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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

Tuesday, 21 September 2021

Legislative Assembly

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ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

The meeting commenced at 9.00 am.

Division 36: Communities — Services 1 to 6, Child Protection; Women’s Interests; Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence; Community Services, \$1 017 328 000 —

Ms M.M. Quirk, Chair.

Ms S.F. McGurk, Minister for Child Protection; Women’s Interests; Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence; Community Services.

Mr M. Rowe, Director General.

Mr M. Richardson, Director, Management, Accounting and Financial Analysis.

Mr P. Payne, Executive Director, Regulation and Quality.

Mrs R. Green, Deputy Director General, Community Services.

Ms C.H. Irwin, Assistant Director General, Strategy and Partnerships.

Mr M. Crevola, Chief Finance Officer.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. It is my intention to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. This estimates committee’s consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information she agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister’s cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 1 October 2021. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

I give the call to the Member for Vasse.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to item 6 on page 519 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and the forward estimates for care arrangements and support services for children in the chief executive officer’s care. Why is there an anticipated increase in costs when page 517 states that the total number of children in care has reduced from 5 498 to 5 344, a 2.8 per cent reduction and the first reduction since 1997, and the number of Aboriginal children in care reduced from 3 082 to 3 056, a reduction of 0.8 per cent, which is the first reduction since 1996?

The CHAIR: Member, there are three questions there. To make this more efficient, maybe we will get the minister to answer the first question you asked and then you can drill down into the detail. The first question you asked was: why has the cost increased for the same number of individuals?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The reduction of children in care that the member refers to is something that we are very proud of as a government—perhaps the member has heard me speak about that in question time in the Legislative Assembly—but it is not something that we take for granted. The member may have referred to this in her question. It is the first reduction in total numbers since, I think, 1998—for Aboriginal children in care it is since 1996. There has been in place for some time an assumption within child protection budgeting that there will be an increase in the number of investigations and the number of children in care. That is the short answer to what the member is asking. We are assuming that because of population growth and also because of the complexity of the situation facing families and the number of children coming into care—the attention and care that we need to give them—there will be growth, and that is what we have budgeted for.

The CHAIR: You might have further questions, member.

Ms L. METTAM: Yes, my further question relates to page 518.

The CHAIR: You are on the same point. You had a number of questions. Are you asking the rest of the questions you had there, or not?

Ms L. METTAM: I think the minister has answered them all.

The CHAIR: Okay, is this a different topic?

Ms L. METTAM: It is a slightly different topic, yes. I refer to service 6 on page 518, care arrangements and support services for children in the CEO's care and the desired outcome, and the statement —

Children and young people in the Chief Executive Officer's ... care receive a high quality of care and have much improved life outcomes.

I note that the review into residential care placement decisions report was released last week. It highlights that the opposite appears to be occurring with regard to children in the care of the CEO who have been subject to sexual abuse and rape. Why did the department place young victims in the same residences as the perpetrators?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Is the question why some children with harmful sexual behaviours were placed in the same residential facilities as other children?

Ms L. METTAM: Yes.

[9.10 am]

Ms S.F. McGURK: Practice guidelines for children with very difficult behaviours have been in place in the department for some time. That is the nature of children in care, particularly those in residential care. They will have a series of challenges, including behavioural challenges or difficulty regulating their behaviour, or past trauma that has not been resolved. Some of those difficult behaviours include harmful sexual behaviours. A risk assessment is done to determine what placements are best for those young people depending on the nature of those behaviours, including whether they may be placed in group homes with other children. Risk assessments are done to determine whether they should be placed with other children at all. That is probably the best answer I can give to the member's question. The practice guidelines contemplate that it is possible for children with harmful sexual behaviours to be placed in group homes. However, when those behaviours are of an extreme nature, some of those children will be classed as what is called a reportable offender, so the court will decide that their harmful sexual behaviour is of such a difficult nature that they become categorised under the law as a reportable offender. The department has made a decision that no children who are notified as reportable offenders by the court will be placed in group homes with other children. That is when the department knows that that child is a reportable offender.

Ms L. METTAM: Knowing that a child exhibits harmful sexual behaviours, how can the Department of Communities, which is meant to be protecting children, justify such a decision—this has obviously been expressed by the Commissioner for Children and Young People—when it has knowingly allowed for someone with harmful sexual behaviour to be in the same residential care as a victim of child sex abuse?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I referred to some of these issues in the Parliament recently, and the investigation by the Commissioner for Children and Young People into the department's policies and practices of placing children with harmful sexual behaviours in residential care settings. This independent review was tabled in the Parliament only last week. In my response, I said that the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse referred quite a bit to children with harmful sexual behaviours. In fact, one of the things that can occur when young children are abused is that their perception of sexuality changes and they start to demonstrate some sexualised behaviours as a result of that abuse. The royal commission investigated and talked about this matter quite a bit. In fact, around Australia, and internationally, there is an emerging body of work to understand what is considered age appropriate and, if you like, normal behaviour, on what is a long continuum—for instance, what matters are perhaps concerning but not considered harmful sexual behaviours, what are harmful sexual behaviours, and then what are quite serious behaviours. As I said, in some instances, the court will determine whether some of those children are actually reportable offenders. As a result of the investigation by the children's commissioner, the department made a decision that when it notes that young people are reportable offenders, they will not be placed with other children. First of all, the royal commission talked about this issue and made a number of recommendations on how we deal with these matters. In fact, the federal government and all jurisdictions agreed that a national centre will look at best practice and responses to children with harmful sexual behaviours. The federal government has not yet made a decision about establishing that national centre but I have raised it with the appropriate federal minister, Minister Ruston, and we understand that a decision is imminent. It is an emerging body of work to determine how we respond to children with harmful sexual behaviours, how we identify them, what treatment practices are considered, and the best approach. That is the first point.

The second point is that in a residential care setting, each child has a safety plan developed in conjunction with their care team that identifies possible risks posed or experienced by the child. The plan contains specific strategies to mitigate those risks to the child and to others. That is generally what occurs. When a child exhibits harmful sexual behaviours, a risk assessment is carried out by the department. That is contemplated in the practice manual that governs the departmental workers or the community sector organisation workers who work with those children.

Training is currently being rolled out to residential staff to improve the identification of and responses to children exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours. That was another response to the Commissioner for Children and Young

People's report that we spoke about before. This training includes indicators of sexual abuse and harm, responding to disclosures, ensuring that children's voices are heard, and reporting processes. That system is similar to the traffic lights framework produced by an organisation called True Relationships and Reproductive Health. As I said, there is an emerging body of understanding and response on how to deal with harmful sexual behaviours. As a result of the work that has been done by the Department of Communities, we are increasing the capacity of our care team staff and residential care staff to understand what we know about that work through the rollout of training and ensuring that individual safety plans are done for young people placed in care settings.

Ms L. METTAM: The minister has referred to the report that was tabled last week and to the case that highlighted a number of concerns. As was highlighted in the report, the victim, Macie, said that she had raised concerns about Lee on a number of occasions and the threats that she felt because of his behaviour. What commitment has the department or the minister made to ensure that those recommendations will be implemented?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I have addressed that question, which I mentioned in Parliament last week. The department has made a commitment that it will not knowingly place a reportable offender—a young person with harmful sexual behaviours—in a residential care setting with other young people. That change of policy was made by the department as a result of that case and the investigation by the Commissioner for Children and Young People.

[9.20 am]

Ms L. METTAM: How many times has this occurred, and are there still any instances where victims and perpetrators are housed together in the same residence?

Ms S.F. McGURK: There are no instances now where reportable offenders are placed in residential care settings with other children.

Ms L. METTAM: What about since 2017? Is the minister aware of—

The CHAIR: With all due respect, member, you might want to limit that, because that may cover a previous term of government.

Ms L. METTAM: I will rephrase that. How many times has this occurred since the minister has been Minister for Child Protection?

The CHAIR: We are dealing with this budget, member. I do not know that you can ask that.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I would also ask the member to refer to a particular line item in the budget so we can be clear on what we are talking about in relation to the budget.

Ms L. METTAM: Okay. I refer to budget paper No 2, *Budget Statements Volume 2*, and the line item "Child Protection Assessments and Investigations". In the "Outcomes and Key Effectiveness Indicators" table, it states that the outcome is that children and young people needing protection are safe from abuse and harm.

The CHAIR: This is a different page from the one you cited before for this line of questioning.

Ms L. METTAM: No.

The CHAIR: Page 518?

Ms L. METTAM: Page 518. It is the same area, but I would say that this is much to do with —

The CHAIR: All right, which paragraph?

Ms L. METTAM: Service 6, "Care Arrangements and Support Services for Children in the CEO's Care".

The CHAIR: Okay, so we are back on page 519.

Ms L. METTAM: I am just asking: how many times have young victims been in the same residence as perpetrators since the start of the forty-first Parliament?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Sorry; I am a bit unclear about what the member's question is. Is she asking about young people who are victims who have been in the same residential care setting as their perpetrator—was that the question?

Ms L. METTAM: Yes.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Victims of what, and perpetrators of what?

Ms L. METTAM: Victims of child sexual abuse—how many times have we seen instances where there have been victims like Macie in the same residence as perpetrators such as Lee? How many other occasions is the minister aware of?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The member will have to be more specific. If she says "victims like 'Macie'", it gives me no indication of what she is talking about, at all; and, perpetrators of what? In the child protection system there are a number of children who have been harmed or who are at risk of harm; that is the nature of them coming into the child protection system. I need to be clear about what the member is asking if she wants me to give her an accurate answer.

Ms L. METTAM: I will try again. How many children who have been under the care of the Department for Child Protection and Family Support and who have been in the CEO's care have been exposed to other children who have expressed characteristics of harmful sexual behaviour?

The CHAIR: Member, do you mean how many instances is the minister aware of? Is that what you are talking about? Does that assist?

Ms S.F. McGURK: With all due respect, that is such a broad question. At the moment there are 5 300 children in the CEO's care and over the course of the year there will be many more because the nature of child protection is that children come in and go out—they might be in the system for 12 months and then go out of the system—so the number we give is how many people are in the CEO's care at the end of a financial year. I need the member to be a little more specific. If she is asking how many children have been placed in a residential care setting with other children who are reportable offenders—I suspect that that is what she is asking—I cannot answer that question here at all, and I suggest that the member place it on notice. I am asked those questions very frequently by my opposition counterpart in the upper house and I answer them. I suspect that is what the member is asking. If the member is asking how many children there are with harmful sexual behaviours, as I tried to indicate before, this is actually an emerging body of work. One person's version of harmful sexual behaviour is not the same as another person's, so state governments and the federal government are trying to establish some authorities to support some authoritative work on this matter, to recognise, identify and treat and respond to harmful sexual behaviours, as distinct from normal, age-appropriate sexual behaviours, in young people. We want to make sure that we can improve that area of work. In fact, the Western Australian state government is leading some of that work with the establishment of the WA Centre for the Pursuit of Excellence in Responding to Child Abuse and Neglect. We are trying to do some of that work, but just to bring this back to the member's question, if I understand correctly, she is asking how many children have been placed in residential care settings with other children who are reportable offenders, and as I said, I cannot answer that question here. I suggest that the question be placed on notice.

Ms L. METTAM: In relation to children who have been identified as having harmful sexual behaviours, when was the minister first made aware that this practice was occurring and that children who had exhibited harmful sexual behaviours were living in residential care with other children who were under the care of the Department for Child Protection and Family Support?

Ms S.F. McGURK: As I mentioned before, the current case practice manual for the department contemplates that this is possible, and has done for some time. As far as I am aware, I inherited that as a minister, and that has been part of the practice manual for some time. I have answered questions on notice in respect of this particular point. There is a risk assessment done as to the nature of those children's behaviours, whether they are harmful sexual behaviours or other challenging behaviours that could cause a risk to other young people in a residential group home or setting. An assessment is done by the care team—part of the care plan is about whether those risks can be managed safely—and the placement arrangements are put in place. For instance, it might be that the risks cannot be managed, so the child will not be placed in a group home, even though there is a vacancy that could mean they otherwise would be in a group home. We have some children and young people who are placed on their own, with their own dedicated carers, as a result of their challenging behaviours, whether they are harmful sexual behaviours or perhaps violent or deregulated behaviours. The member can imagine that that is a very difficult decision for the department, because we are essentially placing that child on their own with around-the-clock adult carers. It is a very poor outcome for those children. To answer the member's question, the practice manual has contemplated this for some time, and, as far as I am aware, I inherited that. It has been department practice under this government, the previous government and those before it.

[9.30 am]

Ms L. METTAM: What assurance can the minister provide that children who are in the CEO's care are no longer living or residing with individuals who —

The CHAIR: I think the minister has already answered that question on the practices it has adopted moving forward, member. I think she has already answered that question.

Ms L. METTAM: I thought it was reportable offences.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I have a number of times; that is, as a result of the investigation recently into the case of Macie and Lee undertaken by the Commissioner for Children and Young People, the department now has a changed policy that it will not knowingly place a child who is a reportable sexual offender in a residential group home with other children.

Mrs J.M.C. STOJKOVSKI: I refer to the significant issues impacting the agency, and specifically item 10.3 on page 517. This is something that is particularly close to my heart, as the minister knows. Can the minister explain more about how the expansion of the Home Stretch program will offer young people transitioning from out-of-home-care enhanced access to the supports and services they need to succeed in adult life?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Thank you, member. I would be happy to talk about that. I know this matters to the member because she grew up with a foster sibling, and still has a foster sibling.

Mrs J.M.C. STOJKOVSKI: I do.

Ms S.F. McGURK: So she understands the importance of supporting a young person to not just the age of 18—that is obviously very important—but, in fact, as their lives go on. The Home Stretch terminology has come about from a national campaign that was put in place, led, by and large, by Anglicare and a number of community sector organisations and advocates. At the moment, the child protection system, under which young people are given formal support—that is, foster care support and the full wraparound supports—technically cease after the age of 18. Under the Children and Community Services Act, there is provision for some supports to continue—some access to counselling or some services—but not the full foster care payments, for example, and only if a young person asks for them. The Home Stretch campaign has been running in recognition that young people at the age of 18 often need more supports for a longer period. In the last period of government, as minister, through the Department of Communities, I supported a trial of the Home Stretch supports through a \$440 000 investment by the Department of Communities. That trial has been run through the district of Fremantle. Anglicare has been managing that work, and a number of young people have been coming in. It actually had some Lotterywest support as well to try to expand the number of young people supported. I think supports were offered to 22 young people, although some of them have either aged out of that arrangement or opted not to enter into the trial. We expect to receive a full assessment or report of that trial later in the year.

In the last election, the McGowan government made a commitment that it would fully support the Home Stretch campaign and offer supports to young people from the age of 18 to 21. The government has funded that in the recently announced budget—\$37.2 million to permanently establish the program to support young people who exit the child protection system at 18 years of age, until they turn 21. The expansion is expected to support around 200 young people, knowing, of course, that some young people will not take up the offer, but it will be available to them to the age of 21. At 18, they might not take it up, but they might decide at 19 or 20 that they want to avail themselves of some of those supports. Knowing that we do not have the final report on the Home Stretch trial or the full evaluation of that trial, the department is now doing some work to properly design what that program will look like and how we can start to allocate that support as quickly as possible.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to “Outcomes and Key Effectiveness Indicators” on page 520 of budget paper No 2, volume 2. I am looking at the proportion of children in the CEO’s care with comprehensive care planning undertaken within the set time frames, which we can see continues to slide from 84 per cent in 2019–20 to 76 per cent in the estimated actual for 2020–21. What will happen when these targets are not met?

The CHAIR: That is two-thirds of the way down, minister.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Thank you. I understand the concern around failing to meet that particular target. One of the influences, obviously, in the last 18 months and through the last financial year has been the impact of COVID. First of all, staff were pulled to support children in care in other ways, so it caused a lot of disruptions, particularly last year when a lot of contact visits were suspended. There was a lot of concern by carers about how to manage young people in care if some of them were held back from school and the like, so that caused a lot of challenges. There has also been a number of vacancies within the department. The labour force pressures we are seeing around the state with low unemployment and an inability to recruit staff from overseas, which has traditionally been a source of skilled workforce for the department, have hit the Department of Communities in the child protection area. Added to this, the complexity of children in care, and simply the challenges of convening care planning and engaging with other significant parties, I think, are the reasons we have seen a reduction in meeting some of those targets. But it is something the department is very focused on and it is not something we expect to see carry over into this financial year.

Ms L. METTAM: My question was: what happens when these targets are not met?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The targets are reviewed annually to make sure that they are informed by the average results in the previous three years and whether any new programs that have come into line mean that the targets should be increased or adjusted in any way. The performance informs the budget planning for future priorities and practices. I think I gave an explanation, member, about the particular circumstances that we have seen over the last financial year due to COVID and the impact that has had on care arrangements for individual foster families managing children and also whole care teams. I think we understand that these are unusual times. As I said, at a departmental level, that is taken into account in setting new targets and in budget planning for future priorities and practices.

[9.40 am]

Ms L. METTAM: In 2020–21, how many children made up that target—that 24 per cent estimated actual?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will see whether I have that information with me. No, I do not have the actual numbers here; I am sorry. Perhaps the member can place that on notice if she is really that interested.

The number of children without care plans, again, is a matter that the shadow minister asks about regularly to keep track of the number of young people with care plans to make sure that they are done in a timely manner. I know that that has been a matter of public record for some time.

The CHAIR: Further question, member?

Ms L. METTAM: A question for the chair: does it have to be a question on notice or can it be provided as a supplementary question?

The CHAIR: It could be a question on notice. Another way of putting it, of course, would be, “What is the total number?” and then the member, presumably, could subtract the 24 per cent from that.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I just wonder, understanding what this means historically, what this will tell us in the context of COVID, and the particular dynamics of 2020 and 2020–21 and trying to live under COVID in its various forms and under its impacts as they changed over that financial year. I am not sure, because of the particular circumstances of this year, that knowing the number of actual children who did not have their care plans met within a certain time frame will tell us about the next financial year. For instance, there were some lockdowns and a lot of uncertainty. The sorts of public discussions that we are having now in September 2021 are quite different from those that we were having in May, June or July 2020, when people really were unsure about what the transmission of COVID meant for them, and the department was needing to be very agile in its response, particularly that not only of staff but of carers who were concerned about contact visits and what that would mean and how they had to be adjusted because of the particular circumstances of COVID.

The CHAIR: In short, minister, you are not prepared to respond by way of a supplementary?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I just do not know what it will tell us.

Ms L. METTAM: Can the minister provide it as supplementary information?

The CHAIR: I think the minister has indicated that she is not prepared to do so.

Ms S.F. McGURK: It is not my preference to do that because I am just not sure what it would tell us, member. What is it that the member is hoping to elicit that those figures do not already tell her?

Ms L. METTAM: My original question about what happens when these targets are not met has not been answered. I appreciate the minister has explained the challenges with COVID.

The CHAIR: That is a further question.

Ms L. METTAM: I am trying to get an indication of the number of children that we are talking about. It is pretty basic.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am not sure whether the question before was about what happens when the targets are not met at a departmental level. I talked about what response the department makes when targets are not being met—that is, to understand what it needs to do in its budget bids and program delivery in the future years to respond to targets that are not being met in respect of care plans. I think that that can be managed at a district level in terms of whether it is an individual care team performance or whether it is a phenomenon across the district that needs to be accommodated by extra resources to that particular district. But we do not have the actual numbers here. Sometimes it can take some time to pull those figures together, so if that question could be put on notice, we would appreciate it.

Ms M.J. HAMMAT: I refer to page 516, “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”, paragraph 7. How do the commitments listed in paragraphs 7.1 to 7.9 help to prevent and support those people who are experiencing, or may be at risk of, violence?

Ms S.F. McGURK: We are doing a range of things in the budget to respond to domestic violence; we did the same in the last term as well and we are building on that body of work. Members will have heard me say before that that is because there is a lot of work to do. Very little whole-of-government focus on this issue took place during the years of the former Liberal–National government. I am proud of the focus and extra resources that we have brought to address domestic violence.

As part of this 2021–22 budget, we will deliver \$45.5 million to boost domestic violence services. That includes a range of initiatives across portfolios, not just in mine directly. For instance, under the Attorney General’s portfolio, we will expand the shuttle conferencing pilot to support victims in Bunbury, Broome and Armadale. That will make obtaining restraining orders easier and less traumatic for victims. A skilled mediator, a magistrate, will be given an opportunity to sit separately from the applicant and respondent to see whether the terms of a restraining order can be agreed upon. That will be voluntary on the part of the applicant; if they do not want to do that, they do not have to. But there will be an opportunity, as demonstrated in other practices, to increase compliance because people will understand the terms of the restraining order. That will be expanded to some regional areas. We will establish a Broome Aboriginal-led specialist family violence court based on a similar court in Geraldton. We are committing \$5.6 million to that. That is another matter under the Attorney General’s portfolio. We think that that, hopefully, will give us better outcomes in respect of high levels of domestic violence experienced particularly by women and children in Aboriginal communities.

Importantly, there will be \$4 million for young people experiencing domestic violence—counselling targeted at teenagers. Again, this is an area in which we need to do quite a bit of work to support children and young people who experience domestic violence. This program will be focused on teenagers.

We are expanding the Safe at Home program—\$3.4 million. We are also going to bolster primary prevention in Western Australia. One of the things that we did in the last period of government was to sign on to Our Watch, which is a national prevention body. We had not signed on to it under the previous government; now all governments and the federal government have signed on to Our Watch. We understand that in Western Australia we need particular focus in some of our Aboriginal communities and perhaps some of our regional areas.

[9.50 am]

We will invest \$3.4 million to do some primary prevention work in Western Australia. We have allocated \$2.3 million to expand the Respectful Relationships program in schools, which has already been very successful so it will be good to expand it. We will also provide two additional one-stop domestic violence hubs. There is now one in Kalgoorlie and one in the member's electorate of Mirrabooka. We have allocated \$1.1 million to establish two more now that we have been able to see how the other two have been running. There will be one in a regional area and one in the metropolitan area. Another significant investment will be training 3 000 first responders to better recognise and respond to domestic violence. We did that with perinatal services in the public health system under the previous government, which involves a screening, if you like, of women before or after they have had their baby in which they are quizzed about whether they are experiencing domestic violence. We know that some victims are more likely to disclose that relationship. Shockingly, women are more likely to be exposed to domestic violence when they are pregnant or just after they have had a baby. We are going to expand that awareness and capacity to 3 000 more first responders as a result of the last budget. There is a lot to talk about in the area of what we are doing to address domestic violence. There is our financial commitment, but also our focus across a range of portfolios demonstrates our commitment.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 513 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, which details the total appropriations for the Department of Communities. During the reporting period, how much was spent on investigating the unknown whereabouts of children in the care of the CEO?

The CHAIR: Minister, I am just wondering whether that is the total appropriations for all Communities, and you are just dealing with services 1 to 6.

Ms S.F. McGURK: That is one of the considerations, chair. I understand the question; I am just speaking to my advisers about whether we have any specific budget or financial allocation that deals with young people who are in unendorsed placements, and I am not aware that we do.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 514 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and the expansion of the Home Stretch program.

The CHAIR: This is the matter that the member for Kingsley asked about.

Ms L. METTAM: That is right. Can the minister clarify how many and which organisations will receive these funds?

Ms S.F. McGURK: That has not been determined yet. I do not know whether the member was listening when I answered the question before, but we are expecting the evaluation of the Home Stretch trial to be finalised towards the end of the year. That has caused us some tension, because we invested in the trial. The feedback from Anglicare, which assisted us with the trial; Yorganop, another community sector organisation, which is an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation; and some young people I have met who have helped to inform the trial, have been very enthusiastic about that work, so I do not want to disregard the trial for which there was significant investment, particularly by those people, but also financial investment. But having said that, we now have a budget allocation and I am keen to spend that budget allocation and make sure that we get supports out as quickly as possible. But to answer the question, we have yet to determine the program, and that means that we do not know which organisations will be assisting us to do that work and how many of them there will be.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The department is currently designing a system that is based on a pilot that has yet to be evaluated. Can the minister explain how that is going to work? I am presuming, as the minister said, that the department wants to take into consideration the outcomes of that review. When will the planning be finalised so that the department can spend that budget allocation?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The department is currently working to determine how we can ensure that we understand the lessons that have been learnt. As I said, the evaluation of the current pilot is expected towards the end of the year and will inform the program for which we now have a budget allocation. We are yet to determine whether there will be some sort of interim arrangement, for instance, in which some payments are provided to young people after the age of 18 while we get the full program design finalised.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Will Anglicare WA and the Aboriginal community-controlled organisation that have been part of the pilot be provided the interim funding, and how will the department structure something like that?

Ms S.F. McGURK: They will certainly be consulted, but it has yet to be determined that they will be the recipients or some of the organisations that will be charged with delivering the program in the long term. That has not been decided yet.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The minister mentioned interim funding, potentially, if the department is not ready to roll out the funding to the final organisations that will provide the program. Does the minister expect that Anglicare and— I missed the name of the —

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yorganop.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: — Yorganop will be well placed to take on the interim funding while that is finalised, or will the department undertake it? I am trying to understand where those resources will go so that there is continuation for anybody who is in the system being supported at the moment.

Ms S.F. McGURK: None of those matters have been determined. I want to make it clear that we want to understand the evaluation of the pilot and for that to inform what Home Stretch will look like in Western Australia in the full program delivery. We also have a budget allocation now to provide supports, and there are young people who need supports now. That is the balance that we are trying to strike in seeing whether we can get any of those supports out as quickly as possible and in what form, but none of that has been determined yet.

Mr H.T. JONES: I refer to page 516 and paragraph 6.1, which refers to increasing the capacity of Common Ground facilities. Can the minister explain how support services such as Common Ground will help adults who are sleeping rough or experiencing chronic homelessness?

