.

If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

I give the call to the member for Vasse.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to page 104, and note that all 17 FTE positions within the commissioner's office have since been filled. How many are senior staff?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Five.

[5.40 pm]

**Ms L. METTAM:** I will move to page 106. I refer to the advocacy work of the Commissioner for Children and Young People and the media statement of 22 February 2024 titled —

Australian and New Zealand Children's Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates have long called for an end to the harmful practice —

**The CHAIR:** Sorry, where is that on page 106?

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to the heading "Explanation of Significant Movements".

**The CHAIR:** Paragraph 1 or 2?

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to paragraph 2 that states "Additional resourcing has been internally reallocated to representations —

**The CHAIR:** Okay. Can we have the question?

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer also to the media statement of 22 February. What measures of success has the commissioner had in advocating for the nationally consistent definition of isolation and associated counting rules for periods of isolation experienced by detained children and young people to enable nationally consistent recording, monitoring and reporting?

**The CHAIR:** Can you be succinct, please?

**Ms L. METTAM:** I know it is a long question.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I defer to the commissioner, Ms Jacqueline McGowan-Jones.

**Ms J. McGowan-Jones:** I am currently the co-chair of the Australian and New Zealand Children's Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates. That collaborative work has gone to Attorneys General and Premiers across all jurisdictions. We are awaiting advice from all jurisdictions at this point in time.

**Ms L. METTAM:** What is the commissioner advocating for at a state and national level?

**Ms J. McGowan-Jones:** There are a vast array of definitions around what is confinement, what is solitary confinement and what is good law and order. That can impact the reporting and understanding of how many hours children and young people are remaining in an isolated circumstance. We believe, and this is backed up by evidence, that that is not suitable and we need to have a nationally consistent definition so that it can easily be tracked, monitored and reported on.

**Ms L. METTAM:** What impact does the Attorney General think that this work and the refinement of the definition will have in the Western Australian jurisdiction?

**Ms J. McGowan-Jones:** In the Western Australian legislation, we have a term only around confinement, rather than isolation, when confinement could in fact be seen on occasion to be isolation. It is not accurately reflected in the way the legislation is currently written. I understand that the discussion paper around the review of the Young Offenders Act is due shortly, and we hope that this is one of the areas we can address.

**Ms L. METTAM:** In building evidence for the need for this change in this report, was evidence provided by Western Australia?

**The CHAIR:** I think that may be trespassing outside the terms of the —

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** It is outside of the budget items. It is what they call bracket creep.

**The CHAIR:** Let us proceed with another question. The member for Vasse needs to be mindful that we have divisions on the Office of the Information Commissioner, the State Solicitor's Office and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions to go. I am sure that you do not want to let them get off scot-free.

**Ms L. METTAM:** It is a matter of time, is it not? Although we have more questions, we will have to leave this division here.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

**Division 28: State Solicitor's Office —**

Ms M.M. Quirk, Chair.

Mr J.R. Quigley, Attorney General.

Mr G. Hill, State Solicitor.

Mr W. Meier, Chief Finance Officer.

Mr J. Lee, Principal Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

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

I give the call to the member for Vasse.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to page 132.

**The CHAIR:** Is it in budget paper No 3, member?

**Ms L. METTAM:** Yes, it is in budget paper No 3.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** We are on division 28, part 7.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Yes. I refer to demand for legal services on page 132 of budget paper No 3. It notes that \$28.6 million has been allocated to meet ongoing demand for legal services and manage high-profile court proceedings and class actions on behalf of the state for legal practitioners and support staff over the forward estimates period. Can the Attorney General indicate what the high-profile court proceedings and class actions are and their associated costs?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I will defer to the State Solicitor.

**Mr G. Hill:** Thank you, Attorney General. There are a number of major litigations on the horizon that are coming our way. Quite a number of native title compensation claims are out there and a class action concerning children in care. There are also class actions concerning the fines and infringement legislation and its application over time. There is a racial discrimination class action concerning housing. Of course, there are historical sexual abuse cases against the state that are out there. A number of matters are in the courts and about to come to fruition and be litigated. The cost of those will depend on how far they go and when they settle, but that is the answer to it.

Of course, the \$28 million that the member referred to in baseline funding does not represent an increase in funding for us at all. We have fixed-term funding for a whole lot of projects that comes to an end after a period. That money will transition that fixed-term funding to permanent ongoing funding. It does not represent an increase in resources to the State Solicitor's Office, but it does have a profound effect on us in that it is permanent rather than fixed-term funding.

[5.50 pm]

**Ms L. METTAM:** I would like to better understand the quantum of the class action for children in care. How many cases are there? How much are we talking about, and how does that compare with previous years?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** A lot of these class actions have recently commenced or threaten to commence. When the member talks about previous years, it is not really relevant, with the plaintiffs now bringing their actions this year. We do not control that.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Regarding the costs that the Attorney General is talking about that are associated with the class actions, how many are we talking about and how much of those funds?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I will ask the State Solicitor to answer that.

**Mr G. Hill:** Two class actions are on foot. The first was filed on 9 February 2023 and the second on 21 March 2023. They are in the Australian Human Rights Commission at the moment. The way it works is that these complaints are in the Australian Human Rights Commission and if they cannot be resolved there, the AHRC will terminate the

complaint. The complainants will then have 60 days to start legal action in the Federal Court. At the moment, they are still in the AHRC with negotiations ongoing, but it is very likely that they will be terminated soon and that litigation will start in the Federal Court.

These complaints are both class actions. They allege racial discrimination by the Department of Communities between 1992 and 2024 concerning various conduct including the decision to remove Aboriginal children from their families and place them in care. Those two class actions will be at an embryo stage at the moment, but will soon be in the Federal Court.

**Ms L. METTAM:** The other case was about racial discrimination associated with housing; is that right? Can the Attorney General provide some further clarification around that case?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** To the State Solicitor, please.

**Mr G. Hill:** Thank you. Yes, that complaint alleges that the Housing Authority engaged in unlawful racial discrimination under the commonwealth Racial Discrimination Act. It concerns the termination of tenancies at disproportionately higher rates for Aboriginal tenants compared with non-Aboriginal tenants. It alleges the refusal of applications for public housing assistance in relation to Aboriginal applicants at disproportionately higher rates, and claims that the design of support services are not meeting the needs of Aboriginal public housing tenants.

The Department of Communities is the client in that matter. The parties had a conciliation conference late last year and negotiations to settle the matter are ongoing. If the matter is unable to be settled, again, it is likely that the Australian Human Rights Commission will terminate the complaint on the grounds that there is no reasonable prospect of resolution. In circumstances in which the complaint is terminated, the complainant will have 60 days to take a class action in the Federal Court. That is where it is up to at the moment. We are not instructed about the size of the class that it will concern, but it is likely to run into hundreds if not thousands of people.

**Ms L. METTAM:** In terms of the cost to the state and the \$28.8 million, how much are we looking at? Is the racial discrimination matter relating to housing one class action?

**Mr G. Hill:** Yes. It was brought by a complainant, but it is a class action and others will join the class later in the proceeding. It is an indeterminant amount.

**Ms L. METTAM:** This may be outside what the Attorney General is able to answer, but is that class action already having implications on housing policy —

**The CHAIR:** I think that is definitely beyond scope.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I just thought I would try!

**The appropriation was recommended.**

**Division 9: Office of the Information Commissioner —**

**The appropriation was recommended.**

**Division 30: Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions —**

**The appropriation was recommended.**

*Meeting suspended from 6.00 to 7.00 pm*

**Division 45: Western Australian Land Information Authority — Landgate —**

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Mr J.N. Carey, Minister for Lands.

Mr B. Roberts, Chief Executive Officer.

Mr G. Dewar, Chief Financial Officer.

Ms C. Comrie, Chief of Staff, Minister for Lands.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

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



Are there any questions? Member for Cottesloe.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I refer to page 744 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and the significant issues impacting the agency. Paragraph 2 refers to the new property valuation system. When does the minister expect the next Landgate valuations to occur for rating and taxation purposes under the Valuation of Land Act 1978?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I hope the member does not mind, but I will get the chief executive officer to speak on that matter.

**Mr B. Roberts:** There are essentially two programs for valuation under the Valuation of Land Act. One is the gross rental valuation and the other is the unimproved value valuation. Gross rental valuations are undertaken by Landgate. Essentially, through the auspices of the Valuer-General, the land is valued for rating and taxing purposes. Those values are then struck. We are about to move into the next year of the gross rental value program for the state. That program lasts for about three years. The UV program lasts for approximately a year. The UV program calculates the unimproved value of land for such things as taxation questions on those pieces of land.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Is it anticipated that the upgrade to that property valuation system will be ready in time to facilitate those two processes?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I am comfortable with getting Mr Roberts to answer that question.

**Mr B. Roberts:** Essentially, the new valuation system is a software service system. We are receiving drops of code, if you like, or software. Our next drop of code will be in July and our final drop of code will be on 24 November this year. Our organisation undertakes an assessment of that code and if it meets our standard and requirements under the contract, we will signify that it is accepted and we then begin the process of essentially running the system for the next round of valuations. Interestingly, we are also running our existing system as a check to the new system. Essentially, we have a check safe there.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Is it too early to anticipate the likely increase in values? Is that something Landgate can speculate on or would it wait until that process is completed?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** We do not speculate on it, to not pre-empt the decision by the Valuer-General.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Can I just get a clarification on terminology the CEO used—the drop of code? Is that the software?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I am not a software expert so I will let Mr Roberts answer that.

**Mr B. Roberts:** Yes, essentially we are talking about the development of software. When it is deemed ready by the company we have engaged, it provides the software into our system and we analyse the software and run tests to determine whether it is doing what everyone thinks it should do.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Paragraph 4 under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency” discusses Landgate’s information and communications technology operating model and the replacement of its primary ICT service contract and the changes being made. As we all know, we are utterly dependent on the ether to prove that we own the land that we are on. What processes are in place to ensure protection against security risks and that Landgate has impeccable cybersecurity with the new system being implemented?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** The Office of Digital Government provides clear guidelines to all government agencies. I will ask Mr Roberts to speak further on that.

**Mr B. Roberts:** Landgate has in place significant security protocols. We follow the Office of Digital Government guidelines. We also follow commonwealth guidelines on cybersecurity. Landgate is not alone when it does this. We work across the country with other land registries to determine what is the best course of action to deal with all cyber threats.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I note that this is a cloud-based system. What processes are in place to ensure that Landgate continues to have access to data in the event of major hacking events or the like on systems? Will this data be kept on servers in Western Australia to ensure that we cannot be disrupted if overseas connections are broken or the like?  
[7.10 pm]

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** This is becoming an estimates of IT questions! I will ask Mr Roberts to answer that question.

**Mr B. Roberts:** Thank you, minister. Landgate has its digital data for its land title register and all its other data stored in the cloud over in Sydney with appropriate security protocols in place. The land title registry has two hot sites for failover. If we are attacked, we can move to the second and third site as redundant sites. Essentially it is kept in sync, literally by the second, over a period of time. We are aware of the protocols required to keep such datasets in sync and we engage cybersecurity experts—not only Landgate people—to undertake reviews of our weaknesses. We have penetration testing for our system, which means we engage people to hack into the system to understand our weaknesses and then deal with any issues that are brought out in relation to that.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I do not expect the minister to tell me exactly where those facilities are located; I appreciate it is important that those things are not widely known, but if we lost the fibre-optic link, for example, to the eastern states, which has happened, would we lose access to our service or will the redundancy you have mean that a loss of that link would not mean a loss of services?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I have been advised by Mr Roberts that that is probably too technical. He is not able to answer that question, but the member could put a question on notice.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** There is a mention of increased software and service costs due to this change. Is the minister able to inform me what that increased cost is?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Sorry, member. Which page is that?

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** It is on page 744. It is a sentence in the middle of the fourth paragraph, and states —

Increased software-as-a-service costs will be incurred as Landgate moves to more cloud-based services. What will those cost increases be?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I will ask Mr Roberts to explain. That matter is commercial-in-confidence, but I will ask Mr Roberts to indicate why.

**Mr B. Roberts:** We are currently negotiating the contract arrangements for ongoing ICT systems for Landgate, as we move forward. We are in the process of determining the costs, and the cost for those IT systems in terms of the service costs and software costs are commercial-in-confidence at the moment. They are still subject to the procurement arrangement that we are currently involved in.

**Ms L. METTAM:** My question refers to land title registration times on page 746 under “Outcomes and Key Effectiveness Indicators”. I have a number of questions regarding this. What is the total average time for title registration from lodgement to registration in 2023–24? I refer to the 88 per cent KPI for timely land registration in the estimated actual.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I note that this received significant media earlier in the year. I want to put it in context for the current market and then I may hand over to Mr Roberts to give further detail. We are facing an extraordinary time and to compare it to previous history, between 2013–14 and the end of 2021, lodgements averaged 307 000 a year. During 2021–22 and 2022–23, that bumped up to 411 000 land registry documents lodged. To put that in context, that was a 34 per cent increase from the preceding period. It is important to note, from 2022–23 to 2023–24 to date, it is projected to continue at these levels, with 381 948 land registry documents lodged at Landgate as of 17 May 2024. Last financial year, more than 90 000 transfers were lodged. This is critically important—80 per cent of those were lodged electronically, with 94 per cent of those automatically registered within seconds of lodgement.

We acknowledge that there are more complex cases with longer timeframes. That is to be expected. They could be dealing with deceased estates or other matters, but generally Landgate works with settlement agencies and third parties to address any lodgement errors. I note that some delays—perhaps Mr Roberts can go into it further—are often as a result of lodgement errors. Someone may incorrectly enter information and expect it to be processed and so forth. I will ask Mr Roberts to provide further information.

**Mr B. Roberts:** The minister is correct. We receive 90 000 transfers, and we receive a similar number of mortgage documents and a similar number of discharge of mortgage documents. That essentially means that 301 000 of the 411 000 documents that are ultimately lodged with Landgate are registered in less than 20 seconds. We have a remaining 100 000 that are paper documents and are usually of a more complex nature—not always—and they require examination by an individual. The error rate by the industry of those documents is approximately 10 per cent, which means that our staff are requisitioning those transactions. As soon as those transactions are requisitioned, the time period to resolve the transaction and register it becomes something that is relevant to that transaction. We cannot generally predict when that is going to happen.

**Ms L. METTAM:** What is the average time for title registration from lodgement to registration in 2023–24? I note what the minister said about the volumes changing significantly. Can we compare that to 2013–14 or 2021–22? What is the difference in average title registration?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Respectfully, that is a problematic question in that it is dependent on the document. Obviously, different documents have different requirements. Accordingly, they have a different turnaround time. Is the member seeking a timeframe for a particular document?

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to the documents that are captured in this part of the question and the KPI for land title registration. The minister has already talked about the 90 000 documents that were lodged last year. What is the average wait time for land title registrations?

[7.20 pm]

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** We do not have the average timeframe, but I can ask that Mr Roberts go through some of the timeframes for some of the documents.

**Mr B. Roberts:** Essentially, the reports on transactions of certificates of title do a couple of key things. One is that they record the change of ownership, the mortgage and any encumbrance over the land. The other thing they do is record things that go on with the land, such as the registration of a power of attorney. We also have applications for the lodgement of survey plans and the creation of new certificates of title. Each of those transaction groups, if

you like, have different processing streams with different timeframes. It is a bit illusory to ask, “Out of all of those, what is the average timeframe?” I would say to the member that it depends on the document type. Some timeframes are shorter; some are longer.

For example, an application for new titles currently takes 12 days for the completion of registration. The examination and approval of a plan for the creation of new certificates of title—these are complex plans—take four days to be approved. Those lodged under our electronic plan lodgement system take less than a day to be approved. Applications that deal with the transmission of land from a deceased proprietor to the executor of the estate take on average about 17 days at the moment. Survivorship applications take approximately 18 days at the moment. Powers of attorney take eight days to be registered and applications to change name take 17 days.

The other thing I will say is that Landgate works with the industry and the public to expedite transactions. It has an expedite policy. If a member of the public or a settlement agent requires a transaction to be registered on an urgent basis, that expedite policy basically allows those people to provide a sufficient reason for registration. A sufficient reason for registration can be one of two areas—either hardship is being caused to the person because the transaction has not been registered or the settlement date is essentially immediate and registration is then required. Although we have average turnaround times, it is quite possible for members of the industry and the public to put a case to Landgate for that transaction to be registered faster than the average time.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to the article that the minister touched on. It relates to the time that it takes Landgate to register a change of titles. That article was about how that time had blown out by six months in some cases. I do not think that was about the average time; it was about seeing times blown out by that long. What is the longest that people are waiting at the moment for a change of title?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** The advice that I received at the time about that particular media issue is that it was incorrect and, as we have heard, 10 per cent of applications do not provide the correct information. I do not use that example. It cannot be used. I appreciate it got media attention but I think it was unfair. I will come back to the point that electronic documents that are capable of automatic examination, which is 90 per cent of the electronically lodged volume, are registered in under 20 seconds. That equates to 75 per cent of all documents, which I think is an extraordinary achievement. It reflects that we keep working through electronic lodgement and examination. However, as Mr Roberts indicated, more complex scenarios require more time.

**Ms L. METTAM:** How many title registrations have taken over 50 days from lodgement to registration in 2023–24?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** We do not have that information available.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Is the minister able to provide that by way of supplementary information? How many title registrations took over 50 days, 100 days and 150 days from lodgement to registration in 2023–24?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I just have to check if that is possible. The difficulty is about whether we can provide that information. We will endeavour to provide as much information as we can if possible according to how many took over 50, 100 and over 150 days.

*[Supplementary Information No A35.]*

**Ms L. METTAM:** How many complaints were received about titles not being registered quickly or in a timely manner in 2023–24?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** The advice is that Landgate does not register that. I cannot provide that answer.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** The minister would know that there are concerns about the move to exclusively electronic titles in that mistakes could be made. It could disadvantage a person or transfer a title when it should not have been. Is the minister aware of any errors that have been caused by the electronic system? What is the magnitude of those errors if they have occurred?

[7.30 pm]

**Mr B. Roberts:** Essentially, the electronic titling system does not create errors of registration, if I am getting the drift of the question. There are errors in the titling system when it is operated by humans, so that is when the electronic system is not involved—humans make errors. Our error rate for those transactions is 0.002 per cent of all transactions being lodged at Landgate. If the member is asking whether the electronic system makes errors, the answer is no, it does not, because it is based on a series of business rules by which if the transaction lodged at Landgate does not meet those business rules, it rejects the transaction and forwards that transaction to a human who then examines it.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Is the minister aware whether anyone has used that system fraudulently; that is, the system itself may have registered a title transfer but the person has been misusing the system to do so?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I think I can answer that. In terms of internal staff members, there are none. I assume that is what the member is asking about.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I was also asking about someone fraudulently misusing it—whether someone who has access to the system has used it to fraudulently transfer a land title.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** No. One would say that any fraud happens before the registration of title.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I move to the fourth expense referring to accommodation costs in the income statement table on page 751 of the *Budget statements*. There is a \$6 million accommodation cost for the forecast budget, and it was a bit over \$8 million this year. What are those accommodation expenses for? Do they only relate to the Landgate office in Midland or do other offices go to that? If there is other accommodation, could the minister explain the split between the Midland Landgate office and any other accommodation?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** It relates to Midland Square, Perth and Bunbury offices.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I will narrow in specifically, and I am sure the minister would be disappointed if I did not, to the Midland Square office. What is the rent paid for that office?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** We do not have that figure. I will have to provide it by way of supplementary information. I will provide the rental accommodation costs for Midland Square over the forward estimates.