[10.00 am]

Ms S.F. McGURK: Common Ground has been enthusiastically welcomed by not only specialist services that work to support homeless people, but also the community. People understand that if we provide appropriate accommodation for people who were previously sleeping rough and wraparound supports, preferably onsite if at all possible, we give those people the best chance of being able to stay stable in their accommodation for a longer period. The Common Ground model was developed in New York more than 20 years ago and it has been adopted internationally. Australia has a number of Common Ground facilities. Other states have them, but Western Australia does not have them. I am not aware whether Tasmania has them, but I know that Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra and Adelaide all have Common Ground facilities. However, Western Australia does not have them. When we did our 10-year strategy to address homelessness, which was based on the evidence of how to best support people who were previously homeless, it made sense to establish and fund a Common Ground facility in Western Australia. It was informed by evidence and it was the approach that we took in the strategy. These facilities are essentially residential apartment complexes. They are purpose-built to make sure that they are best placed to meet the needs of people who were previously homeless. Importantly, only half the number of the apartments will be allocated to people who were previously homeless. The other half will be used for social housing, so that we do not have a concentration of too many people with high needs in one place. We have made an announcement that we will establish two facilities. One will be in East Perth and one will be in Mandurah. Combined, they will deliver more than 160 new units for people in need of accommodation. They will also add to the stock of public housing. As I said, the typical mix of residents in Common Ground complexes is 50 per cent each of people who have experienced homelessness and people on low incomes. It is also worth noting that out of the \$73.5 million in funding for the Perth city Common Ground facility, \$8 million has been contributed by the federal government as part of the Perth City Deal. Both facilities will be within easy access of a range of services, including public transport. The sites were carefully chosen and based on not only the location of people experiencing homelessness, but also their proximity to other services. We now have the locations and full budgets for both of those sites. The City of Perth, the City of Mandurah and their local communities were closely consulted during the establishment—the planning and design phases—of those sites, and they are enthusiastic about the establishment of the facilities.

Ms L. METTAM: I have found a line item that applies to my previous question. I refer to page 525 in budget paper No 2, volume 2, which details the appropriations for child protection assessments and investigations.

The CHAIR: What exactly is the member referring to?

Ms L. METTAM: The line item for the “Total Cost of Service”. I will ask that question again: how does the minister account for the funds that have been spent investigating the unknown whereabouts of children in the care of the CEO?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Member, my answer to that question has not changed. I am not aware that there is a specific allocation given or known in the department. Very few young people are not in endorsed placements where their whereabouts are unknown—very few. Young people can be in either unendorsed placements or have absconded from their placement, but the whereabouts of the vast majority of them is known or they are in regular contact with their caseworkers. My answers to a number of these questions from the upper house are on the public record.

Ms L. METTAM: What is the procedure for investigating the unknown whereabouts of children in the care of the CEO?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Was the member’s question: what are the procedures in place for investigating when a child is not in an endorsed placement and whose whereabouts is unknown?

Ms L. METTAM: That is right, when the whereabouts is unknown for children in the care of the CEO.

Ms S.F. McGURK: It has just been pointed out to me that the line item that the member has referred to is about the referral to child protection assessments and investigations, which are investigations into child abuse and/or neglect. They are not investigations into unendorsed placements or when a child’s whereabouts is unknown. They are different matters. I do not know whether the member is aware of that.

Ms L. METTAM: When a child under the CEO’s care goes missing, is that not a matter of neglect?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The terminology used for child assessments and investigations in the department’s practice manual, and perhaps even within the act, have a certain meaning. The investigation that would take place to determine whether a child has been harmed or is at risk of harm, for instance, is a child safety investigation. The department

works very hard to ensure that children are kept safe and connected within their families whenever possible. When they are not able to stay with their family, they are placed in a variety of different care options depending on their needs and best interests. In a small number of cases, children in care choose to leave their placements and will choose themselves where they want to live. When a person has chosen to live with people or a family in an arrangement that has not been endorsed by the Department of Communities, and has been located by the caseworker, an assessment is arranged as a matter of priority. It is certainly the case that the department works very hard to keep track of those children and to assess what sort of arrangement those children are in, whether they are safe and what action needs to be taken to keep them safe and minimise risk.

Ms L. METTAM: Have the children whose whereabouts were unknown for 40 days, which was revealed in the Legislative Council last week, been found?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Can the member please give me a bit more detail?

Ms L. METTAM: My understanding is that last week in the Legislative Council it was revealed that the department had no idea where two young people were despite being in the care of the CEO. As at 31 August, the whereabouts of one child had been unknown for 40 days and for the other child it was 83 days. Have they been found, and how regularly is the minister briefed on this matter?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The question without notice that the member referred to was asked at a particular point in time. I do not have any update in front of me on the whereabouts of those two young people. As outlined in the answer to that question without notice in the Legislative Council, police have been notified of those young people and the department is working with police to make their inquiries. I am sorry, but I do not have an update as of today on those two young people.

[10.10 am]

The CHAIR: Can I just clarify, minister: do I need to write down anything specific to take on notice?

Ms S.F. McGURK: No.

The CHAIR: We are good; okay.

Ms L. METTAM: How regularly is the minister being briefed on their location?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I get regular updates on the location of those two young people, and in respect of police investigations.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to “Outcome: Families and individuals experiencing FDV” et cetera under “Outcomes and Key Effectiveness Indicators” on page 520. Under that heading, it has “Percentage of homelessness clients with some or all goals achieved at the completion of a homelessness service support period”. It is also captured on page 519 at the fourth item under the service summary, “Preventing and Responding to Family and Domestic Violence”. In relation to the \$54 million allocated this year —

Ms S.F. McGURK: The member will have to back up. The member referred to page 520 in respect of “homelessness clients with some or all goals achieved at the completion” —

The CHAIR: I think it is in the top quarter there; the second black —

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes, I have that line item. The member then referred to FDV; they are different matters—that is, if I understood her correctly. The first outcome the member referred to was “Percentage of homelessness clients with some or all goals achieved at the completion of a homelessness service support period”. Did I understand the member correctly?

Ms L. METTAM: Yes; but can we just refer to page 519? My apologies.

The CHAIR: Are we on page 519, member for Vasse?

Ms L. METTAM: At item 4 on page 519, “Preventing and Responding to Family and Domestic Violence”, there is an allocation of \$54 million this financial year. A recent article in *The Sunday Times* stated there had been a surge in first-time homeless women fleeing domestic violence. Can organisations such as the organisation featured in that article access any of those funds in the \$54 million allocation to support individuals who are fleeing family and domestic violence situations?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The allocation of over \$54 million in funding will all be directed at people experiencing domestic violence or who are at risk of domestic violence—along the continuum. It might be in some preventive work. It might be in some of the court procedures that I spoke about before, although much of that will be contemplated in the justice budget. I referred to some of these issues in answer to the member for Kingsley, who asked about the domestic violence commitments during the last election campaign. For instance, that will include the establishment of two new hubs, one in a regional area and one in the metropolitan area, and increased money to keep women safe at home. The proposal relates to women who are experiencing domestic violence in the home. After a risk assessment is done, they are able to stay in their residence and the perpetrator is asked to move out, but some services work with the perpetrator. I could outline many items about what we are doing.

The vast majority of that money will go to community service organisations to assist them to work with people experiencing, or at risk of, domestic violence. One of our election commitments, which is being funded, is \$4.3 million over four years to deliver what we are calling the Safe Home, Safe Family rapid rehousing initiative. This has two components: \$2.15 million to rapidly rehouse women and children into safe and affordable housing after leaving a refuge; and the same amount to support Aboriginal women moving into safe and affordable housing after leaving a refuge. This is intended to quickly help women and children who are experiencing domestic violence move into safe and affordable transition homes for a period of 12 months, with quite intensive supports. The initiatives are expected to support up to 40 women and their children each year and ensure they have safe and affordable housing as they rebuild their lives. It is expected there will be an evaluation of this program to determine the suitability, effectiveness and cultural appropriateness of the two initiatives. That is one example. As I said before, out of that \$54.675 million, well over \$50 million of it will go to community sector organisations, which deliver the vast majority of our domestic violence support services.

Ms L. METTAM: Out of the \$54 million and out of the programs the minister touched on, organisations such as the one featured in that article should be able to access funding to address the issues that they have with not being able to answer the phone and support that huge surge in the number of people fleeing family and domestic violence situations in the Midland area.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I do not have that article in front of me. The member is talking in quite broad terms. I do not know whether the member can tell me the name of the particular service she is referring to.

Ms L. METTAM: It was the Indigo Junction service in Midland. The article referred to the fact that there were 6 000 unanswered calls for assistance over the last 12 months, and that it does not even have the facilities to answer the phone. I want to clarify whether Indigo Junction will be able to access some of the programs to address that issue.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Indigo Junction is not an FDV service; it usually supports people who are experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness, as far as I am aware. We are spending quite a lot of new money in addition to the \$108 million we spend every year on homelessness services. In addition to those amounts, a massive social housing investment has been made by this government and was highlighted in the last budget. That will be backed up in service supports through additional funds in either Housing First FDV or other specific programs, both in domestic violence and homelessness supports. We understand there are pressures out there. They are not new. There were certainly pressures throughout the systems that have been exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, but we are doing our best to meet those needs both in terms of building new accommodation, either accommodation for people who are homeless, such as the Common Grounds, or new social housing. Just on that point, there has been a massive increase in housing approvals. It is expected that some of the new private rental accommodation, private houses, that are coming online will in turn relieve the pressure across the board. We are spending a significant amount of money in homeless services and family and domestic violence services. If Indigo Junction is on Tenders WA and the tenders for any of that new work come up, it will be able to apply. I am advised that at the moment it receives about \$2 million per annum for some of our homeless services.

[10.20 am]

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to access to regional childcare under “Election Commitments” on page 534 of budget paper No 2. Can the minister provide greater detail on this program, which starts off with \$383 000 this year and culminates in around \$4.8 million? Where is this to be allocated? Is it in a model similar to the Regional Early Education and Development program, which is supported in a line item a little further down? I see that it is coming to an end. Will that continue? What is this allocation about?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The government supported the REED program. Some of the early work on that was done under the previous government but the vast majority was done in the previous period of the McGowan government and it has been a very successful program. What is particularly heartening about REED is that it is designed to be a self-sustaining program. Over 20 individual smaller childcare centres now operate under the umbrella of REED, which does some of the extensive regulatory oversight that is required under early childhood education. That is a good model. That will certainly be one of the models we are looking at, but it will not be the only model.

Out of the money to which the member referred, \$1 million will go to local governments in regional areas to fund retention and attraction packages for childcare workers. An amount of \$250 000 per annum will be available to local governments in regional areas, and \$4.1 million is funding to identify key regions and assist in the establishment of sustainable models in regional childcare. The REED model might be one of those models. However, in the Pilbara—in South Hedland, for instance—there has been a lot of discussion about the lack of availability of childcare places and REED would not work there. It is a different issue from that of smaller geographical locations not being able to sustain large centres. The government has an open mind about what that support will look like in various locations and the work is just beginning to look at the need in regional Western Australia and what sorts of models we could put in place to support them. As I identified, the breakdown is that \$1 million of that funding over four years will be allocated to local governments to attract and retain workers, and \$4.1 million will be allocated to look at various models for the rest of regional Western Australia.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The allocation is made under the heading “Election Commitments”. Have individual commitments been made to communities to spend some money in those communities, or is this something that is available regardless of a particular promise in a particular seat?

Ms S.F. McGURK: No, not as part of this funding. As part of this \$4.1 million allocation for the regional work that will be done and the \$1 million for local governments, no specific recipients of that have been allocated yet. Some consultation has been done already that the member might be interested in. A webinar was held on 8 September by the Department of Communities in collaboration with the Western Australian Local Government Association for regional local government authorities to go through the workforce issues in the regions and possible solutions and to support the development of the grants program. The scoping exercise to do this work is expected to be undertaken in January next year. To answer the question, no specific programs in regional locations have been made under this line item. There might be some local commitments, or small election commitments, that have been made separate to this that are not under this line item.

Mr R.S. LOVE: This question is also on the election commitments on page 534. There are quite a few in here that I will run through, but they are separate questions.

The CHAIR: Is that okay, minister?

Ms S.F. McGURK: It is, so long as I am clear on what they are.

The CHAIR: The minister is asking you to break it down, member.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I do not intend to ask them at all once. There is an allocation for the northern suburbs men’s shed, and there is another men’s shed in Baldivis. Is there a plan to fund men’s sheds on an ongoing basis? What does that \$1 million provide? It seems a lot of money for a men’s shed. Is it a men’s shed that is being built or is it funding for the establishment of work to be done? Can the minister explain how \$1 million has been arrived at? Is there a commitment to men’s sheds generally or just on election promises?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will answer the second part of the question first. About two-thirds of the way down the page under “Community Services”, an amount of \$113 000 was allocated last year to men’s shed sector support to make sure the peak organisation had some funding.

Mr R.S. LOVE: That was the year before last I think.

Ms S.F. McGURK: It will be given ongoing money.

Sorry, it has just been pointed out to me that that is now under controlled grants and subsidies. I thought it was given ongoing money; however, that amount is now being funded on an ongoing basis. It will increase slightly over the years, but in 2021–22, \$154 000 is allocated for the peak body. That answers the question about overall money for Men’s Sheds of WA. That has now been funded over the forward estimates.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Where will I find that?

[10.30 am]

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will ask Matthew Richardson to answer that particular question because the men’s sheds are getting ongoing funding. Mr Richardson can probably best answer how it has been set out in the budget papers.

Mr M. Richardson: Funding for the men’s sheds appears as the actual for 2019–20 because it used to be a grant. There is a different funding arrangement with the service provider. Since 2019–20, we have changed it from a general grant payment to a contracted service that will guaranty the men’s sheds at least five years of funding. It is reviewed on an ongoing basis. It no longer appears within the controlled grants and subsidies table because it is no longer a grant. Although not separately identifiable, it will feature throughout the “supplies and services” expense in the statement of cashflows or the income sheet. It will be seen under expenses generally.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am happy to place on the record, if this helps, that in 2020–21, men’s shed support will be \$151 000; in 2021–22, it will be \$154 000; and in 2022–23, it will be \$158 000.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Could I ask the minister to provide that information as supplementary information so we have it all written down?

The CHAIR: Do you want to take that on notice?

Mr R.S. LOVE: I am asking for supplementary information.

The CHAIR: What are you asking for specifically?

Mr R.S. LOVE: I am asking for the amounts to be funded on an ongoing basis for the support of men’s sheds and to whom that is flowing.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am happy to give that information. We will outline the amounts being provided to Men’s Sheds of WA, which is the peak body, over the forward estimates.

The CHAIR: Is that okay, member for Moore?

Mr R.S. LOVE: Yes.

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

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am happy to provide details of the amounts being awarded to Men's Sheds of WA for the years 2020–21 to 2024–25.

[Supplementary Information No B1.]

Ms S.F. McGURK: The member was also asking about the Northern Suburbs Men's Shed, which was provided with \$1 million.

Mr R.S. LOVE: And Baldivis.

Ms S.F. McGURK: That is a one-off amount that was a 2021 election commitment. A total of \$1 million was approved through the budget to contribute towards the development of the Northern Suburbs Men's Shed. This will be for the construction and commissioning of a new sustainable and fit-for-purpose facility to provide a welcoming, safe and accessible service to all and provide long-term welfare and financial benefits to the members of the City of Wanneroo and the state.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I have further questions on these election promises.

The CHAIR: Are they supplementary to this question, member for Moore?

Ms S.F. McGURK: No.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Yes, I think so. It is to do with the election promises. I will treat it as such.

I wanted to ask about the Respectful Relationships expansion. It has been allocated \$68 000 this year and \$721 000, \$741 000 and \$760 000 in the forward estimates. If I look at page 535 of budget paper No 2, I see that a program already exists. Is that the same program with more money or is that a different program? Can the minister explain what the Respectful Relationships expansion will provide and what relationship it has to the existing Respectful Relationships program outlined on page 535?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I think I briefly referred to the Respectful Relationships program earlier. It supports public schools to develop an approach to primary prevention of gender-based violence. It supports teaching young people about health and positive relationships in the context of domestic violence prevention. As part of our 2017 election commitments, the McGowan government committed to identifying evidence-based Respectful Relationships programs for suitable delivery in schools. We allocated funding of \$1 million for the program to be delivered by organisations with appropriate expertise. As part of our 2021 election commitments, we made a further commitment to continue the current Respectful Relationships teacher support program, which supports an average of 10 schools per annum, expand the current pilot to 12 additional schools per annum from 2022 to 2023, and also expand Respectful Relationships approaches to address the gender drivers of violence and teach young people about health and positive relationships in the context of domestic violence through local sport and recreation clubs and organisations. Existing funding is in place and then there is the election commitment, which is new.

The amounts that the member referred to on page 534, which start off at \$68 million in 2021–22 and then go to \$721 000, \$741 000 and \$760 000 over the forward estimates, are the 2021 election commitments. The amount that the member was referring to earlier is the existing funding for Respectful Relationships over the forward estimates. In 2021–22, it was \$277 000 and for the following three years, it will be \$168 000.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The program is to be expanded to sport and recreation clubs, as well as schools. How will the results of that expenditure be measured? What will be the parameters around that expenditure to ensure that it returns some value for money? How is something like that measured? What are the metrics of trying to determine whether that funding is achieving an end?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The 2017 election commitment that was rolled out in schools has been described as a pilot in its final year with a fourth cohort of teachers underway. Cohort 4 includes a large percentage of regional schools. An independent evaluation of the program is being undertaken by an external evaluator, with a report due after the completion of the existing program in June 2022.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Is that report complete?

Ms S.F. McGURK: No. As I said, it will be completed in June 2022. An evaluation is being undertaken of the current work being done in schools.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Will that report be tabled in Parliament? When will we know when that report is done?

Ms S.F. McGURK: It is not usually our practice to table in Parliament every evaluation of every program that we carry out, but the member is welcome to put a note in his diary and ask me about it in the middle of next year.

Mr R.S. LOVE: So such a thing is not normally put in a report somewhere?

The CHAIR: Member for Moore, I think the minister has answered the question.

[10.40 am]

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 514 of budget paper No 2 and the heading “Election Commitments”. I am asking about the Rapid Rehousing pilot program, which is also referred to on page 516. The line item “Rapid Rehousing Pilot” is near the top of page 514, under “Family and Domestic Violence (FDV) Initiatives”. I know there is a lot of enthusiasm for this program. Given that we know that access to safe housing is one of the biggest issues affecting the ability of women to escape family and domestic violence, I am interested to know why this pilot, which is outlined as giving women and children improved access to the private rental market, will not start until the following financial year.

Ms S.F. McGURK: It is not the only initiative we have to keep women safe through both refuges and the outreach work that is currently done by specialist women’s refuge organisations, Department for Child Protection and Family Support staff and the Western Australia Police Force. There is extensive work being done in support of women experiencing violence. As an example, Keeping Women Safe in Their Homes is a program I spoke about before. A risk assessment is done by a service organisation and women are supported to stay in their houses, and the perpetrator moves out. There might be restraining orders put in place along with security, safety plans and the like. I just asked my advisers to see whether they could come up with a note, because two or three years ago it was a source of some frustration to me. The federal government had formerly funded that program and then ceased funding it. We supplemented our state support because the federal government opted out of that support, but then after a period of time reinstated its support, so there was a gap in service provision, which is very difficult for community service organisations that are employing people, then laying them off, and then trying to bring them back on. When the federal government reallocated money to that program, it was a lesser amount. As a result of that, the state government has put well over half a million dollars into the program. A lot of that was basically picking up on the federal government’s contribution after it had decided to take a break and then reinstate its support.

We have a lot of supports in place, but sadly there is a lot of work to do to make sure women are kept safe. Accommodation is part of the answer, but it is also making sure that they are linked to appropriate supports. We have put in place two hubs, and we are planning two more, to make sure that there is an alternative entry point or place where people can come forward to get advice. I do not shy away from the amount of work we have in front of us, but I am not at all apologising for the focus the government has placed on FDV. That is in stark contrast with the complete lack of attention that issue was being given when we first came into government. Very, very little was done for additional services for domestic violence victims under the previous Liberal–National government. The expansion of the election commitment to which the member has referred, Safe at Home, will support an additional 150 women over the course of the forward estimates.

Ms L. METTAM: I was referring to the Rapid Rehousing pilot, not Safe at Home.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Sorry; I am reading from the wrong notes. Safe at Home is another name for Keeping Women Safe in Their Homes, so our expansion of that program, which we have funded in this election commitment, will support an additional 150 women.

Ms L. METTAM: How will the Rapid Rehousing pilot work, appreciating that it will not start until 2022–23?

Ms S.F. McGURK: There are two elements to the program, which I think I outlined before in response to another question from the member. There is \$2.157 million for the pilot for women and children leaving refuges, and the same amount for Aboriginal women leaving refuges, to support them into safe and affordable housing. There will be an allocation for them to be supported into accommodation. That also includes financial assistance to enable women and children to exit refuges and enter the private rental market. That, in turn, will free up crisis beds for more urgent needs. Part of the money is allocated so that they can be given financial assistance, as well as for caseworkers and outreach workers based in the refuges.

Ms L. METTAM: What is the reason for the delay in the implementation of this program? Will it take time to construct? The minister has suggested that there is a range of other programs already out there.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I have just been advised that there has been an allocation of \$113 000 for the planning and service design that will take place this financial year. Procurement will also be able to be undertaken this financial year, with the intention that it will be operational by next financial year. It just takes some time to make sure we have the program up and running. Our strong preference and general method of delivery is to consult with the sector to see what the best way is to organise the program and to make sure they have the opportunity to tender for that work.

Ms L. METTAM: Is there any indication of how many women and children it is anticipated this program will support?

Ms S.F. McGURK: It is expected that 40 women and their children a year will be supported through each of the programs, so a total of 80 women per year. One program is a general program, and there will be a program for Aboriginal women and their children, so it will be 80 women and their children across both those programs.

Ms L. METTAM: It will obviously be very competitive. There were cuts to Lamp Inc in Busselton; that decision was made when the McGowan government first came to office. Will anyone across the state be able to apply for that program?

[10.50 am]

Ms S.F. McGURK: A comment was made at the beginning about a cut that was made earlier on by the McGowan government to a program called Lamp. I do not know what the member was talking about.

Ms L. METTAM: It was a program that was delivered through Lamp in Busselton to assist people with mental health challenges or a range of different challenges to access independent living.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I cannot comment on that because it is not part of my portfolio, member. I do not know that it is useful to refer to that.

Ms L. METTAM: Is not homelessness part of the minister's portfolio?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Homelessness is part of my portfolio, but it is not a homelessness service that we have ever funded under my portfolio.

The CHAIR: We will stick with the budget questions.

Ms L. METTAM: I have a supplementary question. How will it work for the 80 people who will be able to access this program, not from next year but the year after? What will be the criteria?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The member said that 80 people will be able to access the program not next year but the year after. That is not correct. They will be able to access the program in 2022, in the next financial year. The program is being designed now, which is the budget allocation that I outlined. We will consult the sector, including its peak body, to make sure we have a robust design. Tenders for that work will go out and it is expected that service delivery will take place early next financial year.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I return to the election commitments on page 534. My apologies if I ask a question that has already been asked; I came in an hour after this session had started, so it might have already been asked. Is a breakdown available of the small commitments outlined in the budget that the minister distributed in 2020–21?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Is the member referring to a specific line item about election commitments?

Mr R.S. LOVE: I am referring to the line item on “Small Commitments”, which is two-thirds of the way down under “Election Commitments”. I am wondering whether the minister has a breakdown of how those commitments were distributed. I assume they have all been met.

Ms S.F. McGURK: The funding is for part of the election commitments approved by cabinet in 2020–21. Cabinet endorsed 151 community programs worth a total of \$4.63 million. The funding supported programs such as caring for communities and play and learn; support for our seniors; youth support; family and domestic violence support; minor infrastructure upgrades, inclusive of minor school works and consumables; and sport and community infrastructure. As I said, a total of 151 election commitment grants packages, inclusive of grant guidelines, were taken up by 146 not-for-profit organisations. The time frames for the completion varied between two and 24 months, with 24 months being the maximum period allowed to acquit the grants. I think I have given the member an outline of the programs that were contemplated in the line item that the member referred to, with funding of \$4.63 million for small election commitments under the Department of Communities' responsibility.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Is the \$4 million all in the minister's area or is it spread across other areas?

Ms S.F. McGURK: It is spread across multiple portfolios; it is spread across other portfolios within the Department of Communities.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The minister can understand that this did not go through the budget process of the previous year, so no outline was available to us earlier of where this expenditure went. Of those provided, is it possible to get a list of where those projects were and what they were?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am happy to give the member a list of those under my portfolio.

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

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am told that there are 117 under my area of responsibility. I am happy to list them now; it will probably help fill out some of the time. Does the member want me to do that?

Mr R.S. LOVE: I think it would be more time productive to provide it as supplementary information.

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

Ms S.F. McGURK: I agree to provide supplementary information in relation to page 534 and the budget allocation under the line item “Small Commitments” on the small commitments that have been awarded under my portfolio responsibilities.

[*Supplementary Information No B2.*]

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to pages 520 and 521 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and the explanation of significant movements. I refer to the percentage of departmental clients who were assessed and received a response as a result of family and domestic violence incidents and did not require an FDV-related response within 12 months.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Sorry, I am having trouble finding the place the member is talking about. Is it page 521?

Ms L. METTAM: It is pages 520 and 521. It is probably easiest to refer to note 2 on page 521.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Is the member referring to the line item on the percentage of department clients who were assessed and received a response as a result of a FDV incident and did not require another FDV-related response within 12 months?

Ms L. METTAM: That is correct.

Ms S.F. McGURK: What is the member's question?

Ms L. METTAM: I want to know the actual case numbers; we do not need to know the percentages. What is the number of people we are talking about here?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will answer the member's question. If the member goes to page 524, she will see some metrics about how we are preventing, and responding to, domestic violence. The number of cases is referred to in note (b) in the middle of that page. I am advised that these are people who are experiencing domestic violence, but it might also include financial counselling, subsidised driving lessons or other supports that are given. We can get some idea in note (b) of the numbers contemplated in the budget. It is not an exact comparison, but that is the number of people on which we base our assumptions in terms of the services provided by the department. It is not an exact comparison, because some of the services on page 524 might be a little broader than some of the ones on pages 520 and 521.

[11.00 am]

Ms L. METTAM: This figure, obviously, has dropped significantly from the target figure. The target figure for this coming financial year is more than 77 per cent, or the figure that was achieved in 2019–20. How can the minister account for such a turnaround?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The member said that the number has dropped significantly, but I think she is taking a little licence there. She will be familiar, hopefully, that through all departments the budget papers set targets for various metrics within a department's responsibilities. Those targets are based on a number of different factors. Sometimes the ability to reach those targets is also influenced by a number of factors outside our control. I suspect that in the case of this financial year, there have been a number of important global events that have been well outside our control. But I will refer specifically to the line item that the member talked about. The estimated actual in 2020–21 is lower than the 2019–20 actual and the 2020–21 budget target. This result reflects the complex and repetitive nature of domestic violence in many families that has been exacerbated by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is what I was just referring to. The department will continue to assess and refine its family and domestic violence responses to ensure that they are effective and sustainable and, accordingly, will continue to set aspirational targets to aim for better than the 2020–21 estimated actual results.

The CHAIR: This is timely; minister, would you like a comfort break of 10 minutes?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Sure.

The CHAIR: We will break until 11.10 am.

Meeting suspended from 11.02 to 11.12 am

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to page 514 of budget paper No 2, and to page 534, "Election Commitments", specifically "Grandcarers Support Scheme". What is the total amount of funding provided to Wanslea to deliver the scheme in 2020–21, as well as each year across the forward estimates?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The member is asking how much is paid to Wanslea.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Yes.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Over what years—for 2020–21?

Mr R.S. LOVE: For 2021–22. Sorry, I might have said 2020–21.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I cannot remember. Wanslea will receive \$1 050 000 in 2021–22 and the same amount has been allocated each year over the forward estimates.

Mr R.S. LOVE: What is the total number of grants administered as part of the scheme up to date and does the department have a forecasted amount for next year?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Is it the total amount for the scheme?

Mr R.S. LOVE: The total number of grants.

Ms S.F. McGURK: For grandcarers?

Mr R.S. LOVE: Yes.

Ms S.F. McGURK: In 2020–21, the McGowan government provided a total of \$1.49 million to grandcarers for the care of 2 157 grandchildren. This comprised \$711 400 in normal payments to grandcarers, as well as the extraordinary amount of \$783 600 for the additional WA recovery plan payments to assist grandcarers with the ongoing costs of keeping children safe during COVID. I think I have probably answered only part of the question. That was in 2020–21. The member wants to know the forward estimates.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Yes, as much as the department can make a prediction.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Member, it will not be possible to give the exact amount in the forward estimates because it will depend on how many grandcarers we are expected to support; the numbers may change. If there is an increased number of grandcarers, we will increase our supports.

Mr R.S. LOVE: There are successful and non-successful applicants in a program like this. Does the minister have any idea how many actual applications there were for support and how many of those were unsuccessful?

Ms S.F. McGURK: People have to meet the criteria to be eligible for grandcarers support and if they meet that criteria, all applicants are successful.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Yes, but the minister does not know how many applied in total.

Ms S.F. McGURK: No, I do not have that figure. They may have applied for the funding, but if they are not eligible —

Mr R.S. LOVE: So the department does not keep a record of the applications as such.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Not that I am aware of.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Are any other pools of funding provided for grandcarers who do not meet the eligibility criteria for that particular scheme; in other words, does the department provide any other supports?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The nature of grandcarers is that it is an informal arrangement that is in place for grandcarers—grandparents or other extended family members who support children outside the child protection system. We provide assistance to Wanslea, which also runs group supports for grandcarers. I am not sure whether a person needs to be an approved grandcarer and eligible for the annual funding in order to go to the support groups that Wanslea runs and to be eligible for the other support services. Most grandcarers who apply for support will be given support. If they have children in their care and they are not in the formal child protection system, I would think that they would be eligible for the supports that we are talking about. Perhaps the member can outline the people who might consider themselves grandcarers whom we would not consider grandcarers. I am not quite sure whom the member is talking about.

[11.20 am]

Mr R.S. LOVE: I am aware that a number of people claim that they have not met the eligibility criteria but consider themselves to be grandcarers. I do not know the number or the particular circumstances for each of them, but there certainly are people who are not eligible and feel that they should be.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am surprised to hear that, member. I would be very happy for the member to take that up separately with me and write to me or send me the details. Some grandcarers would prefer to be paid full foster care payments, in the same way that kinship carers are paid for those children who are formally in the care of the CEO of the department but their foster care arrangement is with a relative. They are paid full foster care supports and given full supports under the department. Sometimes people refer to that as not receiving the full supports. Under our new policy, grandcarers will receive \$1 000 per year for each child in care and be eligible for other supports through Wanslea. For the member's information, the criteria on the Wanslea website state —

To be eligible for the Grandcarers Support Scheme:

1. You must be an informal grandparent carer

'Informal' means you're not receiving any regular financial support from the Department of Communities, for example, a carer subsidy or Special Guardianship Order payment

2. You must be a full-time, primary carer

To apply, your grandchildren (up to 18 years) must have resided in your full-time, primary care for at least four months

3. You must permanently reside in WA

You must be an Australian citizen, hold a permanent visa and be a permanent resident of Western Australia

4. You must be a grandparent

You must be a biological, marital, defacto or culturally defined grandparent to the children in your care

I would have thought that that was a pretty broad assessment. If the member believes that there are grandcarers who sit outside that eligibility criteria for supports, I would be interested to know about them.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 521 in budget paper No 2, volume 2. The sixth paragraph under the explanation of significant movements refers to the average and the median waiting times for accommodation.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Is this about the total housing assistance?

Ms L. METTAM: Yes. Does it not come under —

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am not the housing minister.

Ms L. METTAM: Does it not come under homelessness?

Ms S.F. McGURK: No; that is a housing question.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to the table on page 534. Under community services, an amount of money was allocated in 2020–21 for “Disaster Recovery Arrangements—Severe Tropical Cyclone Seroja”. I also refer to Woorloo fire recovery at the bottom of that same section of the table and the allocation of \$164 000 for this year. Looking at these figures, I wonder why there was no expenditure in the year just past for the Woorloo fire, which happened at the start of this year, and, conversely, why there is to be no further expenditure in this program for the area affected by cyclone Seroja. I want an explanation of those figures and their application on the ground.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Is the member asking why there are no ongoing allocations for either of those figures?

Mr R.S. LOVE: The question is in two parts, I suppose. In the case of the Woorloo bushfire, the expenditure seems to have happened only in this current year, even though the fire was a considerable time ago now. For cyclone Seroja, which happened after the bushfire, there was \$2 million expenditure but there is nothing in the forward estimates. I am asking about the timing of those payments and what they represent in terms of service.

Ms S.F. McGURK: It is important to know what the role of the Department of Communities is in response to those disasters. Obviously, we are not the Department of Fire and Emergency Services. In the case of the Woorloo bushfire, which occurred in February 2021, the department’s role was to assist in the establishment of a one-stop-shop recovery centre and to continue to provide required emergency welfare services. The department also assisted with the set-up of the evacuation centres in the immediate response to the fire to provide emergency accommodation and care for affected families. The bushfire destroyed 86 properties. Assistance was provided by the Department of Communities to set up the evacuation centres, as I said, and continue to staff the bushfire recovery centre at Gidgegannup. Communities provided \$202 535 in financial support to impacted people.

In the case of cyclone Seroja, which impacted 16 local governments across 130 000 kilometres, Communities deployed over 196 frontline staff and 122 Australian Red Cross staff to the affected regions. To date, a total of 4 650 outreach and welfare appointments have been undertaken and \$2.69 million of emergency financial support has been provided. I should also say that we have since had other fires and floods, but the allocations that have been made reflect the nature of Communities’ response, which in an emergency is an immediate aftermath response, not an ongoing role. That role is picked up through ongoing work by the Fire and Emergency Services Authority and the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, but also perhaps the Department of Housing, the Mental Health Commission, the Department of Health et cetera. Ongoing supports are picked up in the general work of government departments or service organisations.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 524 in budget paper No 2, volume 2, and note 2, which we touched on before. The 2020–21 estimated actual for preventing and responding to family and domestic violence is \$69 million. The budget target for the following year is about \$54 million, which represents about a 20 per cent decline in funding. Can the minister explain why there is a drop in funding for this area?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Part of the explanation is outlined in note 1. Significant additional amounts were given in response to the COVID-19 pandemic by both the state and federal governments. The reduction in the 2021–22 budget target reflects the conclusion of the COVID-19 response initiatives and the finalisation of additional and expanded refuge works.

[11.30 am]

Ms L. METTAM: I note that additional staff were provided over that same period as well. Can the minister explain why additional staff were allocated in this area?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The increase is due to the new one-stop FDV hubs program, forming part of the 2021 election commitments. The McGowan government has approved funding to establish two additional one-stop hubs. Two are already operating—one is in Kalgoorlie and the other is in Mirrabooka. The increase in the number of FTEs responding to domestic violence is because of the operation of the hubs.

Ms L. METTAM: The minister has already touched on one-stop hubs in a previous question. Can the minister clarify how the decision will be made in respect of additional hubs? Who decides the location of the additional hubs and what is the decision based on?

Ms S.F. McGURK: An allocation for two new hubs has been made for 2021–22. Project planning and development will commence, including the co-design, in each location, and building procurement. To answer the question, the information that will be taken into account will include police data in terms of the number of reported FDV assaults, child protection data, and population data, and the proximity of other services in the area.

Ms L. METTAM: Will the minister be able to table the advice when those decisions are made?

Ms S.F. McGURK: We have not got that advice yet, so I am reluctant to say that I will table what advice we have. If the member is not happy with the locations when they are announced, there are ample opportunities for the member, or any of her colleagues, to ask questions about how those decisions were arrived at. It is a little theoretical for me to commit to tabling advice that I have not seen or in fact advice that has not yet been written.

Ms L. METTAM: When will the decision be made on the locations of these additional hubs?

Ms S.F. McGURK: We have not made a decision yet. As I said, we have just received in this budget the approval of \$1.6 million to commence the planning and project management, but we have not made a decision yet. I have not received advice about where the locations will be. As soon as we receive that, we will make that known.

Ms L. METTAM: When will the minister be making a decision on the locations? When will that information be known?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am expecting to make a decision this year.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to “Election Commitments” on page 534. There is \$500 000 in the budget for something called “Micro-Enterprise Support”. Could the minister give an outline of that program and why it only appears once in the budget?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Sorry, member, what is it called?

Mr R.S. LOVE: “Micro-Enterprise Support”.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I understand that this is a disability program, so perhaps this question would be best directed at the minister responsible for disabilities.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Thank you. We will let that one go, then.

Again on the same page, I refer to the third item, “Elder Rights WA”, under “Election Commitments”. There is an allocation of \$1 million a year, starting this year. I understand from page 517 that there is a grant going to the Legal Aid Commission for the rollout of that. Could the minister provide a breakdown of what that funding will be used for and what services will be provided to seniors under that funding? Given that this seems to be a new stream of funding, how will the minister measure success and ensure that the money is going to where it was intended or for the purposes intended?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am not the minister responsible for seniors. Perhaps the member might direct that question to the minister responsible.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Okay, thank you.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to the item “Women’s Grants” on page 535 under the heading “Women”. I note from the minister’s media statement when these grants were announced that they are part of the government’s plan for addressing gender inequality in Western Australia. When did the grants commence?

Ms S.F. McGURK: These grants have been in place for some time. They have been an annual amount. The outline of the grant program has been in place for some time. We have adjusted it slightly to accommodate Stronger Together, which is our overall strategic direction for making inroads into the significant gender inequality we face in our state and our country. To answer the question, the grants program has been in place for some time and the program outline is available on the department’s website.

Ms L. METTAM: Have these grants been oversubscribed for each session; and, if so, can the minister provide the figures, since it commenced, of how much it has been oversubscribed or undersubscribed for each round?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Is the member asking whether people apply for grants but do not meet the criteria?

Ms L. METTAM: No. I am asking whether it has been oversubscribed for each session, meaning that people have met the criteria but there are limited funds available. I am wondering whether it is oversubscribed.

Ms S.F. McGURK: There are more applicants than we are able to fund; that is true. I do not have the figures available to me about how many applicants there would be. I venture to say that some organisations apply that would not meet the criteria, which is the reason they are not successful. There might be others. We only have a limited amount of funding so we are not able to fund every applicant that comes before us.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the minister able to provide that information via supplementary information?

Ms S.F. McGURK: How many organisations have applied and not been successful?

Ms L. METTAM: That is right.

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

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am prepared to table those organisations that applied for funding in 2020–21 under the women’s grants projects that were not successful.

[*Supplementary Information No B3.*]

[11.40 am]

Ms L. METTAM: How is the effectiveness of the grants program being assessed and how can the government be sure that the grants are contributing towards the goal of addressing gender inequality?

Ms S.F. McGURK: They are reasonably small amounts of money. We do not want to spend too many resources evaluating each program. They are up to \$10 000 on average for each grant recipient, and often between \$5 000 and \$10 000. The evaluation of the expenditure needs to be proportionate to the amount that has been allocated. A broad range of activities are successfully awarded grants within this program. They could be Aboriginal organisations, regional organisations, young people’s organisations or occupation-based or industry-based organisations. I can give some examples, but the evaluation of whether the actual grant recipients fulfil their requirements under the grants takes place through an acquittal process within the department.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to the fifth note on page 522 under “Community Services”. How many working with children cards were allocated over the past financial year?

Ms S.F. McGURK: We have the head of the working with children check unit here, so I might get Mr Payne to answer some of those questions, because then it will make his morning seem productive. Is it the number of applications the member is asking for?

Ms L. METTAM: Yes.

Mr P. Payne: Thank you, minister. For 2020–21, there were a total of 145 878 working with children applications. That is a 12 per cent increase over the previous year.

Mrs J.M.C. STOJKOVSKI: Can the minister explain to us how the Department of Communities’ working with children cards are helping to keep communities safe?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am happy to talk about this because quite a bit of work is being done in the department to improve the working with children check processes to ensure that not only do we have a quick turnaround of applicants, but also that when there are concerns or any further investigation needs to take place, that is done in a timely, but importantly, thorough, manner. That can be quite challenging when accessing different databases, perhaps even across jurisdictions, let alone across departments. As Mr Payne pointed out, as a result of that there has been a significant increase in the number of applications. That is partly too because there has been a lot of proactive work in the unit targeting industries or areas where there could be noncompliance. An example of the proactive work that has been done, and the focus being on providing decisions that best protect children in a timely manner, is that where there is a criminal record, the average time to finalise a decision is under 20 days—a decrease from 22 days in the prior year. There has also been a focus on the proactive compliance program. I will get Mr Payne to speak about that.

Mr P. Payne: There are two main strategies under the working with children compliance regime: one is proactive and one is reactive. The proactive looks to Gumtree advertisements, for example, and we write directly to people who advertise to make sure they have a working with children check. Obviously if they do not, we take appropriate action to respond to that. More proactively, we have been delivering an online education campaign through Facebook and Gumtree—those types of online platforms—specifically targeting high-risk areas in which people may not necessarily understand that they need to have a working with children check. That is based on a risk assessment we have done of all the different categories of people who are subject to the act. Most recently it has been those delivering tutoring services. Next year we will commence a campaign that focuses on sporting activities or volunteer-type activities. We target those who work predominantly unsupervised. That is a high-risk area compared with, perhaps, teachers in the school environment, who are obviously employed and do not fall into the category of high risk. Those activities identify people who are compliant and also people who are not compliant. Additionally, we have an ongoing system for people who are issued with negative notices to make sure they continue to not be engaged in child-related work.

Ms L. METTAM: I note a statement by the department on 10 September about a woman who was convicted after making false claims on a working with children check application. How many false claims have been made over the past financial year?

Ms S.F. McGURK: We are aware of one. Obviously, we can talk about only those that we are aware of. There might be false claims made. The unit is conscious of regulated areas, but, importantly, those areas that are less likely to have some oversight, as in online and advertising opportunities through Gumtree and the like, or tutoring, to make sure there is a proactive approach to these issues.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I understand that previously there were some issues with the Departments of Education, Justice and Health not complying fully with the working with children checks, and the Auditor General reported on that matter. Has the Department of Communities made some progress in ensuring that the conditions described in that report have been addressed? Is the minister satisfied that those matters are now in compliance?

[11.50 am]

Ms S.F. McGURK: Quite a lot of work has been done in response to the Auditor General's report that the member referred to. I have already spoken about some of that work, which includes making sure that there are quick turnarounds for applications for working with children checks, ensuring investigations are done thoroughly when they need to be done, and also carrying out proactive work. I might ask Mr Payne to talk about the work that has been done to ensure that people working in other government departments, including within the Department of Communities, have met their working with children check requirements.

Mr P. Payne: Following the Auditor General's 2020 report, four different government departments were identified, which are predominantly higher users of the working with children system. We have an ongoing relationship with senior officers in those departments to ensure they are in compliance with the working with children system and also with their administrative practices and procedures. Following that report, the then director general wrote to not only those departments, but to all directors general across government, to bring to their attention the requirements of the Working with Children (Criminal Record Checking) Act. Our current work includes looking at supporting better online connectivity between the working with children system and those departments in order for them to be more timely and accurately aware of their officers who are currently subject to a working with children check or when those officers are due to lodge a renewal. That system development process is currently under consideration.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 514 of budget paper No 2. I note that in the 2021–22 budget, \$110 000 was allocated to the Caring Dads program. What has this money been budgeted for?

Ms S.F. McGURK: This is an election commitment for a specific program in the Peel region called Caring Dads. It is a program to engage men in group interventions to change behaviour, with the aim of reducing and preventing instances of family violence. As part of the 2021–22 budget, an allocation of \$110 000 has been approved for a 12-month trial of the Caring Dads program. The program is designed to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children by working with fathers who are alleged to have abused or neglected their children or exposed them to the abuse of their mothers. The initiative will be delivered by Stronger Families, which has advocated for the funding for the program in the Peel region, with the support of the member for Mandurah.

Ms L. METTAM: How many families or individual dads is this program anticipated to support?

Ms S.F. McGURK: At this stage, an election commitment was made for the allocation of \$110 000. Now that we have secured the money in the budget, the work will be done to understand how many families the organisation will be able to work with.

Ms L. METTAM: Why are there no funds in the forward estimates for this program?

Ms S.F. McGURK: It is a trial at this stage. That is the amount of money that was committed for the program at the last election.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to the grants and subsidies on page 538 of budget paper No 2. The first line item is "Connected Beginnings—Roebourne". There is an amount of money for 2019–20. Nothing was allocated last year, there are allocations for this year and next year but there is nothing going forward. What does the Connected Beginnings program deliver and why was no money allocated in the previous year?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Connected Beginnings is a program that has been funded by the commonwealth government through the Department of Education, Skills and Employment. It has three objectives: to ensure that children and families in Roebourne can thrive and reach their full potential; to foster a genuine partnership with local service providers; and to support the community. To answer the member's question, it is essentially a federal government program. We receive the funds and make sure they are delivered to the program in Roebourne.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The disjointed nature of the funding is simply down to another government. It is not because of the structure of the program that it is able to survive without money for a year. It is quite strange that there is absolutely no expenditure for a program for a year and then it is resurrected.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I suggest that the member ask the federal government why it stops and starts its funding arrangements. It frustrates me as well.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I am asking the minister: did the program cease to be on the ground in the last year or was it able to continue in some form? If not, what is it delivering?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Earlier, I outlined some of the points that are contemplated under Connected Beginnings. The program in Roebourne is called Yandi for Change. As I said, it is funded by the commonwealth government. It is

designed to support the Roebourne community around three key objectives. We have done what we can to support that local community in a range of ways but no budget was provided by the federal government for 2020–21. We have worked with the community as best we can on that particular program.

Ms L. METTAM: I realise that we have already touched on the Safe at Home program. There is a reference to the program on page 514 under “Election Commitments”. I wanted some clarification on how many people currently use the Safe at Home service. It is under “Safe at Home Expansion”.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Under the expansion, the McGowan government made an election commitment to expand the Safe at Home program to support an additional 150 women, with or without children, each year who are at risk of domestic violence.

Ms L. METTAM: Will it support an additional 150 women from 2022–23?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Some funding was approved for 2021–22. The funding of \$3.392 million has been approved through the 2021–22 budget, which includes \$100 000 approved in 2021–22, so in the current year, to consult and engage with partners and stakeholders to review the program and see what the model might look like. I think this is the answer to the member’s question: \$100 000 has been approved for this financial year—the current financial year—to engage with partners and stakeholders. At the moment, prior to this expansion, there are six support services providing Safe at Home services throughout WA.

[12.00 noon]

Ms L. METTAM: Going forward, will there be additional support services providing the expanded program?

Ms S.F. McGURK: It is expected that that will be the case. Although the opportunity to bid for that work will be made available to everyone, it might be that only the existing services will want to do it and will bid for it. But I would expect a geographical expansion as a result of our work, so I would be surprised if it did not include other services.

Ms L. METTAM: Can the minister tell me what she means by “geographical expansion”? Is everyone across the state eligible for the Safe at Home program? Is geography a challenge?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I outlined earlier that there are six support services currently operating that program. I am aware, for instance, of one in Bunbury, and I assume that they deal largely with women from around that geographical area. That is not to say that someone from another region, either the metro region or somewhere else in the state, could not make contact with that service and ask to be relocated to that area; of course they could. But the nature of services is such that they tend to operate within their geographical location. When we look at the expansion, we will be looking at what the need is across the state and what the current footprint is across the state, and we will make sure that we are responding to need when we have the opportunity to expand the program.

Ms L. METTAM: The minister said that it will provide for an additional 150 people. How many people currently use this service on an annual basis?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I do not have that number here, I am sorry, member.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the minister able to provide that as supplementary information?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes, for the last financial year, which might make more sense.

The CHAIR: Can the minister state exactly what information will be provided?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will provide the number of victim survivors who were supported by Safe at Home–funded services over the year 2020–21.

[*Supplementary Information No B4.*]

Ms L. METTAM: Has this funding been oversubscribed? Are some people unable to access this support?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Individual services determine which clients might be best suited to access the Safe at Home program, depending primarily upon a risk assessment and the wishes of the clients. Some clients would prefer to move—to leave their residence and move, either to another home or location, or to a refuge. Others want to stay in their residence and, as I said, depending upon a risk assessment of how safe that is, the individual service will assess whether that is a suitable option for them. As far as I am aware, we do not ask those services to report with that sort of detail on whether they have had some women who might be eligible for Safe at Home, but they do not have the funding for them. But I reiterate the point that I made earlier: I wonder what advocacy the member has made to her federal counterparts on this issue, because for well over 12 months in the last term of government, the federal government simply ceased funding this program, much to my frustration, and I did some public advocacy on that. When the federal government reinstated the funding, it was at a lower amount, and the state government had to pick up the tab. I hope that, in advocating for this program, the member has expressed that to her federal counterparts.

Ms L. METTAM: I have been advocating to ensure that there is support in the electorate I represent, from a state government point of view.

The CHAIR: Member, is there a question there?

Ms L. METTAM: She asked me a question, so I responded.

The CHAIR: It is up to you to ask the questions.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I do not think I did ask a question; I just made a point.

Ms L. METTAM: The minister touched on Bunbury being an area in which a support service is provided. Are women seeking support in the south west region able to access the Safe at Home support service in Bunbury?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes, they are.

Ms L. METTAM: The funding that has been allocated to this program has not been a limiting factor in terms of the delivery of this service. To expand on the answer the minister gave before, can the minister confirm that every individual who is eligible for this service has been able to access it?

Ms S.F. McGURK: In response to a question that the member put earlier about whether this service was oversubscribed, I said that it would be up to individual services to determine whether this service was appropriate for an individual woman and her family. As an example, it would be up to the service to decide whether it had cases that might be appropriate for that program, but they might not have been able to find accommodation or did not have money in that particular program. However, we do not ask them to report on that.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to page 538 of budget paper No 2 and the heading “Grants and Subsidies” at the top of the “Net Appropriation Determination” table. The line item “Western Australian Council of Social Service Sector Support Development” has an allocation of \$91 000 for 2019–20, \$680 000 for 2020–21 and \$192 000 for each year of the forward estimates. Can the minister explain why there is such a variation in funding through 2019–20, 2020–21 and 2021–22? Why is the estimated amount at such wide variance with the budgeted amount for 2020–21? There seems to be an allocation that has not been spent. What was the service to provide, and where is it at now?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The budget of \$680 000 in 2020–21 includes \$500 000 for financial counselling. This program is now listed separately.

[12.10 pm]

Mr R.S. LOVE: Can the minister outline what the \$192 000 is actually provided for?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The Western Australian Council of Social Service provides advice and information on emerging issues impacting disadvantaged and vulnerable people and on the current trends and issues experienced by the community services sector in Western Australia.

Mr R.S. LOVE: There is an amount for financial counselling already in the grants and subsidies table. Last year when WACOSS was allocated \$500 000 to provide financial counselling, when the budget was \$680 000, there was already a budgeted amount of \$500 000 for financial counselling further up the table. Are they different streams of financial counselling or are they the stream of financial counselling the minister referred to? If so, is there a double up from last year?

The CHAIR: I think the member might be looking at the line below, “Kimberley Juvenile Justice Strategy”, which is \$500 000.

Mr R.S. LOVE: No, that is \$200 000, I think; I will put a ruler on it, but I am pretty sure it is.

The CHAIR: Okay, sorry.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I might get Mr Richardson to explain whether this is income or expenditure, but I understand we are talking about the net appropriation determination.

Mr M. Richardson: It is helpful to recognise that this net appropriation determination table actually reflects the income of the Department of Communities to undertake various services. Only a subset within that is exclusive to statutory authorities. The \$500 000 listed here in the budget was expected income to Communities from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. The \$500 000 the member referred to in the grants table shows the expense of that same program. It is not so much a double up as the money coming in and the money going out.

Mr R.S. LOVE: They are both in the same table, so, presumably, they represent the same type of either grant or subsidy.

Ms S.F. McGURK: As I understand it, the amount received from WACOSS was a one-off amount and it is now expended through grants.

Mr H.T. JONES: I refer to paragraph 6.2 under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency” in the *Budget Statements* on page 516. Can the minister outline how Boorloo Bidee Mia will ensure there is a culturally appropriate response to those who are rough sleeping in the CBD?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I can speak about this issue because we have great hopes for this organisation to provide, for the first time, homelessness support delivered by an Aboriginal-controlled organisation in the CBD area. Of course, Aboriginal-controlled organisations do important community service work across the spectrum. However, a specific tailored service has not been provided by an ACO in Perth. Although this service will be provided to not only Aboriginal people, we know that Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness in the CBD is a cohort that is poorly serviced by our current system, so we are hoping to address that through this new service.