[*Supplementary Information No A36.*]

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I refer to the number of employees for land titling set out on page 746 of budget paper No 2, which remains at 110 full-time equivalents. This is really an open question, and it probably relates to the question that the Leader of the Liberal Party asked. Is it the minister's sense that the number of FTEs in the land title office is adequate to handle the workload? I appreciate we have a peak at the moment, but is it an adequate level to maintain a reasonable backlog in lodgements or are staff under stress?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** To assist with increased lodgements, Landgate has recruited nine additional staff to manage and meet the increased level of demand the member referred to.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I refer to "Expenses", "Employee benefits" on page 751. Between the 2023–24 estimated actual and 2024–25, employee benefits increase by \$5 million, which is much more than the annual increase across the forward estimates. I wonder what that increase is due to.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** The advice is that it relates to the increase in staff.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** If it is a \$5 million increase for nine staff, as the minister knows, next year I might be looking for a position, and I wonder whether I could apply for one of those jobs! To be more serious, that sounds like a lot for nine employees.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Apologies, the figure also includes wages growth.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

**Division 43: Planning, Lands and Heritage — Services 1 and 2, Planning; Lands —**

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Mr J.N. Carey, Minister for Planning; Lands.

Mr A. Kannis, Director General.

Ms J. Lundberg, Assistant Director General, Strategy and Engagement.

Mr M. Darcey, Assistant Director General, Land Use Management.

Ms P. Rodic, Director Planning Reform Projects.

Mr V. Davies, Assistant Director General, Heritage and Property Services.

Ms C. Hay, Chief Finance Officer.

Ms S. Cardenia, Assistant Director General, Business and Corporate Services.

Ms C. Comrie, Chief of Staff, Minister for Planning; Lands.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

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

I give the call to the member for Roe.

[7.40 pm]

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 723, and the sixth dot point under land administration services, which is supporting the Aboriginal Lands Trust, Aboriginal people, and government and key stakeholders.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I am really sorry to disappoint the member. The Aboriginal Lands Trust sits under the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. I know the member is disappointed. I am sorry.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I cannot ask any questions about transfer of —

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** No. As I understand it, the section the member is referring to relates to the Aboriginal Lands Trust. That falls outside of my portfolio.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to page 718. Under significant issues impacting the agency, paragraph 1 refers to the release of state-owned land to market. Can the minister confirm land supply in WA is at its lowest level in 18 years, as highlighted by the Urban Development Institute of Australia WA Division? Is this shortage increasing the prices of land in WA and what has been the average price of land each year over the past five years?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** This agency is not about forecasting for land sales. Respectfully, I am perplexed. The point that the member refers to is actually about the housing diversity pipeline and does not relate to forecasts for land sales.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Can I ask what steps the department is taking to increase land supply to address the severe shortage of land that we are experiencing in WA?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Respectfully, I would say that question is probably better posed to other portfolios, like the Planning Commission and planning investigation areas. DevelopmentWA undertakes significant work to subsidise the release of regional land. Again, I come back to the point that the member is referring to, which is the housing diversity pipeline. I am happy to speak to that program, in which the state works to identify surplus land and then to make it available for potential housing developments. It is a complex process. As the member can imagine, surplus land can have constraints, contamination and a range of different factors, but we went through an expression of interest process. In addition to that, we also look at other government sites. I know the member for Cottesloe has previously referred to Pier Street. However, those sites include Court Place in Subiaco, Smith and Pier Streets in Perth and other locations. We are working to lessen the constraints and to make them available for housing.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Does that also include the 5 000 homes that were proposed to be created as part of the precinct projects under Metronet? Is that part of the same thing?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** It does not relate to that point.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Further question, chair.

**The CHAIR:** The member for Mount Lawley has a further question first.

**Mr S.A. MILLMAN:** I have a further question on the same item. The minister mentioned the housing diversity pipeline and Metronet housing delivery program. The next line down is “Implementation of Planning Reform Phase Two”. They are line items 9 and 10. Could the minister advise how the government’s nation-leading planning reforms will accelerate the delivery of housing in Western Australia and how it compares with other states?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I thank the member for that question. I want to put on the record that Western Australia is now considered the lead for planning reform in the country. In fact, as we all know, in August 2023, national cabinet agreed to a national planning reform blueprint, which was set out for every state as part of meeting our share of the one million homes targeted under the National Housing Accord. I have to say that these were big, sweeping reforms requiring substantial work, and have really brought forth significant change that I note has gone very well. I put on the record that this was delivered, I believe, in a very fast turnaround time—by 3 March. We now have the three new development assessment panel systems, which are working well; the establishment of the permanent pathway for the streamlined assessment and determination of development systems; and a new online system for lodging and tracking applications. I would suggest that they are having a significant impact. From 1 July this year—this may interest the member for Cottesloe—we are also making it easy for single-home developments. In accordance with that reform, the applications of all Western Australians who are either building a new home or extending or altering their existing home can be determined only by the chief executive officer, or the planning staff of local governments. They cannot be referred or called in by a full council. They are all eligible for full determination, except—there is one exception—when a property is on a local or state heritage list, or in a designated heritage area. The reason for this is if a single-home development is referred to a council, it could add months and months to the process, and then it goes to the State Administrative Tribunal before the house is built. We are very confident that this additional reform that kicks in on 1 July will also be very meaningful for Western Australians.

[7.50 pm]

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** On page 722, under “Services and Key Efficiency Indicators”, the third dot point under service 1, “Planning Services”, states that the government will achieve its goal of investing in WA’s future by “ensuring that sufficient land is available for purchase for both residential, commercial and industrial/employment

purposes". The minister indicated there is perhaps confusion with other agencies about the questions by the member for Vasse. What has been done to do that? What land is being made available over the forward estimates for purchase for residential, commercial and industrial and employment purposes?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** The member for Vasse referred specifically to the housing diversity pipeline. In terms of those broader land trends, I refer the member to the urban growth monitor. That is prepared annually and reports on a broad assessment of land that is zoned for urban development. The advice from the urban growth monitor says that the modelling indicates that there is sufficient stock of zoned land available—around 23 720 hectares across Perth and Peel—to support urban development well into the long term. In addition, approximately 12 500 hectares of land have been identified for urban expansion or investigation. I also note that, as we are referring to media, there was a story in *The Australian Financial Review* today. I do not know whether the member saw it. Did he see it?

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I have been here since seven o'clock this morning, and I have sat in the chamber the entire time! We do not even read *The Australian Financial Review*, according to *The West*.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I would assume the member for Cottesloe does read it!

**Ms L. METTAM:** He has been busy.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I read *Farm Weekly*.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I know the member likes his farms.

**Ms L. METTAM:** We love our farms.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I know that, member for Vasse. I would suggest everyone read that story. It says that only one state is keeping up with demand for housing supply, and that is Western Australia. I believe the source was the Urban Development Institute of Australia.

**Ms L. METTAM:** That is probably what my question referred to.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Did the member write that question? I am not having a go. At least at the moment, we seem to be having a jovial exchange. On a serious note, there was an article in *The Australian Financial Review* today that very clearly said that Western Australia is the only state that is meeting demand. I refer to the urban growth monitor. I engage heavily with land developers. We work with them very well to identify challenges in the current market, realising that, just like the housing market, they are hit with skilled labour shortages and cost escalations. Any land developer will say that. We look at any opportunities, and we will continue to look at reform to assist the release of land development.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** How much of that 23 700 hectares of land that has been identified will be available for residential and other development over the forward estimates?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** To be clear, that land is zoned for urban development. That means that it is an intentional proposal. I acknowledge that, as with land in the outer metro area, there could be other factors that require consideration as part of the release of the land. As the member would be aware, it may be contamination or infrastructure or, as is often the case with land development, environmental considerations and assessment. Sometimes that can be complex. As the member would be aware, the state government has already committed to environmental reforms and acceleration of environmental approvals. Although that has garnered media attention around industrial development, it also has an application for land development.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Given that this department's primary responsibility is to ensure that we have adequate housing for the state, surely there must be either estimates of what land will be developed for housing or an estimate of the expectation of housing to be developed over the forward estimates.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** The member should remember that in regional areas, DevelopmentWA, which is a separate agency, acts to provide subsidies where the market fails. The member will see us make strategic investments, such as in Kalgoorlie, Broome and Karratha, to get land out the door. However, in the metro area, it is primarily driven by the private sector and the private sector will make its own investment decisions on the release of land.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** It is my understanding that in the metropolitan area, a small handful of land developers dominate the development of land. It is a very small number of land developers. Has the minister applied his mind to a mechanism that would enable greater competition in land development? My great concern for metropolitan Perth is that, effectively, there will be a duopoly or an oligopoly that controls the release of land outside the hand of government. Is the government considering a proposal—this was done in the 1970s—that expands the breadth of land developers to get greater competition to bring more land on more quickly?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I understand that the member is referring to some of the big players, but I would respectfully suggest that a number of smaller players are coming through now. I meet with them. They are working to get land on the table. I appreciate that everyone refers to one or two big names, but, from my observations, we are seeing smaller players coming into the market, given the demand, and looking at the commercial opportunities. In terms of competition policy, respectfully, that is outside my remit. After a number of face-to-face meetings, I am hopeful, and I say this genuinely, that a number of smaller players are coming through.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I am encouraged by that. Would the minister consider encouraging those smaller incumbents that he talked about and having a policy to enable a greater diversity through state land being released to those smaller developers? It is within the remit of government to do that.

[8.00 pm]

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Respectfully, ultimately, this is beyond my scope for this portfolio. Joint venture arrangements and other arrangements are factors in the capacity to deliver a project, but also in the return to WA taxpayers. I would be criticised if that was not given forefront consideration, particularly the return to WA taxpayers. I say to the member again, as the Minister for Lands, I am very mindful of these things. As the member knows, my office has an open-door policy. I think some of her party's members have sent people to meet me. At every opportunity, we seek to facilitate land opportunities. As I have previously said in this house, we have a cabinet subcommittee that looks at residential and land supply. The Urban Development Institute of Australia and others have presented to that subcommittee, and I have a number of agencies working together on how to unlock land hurdles in precincts. I think we are seeing an unprecedented attempt by this state government to get all relevant government agencies together to assist with the opening up of new land in metropolitan Perth and beyond.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** It grieves me, chair, that I have to go to the other chamber. I will be here in spirit.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Can I just note my great disappointment that the member for Cottesloe is not asking me any questions on planning. I note my devastation. The member for Cottesloe will be missed.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I will try to ask a further question. I hope the minister will allow it. The minister mentioned private investment unlocking land in Perth, but he also touched on the fact that in regional areas, government has a greater role in that process. In terms of developable land, what sort of shortfall are we facing in regional Western Australia in the coming two years?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I suggest that the member might consider asking that question of DevelopmentWA that oversees the regional land booster program. Across the board, we actually have lots available. It is in the key markets of, say, Karratha, Broome and Kalgoorlie where, because of the cost of the land, the private sector, in effect, does not participate in bringing it onto the market. That is when we intervene. The member should ask that question of DevelopmentWA, but, ultimately, through our regional land booster program, a large number of lots are available across regional Western Australia. It is on the record that I have said before that it is not necessarily land supply, but, for example, skilled labour shortages that are impacting the delivery of housing.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to a question that the member for Mount Lawley asked earlier. It was a great question but it just needed a follow-up. I refer to planning reform on page 718, which the minister referred to earlier.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Is the member referring to significant trends on page 718?

**Ms L. METTAM:** Yes, that is right.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** The member knows I am a stickler for references.

**Ms L. METTAM:** How many developments have occurred because of the new deem-to-comply pathway?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I just need to seek clarification. When the member says "deem to comply", is she referring to the single-home approvals?

**Ms L. METTAM:** Yes, and the reforms captured in that line item.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** As I indicated, the single-home approvals process does not come into place until 1 July. That is what I was referring to. The other substantial reforms that relate to development assessment panels and the central pathway have been in place since March. The Western Australian Planning Commission reforms and the single-home reforms will come in on 1 July, so I cannot give the member any data on that yet.

**Ms L. METTAM:** With regard to the precincts project team, what will the \$5.6 million over the forward estimates deliver in terms of improved planning or land supply outcomes?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I am advised that that is not a new team; it is the continuation of an existing team. The member would be aware that we believe Metronet will deliver incredible opportunities to create transit-oriented development. In fact, once Metronet is fully complete, it will be pivotal in seeing new development over a period of time because of the size of investment and the construction constraints we face at the moment. The precincts project team is a multidisciplinary team that works with Metronet rail projects. It provides planning frameworks, because we need to look at what planning instruments will best deliver transit-oriented development. It looks at how we transform those station precincts and what will be the supporting infrastructure. It comes down to what the precinct will actually look like. I put on the record that this is not just about whacking a building here or there. Good urban planning and a good understanding of transit-oriented development means that very strong consideration has to be given to the design and the way the precinct operates. I will ask Assistant Director General Jaime Lundberg to talk about the specific projects or examples that the team is currently working on.

**Ms J. Lundberg:** As the minister noted, it is an existing team. It helps to develop the precinct structure plans for the state. Examples of projects include delivering the concept master plans for the Whiteman Park station precinct.

The team has also undertaken work on the precinct structure plans for Malaga, Bennett Springs East and Karnup. Within that team, we are also working with the City of Kalamunda and the federal government to deliver the High Wycombe community hub. The team also works very closely with DevelopmentWA and the Department of Communities to unlock land and de-constrain it within Metronet precincts to boost the housing supply.

**Ms L. METTAM:** How much infill has occurred around the Metronet precincts as a result of the reforms that the minister has implemented?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** As I indicated in my initial answer, these precincts are still being developed. For example, the Bayswater station was just finished. As the member knows, a number of precincts are still under construction. We have always been on the record as saying that these projects will take time. Significant planning is involved and there are current constraints around the housing market, but we need to do this work now. We need to put in place very clear master plans so that we can maximise the right opportunities.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Precinct projects were announced six years ago, I think, at Joondalup, Bentley, Beaconsfield and Cannington. What progress has been made with those 5 000 homes that were promised?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** The projects that the member has identified are not managed by this unit.

**Ms L. METTAM:** But are they captured through the reforms?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Bentley 360 falls under DevelopmentWA. The Beaconsfield precinct falls within the Department of Communities and DevelopmentWA. This particular unit is focused on the realisation of Metronet sites that are being built as part of our ambitious Metronet program.

[8.10 pm]

**Ms L. METTAM:** Can I confirm that no sites are yet developed at this stage? Is the government still working on the designs? Does it not want to rush things and want to get the design right?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Is the member talking about the Metronet sites as part of this unit?

**Ms L. METTAM:** I am talking about the Metronet sites that the minister has referred to as part of the planning reforms referred to in paragraph 3.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** The ones that I think we went through were about developing a concept master plan for Whiteman Park station precinct and Morley station precinct. I am going through them. We are undertaking precinct structure plans for Malaga, Bennett Springs East and Karnup; collaborating with the City of Bayswater to deliver a Morley station precinct structure plan; working with the City of Kalamunda and the national government to deliver the High Wycombe community hub; and working with DevelopmentWA and the Department of Communities on the housing diversity pipeline. Those Metronet projects have not been built yet. No disrespect, but it is a bit silly to ask how many have been built when many of these Metronet precincts, as I have identified, are still going through structure plans. Structure plans are the backbone for how a precinct looks. Once we have a structure plan, we can do further planning for investment in roads, public spaces, a public open space and add to the value of the precinct.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Are the structure plans for the Joondalup, Bentley, Beaconsfield and Cannington precincts already in place?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** That does not refer to this section. As I indicated, the member will need to ask some of those questions at other stages of the evening.

**Ms L. METTAM:** What improvements in residential density have occurred over the past 12 months as a result of these reforms? Where are they located?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Is the member referring to planning reforms, and on which page?

**Ms L. METTAM:** On page 718, paragraph 3.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Again, I think the member is jumping the gun. The planning reforms that we introduced only started in March this year. They include the consolidation to three development assessment panels, the finalisation and creation of a permanent pathway and all the systems that are in place for that final and established system. I suspect that as we go through the year, we will be able to report back to the media and so forth the number of approvals going through the new DAP system. I can refer to one part, the COVID temporary measure, which the member may be referring to. The temporary part 17 development pathway was established in 2020. That is the precursor to the permanent pathway that we have now. Since that part 17 pathway opened in July 2020, the Western Australian Planning Commission has received 61 development applications with a combined value of \$7.38 billion.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 718, "Spending Changes", and the first line item under new initiatives, "Mira Mar Landslide". I wonder whether the minister could give us an update, because we are three years down the road and several of those residents have had their lives messed up. There is pretty slow action from this government. Can the minister update us about the scenario that is playing out?



**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I say this sincerely: put politics aside for just a moment. I know that can be hard in our jobs, but actually, I say the opposite of what the member suggested. There has been an absolutely incredible attempt by the government and agencies to work with those owners on this matter. First of all, I need to put on the public record, and I think it is very significant and I want to be clear: the state did not have any obligation to purchase these homes. But we stepped in, because we recognised the situation, the distress and that the state could play a role to resolve this issue. We worked very hard and we stepped in when, I think it is fair to say, there was an impasse. No-one was prepared to move. I am pleased to say that all the identified landowners at Mira Mar have now reached an agreement with the state for the purchase of their properties and the documentation is being finalised. There was significant work done with each of the impacted landowners. In fact, we offered for them to get their own independent valuations, which were paid for by the state, to give them some confidence regarding the offers that we made. I think that is pretty unprecedented. It was a very fair process and we made the offers cognisant of the valuation. I would say that as a process, it is quite exemplary that all property owners have now agreed to sell their properties.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I appreciate the minister's comment, but there have been strong suggestions that the cause of the landslide was from Water Corporation pipes breaking, so I believe that the state government has a role in compensating or purchasing. I acknowledge that the former minister Alannah MacTiernan was the one who picked up the baton because it was an isolated situation in which nobody wanted to take responsibility. I acknowledge that. By the way, I also have been in the backyards of some of those properties with six or seven feet of clay coming into their laundry and the back of their house. I can see the frustration. Some of them are still living there. On their behalf and on behalf of the community, I am asking where it is up to. I am glad that the department is on the home straight.

[8.20 pm]

One other question would be: do the planned restoration works for that whole slope come under this department, to sort of resurrect the site in general?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Firstly, the member has speculated on causes. I am not going to do that. I can say that the department has engaged specialist contractors to design and undertake stabilisation works in the immediate slip zone. We will continue to work with the City of Albany to try to find a long-term solution and we will, of course, continue to consult all property owners.

I will ask Mr Darcey to perhaps go into further detail about how we worked with the property owners because, respectfully, I have been involved in a lot of different processes whereby we engage people and I believe that our agency has gone out of its way to engage in a respectful manner, understanding the distress. I might ask Mr Darcey to go through that process.

**Mr M. Darcey:** It is worth saying that the valuations for the land or the houses were done as if they had not been affected by a landslide. The landowners were faced with a position whereby their land and houses were worth nothing. I put on record that the valuations were well above what they would get if the state did not intervene.

The intention is that now the land will come back into the state's ownership. We are desperately trying to stop Sleeman Avenue getting any worse. Half of it has eroded away and if it is not mitigated, it is likely to continue to work its way up the hill. The geography in that area is large granite boulders overlaying clay, which is quite common across Albany. We do not have the geotechnical understanding of what caused it, but we know that we can do things to stop it spreading. That is what we are working with the consultants on now.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** The level of engagement with those property owners was significant, ongoing and respectful, and the valuations were funded by the state.

**Mr M. Darcey:** That is correct.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I will ask Mr Darcey to add to that.

**Mr M. Darcey:** We have travelled down to Albany a number of times and met with the landowners. The relationships have been very good. They are all very appreciative of the state intervening in this process. Clearly, people would like to maximise their benefit out of it. It is difficult to purchase other houses in Albany. Some have been out of their homes for some years and months. We have gone as far as we can with them to cover costs that make sense and can be justified from a state purse perspective.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I assume that once the repair works are done, it will be just like a public open space. It will not be a site for housing again. Is that correct?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Yes. I will ask Mr Darcey to make further comment, but clearly it will not be for housing. We are not going to replicate the cycle. I might ask Mr Darcey what considerations have been made, given the geotech of the site.