The member will be aware that other services now located at 100 Wellington Street will be available for people who were previously rough sleeping. It is important that it is not considered just a shelter; it is also focused on building a kind of community-based environment that supports residents to address the underlying issues that have contributed to them becoming homeless and to get them to maintain their lodging and transition to long-term accommodation. This is part of a significant addition to the resources that we have allocated to homelessness. I referred before to the over \$100 million per annum that is being spent and to the provision of the physical beds that will be provided by Boorloo Bidee Mia in a premises that was previously a backpackers' hostel. It is really well suited in not only its location, but also its construction. Its internal layout is very well suited to the clientele. As I said, having an ACO running that service will, we think, fill a gap that has been there for too long. I was very hopeful when I went to the opening of Boorloo Bidee Mia with the Minister for Housing and we saw the number of new staff who have been employed by Wungening, the Aboriginal Corporation that has been commissioned to run Boorloo Bidee Mia. The young Aboriginal staff were keen to start to work with people who were previously rough sleeping and to develop relationships with them and provide them with support.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to the “Grants and Subsidies” section on page 538 where there is a one-off allocation to the Kimberley juvenile justice strategy. It is a relatively minor amount of money. I am wondering where that strategy is being delivered or what it is because I cannot find any reference to it anywhere else in the budget papers. Is that the full amount for the strategy, will it be delivered in one year, and what does the strategy aim to achieve?

Ms S.F. McGURK: It is a program classified under the youth portfolio so I ask the member, if he can, to direct that question to the Minister for Youth.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to family and domestic violence initiatives on page 535, under the heading “Prevention of FDV”. Can the minister provide a breakdown of the line items across the forward estimates?

Ms S.F. McGURK: This is part of our \$16.53 million support package for a range of domestic violence support services in WA in response to COVID, which was announced in June 2020. Included in the list of initiatives are the following programs led by the Department of Communities. There is the expansion of mobile FDV outreach services and funding of \$8.639 million over 2020–21 and 2021–22 for at least 23 additional outreach workers across metropolitan and regional refuge intake areas to provide support to women and children who are experiencing or are at further risk of family violence. Another component is to strengthen the domestic violence response teams; there is a total of \$6.688 million over 2020–21 and 2021–22 to provide for at least 17 additional community sector team members across the state to work with victims to provide supports following a police call-out. There is also a component for FDV counselling, advocacy and support services of \$1.8 million over the two years 2020–21 and 2021–22 to meet an anticipated increase in demand and restore service levels. Finally, there is a job retraining scheme for women in refuges, with a total of \$123 000 over the two years 2020–21 and 2021–22 to fund a pilot scheme for 50 women per year in metropolitan refuges to gain employment skills and prerequisite certificates in career training.

[12.20 pm]

Ms L. METTAM: It will cease in 2023–24. The minister said that it is a COVID-19 response, so what assumptions have been made around why there will be no future funding under this program?

Ms S.F. McGURK: We announced at the time that these initiatives would be time limited and a response to the expected and, in fact, realised increases in domestic violence, and the uncertainty and added pressures experienced across the community during the COVID-19 pandemic. They were only ever expected to be time limited—that was the program and the budget allocation, and all the services that received money clearly understood that it would be a time-limited increase, particularly in staff on the ground who were placed in refuges and in joint response teams. I should say, too—the member will be aware—that as part of our election commitments in March, we announced a full suite of additional services and programs that add up, I think, to over \$60 million for this next period of government. A range of services were funded in this budget and I think that we have talked about them at other times this morning.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer again to page 538, under the heading “Grants and Subsidies”, the line item “Parenting Community Funding” and the allocation this year of \$534 000. What does that particular program provide?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The Child and Adolescent Health Service contributes annual funding of \$500 000 plus indexation to the Department of Communities for the parenting support service Ngala Parenting Line via a memorandum of understanding. The line item “Parenting Community Funding” contributes to parenting services to provide sessional or occasional early intervention and care services in regional areas, many of which have limited or no alternative childcare options. The term of the agreement was February 2017 to June 2020 with an extension option to June 2022. The extension option has now been exercised.

Mr R.S. LOVE: To be clear, there is no further funding allocation in the forward estimate because that will be the end of the program that has been offered as an extension by the commonwealth. Is there any plan to address that with an approach to the federal government to see whether it can be extended further, or will that just peter out?

Ms S.F. McGURK: That will be a matter for government to determine, but perhaps it is a matter best directed to the Minister for Health.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 534, and the election commitments in the table titled “Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies”. There is a commitment of \$4.063 million in the line item titled “Small Commitments”. Can the minister please provide a breakdown of what that covers?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Through the chair, I do not think the member was paying attention because I have been asked this question and agreed to provide an answer on notice for those areas within my portfolio.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to page 517—this is where it is difficult to know which minister can respond—and to paragraph 14, which states —

... the Department will focus on implementing the recommendations of the Functional Review of corporate functions that was completed in 2020–21, with a particular focus on: further integration of non-frontline service delivery ...

Can the minister provide an update on the implementation process? Is that in her area of responsibility? Is it a joint responsibility? How does it work?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will get the director general to address some of these issues, but, essentially, the functional review was an opportunity to identify efficiencies and effectiveness of non-frontline services in the new Department of Communities. A cross-agency oversight committee with an independent chair was tasked with progressing the review. As frontline services were not within the scope of the functional review, direct services in the community have not been affected. Although the objectives included financial sustainability, no savings targets were imposed on Communities as part of the review. Findings from the review will be actioned over the course of this financial year. I may have just said everything that the director general was about to say, but I will hand over to see whether he wants to add anything else.

Mr M. Rowe: Only to go into more detail, thank you, minister. In terms of what was in scope, as the minister said, it is not about frontline services; it is more about corporate services, effectively. That included a range of things across our agency in divisions that included: strategic policy and stewardship; governance integrity and reform; people; finance; contracting; corporate and ministerial support; and facilities. The recommendations addressed four key areas: further integration of non-frontline delivery—following the machinery-of-government changes, it is important to keep attending to the opportunities for integration where it makes sense to do so—as well as rebalancing transactional and strategic activity across all functions, supporting greater agility, and reprioritising our work. That is the summary of the focus that we will be implementing now.

Mr R.S. LOVE: What is the time frame for not only the delivery or the completion of the review, but also the implementation of the functional review?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will hand over to the director general, who is primarily responsible for that.

Mr M. Rowe: The nature of the recommendation will influence the timing of when it will be adopted. For example, some of the recommendations pointed to a need for additional focus on baseline systems in the organisation—that is, the underlying human resources and finance systems. That is something for which we will be pursuing additional resources from the government. There will be other changes flowing out over the out years in relation to resourcing in different areas of the agency and that will be managed according to natural attrition and changes to the organisational structure over time. When it will be implemented will depend on which recommendation. Some have already effectively been achieved; others will take a bit longer.

Ms M.J. HAMMAT: While we are on page 517, I direct the minister to paragraphs 10.1 and 10.2. Can the minister outline how that will help to maintain improvements in child protection outcomes?

[12.30 pm]

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am happy to talk about this because it is the core work of the department to make sure that children across our community are kept safe. A key focus has been to ensure that Aboriginal children receive maximum safety and wellness outcomes. In fact, Aboriginal children make up 57 per cent of children in care in our state, and that is a reality that we do not accept and that we want to challenge and improve on. Child safety is always the priority, but we know that to make inroads into reducing the number of Aboriginal children who are being taken into care we need to work in partnership with Aboriginal people and communities, and their respective service organisations. We are starting to see results in some of that work. The member has probably heard me refer to this before, but we have seen the lowest annual rate of children going into care in more than 20 years. We have also seen the lowest growth rate for Aboriginal children in care since 2004. The total number of children in the care of the CEO has dropped by 154 in 2020–21, from 5 498 to 5 344. This includes the significant number of Aboriginal children in care being reduced by 0.8 per cent, which is the first reduction since 1996. We credit these results to our commitment to early intervention. Since coming to government, we have invested a total of \$112.5 million towards early intervention in child protection. One program being delivered is the Aboriginal in-home support service, which provides intensive in-home practical support for Aboriginal families to address safety issues and to keep children safely at home, and when children do go into care, it is for as short a period as possible and we reunify them as quickly as we can. As at 31 March this year, of the referrals made to the Aboriginal in-home support service

between April 2019 and March 2020, 91 per cent of children were kept safely at home 12 months later. I repeat: between April 2019 and March 2020, 91 per cent of children were kept safely at home 12 months later, which is a real achievement. In May this year, I was pleased to announce a further \$10.3 million investment in a two-year expansion of that program, which is being led by the Wungening Aboriginal Corporation. The program is currently being delivered in the metropolitan area and this funding extension will support the work to design future expansion into regional areas. We are pleased with that work and hope that we can continue to expand to not only keep children safe, but also, if possible, keep them safe with their families.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 525, child protection assessments and investigations, and specifically the line item “Employees (Full-Time Equivalents)”. For the reporting period, for each child protection worker, how many case loads were over the recommended limit of 15?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Just while we are looking for those figures, I thought the member for Vasse would point out the growth in the number of FTEs in child protection over the forward estimates. I know the member would be as pleased as I am to see the government funding additional FTEs.

Within the Department of Communities, the management of child protection case loads is in accordance with the 2007 Western Australian Industrial Relations Commission order. Over the last year, the average case load ratio per worker has remained below the upper limit of 15 as stipulated by the order. Communities does not support the movement of cases for the purpose of data collection. Team leaders monitor and reassign cases in accordance with the need, which is reflected in the movement of cases and changes to an individual worker’s case load. Cases that are unable to be allocated to a caseworker are allocated to a team leader as the nominated liaison officer for monitoring and tasking of actions. These cases are placed on the monitor list. The management of the monitor list is on a one-off triage process. The child and family’s circumstances are regularly reviewed to assess any change to safety and risk factors. When a full-time caseworker is not allocated to a child and family, tasks are completed, where necessary, by other support staff and caseworkers within the district.

Ms L. METTAM: Just to clarify, the minister does not have information about how many case loads are over the upper limit—over 18?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Thanks, member. I think I referred to the average case load ratio remaining below the upper limit, but I can say that as at 4 June 2021, 712.56 FTEs were available for casework and a total of 85 caseworkers—not FTE—had a case load of 15 or more recorded in the system. Of a total of 712.5 FTE, 85 workers—not FTE—had a case load of 15 or more recorded in the system.

Ms L. METTAM: Okay. Thank you. During the reporting period, how many child protection workers ceased working for the department?

Ms S.F. McGURK: We do not have that information, sorry.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the minister able to provide it as supplementary information?

The CHAIR: Is that something the member can put on notice?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am a bit unsure what the question is; does it include people who have resigned or people who have taken advantage of the voluntary targeted separation scheme? There could be many reasons that people have concluded working for the department in the child protection area. I am not exactly sure what the member wants.

Ms L. METTAM: How many child protection workers have left the role, whether they have resigned or moved into another position? Over the reporting period, how many child protection workers ceased working in that role?

The CHAIR: When you say “child protection workers”, do you mean everyone who works at the Department for Child Protection and Family Support or do you mean frontline workers? The member will need to clarify this before the minister can assist her.

Ms L. METTAM: We are dealing with a specific line item.

The CHAIR: The specific line item refers to full-time employees; it does not refer to frontline workers or caseworkers. The line item to which the member referred does not assist the minister.

Ms L. METTAM: Over the reporting period, how many caseworkers have ceased working for the department?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I do not have that information and I am not sure what the member is hoping to elicit from that information. We have funded positions. We have FTEs, and that is usually the discussion with any government department—how many FTEs have been allocated to do particular work. In fact, I said that I was hoping that the member for Vasse would be happy with the numbers that are reflected on page 525 because the number of full-time equivalents in 2020–21 is 562 but that number jumps to 575 in 2021–22. The cost-and-demand model has continued to provide for more FTE. People may have resigned for any number of reasons. I am not sure what the information would tell us. I am happy to discuss how many FTEs have been allocated to do child protection work within the department. This government is providing an increased number of FTEs.

Ms L. METTAM: Just to clarify, is the minister not willing to provide that information?

The CHAIR: The minister is perplexed as to what it is the member is seeking—I gather that is the issue.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Someone may have resigned for any number of personal reasons. There are myriad issues why someone would resign from the department, but an FTE position would be available and the position would be filled. I am not sure what it tells us to know whether someone resigned from the department for any number of reasons.

[12.40 pm]

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to the table on page 514 which has the heading “Spending Changes” on the previous page. Under ongoing initiatives is the Aboriginal community connectors program. No money seems to have been spent on that program this year, but two allocations have been made: \$6.8 million in the current budget and \$7.2 million in the forward estimates. Is this another short-term commonwealth-sponsored program or is it a state program? What does it achieve, what does it aim to achieve, where will it be based and what communities will be able to access it?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will answer the question in two parts. These are spending changes. If we allocated money and spent it last year, it will not appear in this table. In 2019–20, the budget for Aboriginal community patrols or Aboriginal community connectors—that is the new name for the patrols and why the member might be a little confused about the program—was \$6.572 million. We have increased that amount over future years.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Is the minister saying that there is an underlying allocation of \$6.5 million and that we have added another \$6.8 million this year?

Ms S.F. McGURK: No. I said that the table that the member referred to is a table of spending changes. We allocated money and spent that money in past years, so there is no line item under 2020–21 because there is no spending change. Sorry, I gave the member the wrong year. In 2020–21, the budget was \$6.758 million —

Mr R.S. LOVE: Why does it have \$6.841 million in the budget papers?

Ms S.F. McGURK: It is not there because it was not a spending change. This table outlines the spending —

Mr R.S. LOVE: That is the actual money.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Yes. That is the actual amount.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Is the spending change the difference between those two figures or is it an extra \$6.8 million?

Ms S.F. McGURK: It is not extra money. It is the amount that is estimated to be spent in 2021–22.

Mr R.S. LOVE: All right, and then \$7.2 million in the following year —

Ms S.F. McGURK: Exactly.

Mr R.S. LOVE: — and then nothing after that. Is that because it is a commonwealth-funded program?

Ms S.F. McGURK: No; it is not a commonwealth-funded program. It is what the member might remember being called the Aboriginal community patrols program. It is now called the Aboriginal community connectors program and we have funded it for two years. We have extended service agreements and will continue to work on service redesign for better program outcomes. Procurement for 2022–23 service agreements will be conducted in 2021–22 to ensure the department’s compliance with government procurement and contracting policies. The Aboriginal community connectors will be using a new mobile data collection application, or a connect app, to allow for near-instant data reporting to better measure outcomes that will assist in the program’s evaluation in 2022. The program will continue to place a greater focus on prevention and collaboration with other agencies in partnership with local government, businesses and community sector organisations that align with the state’s Aboriginal wellbeing priorities. In 2021–22, there is program funding for that in the Gascoyne, the goldfields, the Kimberley, the midwest, the Perth metropolitan area and the Pilbara, and there are some statewide costs as well.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The department has not slated to change that program in the next year or two and it is working on extending it into the future, depending on circumstances, demand et cetera. What happens when some of the communities receive a cash allocation? For instance, there has been a native title settlement in the midwest with a rather large cash allocation going into those communities, as there will be in the south west in various boodjars. Will those communities then take on some of those services? Does the minister see that as part of the future funding arrangement for these types of patrols, or are they slated to continue to be a function of government?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am not the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and I would not venture to try to answer that question about what is contemplated within those native title settlements. For a more accurate answer, the member is probably better off asking the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to the table on page 514 and the second line item under ongoing initiatives, “Child Protection—Cost and Demand Growth”. What are the reasons for the significant variance in the spending changes in the forward estimates?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The line item that the member identified is about the effect of the cost-and-demand model of funding. Although that system has been in place since 2008–09, it has been refined and changed over the years. In answer to the member’s question, there are two components to the total amount. One is “salary expenses” and the

other is “all other expenses”. The salary expenses for the cost-and-demand model do not decrease, but increase from 2021–22 over the forward estimates. It is the “all other expenses” and some of the overheads that are changed and result in that negative figure that the member referred to in 2022–23. It is not the salary component that changes but the “all other expenses” or overheads. Out of the total amount, the salary expenses from 2021–22 increase to \$5.4 million; in 2022–23, they increase to \$5.729 million; in 2023–24, they increase to \$17.23 million; and in 2024–25, they increase to \$28.995 million. They are significant increases in the salary component, which I know the member will be happy to hear about. For “all other expenses”, some of which are the overheads and interagency transfers, there is a decrease. In 2021–22, it is a decrease of \$4.956 million, and in 2022–23, it is a decrease of \$8.627 million. That gives a total in 2022–23 of a decrease of \$2.898 million. I hope that makes sense.

Ms L. METTAM: Yes, thank you.

Ms S.F. McGURK: That decrease, as it appears in the budget papers, does not affect any frontline services. In fact, the salaries go up, as I indicated.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to each of the six service areas and the full-time equivalent employee numbers —

Ms S.F. McGURK: What page number, member?

[12.50 pm]

Mr R.S. LOVE: Page 522. There are 384 FTEs in community services. In service area 2, “Homelessness Support Services”, there are 16 people; in area 3, “Earlier Intervention and Family Support Services”, there are 365 people; in area 4, “Preventing and Responding to Family and Domestic Violence”, there are 46; in area 5, there are 575 —

The CHAIR: The member is referring to pages 523 and 524.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I am asking about the total number of employees that the minister is responsible for, basically. In area 6, “Care Arrangements and Support Services for Children in the CEO’s Care” —

Ms S.F. McGURK: I do not mean to interrupt, but I am not following the member at all. What page number are we on?

Mr R.S. LOVE: I am asking the minister about all the employees in the minister’s various service areas. According to the budget document, the minister is responsible for six areas; so the various number of employees in each of the six areas —

The CHAIR: Minister, the member is spanning the services and key efficiency indicators from page 522 through to page 526.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Yes, and each one has the number of full-time equivalent employees. In relation to the department’s provision of incentives, or shall we say facilitating people to be vaccinated against COVID-19, is there a program to ensure that employees in frontline services are at least encouraged to be vaccinated? Are there opportunities for people to be vaccinated on the job, or is time allocated for people to leave work to get vaccinated? Will some sort of record be kept of employees’ vaccinations into the future?

Ms S.F. McGURK: Now we have got to the bottom of what we are talking about, I will ask the director general to talk about this because I know he has been directly involved.

Mr M. Rowe: The department has been actively encouraging all staff to be vaccinated, particularly those in frontline roles who work with children or vulnerable people. As the member is aware, that is not compulsory, and neither is it compulsory for staff to report whether they have been vaccinated or not. We have a very easy to use online facility that staff are encouraged to use to notify us when they have been vaccinated, either for their first vaccination or second. We have a record of who has been vaccinated from those amongst our staff who have been willing to tell us. Suffice to say, it is an ongoing program that we absolutely encourage all our staff to be vaccinated and we hope that they do so.

Mr R.S. LOVE: We know that certain health professionals, and staff in disability services et cetera, have to be vaccinated. I take it that none of the department’s workers in service areas 1 to 6 fall into that category?

Mr M. Rowe: That would be a matter for the Chief Health Officer to determine if there was to be an obligation on our staff to be vaccinated, and we would await a direction if that were the case.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to paragraph 14 on page 517 and the implementation of the functional review of corporate functions that was completed in 2020–21.

The CHAIR: The member for Moore is indicating to you that he has already asked about that.

Ms L. METTAM: It must have been when I was out!

I refer to the heading “New Initiatives” on page 514 and the women’s refuge expansion in Peel and Kwinana. How many women currently access this service?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The two services that the member referred to—the one in Peel is called Warlang Bidi and the one in Kwinana is called Andrea Mia—were opened last November. Both have facilities for six individuals or

families. We made a commitment during COVID for both those services to increase their capacity—to effectively double their capacity. That building work is expected to be finalised by the end of the year. That will increase the capacity of both those facilities by six units each.

Ms L. METTAM: Does the minister anticipate that no further funding will be required after 2024–25? Will that mark the completion of the expansion of both those refuges in terms of the investment in the capital expansion?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The ongoing money that is allocated under “New Initiatives” is the operational money that is required to operate those refuges.

Ms L. METTAM: I am unsure whether my next question comes under “homelessness”. I will attempt to ask a question about the line item “Teenagers in Need of Crisis Accommodation Facility” under the heading “Election Commitments” on page 514. I am not sure whether that falls under the minister’s area or under Housing. Can I have some further information regarding the particular election commitment made to that program?

The CHAIR: It is on page 514.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am happy to answer that question, member. The commitment made during the election campaign in March this year was to provide the organisation called Youth Futures with an additional \$3.4 million to support service provision costs. That is the line item “Teenagers in Need of Crisis Accommodation Facility”. Youth Futures is currently funded to provide accommodation to teenagers in need of crisis accommodation services, known as TINOCA. The McGowan government election commitment is to replicate the existing service and create a second TINOCA service, to be provided in the northern suburbs. The current TINOCA service provides support and accommodation to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, using a case management approach to address identified issues that have contributed to the young person’s homelessness. The program assists teenagers to move to more stable, long-term accommodation and reduce the likelihood of future homelessness. With the model, six young people can be accommodated in crisis accommodation at any time, including the transitional accommodation program, which provides medium-term accommodation and support for an additional six young people.

Ms L. METTAM: Will this in effect expand the Youth Futures program and support an additional six teenagers?

Ms S.F. McGURK: That is right.

Ms L. METTAM: What are the eligibility criteria? How does the program work?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I have partly outlined how the program works. In terms of the expansion, Youth Futures has recently advised the Department of Communities that it has purchased a block of land in Merriwa for the service, and expects to receive draft building plans shortly. As I outlined, the service delivery will be modelled around the existing service called Teenagers in Need of Crisis Accommodation—TINOCA. Criteria are outlined for those young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Most people who have visited Youth Futures recognise that it is working with some very vulnerable young people and it is a good service to support, and we are happy to do that.

Ms L. METTAM: Is a referral made by the department of child protection, or how is a teenager who is homeless able to access this important service?

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am advised that referrals can come from any source.

The appropriation was recommended.

Meeting suspended from 1.00 to 2.00 pm

Division 14: Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation — Service 1, Defence Industry; Veterans Issues, \$49 327 000 —

Ms M.M. Quirk, Chair.

Mr P. Papalia, Minister for Defence Industry; Veterans Issues.

Ms R. Brown, Director General.

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

Mr R. Sansalone, Chief Financial Officer.

Mrs R. Sackville-Minchin, Chief of Staff, Minister for Defence Industry; Veterans Issues.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. It is my intention to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee’s consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 1 October 2021. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

I give the call to the member for Vasse.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 205 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, under "Significant Issues Impacting the Agency". Item 10 states that Western Australia is well placed to advance more strategic partnerships between industry and defence. How much money has the state government spent on developing opportunities for industry and defence?

Mr P. PAPALIA: Does the member mean with respect to this budget, or in recent times?

Ms L. METTAM: With respect to the reporting period.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Obviously, successive state governments over many years have invested in defence, particularly in the Australian Marine Complex at Henderson. In recent times we have invested in further expansion to improve the capabilities at Henderson. The Australian Marine Complex received \$89.3 million for additional improvements at Henderson in recent times. That involved an improved transfer pathway between the wharves and a new massive shed that Civmec has there. Money is allocated towards a new shed on the waterfront that will enable us to move the adjacent Echo Marine Group site to the Australian Submarine Corporation building. Upgrades to the main wharf will enable capacity to berth one of the new frigates that are being built in South Australia, and money is also allocated to design work and other advance analysis for further expansion, as well as money for improvements to the road access around the AMC.

Ms L. METTAM: Obviously the submarine docking has been confirmed for South Australia. The state government invested in an ad campaign that took up full page advertisements in *The West Australian* and other newspapers. How much was invested in that campaign?

Mr P. PAPALIA: The overall campaign for advocating the case for Western Australia to be the site for full-cycle docking was \$1.035 million over a number of years. The point to make about that is it is quite extraordinary that after having encouraged the state government and Western Australian industry to advocate for shifting full-cycle docking to Western Australia and accommodating a relationship between the Minister for Defence's office and our public servants and industry with a view to making the case, the federal government then chose with no notice at all, after having delayed the decision for almost two years, to announce publicly that full-cycle docking would be retained in South Australia. That is very disappointing. There was agreement that Western Australia would make the case to the commonwealth that it was in the national interest for the task to be shifted to Western Australia. It was actually predicated on the assumption that had to come, because South Australia would have been incapable of conducting the construction of frigates and the new submarine and continuing to do full-cycle docking when that commenced. The original plan was for the new submarine to commence building in about 2024. Clearly, that is not happening. That is what has motivated the federal government to make this decision. There will be a lot less work happening in South Australia than it anticipated. The obvious conclusion to draw is that it kept Western Australia in the dark in the same way as it kept the French in the dark and decided to not tell anybody until it announced it the other day.

[2.10 pm]

Ms L. METTAM: I appreciate that the government invested over \$1 million in the advertising campaign. Why was more not done?

Mr P. PAPALIA: What exactly do you mean, member?

The CHAIR: Member, keep to the budget items. I think that is an open-ended question. You need to be more precise.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I have a further question on the same point, under "Defence Industry", paragraph 10, which states —

Western Australia is well placed to advance more strategic partnerships between industry ...

Does the government have any plans for regional ports that can cater for defence? A good example is what Exmouth is going through with the strategic base at Learmonth. As the minister would know, with regard to the submarines in Exmouth, it has a communication station. There is a proposal for a deep water port that would facilitate the fuelling of frigates or other defence vessels. Is that part of the government's strategy or is Henderson part of the state strategy? Is it more than just Henderson?

The CHAIR: I think the minister has the gist of the question.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I referred to the recent investment in Henderson because the state has made a significant investment in capital works to essentially provide the federal government with outcomes using our infrastructure.

It is not the only thing we do for Defence. Defence West has a role to mentor and support the defence industry right across all the different fields—not just maritime, but also land, air and space—in preparing for accessing opportunities both with the ADF using the federal government’s investment and also internationally. A lot of activity goes into supporting small and medium-sized enterprises and even prime contractors in preparing to make bids, being aware of them and advocacy around promoting our capabilities to the world. We recently attended Land Forces, a defence expo in Brisbane. We did not talk about Henderson at all, although there was one major reference to Austal bidding for amphibious vehicles. It was about land forces-type technology and capability. WA has a lot of other defence industry players that are active across all fields.

With respect to the Gascoyne Gateway project that the member is talking about, that is not just a Defence-focused proposal but it does have lead agency status and is supported by the department, though not under me as the minister. It is not because it is not solely defence; the department is proposing a range of outcomes or uses for that project. I am not the minister responsible for that particular project. It does have lead agency status. The Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation is the agency that is supporting it.

Ms L. METTAM: Further to the point the minister made about the \$1.035 million spent on the advertising campaign, does he think that the government should have invested more in that campaign or does he think it had any impact on the overall outcome?

Mr P. PAPALIA: It well and truly achieved its objective of elevating the potential for Western Australia to be the home of full-cycle docking activity. We made our case comprehensively. It was not just that advertising campaign that constituted our case; we also commissioned three different papers. PricewaterhouseCoopers completed some work on the strategic benefits of, and the reason for, shifting the full-cycle docking, being in the national interest. ACIL Allen Consulting wrote a report on the financial benefits. The third one was completed by a consultant whose name escapes me at the moment. It answered some of the other questions that were posed to us by the then Minister for Defence, Minister Reynolds. All of those papers, the many and varied fora that we addressed, and our advertising campaign contributed to putting the argument for Western Australia to be the home of full-cycle docking. The director general reminded me that something like \$80 million was spent on developing a workforce plan for the defence industry and committing our government resources towards building our defence industry workforce. We made the case comprehensively. Clearly, a significant decision was made by the federal government, as is its right, to shift from conventional submarine capability towards a nuclear one. That is a really significant decision and it looks like we are collateral damage amongst that. Our argument for full-cycle docking goes by the way because it was predicated on the government building new submarines in South Australia by 2024. That will not happen. The government will need to find work for those 500 or so South Australians who are currently doing full-cycle docking. I suspect that they will continue to do that work. They will not build submarines any time soon.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: On page 202, under “Ongoing Initiatives”, is the line item “Australian Marine Complex Studies”. I notice that in 2020–21, the actual amount is \$570 000, and in 2021–22, the budget estimate is \$7.611 million. Can the minister explain the spend on Australian Marine Complex studies?

Mr P. PAPALIA: What is the line again?

The CHAIR: It is on page 202.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is underneath “Election Commitments”.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I am on page 202. Where is it?

The CHAIR: It is in the table.

Mr P. PAPALIA: On which line?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The line item is “Australian Marine Complex Studies”.

Mr P. PAPALIA: What is the member talking about?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: There is an amount of \$570 000 in 2020–21 and then \$7.611 million in 2021–22. There is then no further budget for the Australian Marine Complex studies. Can the minister elaborate on those complex studies?

Mr P. PAPALIA: It is a range of studies that have essentially been funded from federal government money in partnership with our government to identify work that needs to be done to accommodate defence activities at the AMC. A range of studies are being completed with that money, paid for by the federal government but administered by Defence West.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is the \$7.611 million in the budget state money or federal money?

Mr P. PAPALIA: It is federal money. It is part of a total allocation of \$9 million from the federal government. We are administering it. We have a task force that combines defence at the federal level with our state agency to work on meeting the defence requirements in Western Australia. That is part of the work that is being done. It is looking at an integrated infrastructure program, a transport program and other studies for facilitating defence activities around Henderson.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to the next line item, “Defence West”, on the same page—page 202, under “Ongoing Initiatives”. The budget for Defence West is shown as \$1.875 million and is ongoing. It seems to go up. How many employees are based at Defence West, and can the minister explain why there is a gradual increase in spend on Defence West? What is the focus of Defence West now and moving to the future, given that the federal government has made a decision to base the submarines in South Australia?

[2.20 pm]

Mr P. PAPALIA: Full-cycle docking was just one element of what we were pursuing in advocating for Western Australia’s defence industry. In 2018, we launched the *Western Australian defence and defence industries strategic plan*. One part of that was to advocate for WA being the primary location for the maintenance of frigates and submarines. The first step in making that case was arguing for the full-cycle docking to come to Western Australia, because we knew at that time that it would have to move sometime around 2024. Obviously, that is not happening, but it is not the only part of our strategic plan. We are still making the case for us to be the premier site for frigate maintenance. But also, we are in a new world now. We are going to have to assess what is happening with this argument around nuclear-powered submarine maintenance. Every indication from the Prime Minister is that the submarines will be based in Western Australia, where the submarine fleet is currently based. That is a new environment that we have to become familiar with, and we will have to seek advice from the federal government as to what its plans include.

That aside, Defence West has the role of helping all the defence industry in Western Australia to make their case and prepare for seeking out opportunities in the defence sector. The main argument we will be making and pursuing in the maritime sector is that we want certainty in Western Australia around continuous shipbuilding in the same way that South Australia has certainty. The federal government has committed to continuous shipbuilding in South Australia. South Australia is currently building the new frigates. The federal government has said that on completion of that project, it will roll over and continue to build the next frigate or next surface combatant in South Australia. Way back, when Christopher Pyne was the Minister for Defence, we were designated as one of two shipbuilding sites, but we have not been given that certainty. Right now, Luerksen and Cvmec are building an Arafura-class offshore patrol vessel down at Cvmec’s big shed. When that concludes, they will have no further work. As far as we are aware, there is no designated shipbuilding task for them on completion of that project. Austal is currently building Pacific patrol boats and has a short contract for Cape-class patrol boats for the Royal Australian Navy. The Pacific patrol boats are for our regional neighbours, and they have a Cape-class patrol boat contract for the Navy, but, on conclusion of that, they have no more work. So we have two shipbuilders, with no future pipeline of work. In the same way that the federal government acknowledged that we could not expect South Australia to continue to sustain a workforce at full capacity without a pipeline of work, we confront the same challenge. Our next demand on the federal government will be for it to recognise that it said we were one of the two shipbuilding sites, and we want the same commitment that it has given to South Australia. We want to know that we will have continuous shipbuilding.

The federal government was supposed to have released what it called a naval shipbuilding plan about a year ago, but it has not happened. It is pretty obvious why it has not—it was working on cancelling the submarine project and changing direction completely in the submarine world. That plan should now be released as a matter of urgency. The federal government should commit to Western Australia having continuous shipbuilding so that our industry players know that they can keep their workforce, can continue to invest in capability, and can sustain shipbuilding in Western Australia as one of only two shipbuilding sites in Australia.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Does the minister see Defence West as being a successful partner in securing work now and into the future?

Mr P. PAPALIA: I do. Our defence industry strategic plan identified that the contribution of the defence industry to the Western Australian economy is around \$3 billion a year, and our objective was to double that within a decade. We are on our way to doing that. Full-cycle docking got a lot of profile, intentionally, because we were trying to make the case as forcefully as we could, but it is only one element of opportunity in the defence industry field. Plenty of other things are going on, and they are being sustained and supported by Defence West, but right now the whole environment has shifted as far as submarines go—not just maintenance, but submarine capability. That whole world is new. Defence West will be researching and providing advice to government and industry on where the opportunities lie in that new world. Apart from that, in all the other sectors, we are working all the time to realise opportunities for the defence industry.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: So not all is lost with losing the submarines?

Mr P. PAPALIA: No; we have other things. We have the Defence Science Centre, which came about only because we have Defence West, and we advocated to the federal government to create the Defence Science Centre in Western Australia to access some of the federal Defence Science and Technology Group’s funding. Before that, as with a lot of federal grant schemes, Western Australia missed out because we just were not in the space. We now are. We are regularly funding PhD research. The idea is for all of our public universities to collaborate under the leadership of the Defence Science Centre, which is co-housed with Defence West. They are working to ensure

that we get our share of defence research grants and that we realise the opportunities around Western Australia's competitive advantages. We have always said, as part of our strategic plan, that we recognise we have a lot of capability in research, development, problem-solving and equipment capabilities through meeting the demands of offshore oil and gas, and mining. We want to apply that to defence, and that is our competitive advantage. Those sorts of things are happening all the time.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The minister said that his aim was to double the defence contribution to the economy from \$3 billion to \$6 billion. Without the submarine contract, which has gone to South Australia, does the minister still see that vision and will try to double the defence contribution? Does the minister think we are still on path?

Mr P. PAPALIA: I think we will exceed that. It is not beyond our reach at all. There is a lot of other activity in the maritime sector, but there is also activity in air, land and space that is being supported by Defence West, often facilitated and enabled through working with other government agencies to make sure that our local players get to meet their —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: So not all is lost.

Mr P. PAPALIA: No, absolutely not. I am disappointed, as we all should be. The way things played out was disappointing. We know why, because retrospectively we can see what happened. The federal government at some point made a decision that it did not tell us about, which was to shift completely from a conventional submarine-build in contract with the French naval group —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The minister can understand why it had not told him.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Yes, but that does not make it any easier. It determined that it was going to change from that. What is disappointing is that the federal government was encouraging us and the defence industry in Western Australia to continue down this pathway, and we were pursuing that path until that announcement was made. That is disappointing. The defence industry is one way of diversifying the Western Australian economy that the government is pursuing, and it is already making a big contribution. There are a lot of opportunities in other fields. The agency is right now working in collaboration with the federal Department of Defence on a number of projects that will facilitate greater opportunities for our industry and also ensure that the nation's defence infrastructure and support for our ADF forces is well served in WA.

Ms L. METTAM: Federal members have discussed a dry berth docking facility in Henderson. What is the minister's view on that? Is that something that the state government would be looking at pushing for?

[2.30 pm]

Mr P. PAPALIA: I saw that the federal member for Stirling, Vince Connelly, had written an article in the paper some months after we had commenced consideration last year of a large vessel dry berth. It was no secret; it was public knowledge. Vince wrote about it as though he had just discovered it, which was fine for him, but he was not initiating any great new discussion around the subject. Our strategic infrastructure and land use plan, which was delivered in November 2020, identified the potential for a large vessel dry berth to be built. We have been aware, ever since the defence "2020 Force Structure Plan" was released, that there will potentially be the need for another graving dock in Australia by about 2026, because the Captain Cook Graving Dock in Sydney will have to go out of service for a significant time for maintenance. It is currently the only graving dock in the country capable of taking large vessels. That would leave Australia without the ability to dock a vessel for emergency work if, say, a frigate or another Navy ship touched bottom and damaged its propeller or something of that nature. If it required maintenance and needed to be taken out of the water, the only alternative would be to tow it all the way to Singapore probably during that time. We knew about that and we have been working in collaboration with the federal government on some work.

Some of that \$9 million to which the member referred earlier has been dedicated to some of the work needed to determine whether a dry berth can be built and if it were built what sort of scale would be needed, and what would be required in terms of all the other studies associated with doing something like that. All of that has been underway for some time. From the comments made by the Prime Minister the other day, I think we can pretty safely say that the federal government is very likely to commit to that project, but it will need the federal government to commit to it. It is not an asset that Western Australia as a state should fund or would necessarily be expected to fund. We might recognise that it is a national asset with potential benefit, certainly in construction, for Western Australians, but we are not intending at all to be the ones funding it or seeking funding for it. We expect the federal government to take on that responsibility and we can assist with facilitating it.

Ms L. METTAM: What is the cost of this infrastructure?

Mr P. PAPALIA: It is a big project. It will depend on the scale of it; they are large things involving a lot of steel and a lot of fabrication work. I will argue and I expect—I do not think anyone would argue against it—that it should be done with Australian steel by Australian workers in Western Australia. If it comes about, we are talking about something significant. It is worth well north of \$1 billion. I do not have specific costs or anything of that nature yet but it would be in the order of \$1.5 billion to \$2 billion if you are talking about —

The CHAIR: Minister, I have enough trouble getting members to stick to the budget papers without you getting into speculation.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Sorry, you are right. Just so the member knows, it is a really big project. The member asked earlier about whether we are disappointed about the full-cycle docking campaign. Yes, we are disappointed, but a lot of other things are going on. There is potential well in excess of what was being contemplated.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to item 10.2 “Defence Industry” on page 205, where it states —

supporting the Defence Science Centre to facilitate collaboration in research, which will lead to the enhancement of Australia’s defence capability ...

Can the minister elaborate on how the government plans to support the Defence Science Centre?

Mr P. PAPALIA: I might get the deputy director general to give the member a bit of insight into the Defence Science Centre and where we are at the moment and perhaps where we are looking to go.

Ms L. Dawson: The Defence Science Centre is co-funded by the state and federal governments through the Defence Science and Technology Group. The intent is to look at next generation technologies and capabilities 20-plus years out that defence might require and to stimulate research capability through the local universities active with local small to medium-sized enterprises to problem solve and identify pathways that could be around surveillance, autonomous systems capability, artificial intelligence or machine learning, to actually look at the safety and security of the nation. A number of PhD scholars have been funded through the Defence Science Centre in partnership with the universities. We run a number of defence teaming research programs to get them to collaborate effectively together in pitch for a solution to a project. Small grant funding is then provided to allow them to develop and shape that solution out further and work with the Defence Science Technology Group to, hopefully, prototype, then get into a trial position and look at potentially producing products for Defence direct.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is a figure attached to the funding allocation for that item? The deputy director general said that it is both state and federal funding.

Ms L. Dawson: It is both state and federal funding.

Mr P. PAPALIA: We do twice as much as the federal government, it should be noted.

Ms L. Dawson: It is under \$1 million overall, but we provide three-quarters of the funding.

Ms J.L. HANNS: I refer to the line item “Defence West” on page 202 under “Spending Changes”. What milestones have been achieved in response to government investment to help develop a pipeline of workers for Western Australia’s growing defence industry?

Mr P. PAPALIA: We have covered a fair few of these but we invested \$18 million towards defence industry, first of all for workforce planning, which is a really significant thing that had not been done before whereby the Department of Training and Workforce Development worked with Defence West and the industry on what the workforce requirements would be into the future. We have invested as part of the state government’s overall investment in training and education. However, defence certainly got a good share, \$80 million, towards industry apprenticeships; training and development; tailored short courses and scholarships for women and veterans, although we are still waiting to see some of those veterans get the scholarships; and facility upgrades to South Metropolitan TAFE. South Metro TAFE is renowned in the country as a leading developer and deliverer of training for the defence industry, not just here but over the entire nation. The member will have heard about the state government’s Defence Science Centre, which is bringing together all our universities in collaborating and seeking out grants that we then fund jointly with the federal government for research directly linked to problems identified by Defence. We enable a problem to be recognised from a defence operator and then we try to put researchers together with those people to develop a solution in the hope that they will develop a solution for our idea, for the Australian Defence Force, but we are very focused on any export opportunity to the rest of the world. That is something that happens all the time. They do not do just grants; they also have a range of collaboration activities that bring people together on a regular basis to think about subjects they might not have considered.

We have good connections into the resources sector. We try to bring in those people to think about problems that Defence confronts because often they operate in very similar environments and the challenges they confront are also similar. We do things like that when we put them together with the problem to try to solve it and then get our researchers to fix the problem and then work with an SME to provide the solution with a view to owning the internet protocol and being able to exploit it. As I indicated earlier, we are working on advocating on behalf of all parts of the defence industry in Western Australia to get its share. Obviously, the maritime thing tends to get the most attention just because the Australian Marine Complex is established; it is a pretty special location. Half the surface fleet and all the submarine fleet is based here in Western Australia, so navy and maritime projects get a lot of attention, but we do a lot in other sectors. Recently, we gave an opportunity to a company called Sea to Summit based in Belmont, I think—I have been there—to have a little platform at one of our Indo-Pacific conferences where I walked the Chief of the Defence Force down to its site and it got to do a little pitch to him.

Not unrelated, but sometime later, it was successful in a bid to outfit the Australian Army with non-combat equipment, camping gear and the like. It has developed world-class camping gear that is used in the private sector, in the civilian world, and applied it to the defence opportunity. We have helped it a bit with that. I cannot take credit for all of that, but they are a great bunch. That is a significant contract. I think that is worth \$20 million and I expect it to get bigger over time.

Another example in the aviation world is Orbital Welding, a Malaga-based company. The member might reflect on the orbital engine—that is where it came from originally—but a little Western Australian company, based in Malaga, is now building mid-range uncrewed air vehicle engines for Boeing to be used across the world. The state government helped that company by giving it an affordable loan and then giving it a holiday on that loan at a crucial time when, had the government not done that, it might not have been able to expand and realise the benefit of what it is doing now. It has one competitor, an American company, but Orbital is far better than that company. I expect that it will have unlimited opportunities in the future.

The government is doing a lot; there is a lot going on in all fields of endeavour in this space right now. Curtin University has a strong relationship with Defence West and in the defence push from Western Australia. It is a key player in a lot of space research that is going on. Even though we did not get the full-cycle docking, Western Australians should be comforted by the knowledge that our defence industry is really capable. It punches above its weight and is well and truly competitive for getting greater growth in the future.

[2.40 pm]

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: On page 219, mention is made in the table “Details of Administered Transactions” to the Anzac Day Trust fund. A commitment was made to provide additional funding through the Anzac Day Trust. What impact will this increased level of funding have to support veterans?

Mr P. PAPALIA: At the outset I have to acknowledge that responsibility for veterans really lies with the federal government. The Department of Veterans’ Affairs is a very significant agency and has a bigger budget than we will ever have. It also has responsibility for caring for veterans in many respects. What I am really happy about is that at a state level we can enhance the effort to support veterans to try to fill some gaps. We use our budget effectively to get not only the services that we can provide, but also some degree of funding for commemorative purposes. My predecessor in the portfolio took the case to the government before the last election. There has been significant growth. We went from a budget of \$300 000 a year of state government money to \$1.3 million. That is administered through the Anzac Day Trust and that board undertakes deliberations on behalf of the state.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is that board made up of veterans?

Mr P. PAPALIA: It is partly, but not entirely. There are only three members on the board, but we might be expanding it shortly. The fund is not only for veterans. Guided by some advice from government, the board determines what proposals will be funded and prioritises the effort. We have said, as a way of guidance, that now that we have this \$1.3 million annually, we will allocate the lion’s share, which is 1 million or thereabouts, to service delivery, and focus at a state level—because we are not the ones responsible for patching veterans up and helping them with most of their needs—on easing and assisting them through a successful transition from their defence careers into post-military careers. It is our view that if we can successfully transition someone into a new career path, they will be able to make a contribution and be recognised as a positive asset to the community. That will sustain them and build their resilience and make them less likely to become isolated and spiral out of control so that they need to be patched up. Most of that money will be focused on that. A little bit will be dedicated towards services for people who have been victims of the trauma that they have encountered, but most of that is the Department of Veterans’ Affairs’ responsibility; it has a far bigger capacity than we have.

We anticipate to be able to dedicate about \$300 000 annually to commemorative projects, events or nationally-significant sites. There are a couple of proposals around at the moment for monumental sites to commemorate the Korean War, and also the Battle of Crete, noting that both those events have key Western Australian significance. About \$1 million will be dedicated to services, hopefully mostly towards achieving successful transition for veterans, and about \$300 000 annually towards a commemorative project or nationally-significant event.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Like HMAS *Sydney*.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Yes, like the eightieth anniversary of the sinking of HMAS *Sydney*; that sort of thing.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 103 of budget paper No 3 and the paragraph headed “Australian Marine Complex Upgrade Project”. I also note the recent government media statement regarding the inability of the WA government to attain the full-cycle docking contract. There is a discrepancy. The media statement refers to \$89.3 million for four upgrades to the AMC, while the budget states \$55.7 million as the total cost for the upgrades. I am wondering what the gap in funding is due to.

Mr P. PAPALIA: It is just over a couple of budget periods. The part that the member has referred to is on top of a previous budget allocation. It is the work that we referred to earlier on the design of the finger wharf. In the event that we got the full-cycle docking, it would have required a finger wharf. Nothing has been constructed. Money was

allocated for the planning, but we will not need that. A significant amount of work would have been needed on the main wharf to not only improve the services for the ships, but also extend the wharf to accommodate the new frigates, because they are bigger ships. A transition pathway would have been needed between the wharf and Civmec's shed. It would have also meant moving Echo Yachts and building a new site down near the waterfront, and some work on road access.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 218 and the table "Net Appropriation Determination". A quarter of the way down the page is the item "Department of Training and Workforce Development—Defence Industry Veterans Employment Scheme". There is an allocation of \$130 000 for 2021–22, \$135 000 for 2022–23 and \$135 000 for 2023–24, but then there is no further funding. It is funded for three years. Can the minister explain what the employment scheme is for defence industry veterans?

[2.50 pm]

Mr P. PAPALIA: What was the last question, sorry?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: A small amount of funding has been allocated over three years for the defence industry veterans employment scheme. Can the minister explain that scheme?

Mr P. PAPALIA: It is a similar concept to the activity we were talking about in the veterans' issues portfolio, but this is being budgeted out of Defence West. The idea is that the government assists people who are currently in the Australian Defence Force to look for a potential future career path in the Western Australian private sector, and if a skills gap needs to be filled through training, we will provide that training and link them to an employer. That is the model, but I cannot say that we have the numbers yet. It is a great idea and the funding is available, but we have to deliver on connecting people who are in defence right now or who have just left with this system. I know that the Anzac Day Trust will be considering proposals from people who will fill the gap in connecting people. We have the money for the program. I am pretty sure that we also have defence industry people, at least, and potentially other private sector players, who view defence personnel as an attractive proposition, particularly right now because we need people. We need to connect them together. I know that people are proposing a business case to the Anzac Day Trust to deliver that service. Once that happens and we connect them to this money, potential future employees might take someone on as an adult apprentice or there might be some training that we can fund for free so that they are not out of pocket. We will connect them to an employer immediately post the delivery of that training.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I have heard that there has been a push for veterans to get into the agricultural sector and to drive headers and so forth. It is my understanding that veterans have been plugging some of those gaps. I do not know whether that is the result of a push by the federal government to get those who have been in defence to take jobs in agriculture. Is that what the minister is talking about?

Mr P. PAPALIA: It is not the federal government; this is state government money.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I understand that, but it is my understanding that there has been a push by the feds to get defence personnel who have left defence into agriculture. Is that what this scheme will try to do as well?

Mr P. PAPALIA: I do not know about that. This scheme is exactly what I said it is. We have planned it for some time and we are delivering it and we have got the budget for it. It is now a matter of getting the structure around connecting people who are departing defence with potential employers and the training that is necessary to meet demands of those employers. That is what we are doing. This is our own system. I am not aware of anything by the federal government, certainly not in WA, that connects veterans with agricultural opportunities, but there is no reason why that could not be accommodated by this program. The only problem with that is that such work is seasonal and there is a one-off emergency right now, and there may be people whose skill sets can be applied to that task right now without any training.

We are trying to identify potential employers for people who are either serving in defence right now or have just departed. Ideally, we will do it before they depart defence. Normally, people will undertake a transition period during which they will attend various fora and be connected with potential employers. We have a great opportunity in Western Australia right now because, like most of the country, we desperately need skilled labour and people with potential. We can provide them with the skill sets needed to fill any capability gaps and make them very attractive for employers. The idea with this scheme is to connect them with an employer so that they have certainty.

A lot of people coming out of defence are doing so at a time when they are in a different stage of their life than they were when they entered defence. They often have a family, a mortgage and all the responsibilities associated with needing an income, so if we can deliver training and hook them up with an employer, the moment they step out of uniform they can go straight into new employment and a new life, which will be wonderful for the state, wonderful for the employers and wonderful for the individuals, and that will contribute to our ongoing booming economy.

Ms L. DALTON: I refer to page 215 and details of controlled grants and subsidies, specifically the line item "Defence Science Centre". Western Australia's universities have a proven research record in a wide range of discipline areas applicable to Australia's national defence strategies and priorities. What actions are being undertaken to support researchers in the defence sector?

Mr P. PAPALIA: Thanks, member. We have referred to this a couple of times. The Defence Science Centre is co-housed with Defence West and is a collaboration between the federal government and the state government. I put on the record now that I expect the federal government to step up and match our funding. It can no longer ride on the coat-tails of the state; this is something that it owes us. It needs to invest in Western Australia's defence sector a lot more now that it has let us down on full-cycle docking. The Defence Science and Technology Group is a federal government agency that essentially oversees a lot of funding for research. In the past, Western Australia has not had its share. The idea of this is that we get all our universities to collaborate. We identify opportunities for research in areas in which we have a competitive advantage and then we make a pitch to get funding from the federal government.

Quite apart from the process of seeking funding from the federal government, we might bring together players that might not work together in this field of endeavour. The Defence Science Centre has hosted things such as the Cyber West Summit, defence and research team workshops and pitch fests, which bring together players from across the sector and other sectors, including resources and offshore oil and gas. They will be given a task or problem to focus on. They might break up into teams. They will have a short time frame to concentrate on developing a potential research pathway that solves that problem. If they solve the problem and identify something good, there is potentially an opportunity to seek funding from the federal government, the Defence Science and Technology Group, or the state government for other research grants with a view to solving the problem that has been posed, fixing something for the Australian Defence Force, providing great equipment and better outcomes for Defence Force personnel and potentially an export opportunity for not only defence, but other sectors, because some of these things go across sectors, such as leasing, security and any number of other fields of endeavour. It is a great opportunity to leverage off what has been here all along but was not supported in the past. Before we created Defence West, the defence industry in Western Australia did not have a voice on the national stage. We were out of the discussion.

The appropriation was recommended.

[3.00 pm]

Division 14: Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation — Services 3, 5 to 7, Tourism; Hydrogen Industry, \$233 141 000 —

Mrs L.A. Munday, Chair.

Mr D.A. Templeman, Minister for Tourism.

Ms J.J. Shaw, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Tourism.

Ms R. Brown, Director General.

Mr R. Sansalone, Chief Financial Officer.

Ms D. Belford, Managing Director, Tourism WA.

Ms R. Lowe, Executive Director, Destination Development, Tourism WA.

Ms S. Doherty, Executive Director, Events, Tourism WA.

Ms C. Turnbull, Executive Director, Industry, Aviation and Markets, Tourism WA.

Mr C. Clark, Deputy Director General, Resources and Project Facilitation.

Ms C. Cherry, Executive Director, Infrastructure, Planning and Economic Development.

Mr G. Hamley, Chief of Staff, Minister for Tourism.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: I give the call to the member for North West Central.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The minister has quite a team there—very impressive.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I know; I need help.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 202 in budget paper No 2, volume 1, significant issues impacting the agency, and the line item “WA Jobs Taskforce”. Although ongoing job creation is vital, can the minister highlight in the budget whether a proportion of the funding is to be allocated to tourism; and, if so, how that will be used to fill the gaps for many businesses struggling with a staff shortage, which is impacting their businesses financially, physically and mentally? We hear a lot about the shortage of agricultural workers, but what is the plan for attracting workers to small businesses in the tourism industry?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I thank the member for the question. First of all, I note that the member referred to a range of matters affecting the workforce in the industry.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am talking about job creation and workers.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes, indeed. I can report to the member that the McGowan government recognises very much the importance of the tourism industry to the economic wellbeing of the state. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the industry in a range of ways. Campaigns have focused on intrastate travel, and big numbers of

Western Australians have moved particularly into the regions. As the member would be aware, his electorate has had large visitation numbers. That has been welcomed, particularly by various elements of the sector—accommodation and caravan parks. Those sorts of tourism supply product have been very well subscribed. However, a number of tour operators, particularly those that provide tours and experiences, have not necessarily been as well subscribed by visitors.