**Mr M. Darcey:** Clearly, it is very steep. The member has seen it. The member knows the site is a really problematic site. We are focused on stabilisation. Public open space might be a bit of a stretch because it is such a small site and very steep, but we want to stop any further spread of the slip to other properties adjacent et cetera, so we assume it will be revegetated and stabilised and left as a sort of little public open space.

**Ms E.L. HAMILTON:** I refer to page 718 of budget paper No 2, and spending changes for the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage. Can the minister outline how recent changes to the residential design codes will encourage housing diversity and support the delivery of housing supply in WA?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** For the member for Vasse, I have one other bit of information. I mentioned previously the significant development pathway and the number of applications. I can say that as of 20 May 2024, 35 applications have been approved through the part 17 pathway, with a total value of \$4.332 billion.

I am deeply proud of the work on medium density codes. This is an example of where the state government has worked heavily with the Urban Development Institute of Australia and the Property Council, under the former leadership of Sandra Brewer—a very strong advocate for Labor’s planning reforms! I think it is a great demonstration of how the state listened to industry, given the current cost escalations, and considered the medium density codes and then made changes. As a result, recognising the need to reduce any further impacts on the housing construction sector and to keep the costs of delivering housing affordable, it applies to single houses coded R50 and above, group dwellings coded R30 and above and multi-dwellings coded R30 and 60. For single homes in R30 and 40, the existing codes apply. That was probably universally welcomed. It was welcomed by architects, the Australian Institute of Architects and Property Consultants Australia, who wanted much of the flexibility and incentives that were available as part of the medium-density codes. But then major housing builders were comfortable with R30 and R40 being exempted.

It is a pity the member for Cottesloe has gone. I note that the only person who criticised me on that decision was the member for Cottesloe. Industry was universal in its praise. This is where I would have hoped for some sparring with the member for Cottesloe, but he is not here.

**Ms L. METTAM:** You are missing him a lot.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I am missing him.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** He is too frightened of you; he left!

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I know. He will have to do YouTube or TikToks with us!

The other part of the changes to the residential design codes was the granny flat exemptions, which are quite significant. Again, I note Hon Steve Martin, whom I quite like on a personal level, attacked cutting red tape for granny flats. Let us just be clear what the reform has done. It has permitted granny flats on group dwellings and strata sites, not only single-house properties. It has removed the previous minimum of 360 square metres. It has removed the requirement for the granny flat to be compatible with the existing dwelling, which, when we think about it, is slightly insane, given where products are moving. Someone could build a beautiful granny flat with oak cladding, let us say—can we get fake oak cladding? Let us go with it—that was not compatible with the double-brick house, and a council could refuse it. We have relaxed the car parking requirement, with no additional car bay required in medium-density and low-density areas.

I was criticised by the opposition, although I note the Leader of the Liberal Party welcomed this reform, so I thank the member for Vasse. My chief of staff and I met with the granny flats association and it was over the moon. It reported to me that it had had uplifts of 500 per cent in interest since the reforms were announced. I suspect that the relaxation and cutting of red tape around granny flats will in time deliver further housing supply for Western Australia, just like our other reforms.

[8.30 pm]

**The CHAIR:** Do we have any other questions?

**Ms L. METTAM:** We do, but we are tight against the clock.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Is the member not asking me any more planning reform questions?

**Ms L. METTAM:** We have a number of other divisions and the minister’s answers are very long.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I understand; I like to give detail.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

**Division 44: Western Australian Planning Commission —**

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Mr J.N. Carey, Minister for Planning.

Mr A. Kannis, Director General.

Ms J. Lundberg, Assistant Director General, Strategy and Engagement.

Mr M. Darcey, Assistant Director General, Land Use Management.

Ms P. Rodic, Director, Planning Reform Projects.

Mr V. Davies, Assistant Director General, Heritage and Property Services.

Ms C. Hay, Chief Finance Officer.

Ms S. Cardenia, Assistant Director General, Business and Corporate Services.

Ms C. Comrie, Chief of Staff, Minister for Planning.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

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

Do we have any questions? The member for Vasse.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to page 736 under “Outcomes and Key Effectiveness Indicators” and note that the target for the percentage of development applications determined within the statutory timeframe failed to reach the 2023–24 target. What factors have contributed to the delay?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** A number of different factors could be at play. It is dependent on the proposed application. It might be that further consultation is required. It may be that more information is required from the applicant. It may be that information is required from the local government. It is difficult for me to give just one answer because it is dependent on the application and the context of the application.

**Ms L. METTAM:** How many applications are referred to in those figures?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** What was the question?

**Ms L. METTAM:** What quantum of subdivision applications are we talking about? How many does that represent?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Is that in terms of how many subdivisions are represented within development applications?

**Ms L. METTAM:** Yes, within those figures.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Does the member mean the number of development applications determined during the year? Is she referring to the figure of 367?

My apologies: the member referred first to development applications and there is a separate section on subdivision applications. Is the member referring to that one?

**Ms L. METTAM:** I am referring to the subdivision applications.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Is it the 2023–24 estimated actual?

**Ms L. METTAM:** Yes.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** The number of subdivision applications determined during the year was 2 133 and the number determined within statutory timeframes as listed here was 1 943.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Further to the percentage of subdivision applications determined within the statutory timeframe on page 736, the budget indicates an improvement in processing time due to additional resources. How many full-time equivalent employees were added to the development application processing effort in the past year?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Over the past three years, median timeframes for development assessment panels have progressed well. Since the introduction of our first tranche of planning reforms in 2020, processing timeframes have trended downward over time. For an application that does not require advertising, for example, the median processing time is 60 days. We are seeing a good trend.

The staffing is only at a service level, so I do not have individual staffing numbers, but I will ask the director of planning reform projects, Phillida Rodic, to say some further words on that.

**Ms P. Rodic:** The allocation of planning staff in the statutory process tends to be across multiple fields. They might look at structure planning, subdivisions and developments because those often integrate; therefore, there is generally not a dedicated staff member working on just development applications, which makes it a little difficult to provide an immediate answer to the question. However, we can certainly look at the number of FTEs and the proportion of time spent on those different processes in time. As I said, we do not have specific staff dedicated just to development applications, other than in the state development assessment unit, part 17 and part 11B.

[8.40 pm]

**Ms L. METTAM:** I will ask the question the minister thought I was asking before, which was about the figures for the development applications within the statutory timeframe. How many applications is the 81 per cent budget target referring to?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** The number of development applications to determine within the statutory timeframe was 298. The number of development applications determined during the year was 367.

**Ms M. BEARD:** I refer to paragraph 3, “Land Acquisition”, on page 735. Can the minister advise what strategic land acquisition on behalf of the state the commissioner has undertaken over the past 12 months?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Is the member referring to the metropolitan region improvement fund?

**Ms M. BEARD:** Yes.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I want to be clear. The properties that are acquired for this can be quite expansive. They can be for public purposes, such as roads, public transport, Bush Forever sites, parks, open space and other land development. Basically, it is to ensure that the land is held for the state. It is for current and future infrastructure, environmental conservation, as I said, and for public open space. Of course, it also provides for strategic land acquisitions for significant projects. That differs each year according to what the Western Australian Planning Commission identifies. I put on the record that the owners of reserved land can retain, sell or offer their property to the WAPC or make a claim for compensation if their development rights are affected by the reservation. They purchase a property at its current market value. This is important—it relates back to Mira Mar and the same approach. It ignores the effect of reservation and obtains two independent valuations to advise on its price. For 2024–25, I am advised it includes additions to parks, recreation reserves and progressing the purchase of remaining land parcels identified as being part of Bush Forever sites.

**Ms L. METTAM:** We want to move on.

**The CHAIR:** As in, move on, move on?

**Ms L. METTAM:** We want to move on to DevelopmentWA.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

**DevelopmentWA —**

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Mr J.N. Carey, Minister for Lands.

Mr D. Mudford, Acting Chief Executive Officer.

Ms F. Barclay, Chief Financial Officer.

Ms C. Comrie, Chief of Staff, Minister for Lands.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

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I give the call to the member for Roe.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to works in progress in the table on page 758. Can the minister enlighten us on the East Perth power station situation? There does not seem to be a lot of funding in the out years. What is happening there?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** As the member would be aware, there was a lot of media attention regarding the withdrawal from the East Perth power station redevelopment by the previous successful applicants. I want to put this on the record—I think the member knows this: do not underestimate the level of contamination and infrastructure challenges we have had on that site. We have invested over \$120 million, which was previously noted on the public record. I will ask Mr Mudford to go into further detail, but over the past two years we have worked with Western Power, Main Roads, ATCO Gas and other government agencies to relocate gas and power infrastructure, demolish contaminated underground coal-handling infrastructure—of course, that makes sense, but people would not have thought it was still there—and remove asbestos from heritage buildings. All of that has been required, which is significant remediation of the site. We are still committed to the overall vision, whether it is high-density residential—I think the member would agree that there could be opportunities there—or commercial or tourism uses. There is

the final remediation and removal of the Western Power switchyard, which will be completed by early 2025. It is already on the record that we are working on a new master plan for the precinct. I will ask the acting chief executive to make any further comment regarding the significant process to remediate the site.

**Mr D. Mudford:** Thank you, minister. Most of the remediation works and relocation of infrastructure has largely been completed. We are well advanced on some thinking around a new master plan for the western part of the site, which is in front of the power station building. We will look at what opportunities there are to independently develop that vacant land, separate from the power station building. The power station is a significant heritage building and it takes a lot of capital to redevelop that. There is an opportunity to at least advance the development of the vacant land that sits on the western side. We will finalise that thinking and that business plan for further development over the coming months and will present that for consideration.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** If the minister were a betting man, what would he perceive —

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** You cannot ask me that question! Respectfully! Come on, member for Roe!

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** What does the member perceive will be the final result? Will it be residential? It has just been pointed out that there is some vacant land there. Will it be commercial? What does the minister feel will be the final result and, in honesty, the final achievable timeframe?