In terms of gaps in the workforce, we know that there is a shortage of a variety of workers across the hospitality and tourism sector, including chefs. In various parts of the regions, the stresses and strains vary. In the north west of the state, in towns such as Broome, there are staff shortages. There have been staff shortages across the spectrum of providers, be they hospitality, beverage providers or restaurants. Accommodation providers have also had a shortage of cleaning staff, for example. The government has been very successful in marketing these regional areas to Western Australians, but the challenge has also been to provide a workforce to cater for demand. In destination Perth, it is a different scenario. In the tourism sector, the occupancy rates of hotels in the CBD has been down, but there is still an increasing demand for key skilled and semi-skilled workers.

Tourism WA in particular has been undertaking a number of initiatives. These initiatives include programs linking available workers directly with employers and encouraging the selection of tourism and hospitality vocations by school leavers. Tourism WA and other players in the sector have been engaged in some work. FutureNow is a series of activities over the next two years aimed at delivering programs promoting careers in hospitality and tourism to high school students. There is an in-school chef ambassador initiative. A SkillsWest careers expo was held last month, in August 2021. The agency is also delivering a hospitality job connect program. This program focuses on the regions and on local jobs for local people by offering five-day, fast-track, high-energy theory and practical hospitality courses. Participants who complete those courses are linked to jobs on the final day of the course. Those courses have shown some pleasing success. Two courses have been held—one in Kununurra and the other in Geraldton. Five more are scheduled to take place in Broome, Margaret River, Peel and Albany over the next couple of months. A number of local government authorities are also looking at innovative solutions to address those issues. The Shire of Esperance is an example. It converted an unused youth hostel into workers' accommodation. The government and the agency recognises the importance of work in this area and of course continues to work to address workforce demand.

[3.10 pm]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I do not think that any government campaign has contributed to tourism in WA. The mere fact that Western Australia is closed off to the rest of the world and to the rest of the country is why internal tourism is occurring. When it comes to the workers who are needed in the north west, businesses have a task ahead of them. Exmouth, which traditionally has a population of 2 500 people, is experiencing in the order of 20 000 tourists a day. Exmouth is one example; others are Kalbarri, Shark Bay, Coral Bay and Broome. As we go around the state, pretty much the whole of regional Western Australia is suffering. We are not talking about a couple of people here and there; we are talking about small businesses in the hospitality and tourism sectors needing thousands of workers. Much like what is happening in agriculture, there is a need for workers now to be able to take advantage of the number of people who are travelling around Western Australia. What is the government doing to look at opportunities to bring workers, perhaps from the east coast—as long as they adhere to quarantining and whatever else is needed to make sure they come over here in a safe manner—to alleviate the pressure that businesses are under, particularly in regional Western Australia? Hotels are unable to find workers to clean the bedsheets. Owners of pubs, cafes and restaurants cannot keep opening up day after day.

Some businesses rely on whale shark tours. It is not all beer and skittles for everyone. There is a two or three-speed tourism economy out there, but when it comes to key business owners, they are financially, physically and mentally stuffed, and they need help. They need the government to work out strategies to get workers from over east. If those workers can be found, will the government provide workers' accommodation to cater for the workforce? There is no accommodation for anyone in these towns, let alone the workforce that is required to look after those visitors. What is the government doing to address not only the workforce that is desperately needed, but also the workers' accommodation that needs to go with that? When we hear about hotels being full, at best they are at 80 per cent capacity because hotels are utilising their own accommodation for their workers. They are not getting the maximum benefit from the number of people who are travelling around regional WA. What is the minister doing to action these problems?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: That was a long question. I have outlined a range of short, medium and long-term programs. A solution to this challenge lies across short-term, medium-term and long-term structural change. The Premier and the Minister for Education and Training hosted a Skills Summit about a month ago. One of the direct outcomes was of course a targeted marketing campaign to interstate workers. Work on that continues. As the member well knows, to keep the state safe we have a policy with regard to the current border situation with New South Wales and Victoria. That very important policy is focused on ensuring that we keep out, as best as possible, the likelihood of the Delta variant entering the state. That marketing campaign will continue to focus on attracting interstate workers. Work has already been done and some states, such as South Australia, Tasmania and Northern Territory—particularly the Northern Territory—are not subject to the current border arrangements. Work continues on attracting those Australians.

The member's second question related to backpackers and visa holders who are already in Australia, and are already in this state. There are already formal and informal collaborations with regard to those workers becoming available as the season changes from a focus on the north to the south, for example. Some innovative businesses are already looking at how to take advantage of those workers who might be in the north of the state. As we know, when the season concludes there, those workers can move to the southern regions, particular around the south west.

In respect of education and training, this government is investing record amounts of money in the training sector through TAFE. Included in that, of course, is a key focus on hospitality and tourism-related skills training. That will be a focus. That will be more of a medium-term effort. Because of caps on the number of international travellers who can enter the state, and those who can afford to enter Australia, the reality is that those numbers are not entering the state or the country. However, a number of visa arrangements have been made. The request from our sector continues to be that consideration be given to some skill sets that will address some of the vacancies.

I was in Kununurra earlier this year and met with a number of operators, including hospitality and accommodation operators. As part of negotiations with the commonwealth, they were able to get workers from Vanuatu and Fiji. The accommodation aspect in their case was caravan parks, and that was causing some tensions because, understandably, caravan park owners wanted to maximise yield on their caravan sites and had locked in, if you like, some of the demands of worker accommodation. This is an ongoing issue, and we are working at it from a range of levels to address the short, medium and longer term demands.

[3.20 pm]

On the topic of national arrangements, I had a phone hook-up only six or so weeks ago with the federal Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment and the tourism ministers from the other states and territories. Martin Ferguson is doing some work focused on the way forward for the broader tourism industry in Australia. One of the things that he clearly highlights is the issues around workforce development and training; the cultural nature of tourism and hospitality; and the fact that we have relied, and continue to rely, on a lot of foreign workers to fill the positions that many Australians choose not to do as a career path—or, if they do, it is a short-term career path for them. Those issues will have to be addressed in the longer term.

I assure the member that we are in a situation that is not uncommon in other jurisdictions, but our tourism industry is in a much better place. I do not agree with the member that campaigns like Wander Out Yonder have not increased visitation in regional Western Australia. A natural willingness to be tourists or to venture out is quite innate in Western Australians. The Wander Out Yonder campaign has been highly successful and many regional economies are directly benefiting from that.

We want to make sure that when we come out of this COVID pandemic, we have a more robust industry that is able to respond to the ebbs and flows and demands of supply into the future, and also be ready, of course, for when we can welcome normal numbers of people from interstate and overseas.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I have a further question.

The CHAIR: Member for North West Central, can I ask you to clearly relate your question to a page number, item, program or amount in the volumes, please.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is further to the question I originally asked.

The CHAIR: As long as it relates to —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”. I am talking about the WA Plan for Jobs, and tourism. I thank the minister for that longwinded answer.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It was a longwinded question.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Mine had lots of facts. Perhaps Tourism needs to get on the ground and hear what businesses have to say.

The CHAIR: Member for North West Central, can you please ask a question relating to an item number.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: In relation to jobs, is the department, or the member as a minister in the government, looking at ways to have a campaign to get workers from the east coast to come here and work and holiday?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I just answered the member's question.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: We understand that the Perth tourism market is suffering significantly at the moment compared with the market in other parts of Western Australia, like the north west. Is the minister looking at a campaign whereby we can get those from the east coast to holiday here? Perhaps the government can—as part of its \$5.6 billion surplus—put its hand in its pocket to pay for some of those people to come across and stay one, two or three nights in Perth before they go north to work. Is the minister looking at any incentives to entice people to come over here to work and holiday?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: In answer to the question, a range of measures that I have already highlighted are focused on that. Essentially, we want to encourage people to come and work in Western Australia and live here. That is

one of the reasons the government has its fly-in fly-out workers policy, for example. We think this state offers a wonderful opportunity for people of all ages to relocate, and we will continue to market to the eastern seaboard in innovative ways, which are evolving, to attract people to a range of industries, including, of course, the tourism industry, to address gaps in the workforce.

Ms L. DALTON: I refer to line item 6, “Event Tourism”, in the service summary table on page 206 of budget paper No 2. With over \$52 million allocated for event tourism, can the minister outline what support is being given to regional events?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes. I thank the member for Geraldton who, like a number of regional members, supports and encourages a range of events. There is no doubt that events play an important role in visitation and attraction, but they also play a key and significant role in the celebration of community. Western Australia has a great diversity of events that are supported by the government. Funding of \$52 million is allocated to event tourism. That delivery varies from region to region and from community to community. I am very pleased with the value that we get for that investment. Indeed, I think it has a great impact on the local communities and for those who might be visiting those communities during those festivals and events that are supported by government through that allocation. It makes that very special.

As the member would be aware, the scheme is an annual funding round. It allows for smaller and developing regional events across WA to be funded. We also have the regional Aboriginal events scheme, which focuses on Indigenous opportunity and experiences that involve and nurture and support strong leadership and participation from Aboriginal people in regional WA. There are 62 regional event scheme events, including five through the regional Aboriginal events scheme. The regional events program supports medium to larger regional events. I think the member’s locality has examples of a number of those. They include Ironman WA, the Cape to Cape MTB—a mountain bike ride—Ord Valley Muster, and Shinju Matsuri in Broome, through to Taste Great Southern, the recent CinefestOZ—a film festival in the south west particularly focused around Busselton—and Mandurah Crabfest.

One of the things this government has done through the culture and arts portfolio is the Getting the Show Back on the Road WA program. That is a risk-share program administered by the department. It is specifically aimed at supporting and reinvigorating the live entertainment performance industry, and it is focused on covering any potential ticket revenue loss. It has been a very well subscribed and well-targeted program for ensuring that events can take place. We have extended the Getting the Show Back on the Road WA program. It is supporting, for example, a number of agricultural shows. We are in the middle of the agricultural show season, with the Royal Show starting soon. In regional WA, lots of the agricultural shows are eligible for consideration under Getting the Show Back on the Road. Events tourism is very important. Western Australia continues to build itself a reputation for high quality events in both metropolitan and regional WA, and this government is funding it to over \$52 million in this budget.

[3.30 pm]

Ms L. METTAM: How much did the government have to provide to IMG, now that the Western Australia Gourmet Escape has been cancelled?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: As the member is aware, unfortunately the organisers announced late Friday afternoon that the proposed Gourmet Escape event for November 2021 was not able to be held this year. We will keep working with IMG. The member would probably be aware that there was a rollover of the funding that was committed to last year’s event to ensure that this year’s event could be held. Tourism WA will continue to work with the organisers of Gourmet Escape to see its return in 2022. I think it is a good event. Obviously, there were proposed changes to the event in 2019 and the 2020 event could not be held either. It showcases the remarkable food and wine of our regions and it is an important event.

Ms L. METTAM: Just to clarify, how much did the state government have to provide to IMG?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: As the member can appreciate, the figure is commercial-in-confidence because it was an arrangement made, but the support from when there was a cancellation last year was rolled over, and I would expect we will do the same for the 2022 event. I cannot give the member the figure because it is commercial-in-confidence.

Ms L. METTAM: In relation to the remainder of that figure, the government provided a portion of funds to IMG, I imagine, and there would be a remainder of funds that would not be spent this year on the Gourmet Escape, because it did not go ahead. As the Gourmet Escape did not go ahead, what is the accountability around those unspent funds and will they be put into another home-grown event or dedicated to event tourism?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Let me be very clear: the 2022 event with IMG will be worked on closely with TWA to ensure that next year’s event can take place. Obviously the staging of that event will be negotiated, but we will have an event, and that is important, and there is money in the budget for that event to take place. I cannot disclose the exact contracted amount, because it is commercial-in-confidence, but I assure the member that the negotiations to have an event next year, given that this year has been cancelled, will be negotiated with IMG.

Ms L. METTAM: Will the funds that are not required this year just go into consolidated revenue?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The reality is that we have funding of \$52 million. Of that, an amount would have been allocated under the commercial agreement with Gourmet Escape. That is not happening this year; that will be rolled over. The fund allows for some flexibility for other events to be considered. That is the nature of having an amount of money for events. The total amount is not allocated because we have different events that might emerge in the future.

Ms L. METTAM: What led to the event being cancelled? Was there any discussion about modifying the event? I know that some local operators had talked about the event having a more Western Australian feel in terms of the way the event was hosted. We know there are different ways to facilitate important events such as football games. Was there any opportunity to ensure that event could continue?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The media statement from IMG indicates there were a range of issues. COVID-19 obviously impacted the attendance of some of the guests, some of whom were international. From memory, Rick Stein resides in Cornwall in the United Kingdom and was a big name, along with some of the other signature chefs, if you like. IMG made a commercial decision not to hold the event in November. I am sure a range of considerations ultimately led it to make that determination, but I think one of them was the uncertainty over the signature chefs being able to attend the event. The government accepts IMG's commercial decision; it is its decision. TWA will work closely with it in the coming period to plan for an event for next year. From memory—Saskia may be able to answer this—my understanding is that there is a contracted period over a certain number of years. I will ask Saskia Doherty to clarify whether that is true.

Ms S. Doherty: Just on the point around events this year, IMG will work with all the existing event venues to encourage them to still run their own events, and a fringe event program. It will promote the fringe event program to travellers to encourage them to keep their bookings, and Tourism WA will support them in those efforts. We have a two-year extension option on the current agreement.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to page 202 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the allocation for renewable hydrogen under "Spending Changes", and also to paragraph 5.1 on page 203. What is the \$892 000 for renewable hydrogen being spent on?

[3.40 pm]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am referring to implementing Western Australia's renewable hydrogen strategy. The member referred to an amount of money.

Dr D.J. HONEY: It was \$892 000 in 2021–22, rising to roughly \$1.7 million in 2024–25 of the forward estimates. It is the fourth-last line item at the bottom of the table on page 202, "Renewable Hydrogen".

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The budget provides \$40 million towards demand stimulation and infrastructure development activation. It also provides \$10 million towards demand stimulation and infrastructure development in Western Australia. The first amount is focused on the midwest for hydrogen refuelling infrastructure incentives for the transport sector to adopt hydrogen vehicles, as well as transmission network upgrades, including a water desalination plant and storage, and also to conduct a feasibility study into local manufacture assembly or maintenance of electrolyzers to support the domestic renewable hydrogen industry. The budget also provides \$10 million towards demand stimulation and infrastructure development in the state. This includes the identification and establishment of a metropolitan back-to-base hydrogen refuelling facility, the provision of incentives for the road transport sector to adopt hydrogen vehicles, and a co-contribution to the conversion from diesel to hydrogen fuel cell electric vehicles for local government waste vehicle fleets, regional school buses, and light commercial and heavy haulage vehicles. The funding of \$892 000 in 2021–22 is for staff in JTSI's hydrogen unit. That will provide for approximately 10 full-time equivalents in that hydrogen unit within the agency.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Is the minister able to tell me where in the budget those \$40 million and \$10 million line items reside? I could not track them down. That was one of my follow-up questions.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes, I think we can. I will try. I understand that \$54 million will support increases to the resources devoted to hydrogen activities. I highlighted the two key amounts of that \$54 million. The member wants to know the line item in the budget. This money is held in Treasury-administered funding. It appears in that entity. I will ask the director general to respond.

Ms R. Brown: The \$50 million comprises, as the minister outlined, \$40 million for activation for the midwest but also \$10 million for demand stimulation. That funding is held in a Treasury-administered item.

Dr D.J. HONEY: That appears where—in Treasury?

Ms R. Brown: Yes, in the Treasury estimates.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I have a further question relating to that. An announcement on that funding was made on 7 September. That adds up now. There was a \$7.5 million commitment to kickstart the development of Oakajee's strategic area as a renewable hub. What is that \$7.5 million for, please?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The \$7.5 million for the Oakajee project is part of the investment to fast-track job creation at Oakajee. It is an election commitment. That \$7.5 million includes moneys for an access road and junction with

the North West Coastal Highway as a first step towards activating Oakajee. The government is continuing to take action to accelerate the activation of Oakajee. It has appointed Mr Richard Mann to prepare a business case to support the government's next steps. This will be informed by an expression of interest process. In the broader context, the government clearly has a view that WA can position itself to build on its comparative advantages to establish a competitive renewable hydrogen industry. It is an important commitment that is also supported by an election commitment.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Have any businesses indicated that they will be establishing their hydrogen-producing operations or downstream processing from hydrogen at the Oakajee estate, across the forward estimates?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I will ask Mr Clark to respond.

Mr C. Clark: No specific projects have come forward yet through the EOI process. There was a really positive response to the EOI for Oakajee. We are continuing to work with some of those companies. They will feed into the business case process that we are doing with Richard Mann. I guess we are looking at all the configurations of how we can activate Oakajee and what the different projects can bring to it. It involves a bit of matchmaking to try to get production with offtakes and that type of thing.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I will just add that Minister MacTiernan as the lead minister on this is very focused on ensuring that a renewable hydrogen industry can flourish in WA. She is working very hard on that.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Have those industries that responded to the EOI indicated what other support, including infrastructure, they would require the state to provide for those projects to go ahead?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The answers to those sorts of questions will be borne out through the work of Mr Mann, who has been appointed. He will have a key role in stakeholder engagement and these important questions. Any consideration will be part of his work and will be informed by the EOI process and other stakeholder engagements that take place.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I have a further question. Perhaps the minister has partially answered it. Are any plans currently afoot to build any other enabling infrastructure for the hydrogen industry at Oakajee?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Oakajee has been identified as a key site for such development of sustainable industry. That ongoing work will be led by the minister and supported by the resourcing that is provided in the budget, including the election commitment, to make sure that everything possible is done to establish such an industry at Oakajee, and of course benefit the state more broadly.

[3.50 pm]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Has the government talked about or indicated that there will be any tax put on hydrogen or state agreements to facilitate this new industry in Western Australia? Has that been spoken about; and, if so, what have the conversations been around taxing hydrogen or perhaps having a state agreement in place to secure this emerging industry that is clearly going to benefit Western Australia?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am not going to make comment on matters that are a consideration for the minister, but I can assure the member that our minister is absolutely focused on ensuring that hydrogen is given every possible chance to play a significant role in the future energy mix. She is gung-ho about it, and is having a range of conversations with many stakeholders, but she is particularly focused on making sure that our election commitments are delivered and that something finally does happen at Oakajee, because it has taken a long time.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: So you are out of the loop.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Just on the subject of renewable hydrogen, one energy source for renewable hydrogen is geothermal energy. A proponent who is looking at establishing a geothermal facility has apparently been told that there will, in fact, be a royalty applied to geothermal energy, and they have indicated that that will make the hydrogen produced from geothermal energy uneconomic compared with natural gas. Is the minister aware of that?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am not personally aware of that, but again, as I have highlighted, we have election commitments regarding the development of sustainable hydrogen energy. We have an absolutely committed minister focused on doing that and we have resources in this budget to support initiatives that are focused on achieving that. We have also appointed a person who will have specific responsibility for working through a range of issues as we take advantage of this opportunity for Western Australia.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Does the minister think it would be appropriate to apply a royalty to geothermal renewable energy?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It is not in my field of expertise, member.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 211 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the heading "Tourism Destination Development". Can the minister elaborate on what is funded under tourism destination development? There is approximately \$11 million allocated here for 2021–22. Will this include much-needed tourism development in respect of workers' accommodation in places like Broome, Exmouth, Coral Bay, Shark Bay and Kalbarri?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I thank the member for the question. As I said before, each state continues to face similar challenges in worker accommodation and housing. There is a range of measures that I have highlighted previously with regard to how the agency and the government is responding to that. There is a range of projects that I think will bear fruit, some of them faster than others.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Can the minister highlight one and elaborate on that?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I highlighted one of the projects that has fast-tracked workers into areas of shortage. One was in Broome and one was in Geraldton, from memory. There is also the ongoing work done by other agencies and other aspects of the sector, including the Australian Hotels Association, which is pursuing some industry-led initiatives. As I said to the member, this is a challenge that needs to be approached in a multilayered way, and we are focused on working with the industry to address the challenges. We are not on our own, because this is taking place in all other states and territories, as we know.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Regarding the \$11 million allocated in this budget under “Tourism Destination Development”, is the minister’s agency the lead agency for workers’ accommodation, or for providing financial support to chambers of commerce or local governments to address the dire need for workers’ accommodation? Are those funds there to assist the communities that need workers’ accommodation, yes or no?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The member needs to know what the purpose of the actual fund is —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I asked that question.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The fund focuses on a range of initiatives that are about the development of tourism. It covers areas around Aboriginal tourism, the Camping with Custodians projects, enhanced experiences, tourism attraction, case management and a whole range of other matters that that \$11 million is committed to. The issues around workers’ accommodation, of course, are being experienced in a range of other portfolios, not just tourism. It is my understanding that an amount of \$350 000 has been committed to specifically address workforce issues in that allocation, but that allocation is a broader commitment.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The minister is saying that workers’ accommodation is not part of that \$11 million for tourism destination development. Is he also saying that it does not cover the need for power, water, sewerage, telecommunications and mobile data? These are the areas in which these towns are suffering because of the numbers of tourists. Is the government’s tourism destination development fund going to cater for any of those issues that are currently affecting tourism businesses and businesses in general? Will any of that \$11 million go towards assisting that, or towards highlighting the issues to other responsible agencies? Will this fund help to highlight the desperate needs of these communities?

[4.00 pm]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The fund is there to deliver some tourism-focused initiatives. Issues around power supplies, for example, are clearly important. The member will be aware of the experiences in Kalbarri as a result of cyclone Seroja and some legacy power issues. Before the end of the year, there will be a major upgrade to Kalbarri’s power supply, for example. I recently received a letter from a Kalbarri tourism business, highlighting its challenges with the power supply. Those are being addressed across government, through the specific agency—Minister Johnston’s portfolio. I assure the member that the needs of businesses, particularly regarding tourism, of which there is a broad spectrum, are highlighted and raised with other ministers so that we can have a whole-of-government strategy to respond to those challenges. In Broome, for example, some major election commitments have been focused on enhancing the tourism infrastructure there, whether it be boat ramps or streetscapes, of which some very successful work was done in the Chinatown area. They did not come out of the tourism budget per se, but they came out of other budgets that have a direct and positive impact on visitation and the tourism industry more broadly. We continue to raise matters when enhanced opportunities for visitors will benefit the local community and will benefit, of course, the local economy. There have been some very big successes by this government in terms of election commitments. Obviously, the agency, Tourism WA, works very closely with a range of other agencies and authorities to enhance the visitation infrastructure and experience and will keep doing that. Local government plays an important role, for example, in the provision of services and amenity to not only the local people but also to visitors, and we support that wholeheartedly and will continue to do so.

The CHAIR: Before you speak, member for Collie–Preston, it is four o’clock with five divisions to go. I needed to point that out.

Ms J.L. HANNS: I refer to the spending changes table on page 202 of budget paper No 2 and the line item “Aviation Recovery Fund” under “COVID-19 Response”. Can the minister please explain how this funding will be applied?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes, I can. I will also ask my parliamentary secretary to make some comment, particularly as she was chair of a parliamentary committee that inquired into the issues around aviation, particularly regional aviation. More briefly, the line item the member referred to is an important consideration. Aviation access has been greatly affected by COVID travel restrictions, which has reduced passenger demand and airline capacity. As the

member will be aware, being a regional member, the state's tourism sector is particularly dependent on airline capacity to enable visitor access. It is important to know that more than 93 per cent of our international and domestic visitors arrive into Perth by air—a very significant figure. To support that, there is funding of \$25 million to Tourism WA over the next two years, which will enable negotiation and securing of aviation services. It will allow the exploration of any opportunities of new air routes as airlines begin to designate aircraft to access routes across their network over the coming 18 to 24 months. I ask, Chair, if my parliamentary secretary can make some comment on this matter given her experience in the inquiry.

Ms J.J. SHAW: Thank you, minister, and thank you, member, for the question. Clearly, international air routes will be vital to recovery post-COVID. The state government keenly appreciates their importance; in fact, we have been heavily engaged with the major international airlines that currently service Perth Airport and would like to thank them for their ongoing engagement with the state government. It is vitally important that we recommence those destinations as quickly as possible and target strategic markets that will be very important to Perth's overall reopening and recovery. An ongoing point made, when we are in our engagement processes as we recommence air routes, is that it is as much about tourism as it is about cargo—looking at the front of the plane, the belly of the plane, and tourism and leisure travel. We are heavily engaged with the aviation sector at the moment. The aviation recovery fund sits there as a key tool to enable us to recommence aviation routes. We are working with Perth Airport extensively and, indeed, Perth Airport facilitates a lot of the conversations we have. As airlines review their fleets and the sorts of aircraft they have available and the routes they would like to take, we will engage with the airlines on that. The fund will be utilised on a case-by-case basis considered by the government to encourage airline providers to recommence services here, in line, obviously, with border openings and any potential travel bubbles we have.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I would like some clarification because often a parliamentary secretary may replace a minister or a minister may not be in the Legislative Assembly, so a parliamentary secretary may take over. Is there scope for any more members of Parliament to perhaps go over to the other side and answer questions on behalf of the minister?

Ms J.J. SHAW: Disappointed you never got a guernsey while you were one?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I did.

The CHAIR: The parliamentary secretary is appearing as adviser on behalf of the minister. If the minister left the chamber, we would not be able to continue.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I just wanted clarification; it is highly unusual. I do not think I have seen it in my 16 years. Maybe the minister is slipping and needs help!

Ms L. METTAM: I would like to ask what the Minister for Tourism's involvement is regarding the Busselton Margaret River Airport. The flights were to begin earlier this year, but obviously because of COVID and the borders, it has been put on hold. What is the status of that, and what is the level of tourism involvement and potentially this recovery fund involvement for that project?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Obviously, we are very keen to see the first flight between Melbourne and Busselton, as soon as it is safe for that to happen. I think this is an important project because this could be the next newest popular route with the eastern seaboard. Certainly, I think Sydney will become a real possibility in the future, once the Melbourne flight is up and running. As the member will be well aware, because it is in her electorate, the infrastructure is in place for the airport terminal et cetera. The flight, unfortunately, should have taken place in June this year but due to COVID was unable to take place. Until the situation changes in Melbourne, we will not see a flight.

TWA, as the agency, has of course been involved in discussions over a long period as that proposal was being developed. As Minister for Tourism, I personally see it as a very important addition to our suite of offerings via the aviation entry into the state. As I say, we want to make sure the Melbourne–Busselton route succeeds. My understanding was that uptake of bookings for the inaugural flights was good. Sydney could potentially follow once the Melbourne–Busselton route is established and operating. It will be an excellent thing for the south west. When the statistics show that 93 per cent of visitors to the state come via Perth, this will add another important gateway to the state.

[4.10 pm]

Ms L. METTAM: That is good to hear, minister, because the Minister for Police called the project a pup.

The minister talked about the Busselton Margaret River Airport terminal, which has not received the full gamut of what it was originally promised for its expansion. The Underwater Observatory interpretive centre will be funded by money that was allocated to the terminal.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: That is going to be a good project, too.

Ms L. METTAM: It is a fantastic project. I imagine that they will work hand in hand very well.

My question is: can the minister provide an assurance that when these flights begin, if there is an issue with capacity at the terminal—we know regional aviation projects are challenging—the expansion of the terminal will take place as originally proposed?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Let us get the flights going first. We are ready for them. Obviously, the airline is keen for that route to be established and operational. What might need to be modified, changed or adapted in terms of visitation experience once people land in Busselton are considerations for the future. But I am very keen to see that route operational. I think it will be successful. I think it has huge potential. Again, as I said, I think that it could be a door opener for direct routes to other destinations on the eastern seaboard, including Sydney. I think it is an exciting opportunity. We are very keen for the COVID situation to abate so that we can get that first flight going and build market with regard to that.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I have a question following from the question of the member for Collie–Preston. In terms of the \$25 million to subsidise or reduce the cost of airfares, is the minister aware of airlines that have not paid landing fees to local governments or owners of airports? For example, Qantas owes a significant amount of money to towns that own airports. In the minister’s considerations to giving away \$25 million to try to reduce airfares, and given that a policy adviser talked about renegotiating routes and so forth, will the minister in his negotiations seek to recoup money that is owed to local governments or airport owners? It is a considerable amount of money—a huge amount of money. Will the minister negotiate with those airlines to pay those bills before he gives taxpayers’ money to them?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am not aware of any of the examples that the member raises. I would be interested to hear of them, and the member can certainly —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: They have been highlighted in the media. Is the minister not aware of one airline that has not paid an airport or a local government?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am answering the question. In terms of commercial negotiations, we are focused on making sure that we are able to stimulate regional economies—in this case as much as possible by increased visitation. Our negotiations with various airlines have been focused on providing affordable opportunities for people to explore the regions. That will continue to be our focus. If there are commercial or contractual obligations between two other parties, it is up to those parties to resolve them. I expect that they will be resolved appropriately. If it is a major carrier, it has a community obligation, and I would expect it to fulfil its contractual obligations with, in this case, a local government authority that happens to be the owner of an airport.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 215 of budget paper No 2, the table “Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies”, and the heading “COVID-19 Response”. The budget in 2020–21 for the line item “Regional Aviation Recovery” was \$15 million. The actual was just over \$3 million. The 2021–22 budget estimate is \$6.9 million. Can the minister elaborate on what the regional aviation recovery program is and how it will assist the aviation industry?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The industry in the state’s north, in particular, has felt the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic the most. The remoteness of the north west makes it difficult to attract intrastate tourists. The industry has felt the impact of cancelled interstate bookings when border closures have taken place. The regional aviation recovery program in 2020–21, which constitutes some of the figures that the member highlighted, forms part of the state’s COVID recovery plan. It seeks to provide affordable pricing for tourists and regional residents over the longer term. It also focuses on or seeks to instil competition, where possible—I highlight—on routes to encourage lower fares. We also, of course, discounted or supported discounted fares to Broome through Virgin, and to Exmouth through Qantas over a 12-month period; and to Kununurra through Virgin over a six-month period. That aligned with the region’s peak tourism period. This ensured the operation of five flights a week, in addition to Saturday and Sunday flights, to Kununurra, which were also part of an agreement with Virgin.

The member might also be aware that the agency packaged other incentives along with airline flights to Kununurra when interstate bookings were cancelled because of COVID. The \$300 Kimberley Wanderer Pass allowed someone purchasing a flight to Kununurra to also avail themselves of a tourism experience while they were up there. I understand it was very successful. It was very targeted. That is what we did when there was a particular need to backfill vacancies because of COVID—we tried to fill those vacancies. In the case of the Kimberley Wanderer Pass, it included a discount for an experience.

[4.20 pm]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is the minister able to provide by way of supplementary information a breakdown of the airlines to which that money has been allocated over the course of the last 12 months?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Again, as the member is probably aware, the negotiation of these arrangements is commercial-in-confidence. Given that circumstance, it is not possible to provide that information. We can provide the member with specific information, perhaps through a question on notice, on what we spent on the Kimberley Wanderer Pass, for example, but commercial-in-confidence negotiations cannot be divulged, as I am sure the member can appreciate.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is the minister able to advise, without providing a figure, which airlines have received this financial assistance?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I have highlighted those.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Can the minister repeat the companies that have benefited from the regional aviation recovery package?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It is just Virgin and Qantas at this point in time.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Since these companies have received financial assistance from the taxpayers of Western Australia, in his renegotiation of these contracts, will the minister ask whether these companies have paid local governments the right amount of money for landing fees or the utilisation of the airport—it could be a private company, such as Broome International Airport—and demand that they pay their bills before taxpayer money is used to assist those companies to fly to these destinations?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Again, these are contractual arrangements between two parties of which I am not a party. However, in conversations with a range of stakeholders, I will raise it as a matter that has been drawn to my attention.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to page 215 of budget paper No 2 and the line item “Renewable Hydrogen”. The 2020–21 budgeted amount is \$7.7 million. The 2020–21 estimated actual is \$2 million, the 2020–21 budgeted estimate is \$5.872 million and so on. What is that expenditure for, because it was not mentioned in the description that the minister gave before when he spoke about renewable hydrogen?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: In August 2020, the state government announced a boost to funding for hydrogen through the WA recovery plan. This included \$5 million to fund a second round of the renewable hydrogen fund, \$3 million for a legal frameworks review, \$2.7 million to expand the renewable hydrogen unit, \$1 million to identify suitable locations for the geological storage of hydrogen, another \$1 million towards developing a detailed hydrogen value chain model and \$600 000 to study blending hydrogen in the Western Australian gas network. I understand that those amounts relate to those particular items, and the director general has indicated that that is correct.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 215 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the line item “Tourism Recovery Program”. Why is there no funding for the tourism recovery program in 2021–22?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The member may be aware that we recently announced a \$16.8 million WA tourism and travel agent support fund, which is co-funded with the federal government. The announcement was made by the Premier and Senator Michaelia Cash, from memory, in August this year. That money is focused on tourism recovery. My understanding is that it does not appear in the state budget, but, of course, it is a commitment to tourism recovery so there are funds for tourism recovery in that context.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is that a co-funded amount of \$16 million for travel agents?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Travel agents are included. It is the WA tourism and travel agent support fund, and, of course, it will appear essentially in the midyear review.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: So it is new money.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes, it is new money, of which half—\$8.4 million—is a contribution from the state.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: There is no money in the forward estimates to cater for any future impact on tourism and small businesses if we have an outbreak of COVID; cabinet will decide whether money is required. Why has the government not allocated \$8 million in future years to properly plan for a COVID outbreak?

[4.30 pm]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: As the member would be aware, the scope, impact and severity of a COVID outbreak in dollar terms cannot necessarily be predicted. In the case of a lockdown, our approach over the last 18 months has been to assess the impact and respond with an appropriate budget allocation. That is the practice for not just this government, but other governments around the country. They assess the impact that can include the length of time for a lockdown and the regional impact. Some regions are more severely impacted than others depending on the restrictions imposed. My understanding is that the practice of most governments in Australia, including the federal government, is that there is an assessment of the circumstances and then an appropriate response, including a budget commitment response. The \$16.8 million recognises that the impact on tourism in Western Australia was affecting aspects of the sector and that the funding needed to be targeted, which is one of the reasons that the circumstances for travel agents were considered in the recent announcement by the Premier and the federal minister. Looking forward, and depending upon what circumstances and impacts we may face, the government will respond. It has a track record of doing that and it will finesse those responses based upon the experiences. One of the things that we found, even with the \$16.8 million in funding, was the need to look at the criteria more closely in terms of broadening the scope and capacity to accommodate more businesses that perhaps were not captured in earlier support initiatives. I am very confident that if there are further outbreaks, we will respond as we have already over the last 18 months.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Have those businesses already accessed the \$16.8 million in funding that the minister said was co-funded by the state and federal governments?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Applications opened earlier this month on 6 September, and I think they close at the end of September. Take up so far has included —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Was this during the last lockdown?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It is for the current impacts as a result of the eastern states' lockdowns. Businesses that particularly rely on interstate travel have been impacted by the lockdowns in eastern states. There has been some important nuancing and finessing of the criteria, including the comparison of the business's turnover during two two-month periods. One of the challenges for some businesses in earlier alliterations of support was the criteria that required them to compare their turnover for two months this year with that of two months last year. They were not getting an appropriate comparison. We have finessed that criteria.

As of today, there have been about 242 applications and so far 86 have been approved. All applications are in some stage of assessment and there is a rolling weekly payment program. The aim is to get that money out as soon as is practicable to those people who need that support. We have people working with those businesses to get through the application process so that those applications can be assessed as soon as possible and the support delivered.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: My question is about authentic Aboriginal tourism. I refer to page 204 of the budget papers, paragraph 7.3. How will \$20 million Aboriginal tourism fund support Aboriginal tourism?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I thank the member for Thornlie for the question. This is something that very important for Western Australia, particularly as we move forward into a post-COVID world. Western Australia probably has the most diverse Indigenous population and heritage of any of the states and territories. A person can travel the length and breadth of the state and, because of the diversity of our Indigenous heritage and our Indigenous communities, find that all of them have a unique story to tell. I am very proud of the work that was put in to secure a \$20 million commitment to our Aboriginal tourism strategy. It will be delivered, first of all, through the Tjina plan—a \$20 million commitment over four years to deliver on an aspiration for Western Australia to be the premier place for visitors to have an Indigenous experience. It will ensure that, essentially, when people come to Western Australia, or Western Australians travel within the state, and seek to have an authentic Indigenous experience, they actually get a high-quality experience. I applaud the numerous Indigenous tourism providers and product in our state. They vary from on country experiences through to art galleries in the remote areas of the state, whether they be in Wiluna or—where is that one I keep being told to go to with the slumped glass —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Warburton.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes, that one in Warburton, or a bush tucker experience in the south west or an experience in the city. I applaud all the existing providers, even those that have been operating for many years on the Dampier Peninsula north of Broome. Many of them are small or single-person enterprises and some of them are larger. We want to support those that exist but also grow new opportunities and the Tjina plan is focused on doing that. There are some streams in the Tjina plan that are focused on developing business capacity and facilitating the development of experiences in a variety of contexts. It is a bold plan. Playing a key role in this plan will be the Western Australian Indigenous Tourism Operators Council, the agency—Tourism Western Australia—and communities and other tourism businesses in regional WA. They all have a role to play to develop, nurture and encourage this aspiration to become a premier destination. If there is a positive to be taken out of the COVID experience, it is that we now have some time to hone those opportunities to develop, nurture and support them. The member, who is an avid bushwalker and lover of the environment, knows that this government has committed to the Aboriginal ranger program. We see strong linkages to that government program and to the Camping with Custodians program, which is operated with support through the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions.

We are also very strongly supportive of local governments that understand the role that they can play, and should play, in the telling of local Indigenous stories. I think this is a good plan. It is an important plan for the development of our tourism product in Western Australia. It positions us to offer visitors experiences—whether intrastate, interstate or international—so that they do not go home disappointed that they did not have a good, high-quality and authentic experience—that they will go back to the place where they live saying, “I went to Western Australia and I was knocked over by the beauty and the power of the storytelling that came from an authentic Indigenous experience.” We already have a great network out in our communities in the cultural art space. We have several dozen Aboriginal art galleries and cultural centres throughout the state, particularly in the Pilbara in the north west. We want to maximise the benefits for those people who produce the art; tell the stories to not only get a financial benefit but also share the oldest living culture on this planet. It is a great aspiration.

[4.40 pm]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Can the minister elaborate on the Aboriginal tourism fund? Paragraph 7.3 on page 204 refers to \$20 million for the Aboriginal tourism action plan 2021–2025. Under “Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies”, there is \$320 000 for “Aboriginal Tourism Fund” this financial year, \$1.2 million for 2022–23, and \$2.75 million for each of the 2023–24 and 2024–25 forward estimates. I am not very good at maths, but it does not really add up to \$20 million. Can the minister show me where the \$20 million is in the budget? “Aboriginal Tourism Fund” is on page 215. I am assuming that is what it is.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The member is referring to the grants expenditure attached to that fund.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: How much is for the Aboriginal tourism fund in 2021–22? Can the minister provide the breakdown over the five years?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It is as shown in the budget, and expanding out into 2024. I did maths 4 at Northam Senior High School; I reckon it adds up to about \$20 million!

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Whereabouts is that?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: At the top of page 202.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: What is the Aboriginal tourism fund? What is that in aid of?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: That is the Tjina plain. The member was referring to other figures.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am referring to the Aboriginal tourism fund of \$320 000.

The CHAIR: You are on the grants and subsidies.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: No. The member is referring to the grants one. “Aboriginal Tourism Fund” is the first item under “Election Commitments”.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I understand that now. In terms of the Aboriginal tourism fund of \$320 000 in 2021–22, what is that in aid of?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I will ask Renata to respond because she will be able to give the member that detail.

Ms R. Lowe: As to the grants and subsidies for the Aboriginal tourism fund, when we deliver activities such as the Camping with Custodians program, we grant funds to communities for the delivery of their activity. We do all the work with them in the planning and approvals, but when it comes to actually building the bricks and mortar, we provide the funding to them in a grant.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: How many Camping with Custodians have we got now?

Ms R. Lowe: Minister, we have five in operation. One is under construction at Djarindjin on the Dampier Peninsula, one is in the planning stage, and we have just put out, through the minister, a registration of interest from communities on further developments.

Ms L. DALTON: I refer to service 7, “Tourism Destination Development”, on page 211 of the budget papers. I note this service area focuses on tourism supply side issues, working across government and industry to determine the needs of destinations. Can the minister please advise what support has been provided to support Kalbarri, which was significantly damaged by cyclone Seroja earlier this year?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I thank the member for the question. Significant damage was experienced not only in Kalbarri but right through the midwest as cyclone Seroja crossed the coast at Kalbarri and continued inland, crossing through several shires in the midwest and ultimately into the wheatbelt. Minister Whitby, the Minister for Emergency Services, was lead minister in terms of the response. However, from a tourism perspective, it was important for the agency and the tourism sector to respond, particularly those providers in Kalbarri and surrounds. I visited the township of Kalbarri in the weeks following the cyclone. I met with business owners and tourism operators. It was a frank and robust meeting. A whole range of issues were highlighted with regard to their immediate needs. They were aspirational objectives by the operators there.

In response, Tourism WA dedicated a recovery program for the region that included a range of initiatives. A number of them were immediate. We placed an officer from Tourism WA in the region to assist tourism operators as they rebuilt. An office to provide support was put directly into the region. The sum of \$250 000 was provided to the Mid West Development Commission to support the redevelopment of public tourism infrastructure in Kalbarri, particularly infrastructure that had been damaged by the cyclone. That funding was used to assist the Shire of Northampton and the Kalbarri Development Association in the redevelopment of beach and foreshore infrastructure. Funding of \$220 000 went to Australia’s Coral Coast regional tourism organisation. That RTO is focused on tourism promotion for the region. That \$220 000 went towards marketing activities to promote a measured return to visitation to Kalbarri and other cyclone-impacted areas. The sum of \$50 000 went to Australia’s Coral Coast to provide 50 per cent discounts on tours and hire equipment in Kalbarri. This was known as Experience Kalbarri at Half Price. It was launched on 19 August and sold out within a week. It was one of the things that was particularly put to me when I visited, particularly by tourism operators, boat-hire owners and businesses that run four-wheel drive or motorbike experiences on the beach; all of those sorts of experiences. The uptake of their product was very slow; even when people started coming back to Kalbarri, because it was officially, if you like, open again.

That support is very, very important. Again, it demonstrates how we have always tried to respond to needs and target a response, and that particular response was obviously very successful. Nearly 1 000 visitors booked tours or hired equipment through Kalbarri Visitor Centre. Importantly, the program was delivered through the Kalbarri tourism centre, which is important for a small local tourism centre. It is important that it was able to assist directly with the promotion. Twelve operators in the visitor centre received commissions from that targeted program. We will look at those sorts of programs for experiences into the future. That targeted program worked really well, and if such a targeted program is required in the future, that is what we will consider. We have done it in the City of Perth and a range of other places.

Also, in July, we made a \$104.5 million allocation to support recovery and rebuild in areas impacted by the cyclone. That is a federal and state initiative. I understand that is a historic amount. The 16 local government areas affected are eligible for funding from the disaster recovery fund in addition to \$4 000 grants through the small business grants program administered by Minister Whitby's Small Business Development Corporation.

I am very pleased that Kalbarri is now on the road to recovery from what has been a devastating experience. One of the important things highlighted to me by one of the residents is that it was a very frightening experience for many of the residents of that town, particularly children. One of the operators whom I met with—who was quite distressed, to be honest, on the day I was there—talked about not only the devastation caused to infrastructure and houses, which is heartbreaking, but also the impact of the cyclone's ferocity on children who had sheltered with their parents and loved ones during that evening. That is an important consideration when local governments are working to restore a town back to full operation. Thankfully, Western Australians heard the call to go back and support Kalbarri and are doing so in big numbers. I understand that, again, the school holiday period looks as though it will be a very, very popular time to visit that magnificent region of Western Australia.

[4.50 pm]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: From the outset, yes, the minister is right about children being affected. If he talks to people at the school, he will see the impact it has had on the school community. It has managed to slowly make its way forward, but every time it rains it brings back that memory.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: That is right, or high wind.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The minister is right. In Kalbarri, it is not business as usual. There is still a lot of heartache, and a lot of families living with other families. There is a lot of pressure to find workers to rebuild Kalbarri. As the member for Geraldton will know, there is no accommodation left in Kalbarri. Even in Geraldton, it is very hard to get accommodation because that is where the tradies and builders are coming from. The government made a commitment out of that \$100-and-so million, or a commitment very early on, to provide workers' accommodation to Kalbarri. In actual fact, it was an election commitment announced by, I think, the Premier and the Minister for Regional Development in the dying days of the campaign. They said that they will support and financially assist workers' accommodation for the tourism businesses of Kalbarri. Where is it, minister? Where is the support for those businesses who are doing it tough? Kalbarri is not all beer and skittles. Yes, it is slowly recovering, but I would say that it is about 20 per cent of the way. It will take years. Where is the support for workers' accommodation? Given that many houses have been destroyed or are in the process of being rebuilt, and accommodation is at a premium, how is the government helping the small businesses and the tourism operators by providing workers' accommodation? Where is it at, minister?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I have highlighted to the member that no-one can really understand what someone has gone through unless they go through it themselves. I have spoken to people who went through cyclone Tracy as children who are now full-grown adults and the impact is still with them, and I do not underestimate that. I also do not underestimate the impact on children and families in Kalbarri and, indeed, in other parts of that region; farming communities further inland also experienced pretty strong damage to their properties and houses. Through its emergency management processes, the government responded immediately to immediate needs with a variety of service providers to restore power and water connections et cetera. From an emergency management perspective, both salaried and volunteer personnel were required. The response from the Western Australian volunteer community was remarkable. A State Emergency Service brigade from my community in Mandurah went to the region to respond, as did crews from a number of other places. Western Australians more broadly, I think, appreciate in some way the impact, but no-one really understands it unless they go through it. Minister Whitby is the lead minister. His response as a new minister in the government, just weeks after the election, was outstanding. He has been committed to delivering a cross-government response, which included immediate support and then calling upon the federal government for support. That has resulted in a record state-federal government commitment of over \$104 million for recovery.

I have highlighted to the member in detail the tourism support that came directly from my agency. Again, we listened and focused on what we could do through my agency to support that community. In terms of infrastructure, the record \$104.5 million has a variety of streams of support that will be ongoing. I think the member is right. The reality is the recovery will take years. There is no doubt about that. I can assure the member that the people of that town have been very much in the thoughts and actions of local, state and federal governments, and will continue to be. From a tourism perspective, I will do everything I can to ensure that Kalbarri is marketed as a fantastic destination so that visitation can continue in the future and support the businesses that rely on a steady stream of visitation to the region. We will look at a whole range of supporting infrastructure, including the magnificent Skywalk, which I think is a wonderful addition to that region, and at how we can interpret our natural environs so that the visitation experience is even more enhanced. All those will assist the local community.

I am sure that those conversations on workers' accommodation and housing and the \$104.5 million can be had with Minister Whitby. It is one of a number of considerations that need to be addressed and are being addressed, including the power problem. As I said, the legacy issue has been around for a long time and it is being fixed. My understanding is that an electrical unit—I am not sure what the correct term for it is—will be installed.

[5.00 pm]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is going to assist; it will not fix it, minister.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I do not want to get political, but I have to say that the member has been a member for that place for a long time.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Sorry?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The member has been a member for that area for a long time.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: No, I have not—it has been for about six months.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes, but part of a government prior to that that did not address a lot of infrastructure.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The minister does not know the history of it.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: No, no, no—you do not like it when it is thrown back at you, do you?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Do not embarrass yourself!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: You do not like it, do you?

The CHAIR: Are we moving on to the next question?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: We will move on to the next question because he is rambling.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am going to continue to keep Kalbarri at the forefront of our considerations for tourism and visitation support. That is why we are investing in supporting some infrastructure for the local government. That is why we are supporting programs for targeting and assisting tourism operators—those I have highlighted—and we will keep looking at that as a means of supporting tourism into the future, because I think people will continue to see Kalbarri as a place they want to visit into the future. The future looks bright for them in that respect as we work together to address the challenges that cyclone Seroja delivered on that April night earlier this year.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 215 under “Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies” and to “Tourism—Other Grants and Sponsorships”. Reference is made to \$800 000 each year until 2024–25. The minister spoke about Kalbarri and the midwest being affected by the cyclone and referred to the so-called grants that have filtered out to those in Kalbarri. When it comes to tourism businesses, a grant of \$4 000 was made available out of the recovery for tourism businesses and businesses in general.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Small businesses.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Yes. Kalbarri is made up of a lot of mum-and-dad businesses, for want of a better word, who do not earn more than \$75 000 a year. Unfortunately, those grants missed a lot of those businesses and tourism operators because they could not meet that criteria of earning more than \$75 000, plus being registered for GST and so forth. The criteria announced by the Minister for Small Business clearly did not meet a lot of the needs of the majority of small businesses in Kalbarri. What is the government doing to address that situation to allow those mums and dads or sole traders to access the \$4 000 that was to assist those businesses in Kalbarri?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The question is, essentially, in relation to that program and I do not have a budget item for that in my budget area; however, I am happy to answer it in the context of the recent announcement on the support for tourism businesses and travel agents. The reality is that we learn from each program. The learnings quite often relate to how we tweak the criteria for the next program—whether it is a subsidy, a grant or a discount. The aim is not to discard people from being considered; it is to make sure we target it to those who need it. The criteria in the fund that is referenced in this budget does that, because we learnt from earlier iterations, if you like. That includes the months that are used to compare income loss and eligibility. The definitions issue is one also that has been raised and has been tweaked in subsequent programs. One of the challenges is that some businesses have registered in previous iterations. Some wineries, for example, register as a winery, but also have a cafe registration as well. There are various examples of some applications that were excluded because they were not a particular defined business. In this recent round we have worked very hard to look at the criteria and the two-monthly comparisons that assess them against loss and also at expanding the net, if you like, of capturing businesses that under other iterations would not have been captured prior.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: How is that impacting on the businesses that have missed out on that \$4 000?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: That program has concluded. It was opened and closed; it has concluded. Subsequent programs have been delivered. The \$4 000 grant the member mentioned did not have a continuous time line. It was not a rolling program. It was a program that had a defined time. That was not a program auspiced by myself or by my agency but in the development of the latest support package through tourism; it was specific to tourism businesses. The criteria were to capture as many tourism businesses as possible. We did some other things at the request, by the way, of tourism operators in Kalbarri and its surrounds; for example, with regard to requests for the waiving of fees and licences specific to those who might be licensed to operate on Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions land. The requests to waive those fees were successful. We waived fees for them, because that is what a lot of the business entities said would really help them. They said that if they could have their

fees waived that they pay to the DBCA for accessing the national park, for example, that would be really helpful. The government listened, the agency listened, and the minister listened and it was delivered. In these programs we listen constantly about the impact and measure it carefully, and if we have to tweak or modify, we will, and we have.
[5.10 pm]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: That does not help those people, those businesses and those mums and dads who suffered because of the cyclone. They were not able to access that \$4 000 because they were a sole trader, did not pay GST and earned under \$75 000. Does that not highlight that the minister's agency, Tourism WA, was not on the ground talking to businesses during the early part of the cyclone disaster and the need to bring tourism agency staff back into the regions so there was a direct link between what was happening on the ground and what the minister was being told?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I do not agree with the premise of the member's question. The government and a whole range of other agencies responded —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am talking about a tourism response that could have influenced some of these changes to the \$4 000.

The CHAIR: Member, let the minister answer.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The \$4 000 program that the member is referring to was not an initiative of the tourism budget.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It affected tourism businesses. You did nothing about it.

The CHAIR: Member for North West Central, let the minister answer.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Get off your high horse. We have been going pretty well so far. The program that the member referred to, auspiced through the Minister for Small Business, was an immediate response to immediate need. From an agency perspective, through my visit and also through the positioning of an officer in the region to support tourism businesses to recover —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Where was that person put?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: In Geraldton. The member just told me there was no room in Kalbarri for them.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: How often? That should be taken into consideration.