[8.50 pm]

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I really appreciate the member for Roe's genuine interest in this. I am passionate about a renewal of this precinct. As I and previous ministers have said on the record, there are difficult constraints, but we are looking at that side that will perhaps provide more opportunity in the closer term. As the Minister for Housing, I would clearly like to see that masterplan include residential housing. It makes sense. It is close to the city and public transport. Ultimately, it is a decision for cabinet and I will not pre-empt cabinet, but I think it is realistic to expect that.

The other part, which is the heritage building itself, is still very complex. It still has significant contamination. It has largely been decontaminated, but there is still some to go. As we have heard from the CEO, I think there are real residential opportunities.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Has the minister discarded the prospect of any joint partners coming in or does it look like it is going to be a government project?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Again, I am not going to pre-empt cabinet's decision on that. I think we have to be realistic about the times and the current financial constraints that we face in the market. I am very cognisant of that. I do not want to pre-empt, but as the Minister for Housing, my priority is to get some residential housing as part of that land because it is so close to the city.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to page 760 and the income statement of revenue from government regional infrastructure and headworks. I refer to the regional infrastructure and headworks funding, which includes \$8.7 million in 2024–25, with nothing in the out years. What projects are to be delivered in 2024–25? As part of that, how many serviced residential and industrial lots will be delivered as part of this funding?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Is it right that the member is referring to \$8.7 million?

**Ms L. METTAM:** Yes, I am.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I think there is a bit of confusion there. As the member would be aware, we have a regional land booster program, which is about releasing more land. We have made specific investments in the budget for that. That particular \$8.7 million relates to some funding allocation for stage 3 of transforming Bunbury's waterfront, phase 1 of the Nambeelup Transform Peel project, the Peel Business Park and East Keralup economic activation infrastructure. The most substantial amount is already on the public record and is towards the Nyamba Buru Yawuru health and wellbeing campus—excuse my pronunciation.

**Ms E.L. HAMILTON:** I refer to page 755 of budget paper No 2 under the line item "Regional Development Assistance Program". Following the success of the regional land booster campaign, how is DevelopmentWA ensuring continued support for regional land supply?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I thank the member for Joondalup. I respectfully suspect the member for Vasse was reading the wrong section. She asked about residential lots. I want to put this on the public record. Since 2020, our regional land booster program has seen 697 lots contracted across 98 projects in 82 regional towns, generating over 2 178 construction jobs and private sector investment of more than \$703 million.

**Mr S.A. MILLMAN:** Well done.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I thank the member for Mount Lawley. I always love his encouragement.

This is important because I got a question from the member for Vasse in the last session, which I indicated was towards the wrong agency. Over 670 lots remain available across regional Western Australia as part of the land booster initiative for residential, mixed-use, industrial, commercial and tourism use. That is incredible. On top of that —

**Mr S.A. MILLMAN:** It is insane.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Insane?

**Mr S.A. MILLMAN:** It is incredible.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Get out in the regions!

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Wait a minute, member for Vasse! Do not mock me!

I have been very respectful to her the whole time. She asked me a question. In her last statement, she said that there were no regional lots available, and I am letting her know that there are! It is my obligation to the house and for the public record to do that.

Of course, through DevelopmentWA, we have also announced some additional funding for regional land projects. That includes \$16.8 million to provide 32 residential lots in stage 5 of GreenView, which is obviously in Kalgoorlie. A further \$13 million has been allocated for 51 lots at Karratha's Madigan at Baynton West estate, with seven lots for social housing and additional lots for Government Regional Officers' Housing. Additionally, 23 new larger-sized lots will be delivered in early 2025 to support an increase in the resident workforce. A sum of \$5 million has been committed to unlock 26 development-ready lots in stage 13 of Broome North's Waranyjarri Estate, including three multi-residential social housing lots, two single residential social housing lots and three lots for key workers. There is also the extension of Tanami Drive, a critical road connection between Broome North and Cable Beach.

Of course, we are also supporting local governments and communities through the state government's regional development assistance program. This helps to free up land supply in areas where privately developed land is limited, thereby making such projects commercially viable and boosting supply in the regions. It is a \$7 million investment. Land is available to 42 regional towns. For the member for Roe, some of the towns have RDAP-funded approval to proceed to construction, including five industrial lots in Kondinin. Jurien Bay, for example, has 11 light industrial lots. Dalwallinu has nine residential lots to support the town's agriculture by offering further housing options and eight light industrial lots. Right there is significant subsidisation to get regional land available.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I have a further question about the regional development assistance program. This has been adjusted down by \$21.8 million in 2024–25, and then it has gone up by \$1.89 million in the three out years.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Sorry, member. Apologies, what line item is it?

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

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Yes, but I need a referral point. The member has indicated that there has been a reduction in funding. I need the referral line.

[9.00 pm]

**Ms L. METTAM:** I am going to have to find it.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** For the record, we increased funding for the program from approximately \$5 million to \$7 million per annum. If the member gives me a line item, I can look at it.

**The CHAIR:** Is it page 755?

**Ms L. METTAM:** Yes, but this is a different question.

**The CHAIR:** Okay, so you are moving away from the recent development assistance program.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to page 755 of the *Budget statements*. On page 755, it looks like there has been a \$21 million underspend.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Respectfully, member, I just need a line item. It is not just for me.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I am referring to "Key Adjustments" under "Financial Changes".

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** What page is that again?

**Ms L. METTAM:** It is on page 755.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** The \$21.8 million is the allocation to address demand for housing land in the Kimberley and goldfields regions. If we break that down, \$5 million has been allocated to Broome north stage 13 to deliver 26 lots; and \$16.8 million has been allocated for the goldfields at Greenview Estate, Kalgoorlie, to deliver 32 residential lots.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Just to confirm, it is not an underspend but an allocation into other parts of the budget.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Yes.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I turn to the 697 lots that the minister referred to previously following the member for Joondalup's question. Can the minister provide a breakdown in terms of residential and industrial lots and their locations? By way of supplementary information is fine, given the time.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I will go through it. I said there were over 670 lots. I am advised that there are 692. In the Kimberley, there are 78 residential lots, 17 light industrial commercial lots and seven general industrial lots; in the

Pilbara, there are 113 residential, 11 light industrial commercial and 55 general industrial; in the Gascoyne, there are 24 residential and one light industrial commercial; in the midwest, there are 48 residential, 16 light industrial commercial and 32 general industrial; in goldfields–Esperance, there are 73 residential and 11 light industrial commercial; in the wheatbelt, there are 93 residential and 22 light industrial commercial; in the Peel, there are 14 residential and 20 light general industrial; in the south west, there are seven residential and 11 light industrial commercial; and in the great southern, there are 32 residential and seven light industrial commercial. That is 482 residential lots, 96 light industrial commercial lots and 114 general industrial lots equating to a contracted total of 692 lots.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Can the minister provide that breakdown for the previous year?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I just read out the whole lot.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Can it be by way of supplementary information, just as a comparison of the quantum?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I just read out all the details for the member. I do not have that information on me.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Can the minister provide it by way of supplementary information just for the previous year?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** It is not part of this budget. The member can go through the normal question on notice process.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to financial changes on page 755, the same page and similar section, and the funding associated with “Housing Diversity Pipeline—Brown Street”. The funding figures are in brackets. Can the minister explain? It appears that the funding for this line item has been removed. Can the minister please clarify what the financial changes in the key adjustments table mean?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Just to clarify, is the member suggesting that it is a deduction?

**Ms L. METTAM:** I am asking for clarification.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Just to be very clear, as I think I mentioned in my last answer about the housing diversity pipeline, we are pursuing Court Place, Subiaco; Smith Street, Perth; Pier Street, Perth; East Parade, Mt Lawley; and Brown Street, Busselton. That is an additional allocation in the budget. As the member would be aware, the housing diversity pipeline seeks to secure for Western Australian taxpayers a return of social housing or affordable rentals, or it could be a mixed development, but we want social housing. We are still in the process with the proponent, and I will make further announcements. It is in the member for Vasse’s electorate and it will be a social housing contribution to Western Australia.

**Ms L. METTAM:** When will the housing be completed for each of the 12 sites identified in the original housing diversity pipeline?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I have answered this question about the housing diversity pipeline repeatedly in the upper house. As I indicated, five are at very detailed stages under various processes. We were always very clear with the housing diversity pipeline that we were taking surplus land, going to the market and identifying proponents. We also recognise that not all of that land, given constraints, could be viable in the current market circumstances. I am very pleased, and I am sure the member for Vasse will embrace having Brown Street as a social housing contribution in her electorate. I have already been on the public record about the delivery numbers on Pier Street. There will be further announcements as we progress about the number of dwellings to be delivered on Smith Street, Court Place, Brown Street and East Parade.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

[9.10 pm]

**Keystart Housing Scheme Trust —**

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Mr J.N. Carey, Minister for Housing.

Mr L. O’Sullivan, Chief Operating Officer.

Ms C. Comrie, Chief of Staff, Minister for Housing.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

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

I give the call to the member for Roe.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Page 530 refers to how the trust ensures provision of sustainable housing outcomes by assisting affordable home ownership. How many active Keystart loans are there currently?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I put on the record that the member for Roe's upper house member regularly asks me these questions, so it is provided on a regular basis. As of 31 March 2024, the total loans managed is 11 519.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Of those, what percentage are 30 or more days in arrears?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** The number in arrears of 30 days is 748 and the number in arrears of more than 90 days is 492. These numbers have been previously reported for the record, but I want Mr O'Sullivan to go through what supports are in place. There has been significant work. We are very cognisant of the 13 interest rate rises. The member would be aware that I announced a change to the interest rate settings for Keystart, which saved Keystart owners thousands of dollars. That was a significant reform in Keystart policy, but I will ask Mr O'Sullivan to talk about the supports.

**Mr L. O'Sullivan:** Thank you, minister. Lenders around the country have experienced increases in arrears. It is the rapidness of the increasing interest rates in the last 18 months that have had the most impact on consumers. Borrowers have found the process quite difficult to adjust to quickly. Keystart is no different from that. I think what is different about Keystart is the majority of our customers are younger and first home buyers, so they do not have significant amounts of savings. We believe we provide a lot more support than mainstream lenders. That level of support includes using a case management approach for customers who are in arrears or experiencing financial hardship. Individual customers work with the same adviser over a period of time for however long that support is required. Unlike other lenders, we provide a number of free financial tools and guides, which includes a free financial coaching service in partnership with Anglicare and the Financial Wellbeing Collective. The aim of that particular financial coaching service is to support customers to build the resilience to handle periods of financial hardship. We offer a free financial counselling service through Relationships Australia. All our customers have access to that free of charge. We have a hardship policy that gives customers time to adjust. Those kinds of adjustments can simply be time, reductions in payments or deferred payments for periods of time. That provides enough support.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Would the minister be able to refresh me about the interest rates announcement? Are all Keystart customers or clients on the same rate? Is there any differential?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Based on his last question, the member may be interested to know that Hon Steve Martin asked about Keystart in greater detail. The data provided to the member was only recently provided, in quite significant detail, to the government as of April this year.

As for the member's question about the current interest rate, which is 7.85 per cent, the advice is that the majority of Keystart clients—95 per cent plus—are on the same rate. The reality is that some are on a legacy interest rate setting, but I might ask Mr O'Sullivan to give the context of that legacy policy.

**Mr L. O'Sullivan:** There are some products that would be 15 years or older. When there were previous changes to interest rate setting policies, those customers were put on a legacy product. There are various versions of that, but a very small number of customers are on those rates now, which are typically slightly lower than 7.85 per cent.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** How many Keystart homes have been repossessed in 2023–24 and how does this compare with previous financial years?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I think it is important to stress that Mr O'Sullivan did go through in detail all the additional support services that are provided to people experiencing hardship—case management, free financial tools, financial coaching services and free counselling services, as well as implementing a hardship assistance policy. The member may think this is naff, but an incredible app has now been launched for Keystart customers, through which they can access to see how much equity they have in their home. Why is that important? If they see how much equity they have in their home, they can make the decision to jump to another lender because, ultimately, Keystart is a transitional lender. That is the main game, as the member knows. Through that phone app, customers can see the equity and then move on and move faster. I will ask Mr O'Sullivan to give some more words, but, in fact, the number is relatively low. I am advised that this financial year, it is 12, but I would ask Mr O'Sullivan to perhaps give some more context.

**Mr L. O'Sullivan:** I can confirm that as at the end of March, 12 homes were managed under mortgagee in possession. There are customers who go through our support process—that process can last weeks, months or years—and reach a point at which they choose to sell their home. We no longer need to take any enforcement action against those customers in terms of mortgagee in possession because they are in a position to sell their property, and they do that off their own bat.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** The second part of my original question was: how does that 12 compare with the last couple of years?



**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I think it is important that Mr O’Sullivan also addresses this, because we have been very focused on all the supports, but we also have clear obligations and financial responsibilities. Of course, I am on the record as saying that no-one wants to see anyone in this type of scenario. The advice is that in the previous financial year, it was 21, but I might ask Mr O’Sullivan to talk about Keystart’s obligations.

[9.20 pm]

**Mr L. O’Sullivan:** Keystart has an Australian credit licence. Under that licence, we have a number of obligations to our regulator, the Australian Securities and Investments Commission. Those obligations include how we assess loans when customers originally apply. We have responsible lending obligations to ensure the loan is not unsuitable for that particular customer. On the ongoing management, we have a number of obligations around collections activities. When a customer experiences hardship, we are obligated under regulatory guides that are quite specific in terms of the level of support. They refer to the recognition of hardship and the supports that are provided to that customer. That hardship can be in many different forms. It is not just financial hardship. Hardship can also be in relation to things like relationship situations, family and domestic violence and health, which all impact on the customer’s ability to service their loan. We have a number of mechanisms that we use to support customers throughout those periods of time. When customers go into arrears, we support those customers for quite a considerable amount of time. That is why the number of customers that we are managing under mortgagee in possession is very low. We have obligations to make sure that if the customer cannot afford the loan over the long term, we do not continue to burden that customer with that particular loan because interest could be accruing, which means that the debt they have continues to grow. We work very closely with customers to help them either make a decision themselves or if we need to, we then take possession of the property. As a result of all the support processes, we very rarely need to go down to that level.

**The CHAIR:** That completes the examination of the Keystart Housing Scheme Trust Authority.

**Division 35: Communities — Services 2 and 7 to 9, Housing; Homelessness —**

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Mr J.N. Carey, Minister for Homelessness.

Mr L. McIvor, Deputy Director General, Housing and Homelessness.

Mr B. Whitehouse, Acting Director General, Community Services.

Mr M. Rowe, Director General.

Mr W. Millen, Chief Finance Officer.

Ms K. Blitz-Cokis, Executive Director, Office of Homelessness.

Ms C. Comrie, Chief of Staff, Minister for Homelessness.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

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

I give the call to the member for Vasse.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to budget paper No 3, page 189, “Government Regional Officer Housing”, which refers to \$43.8 million which will be spent over 2023–24 to 2025–26 to fund 56 GROH dwellings through new builds and spot purchases and the purchase of additional land parcels for future dwellings. Given regional areas across the state are experiencing critical shortages, which I know the minister is aware of, what locations will receive the additional funding? How much of the \$43.8 million will be targeted at new builds and land acquisition to provide urgently needed new housing stock in regional markets?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I have talked about this before in this place in considerable detail. As the member has indicated, we are making an additional capital investment of \$43.8 million. Over four years, that is \$160.3 million for new builds, spot purchases and so forth. The member is asking about exact locations. I have always been very clear that GROH does not work like that. GROH is a demand-driven program with demands and priorities identified by

client agencies. It is not always possible to identify where demand will arise because things change with programs and operations. We make an assessment. I will ask Mr McIvor to give further detail about this. It changes from month to month. That is the reality.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Given the urgency in delivering these houses and the urgency in these regional areas, surely the minister has an understanding of the regions that the minister wants to target.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Can we be clear about how much GROH stock we have? We have 5 286 owned or leased residential properties as of 31 March 2024. That is a significant portfolio. We regularly engage with agencies. We look at the programs and we look at the need. I will ask Mr McIvor to give further detail about how we go about that.

**Mr L. McIvor:** As the minister said, we have approximately \$160 million over four years, and we will use that to purchase land and to undertake refurbishments to extend the life of existing homes, but also, when needed, to spot purchase homes and also build new homes. We work very closely with client agencies on their priorities. In questions in Parliament recently, the minister listed the numbers of GROH stock per region. We work with them to plan ahead. From a construction point of view, we would have a number under construction at any one time. We would expect this year to probably deliver some 60 new homes to the owned stock. We also lease stock in towns where the market allows. Although we absolutely want to make sure that we continue to increase our ownership of stock, we can lease stock from the private market or, on occasion, we have entered into agreements to headlease GROH properties that will be built for us and, in partnership, we will sign up to a 10-year lease. We have a number of ways to meet the priorities of our agencies. Construction is core but refurbishment is also. We will probably deliver some 180-plus refurbishments in the next four years with a view to maintain the stock we also have.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** To be clear, at any one time, there will be vacant GROH housing, which is normal, because we allocate houses to agencies. They then allocate accordingly to their staff and they may keep a GROH house vacant on the basis that they are working to secure employment and so forth.

[9.30 pm]

**Ms L. METTAM:** That points to my next question. How many Government Regional Officers' Housing properties are currently vacant?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I am happy to provide that answer as supplementary information. At any one time, we will have vacant GROH properties because that is the nature of staff turnover. As I have mentioned, the vacancy can be related to anything—for example, maternity leave for teachers. There are many different reasons why stock in the system can be vacant. Staff come and go. We are constantly looking at our GROH stock. The member may have heard me say this in the Parliament before. When there is old GROH stock that is no longer fit for purpose for GROH, we will look at converting it into social and public housing, and often it will still need refurbishment. I am very cognisant that when we have vacant stock and it is beyond its life or no longer fit for purpose for the needs of GROH, we first consider it for social housing, or in other circumstances, we may lease it to not-for-profit community organisations to also assist with housing supply. I do not know whether the member is suggesting that the government is just sitting twiddling its thumbs on this, because it is not.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I am just asking a question.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Well, no —

**The CHAIR:** Members!

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** It is just estimates, minister. It is just a simple question.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** The member for Central Wheatbelt has not been here for the whole context.

**Ms L. METTAM:** It is just a simple question.

**The CHAIR:** Member for Vasse, just hold on for two seconds. Minister, you agreed to provide supplementary information.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I will provide supplementary information on the number of vacant properties at this time.

**Ms L. METTAM:** Further to that, can we get the figure for the last three years to get an understanding of the trend?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I am happy to provide that also as supplementary information, but I want to be clear about this. I do not know whether the member has spoken to Hon Steve Martin, but I am regularly questioned on GROH and I have provided that kind of information to the shadow Minister for Housing. However, I am happy to provide it also as supplementary information.

[*Supplementary Information No A37.*]

**Ms L. METTAM:** It is understood that the GROH program was reviewed by the Department of Communities in 2023. I am not sure whether the minister has already made those findings public, but if he has not, will he provide the findings of the review by the Department of Communities into the GROH program?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** It was an internal review in which the agency looked at the ongoing management and allocation of GROH homes.

**Ms L. METTAM:** In the interests of transparency, is the minister able to make that information public? There is a lot of interest in it.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** No. It was an operational matter.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I want to take the minister back to a year ago tonight and talk about the community of Munglinup. That community has a lack of GROH properties and its teachers are driving 200 kilometres a day to work there—100 kilometres out from Esperance and 100 kilometres back. Tonight, I have heard some statements about an open-door policy, the seeking of land opportunities and an unprecedented effort to get agencies together et cetera. The community of Munglinup in the Shire of Ravensthorpe has provided a block of land. It had a commitment from the department that it would build a GROH property. This time last year, the department decided not to build it there but to build one in Kalgoorlie instead. The Shire of Ravensthorpe also offered to do the land works and ground works et cetera. That community is crying out for housing; there is no spare housing in the town. I appeal to the minister on behalf of the community of Munglinup to build a GROH house on that block.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I am being a bit flexible here, but can the member please refer to a line item in the budget papers. I am being quite flexible.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** My question is related to GROH properties and demand.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** The minister can refer to Government Regional Officers' Housing in the table under the asset investment program on page 520. He wants one of those 56 new GROH properties that the minister is going to build.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, member for Central Wheatbelt.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Member, this relates to the previous question about vacant houses. I want to put this on the public record and note, respectfully, that the member has not referred to this. The GROH program regularly reviews its construction projects and proposed construction projects so that they are aligned to what agencies indicate as their needs and what is highest and best use. There is one GROH property in the town that was vacant from 15 November 2021 to 14 April 2023. For 17 months, that GROH property remained vacant due to the school's substantive principal's preference to live in a GROH property in Esperance and drive to the school. That is an example of a GROH property that remained vacant for some time. The opposition may seek to criticise that, but the Department of Education, which had been allocated the property, left it vacant, as opposed to me leaving it vacant, because of the principal's preference. That demonstrates the flux nature of things. We will also consider GROH properties according to demand and the assessment of the client agency.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Thank you, minister. Obviously, the world changes at different times, but I think we will move on to a new question if we can.

**The CHAIR:** Member for Roe, go for it.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to paragraph 4 under "Homelessness" and significant issues impacting the agency on page 505. Is the \$92.2 million in funding related to the recommissioning process for homelessness services?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** That \$92.2 million relates to the following components, and I think it is important to put them on the record: \$70.2 million in funding to an existing 120 homelessness services, of which 78 are in the Perth metropolitan area and 42 in the regions; and \$15.7 million for expanding Housing First services, which is made up of \$6.7 million for the metropolitan area and \$9 million for Geraldton, Albany and Kalgoorlie. I think the member would be familiar with Housing First, which is a wraparound approach. The member may be interested in the fact that, based on the highly successful supported landlord model in the metropolitan area, we are expanding, as I previously announced, a regional supported landlord model, which I think the member would support. That will first go to Geraldton, and then Albany and Kalgoorlie. Obviously, we need Housing First support services to provide the wraparound. We do that first. In addition, as part of that \$92.2 million, we are providing \$6.3 million to expand the Entrypoint referral service. As the member would be aware, Entrypoint is the frontline service in Western Australia. It takes the calls and makes referrals. That is a significant boost to Entrypoint. All that funding investment follows the midyear review announcement of \$47.6 million for 15 critical homelessness services across WA. When we add the 15 and the 120 services, we are talking about 135 homelessness services across Western Australia. My understanding and the advice to me is that that is an unprecedented increase. It is about providing capacity support for those homelessness services on the front line.

[9.40 pm]

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Does the update that the minister gave us cover the recommissioning process of all of those? Can he provide an update on the recommissioning process and when services are expected to get new contracts?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Respectfully, that is a fair question about the commissioning process. That continues. The money that we have announced is not linked to commissioning. This will ensure that they get a baseline boost to their existing services. It is a significant amount of work and the homelessness services are embracing this approach.

Part of it is about a greater focus as part of commissioning on Housing First services. It also includes a greater consideration of participation by Aboriginal community-controlled organisations. The member for Central Wheatbelt and I attended an ACCO launch strategy. It is underway and the commissioning process will inform future funding decisions for homelessness based on data, evidence and engagement. I want to be clear: there is no reduction in funding to homelessness services for contracts in 2024–25. In fact, it is an unprecedented increase.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Is there a date for when that process is expected to be completed and services will have their contracts signed?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I cannot give the member a timeframe and the reason is that we have broken the commissioning process up into four streams. It is a big, complex piece of work, as the member can imagine. To make it clear for the sector, we have broken it into four: accommodation, providing acute high support, low support or youth accommodation with varying levels of onsite support; specialist support, which is providing case management that provides support over a period to assist people to access or maintain housing, manage a range of support needs and integrate with other elements of the support system; engagement hubs, which I assume is no surprise to the member, providing a safe location for people experiencing homelessness, access to services and basic needs, information and referrals; and coordinated outreach, which is actively seeking out people experiencing homelessness, particularly those sleeping rough.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** The reason we are after the date, and I appreciate that it is complex, is that organisations are looking for some certainty around when contracts will be finalised for employment and expenditure going forward. I can see that there is funding in the system, which the minister spoke about earlier, but it is hard for those organisations to make plans too far in advance if they do not know the outcome of the recommissioning process.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I want to provide this assurance: we have provided contract extensions. The budget announcement, which saw that massive increase to the baseline funding, was overwhelmingly welcomed by the sector. I appreciate that whenever there is change, it is difficult. The commissioning is also about modernising the contracts. I want to be frank, and I have said it before, there are 135 homelessness services in Western Australia. Some have grown over time or have been inherited, and so we need to modernise their contracts and do it within those very specific streams, boost ACCO services and base it on the Housing First approach. Although I appreciate there can be some feelings of uncertainty, so far the sector gets that we need to get it right. I think that it is satisfied by the streams and how we are approaching it, and of course it has strongly welcomed the baseline funding boost.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to page 510 and underneath “Outcome: Affordable housing options are available to eligible Western Australians” is the item “Responsiveness—Total housing assistances provided relative to the public rental waiting list”. The public rental waiting list continues to fall each year, with the budget key performance indicator for this year at 0.26. Why is the KPI falling?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Just to clarify, the member is asking why there has been an increase?

**Ms L. METTAM:** The target for responsiveness is falling and the budget target is now 0.26.

[9.50 pm]

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I have been on the record and we have always been very clear that the overall public housing waiting list has been and is always tied to the rental market. The current rental market that we face not only in Western Australia, but also across the country means that there is greater demand. More people are seeking the safety of the public housing system. I do not think it is a surprise to anyone that an increase in competition in the private rental market means there are fewer options in the rental market, which means that more people are seeking to be placed on the housing waiting list, which puts more pressure on the waiting list. That is why we are doing everything we can to boost social housing supply. I am in this place speaking about this on a regular basis. Just to give members a sense of it, on average, around 125 social homes are being added or returned to the system every month in Western Australia, which, given the tight construction market, is a significant achievement. But I am deeply cognisant that we have to keep pushing forward.

I note that in 2022–23, because of that renewed investment, there was a 35 per cent increase in the number of people on the public waitlist in WA being housed. There was an increase from 1 963 in 2021–22 to 2 643 in 2022–23. As I have said, more competition in the rental market and less product available puts more pressure on the waiting list. I have always been very explicit about that.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I refer to the table “Waiting times for accommodation—Applicants housed”. In 2023–24, the budget is 130 weeks and the estimated actual is 148 weeks; in 2024–25, it will go to 163 weeks. Is that growth of an additional 33 weeks an admission that the government has been too slow to act? I know the minister talks about pulling every lever now, but has the government been too slow to address these issues?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Firstly, respectfully, I reject the member’s proposition. I will put on the record the housing delivery numbers because I think it is important. Since 1 July 2021, when we made the record investment in social housing, to today, 23 May 2024, 2 175 social homes have been added across Western Australia and 1 048 social homes are under contract or construction. That is a significant delivery in the tightest construction market.

As I have indicated and as I just said before, when rental markets are tight, people seek a surety of the public housing system, noting that, as has been acknowledged by Hon Steve Martin, the majority of people on the waiting list have accommodation. That has been acknowledged by the opposition. But people will still seek the comfort of being on the waiting list.

In terms of the actual average waiting times, I want to be clear that is not a target. That is not a target that the state government has set for itself. It is considered a forecast. It is based on a statistical forecasting model. It is not a target for the state government. As I said, we are doing everything we can to boost social housing. I come back to this statistic that in 2022–23, there was a 35 per cent increase in applicants being housed from the public waitlist in comparison with the previous year. That is a direct result of the record investment that we have made over the past few years and the homes that we are adding to the system. But it is not a target as the member makes it out to be.

**Ms L. METTAM:** What is the number of social houses in WA each financial year from 2017–18 to 2023–24 inclusive?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Can I just say one last thing on the last question; I should have mentioned that that forecast that the member referred to reflects the average wait time growth over the preceding 91 months. It is a model for a forecast that has been adopted with standard industry forecasting techniques. Previous to 2021–22—this is important—a simple trendline was used that was considered to be significantly inaccurate. I want to be clear. It is a reflection of only average wait time growth, and this has been adopted as a standard industry forecasting technique.

I provided ample information to the upper house on the numbers that the member has asked for. I just indicated that since 1 July 2021, 2 175 social homes have been added across WA and 1 048 social homes are under contract or construction. I provided a number of answers to the upper house that have given further details on delivery.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 513, “Homelessness Support Services”. The estimated actual number of clients in 2023–24 is 16 550. There is concern over WA government support for homelessness support services. Does the government track homeless deaths at all?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Can I be very clear on this. Because of the cohort involved, it is very difficult to collect data on the cause of death because homelessness is not a cause of death in its own right. However, we recognise that people sleeping rough may be at greater risk due to a range of factors, which obviously can be exacerbated or increased by rough sleeping. Because of the cohort, the best way that we can track, and the best system in place, is by using the By-Name List. We have increased funding to the By-Name List. I want to be clear on this. I think the member’s side has criticised me and the By-Name List. The irony is that I have put more funding into the By-Name List to get more rough sleepers registered on the By-Name List. Ultimately, members on the By-Name List can be referred to our supported landlord model. We would argue that the significant investment we have made in the By-Name List and its expansion is the critical policy consideration because data on homelessness deaths is very difficult to obtain given the cohort and the complexity.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I have a further question. Minister, I note that —

**The CHAIR:** We are going to run out of time to complete it. I have a couple of procedural things I need to do.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

**APPROPRIATION (RECURRENT 2024–25) BILL 2024  
APPROPRIATION (CAPITAL 2024–25) BILL 2024**

**The CHAIR:** The question is —

That the clauses, schedules and titles of the bills be agreed to.

**Question put and passed.**

*Committee adjourned at 10.00 pm*

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