The CHAIR: Member for North West Central, let the minister answer please.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I would not let an officer take up a place that should be taken up by a local resident. The member's argument is that there is not enough housing and now he asks why we did not house an officer in the town itself. The fact is that the officer worked and continues to work very closely with the tourism office, and it was appreciated. The member may not appreciate that support. I do, and so do the businesses that have benefited from it. That has happened. In addition, as I highlighted in an earlier question, after discussing what was needed by the tourism businesses in that town to respond, it included things like helping them waive fees and licences so they do not have to pay the fees and licences they need to pay. That was done. That was delivered by the government.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Minister, that was a piddly amount but a welcome amount.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The member asked me a question about supporting tourism businesses in the town and I am going to tell him what we did. The member is trying to say that we did not do anything.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am trying to give feedback on what is happening on the ground.

The CHAIR: Member for North West Central!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I will tell the member what we did. If he is not going to listen to me, that is his choice. We provided targeted marketing, we supported the regional tourism organisation, the development commission and local government. All the projects targeted what was required and inputted —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Not what was needed. What was needed was workers' accommodation.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am sorry, member. When I was up there, the boat tourism operators said it would be really helpful to have a program that allowed visitors to access a discounted program.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: And they are right but they need more.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It was delivered. What happened? In one week, it sold out. I think that responds to need. This government, through its commitment and collaboration with the federal government, responded with a record amount of money for the recovery. That money has a variety of streams that will be delivered to the people in the region. The sad thing is that people like the member go around stirring up people who are already hurting and suffering in a way that I do not think is helpful to their capacity to rebuild.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: How so? Explain that.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: We all know your history. We all know your personality. We all know your business.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The history! I was there helping out. Where were you?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: We all know what sort of person you are.

The CHAIR: Thank you, member for North West Central. I am on my feet. Let us move on. I give the call to the member for Collie–Preston.

Ms J.L. HANNS: Can the minister outline initiatives that the government has implemented to support the tourism sector recover from the effects of COVID-19? I refer in particular to paragraph 7 on page 204. I acknowledge that we have already covered subparagraphs 7.1 and 7.3. I am interested in subparagraph 7.2.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: There are a range of initiatives. I am not sure whether the committee wants to move on. We have officers from the Heritage Council of Western Australia and the National Trust of Australia (WA). If members do not want them to be here, do they want to let them go?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The minister can keep answering that question and we will give him an answer.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: A range of initiatives focused on supporting the recovery of the tourism sector. I have mentioned a couple but I want to highlight some that I think are important. The intrastate marketing campaign, Wander Out Yonder, which was launched last year, was highly successful. The encouragement of local people to explore WA has been remarkable. I think that campaign was outstanding. People come up to me all the time and say that they have been to places in Western Australia, particularly in regional Western Australia, that they had never been to before or they had not been to for decades. Of course, we are going to see that now with the wildflower experience in the midwest and the wheatbelt areas of regional Western Australia. Record numbers of people are going through those areas. That is doing great things for businesses such as the bakery in Mingenew and the butcher in Perenjori. Those tourism campaigns are making a big difference to those communities. The great thing is that those communities are getting a chance to showcase themselves. People in the town in which I taught, Three Springs, cannot remember the last time they saw the number of visitors they are seeing now exploring the midwest and the wildflower environs.

Dr D.J. HONEY: It went downhill after you left, minister!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I know that the school went down in terms of numbers.

The campaigns have been very successful. I mentioned the Kimberley Wanderer Pass earlier. That focused on assisting tours and experiences in the East Kimberley. There are essentially three subregions in the Kimberley. They are different in terms of impact. The eastern part of the Kimberley, which includes Kununurra and its surrounds, is much starker than Broome, for example, because the East Kimberley relies very much on interstate visitation. It was impacted when borders were closed as a result of COVID-19.

We had the Perth Staycation campaign. We need not forget the importance of Destination Perth. A number of our hotels had some occupancy on weekends but mid-week was very difficult for them in terms of volume. The Perth Staycation campaign targeted city accommodation. It is great to hear that in the lead-up to the grand final on Saturday, a lot of our CBD hotels are booked out, which is fantastic. We want that mid-week visitation to increase. Activities and events that are associated with Perth are important to that story. Take a Mate to WA was a campaign initiative that offered special return airfares from Perth to Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. The Relook and Book campaign focused on backfilling the cancellations that occurred in regional Western Australia, in particular, encouraging people to relook at the availability of accommodation because of the cancellations from interstate visitors. Those vacancies could then be filled.

Ms J.L. HANNS: I still could not get in.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: That is a case in point.

We hosted the Bledisloe Cup and we will host the AFL grand final on Saturday. We have secured game II of the State of Origin and the Australian Surf Life Saving Championships in early 2022. We will keep looking at all types of events, both sporting and cultural, to feature in Perth to continue to build on that visitation. We will keep nuancing these campaigns and marketing to the aspirations of visitors to Western Australia, be they within the state, interstate or international, when it is safe for that travel to take place.

The appropriation was recommended.

[5.20 pm]

Division 43: Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions — Service 2, Tourism, \$53 841 000 —

The appropriation was recommended.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Can I just thank Mr Webb and the others, who patiently waited to be called upon. You have an early pass!

Division 48: National Trust of Australia (WA), \$3 619 000 —

The appropriation was recommended.

Division 37: Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries — Services 1 to 15, Culture and the Arts, \$498 822 000 —

Mrs L.A. Munday, Chair.

Mr D.A. Templeman, Minister for Culture and the Arts.

Ms J.J. Shaw, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Culture and the Arts.

Ms L. Chopping, Director General.

Ms E. Gauntlett, Deputy Director General, Portfolio Management and Coordination.

Mr C. Dykstra, Deputy Director General, Portfolio Capability and Performance.

Ms S. Sherdiwala, Executive Director, Finance and Procurement.

Mr M. Cunningham, Executive Director, Culture and the Arts.

Ms L. Fanciulli, Executive Director, Infrastructure.

Mr C. Klymovich, Director, Infrastructure Planning and Investment.

Mr G. Hamley, Chief of Staff, Minister for Culture and the Arts.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: The estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. It is the intention of the chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 1 October 2021. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

I give the call to the member for Cottesloe.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I will kick off with a question on the Sunset Heritage Precinct, and I refer to page 540 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, although there is no specific line item relating to this in the total appropriations. Minister, the site was originally going to be developed in May 2019. Perusing the budget, I could not see any reference to it. I wonder whether there are any plans for that site, and whether the minister can illuminate me about what is intended for the time line for redevelopment of that site?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I thank the member for Cottesloe for his question. The Sunset Heritage Precinct is a very important site, in the electorate of the member for Nedlands. It has a unique history in terms of its heritage values, both architectural and social. In early 2019 the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries released a two-stage request for proposals for the development of the site. Minderoo Foundation was identified as the preferred proponent. Negotiations with the preferred proponent are ongoing. The conceptual aspiration for that site remains for it to be developed as an arts and cultural precinct, and for community access to be a particular priority. Negotiations have gone on for some time. Most of the buildings at the precinct are not usable in their current condition, and that has resulted in the community having ongoing limited access to the site. The nature of the buildings has prevented them from being activated in any significant way. The reality now is that significant investment will be required to upgrade the buildings so that they can be occupied and activation can commence.

[5.30 pm]

As I said, in May 2019 three respondents were invited to submit a proposal, with Mindaroo being the preferred proponent. A Sunset negotiation panel, with representatives from various agencies, was set up to work with the preferred proponent. In December 2020, cabinet ultimately decided that the Mindaroo Foundation's revised proposal and term sheet should not be accepted because it was not within the original scope, so further negotiations with Mindaroo would need to ensure the outcome is in line with the original proposal. There will be a meeting of that panel and the proponent in October 2021. It has been a slow process but the aim for that precinct to be developed as an arts and cultural precinct remains, as is the aspiration for community access a priority. We will work with the preferred proponent to, hopefully, reach an outcome so we can see some action on that site in the near future.

Dr D.J. HONEY: No pun intended—perhaps a little bit—but is there a sunset clause on that preferred proponent status?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Good pun; you will get your spot in one of those comedy stores down in Northbridge!

No, but I will be honest with the member. I think we need to move this along as soon as possible. It is a great asset and it has huge potential. I want to see it moved on. The director general knows that that is an aspiration we have for this site. Hopefully, with the preferred proponent, through the next meeting, we can land on an appropriate outcome to see that activated.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Thank you very much.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: My history is that I worked for Hon Nick Griffiths, who was the Minister for Housing when he was trying to work a way forward. I know he has a sunset clause on it, but is there a time frame to resolve it because it is a fantastic parcel of land that should be utilised to its full potential? It has a lot of history—some good, some bad—but there needs to be a time when we can move forward and redevelop it or do something with it.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes. That is why I think the aspiration for there to be an arts and cultural precinct with community access as the priority is a good aspiration for that site. I am hoping that we will be able to settle with the proponent imminently so that some action can commence as soon as possible and, hopefully, early next year we will see progress. We have to remember that part of the buildings are already activated and are being used for a variety of things. I think we have a film-making entity, Minderoo has some footprint and a couple of other enterprises are there. In my view, it has to be a place that is highly activated and attractive for people to visit. The grounds around those heritage buildings are spectacular and the access to the river has huge potential. There used to be a boat contact with that site in the early days. It is on a prime site on the river and it avails itself to high-value community use that is highly interactive and of a cultural and arts nature—as soon as we can.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: If my memory serves me correctly, there are some parcels of land that can be sold on there—I do not know whether they have been sold—that can be developed into housing to offset some of those costs that the government may have.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It is an A-class reserve. A portion of it was excised some time ago and subsequently, I think a sultan built a substantial home on it. The value of the site is in keeping it intact, maximising the heritage outcomes and adapting those heritage buildings for engaging cultural and arts activity. That is the aspiration and I think that will be good for the residential neighbours in the area. It lends itself to tourism outcomes as well, of course, given its strategic site.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 541 of volume 2, budget paper No 2. Under “Election Commitments” and “Arts Funding” is the line item “2021 Regional Exhibition Touring Boost” with \$2 million each in 2023–24 and 2024–25. What is this fund all about? Can the minister please explain the fund and the regional arts fund of \$4.9 million, which I think was an election commitment.

In terms of arts funding for 2020–21, can the minister explain what this election commitment is all about and why it is in the later years of this government?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It is already in the budget because it is, essentially, an ongoing election commitment. We originally delivered this in 2017 as an election commitment, so it is a continuation. It is focused on a fund that supports the engagement of regional communities for visual arts in particular. It is a program delivered in partnership by Art on the Move and the Art Gallery of Western Australia. One of the fundamental principles is that we want regional Western Australia to experience both our state art collection, which, of course, is housed in the Art Gallery of Western Australia and other places. We want the state art collection in its various forms to be shared and for people in regional communities to see it. It needs to be in an A-class gallery but some of it can be exhibited in B and C-class galleries. Thankfully, there are a number of those in regional WA. There are some spectacular galleries. I was in Collie only last Wednesday where there is a magnificent gallery. The boost will enable aspects of our state collection to travel on tour to various galleries and collection exhibition places in regional WA.

A program that I think is really good, is when a number of those programs have an opportunity to engage local communities and local artists in those touring exhibitions. It is a wonderful value-adding experience and opportunity for local regional artists. That commitment means that more people in the regions will see high-quality touring exhibition pieces, much of it from Western Australia or from Western Australian artists. If there is an Art on the Move exhibition in the local gallery, it adds to the visitation experience for people who might be visiting that gallery or that town. It also adds to the opportunity for a local community to celebrate artists more broadly. I have to say that regional Western Australia has a remarkable scope of very talented existing and emerging visual artists and other artists of the various genres that those communities should be very proud of. This boost program assists in instilling in people of all ages and experiences the beauty of the arts more broadly in their community. It is a great program.

[5.40 pm]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I have a further question, and I hope to ask a further question under the “Election Commitment” banner. The forward estimate for the Regional Arts and Cultural Investment Program is \$4.9 million. Why is that election commitment only budgeted for in 2024–25? Why has it not been budgeted for sooner?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: This is a funded program. It is valued at approximately \$5 million per annum. It follows the current Regional Arts and Cultural Investment Program that runs from 2019 to 2023 and is funded through

royalties for regions and administered by the department. It will be delivered through a combination of strategic partnerships and initiatives, and includes competitive grant funding rounds. The expenditure of \$6.3 million includes support to CircuitWest. It includes \$1.6 million for the Playing WA Multi-year program. That, of course, allowed some of our high-quality performing institutions to tour regional WA, including the West Australian Ballet, the West Australian Symphony Orchestra, Barking Gecko and the West Australian Opera, to name a few. Part of the program included money for Playing WA to support 13 individual performing arts groups to tour regional WA, including Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company, tours for new music and Theatre 180's very successful production of A.B. Facey's *A Fortunate Life*. It included \$1.6 million for the In the House program to support regional performing arts centres, including the Goldfields Art Centre; the Shire of Merredin's Cummins Theatre; Broome Civic Centre; Ravensthorpe Regional Arts Centre; Harvey Recreation Cultural Centre, which is doing some great stuff; and Mandurah Performing Arts Centre. As part of that program, a range of initiatives will be funded. It is a funded program so it is finite. The intention of it is captured on page 561, which extends it by another year.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I have a further question under "Election Commitments". The estimated actual for "Small Commitments" is \$18.958 million. Perhaps by way of supplementary, could the minister provide how many projects have been funded and whether all the projects are complete? Can the minister also provide a list of all those projects.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Member, most of those projects are listed on page 541 as line items. No; I am misleading the member. I do not want to do that. It is late in the day.

There are a range of projects. By way of supplementary information, I will provide a list of projects and amounts of those projects for that fund.

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

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am going to provide a list and the amount of funding for the "Small Grants" item.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: And whether they are complete.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: We will provide the current status.

[Supplementary Information No B5.]

Ms L. METTAM: I have a further question on arts funding for performing arts centres. I appreciate and understand that the minister will have met with the City of Busselton on its approach to fund the Busselton Entertainment Arts Culture Hub project. I seek the minister's feedback on that project. Does the minister anticipate that the city will be successful in attaining funding for the BEACH project?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I must admit I am a little disappointed that the member does not support the proposal.

Ms L. METTAM: It has been surveyed.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: That is what the community told me.

Ms L. METTAM: Fifty-three per cent of the public do not support it.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I held a community meeting not long ago and they expressed disappointment that their local member does not support the project. That aside, the state government and I, as minister who is strongly supportive of the cultural industries, welcome the decision of the City of Busselton to make a commitment, as it did a week or so ago, in its deliberations. I know that there has been an interesting debate locally with regard to the proposal, but let me say this: there is a strong story to be told with regard to a proposal of this type in Busselton. It has elements that are not the same as those provided through the Margaret River HEART project. It is not the same as that provided currently through the Bunbury Regional Entertainment Centre. I like what the City of Busselton has proposed because it talks about utilising a cultural facility for a broad range of opportunity, including, of course, convention and an economic capacity and capability. I like the fact that it is co-located with the Busselton Repertory Club at the Weld Theatre, which has a lot of history and which I think will celebrate its fiftieth year this year. Community theatre is an important and integral part of the cultural landscape of any community, but particularly regional communities. It is those things that we and the local member should embrace.

Of course, issues around costing and funding are going to be a consideration, but the proposed entity that has now been endorsed by the City of Bunbury in my view ticks a whole range of boxes that will have very important economic benefits for the broader community—the member's community. It will complement the CinefestOZ Film Festival, which I strongly support, endorse and love participating in each year. It will have strong outcomes and benefits for the local tourism economy. It will have strong local benefits for the young people in Busselton and surrounds. We should be saying to them that if they aspire to a career or indeed derive benefit from engaging in culture and artistic endeavours, that that will be good for them in terms their mental and physical health and their health and wellbeing more broadly.

The project ticks all the boxes for me. Obviously, the state government supports it. The state government and the agency that I am proudly a part of will be able to provide a lot of content through our touring support and funded

programs that work within the community. I reckon the member is in a unique situation to deliver this in Busselton. I hope she gets on board and supports the local council, which has said, yes, because it has been a pretty bold thing to do when a few people were very vocal against it. I admire what they have done. I think it is very bold. I support their endeavour. If this project is delivered, the agency will certainly look forward to adding it to its network of cultural infrastructure and assist to fill it with product.

[5.50 pm]

Ms L. METTAM: I hope the government provides more than \$3 million towards the project, minister. The issue with the project has been around the scope, which has changed.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Why does the member not support it?

Ms L. METTAM: I provided a letter of support for the Lotterywest funding. I understand it may get \$3 million, which is just a small proportion of the \$50 million cost for the overall project. There has been concern about the project scope creep, which happened after the provision of federal funding. We certainly support the capacity to expand Weld Theatre and the arts programs. The issue has not been about investing in arts in Busselton; rather, it has been the way the city has managed the project. I have certainly provided a letter of support, which has gone in with the application, which the minister should have.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: This is an opportunity for the member for Vasse to lead. It is about leadership and it is about saying, “I think this is good” because the member’s constituency will look to her for her view and sitting on the fence will not engender strong support for a program. Anyway, I am not going to argue because I would love to see it happen.

Ms L. METTAM: When surveyed, 53 per cent of the population said that they did not support the project.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I say the member should work with the community and highlight exactly what it will deliver. There is a growing population down there of young families and young people, and there is a very creative community. The member has one of the most creative communities in terms of musicians, performers and writers. The area has all the ingredients that say, “Why wouldn’t you have a place to assist them in sharing the beauty of the region and their creative talent?”

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I refer to page 557 of the budget papers and the Perth Cultural Centre rejuvenation.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Put it on notice; we have only a couple of minutes left.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I am happy for a brief explanation of the asset investment program.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: There is a \$20 million allocation to the redevelopment of the Perth Cultural Centre. As the member knows, we delivered Western Australian Museum Boola Bardip, which opened last year on my birthday. It was a special day for me and a very special day for the state. We want that cultural precinct to hum. It has to deliver to a broad cross-section of the community; it has to deliver for all ages and it has to deliver for families. The institutions have to work together to showcase the artistic performance, history and heritage of our state. It is well placed to do that with this \$20 million fund. I have with me the chair of the task force, the parliamentary secretary, and I am sure she wants to make some quick comments.

Ms J.J. SHAW: Thank you, minister. I will comment briefly. It has been a great privilege to work on the Perth Cultural Centre task force. I want quickly acknowledge in *Hansard*, the member for Perth’s original chairing of the task force and his remarkable contribution to the project. On Friday, the task force is due to meet and hopefully we will adopt a final report that will provide a series of recommendations to the minister about the rejuvenation of the Perth Cultural Centre. We welcome also the commitment of both the state and federal governments of \$20 million for the project as part of the \$1.5 billion Perth City Deal. We look forward to the revitalisation of that centre coming together as part of the project.

Dr D.J. HONEY: The first service and key efficiency indicator on page 548 is cultural and arts industry support. The table shows the target for 2021–22 is \$37 million above the budget for 2020–21, but it is also substantially above the 2020–21 estimated actual. Note 3 states that the estimated actual is mainly due to an increase in overheads. I am fascinated to learn how overheads can increase so much.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: You have got me! I will search for someone to provide a response to that question, which I think is a very good question.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am happy to take that information by way of supplementary information.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am happy to provide a response by way of supplementary information.

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

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Further detail will be provided with regard to page 548 under explanation of significant movements, note 3.

[*Supplementary Information No B6.*]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 542 and new initiatives, specifically the line item “Culture and Arts Revealed”. What was the \$160 000 spent on in 2020–21 and what is the allocation of \$90 000 per annum for over the forward estimates?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I do not know whether the member has had an opportunity to look at the revealed program, which was initiated in 2017 and auspiced through Fremantle Arts Centre. It is essentially a showcase opportunity for emerging Aboriginal artists and art centres across the state. Artworks are selected and exhibited at Fremantle Arts Centre as part of the revealed program. Importantly, a lot of those artists are able to—even during COVID, particularly this year—travel around and be present. A market is held as part of a weekend, from memory. It is very successful because the income from the sales goes to the emerging artists whose works are for sale. The revealed program supports growth and vitality and the state funds \$160 000 a year with the commonwealth providing \$90 000 per year. The allocation of \$90 000 in 2021–22 to 2024–25 represents the forward estimates of the commonwealth’s funding contribution through the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support program. We basically co-invest in the delivery of that event. I will ask Mr Cunningham to conclude with some remarks before we vote.

Mr M. Cunningham: Thank you, minister. That is correct. It is funded and delivered under contract by Fremantle Arts Centre. The listing within the budget papers refers to the investment from the federal government. It is delivered as part of an ongoing contract from Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries to Fremantle Arts Centre.

The appropriation was recommended.

Division 44: Planning, Lands and Heritage — Services 3 and 4, Heritage, \$26 036 000 —

The appropriation was recommended.

Division 47: Heritage Council of Western Australia, \$1 606 000 —

The appropriation was recommended.

Meeting suspended from 6.00 to 7.00 pm

Division 15: Primary Industries and Regional Development — Services 6 and 7, Agriculture and Food, \$157 434 000 —

Mr D.A.E. Scaife, Chair.

Mr D.A. Templeman, Minister for Tourism representing the Minister for Agriculture and Food.

Mr R. Addis, Director General.

Ms A. Taylor, Chief Financial Officer.

Mr C. Binning, Deputy Director General, Primary Industries Development.

Ms H. Brayford, Deputy Director General, Sustainability and Biosecurity.

Mr L. O’Connell, Acting Deputy Director General, Industry and Economic Development.

Mr A. Lyon, Managing Director, Capability and Performance.

Ms M. Carbon, Executive Director, Biosecurity.

Mr R. Prince, Director, Horticulture.

Mr G. Hamley, Chief of Staff, Minister for Tourism.

Mr C. Thurley, Chief of Staff, Minister for Agriculture and Food.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. It is the intention of the chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee’s consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister’s cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 1 October 2021. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

I give the call to the member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 221 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and spending changes at the bottom of the page. Can the minister elaborate on the grants process for the agriculture climate resilience fund; the eligibility requirements for that fund; and who is responsible for it within the minister's office or the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I thank the member for Roe for his question. The new agriculture climate resilient fund is a \$15 million fund established to assist Western Australian farmers manage the serious threat of climate change as the state's climate continues to heat up and dry out. The fund will provide opportunities for Western Australia to leverage funding for agricultural research and technology projects. It will focus on improving long-term climate resilience for agricultural industries and regional communities. It will enable Western Australia to develop and implement its own tailored solutions to climate and agricultural issues specific to the local conditions and practices.

The member has asked about the administration of the \$15 million fund and the application process specifically. I will ask Mr Binning, a deputy director general, to answer that aspect of the question.

Mr C. Binning: The administration of the fund sits within my area of responsibility. A cross-agency task force has been established. We are in the design phase of the program. An event was held at Muresk that pulled together farming and interested stakeholders from across the state, and a program is currently being finalised to fulfil the election commitment.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It is very—I will not say airy-fairy—difficult to quantify parts of this package and pinpoint what parts of it our farmers or people in the regional areas can actually apply for. Does the minister have an example of some of the projects within that fund under which someone could apply for a grant?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: As Mr Binning has highlighted, this is a very important election commitment. It demonstrates the government's commitment to addressing the issue of climate change in a genuine way. The important agricultural industry will, like a range of other industries, face this challenge of climate change going forward. This government has appointed a minister responsible for addressing the climate change issue more broadly because for each sector, particularly the agricultural sector, this is a real issue. As Mr Binning highlighted, this is an election commitment. The fund will be focused on resilience and it will work with farmers and producers on how the sector will respond to the challenge of climate change. It is a \$15 million program. I understand that the program is currently being designed. Matters related to the funding guidelines and access will be developed as part of the delivery of this election commitment.

The member asked for an example. An early initiative flowing from one of the forums held back in June was a series of free soil systems masterclasses to help farming businesses become more resilient, profitable and sustainable while capturing carbon farming opportunities. The masterclasses featured experts in soil health and carbon farming fields who discussed the science that underpins sustainable low carbon and biological farming systems. The first of the masterclasses was held in Northampton in August this year. There are sessions in Beacon and Salmon Gums. I think Salmon Gums is in the member's electorate.

[7.10 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That is right.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: They will be held later this week. Some initial initiatives are being trialled or delivered, to give an example, but, of course, the design of the program is ongoing and being finalised so that we can deliver this election commitment and work strongly with the sector.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to "Animal Welfare Package—Small Commitments" on page 221. What is the grants process and what processes are in place to prevent duplication?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: As the member has alluded to, animal welfare remains an important government consideration and, obviously, animal welfare within the context of the industry. The specific program the member highlighted, which is titled the animal welfare grant program, will provide \$2 million over four years to improve the welfare of companion animals and rescued wildlife through the provision of grants. It is also focused on low-cost animal health and veterinary services. Under this program, individual small grants of up to \$10 000 and large GST-free grants of up to \$50 000 will be available to eligible organisations. It is my advice that applications for the first round of grant funding will open shortly and information on the application process will be made available on the department's website. Funding can be sought for a variety of project types, including free or low-cost veterinary services, including companion animal desexing, service systems infrastructure equipment that improves the efficiency and effectiveness of animal rescue, rehabilitation and rehoming of companion animals, and service systems infrastructure equipment that is focused on improving the rehabilitation of displaced and injured wildlife, delivered by not-for-profit organisations in Western Australia. Again, this is a demonstration of the government's genuine commitment to progress positive animal welfare outcomes into the future. This grant program is \$2 million over four years.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: If someone wants to build a new set of sheep yards to improve their animal welfare practices, can any private entity apply or is it just not-for-profits that can apply for this funding?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: This particular program targets companion animals, not livestock.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Is the package to target companion animals in any way linked to the impending puppy farming legislation? Is that part of that rescue package for dogs et cetera?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It is relevant in terms of the wider package of enhanced animal welfare. The puppy farming proposal is specifically focused on puppy farming practices, and the aspiration to prevent that from happening or puppy farming continuing. But this is a mechanism within the government's broader animal welfare focus.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The initial response to the question was that the package would involve some grants for animal rescue. Is that only for domestic animals or is that available for wildlife et cetera?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Eligible organisations may include animal shelters, wildlife carers, rehabilitation centres, companion animal foster care and rescue networks, veterinary clinics, universities, and local governments that might be undertaking low-cost desexing, microchipping or veterinary care programs. Those include wildlife considerations, but, of course, the companion animal focus is one of the key focuses of that program.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to the election commitment "Backing North Wanneroo Agriculture" under "Spending Changes" on page 221. A total of \$750 000 has been allocated—\$500 000 this year. What will that deliver?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The City of Wanneroo has a substantial agricultural sector, with more than 100 horticultural growers. It is a very valuable source of fresh fruit and vegetables for the Perth market in particular. It includes poultry farming and egg production as well as nurseries that supply turf, cut flowers, and plants to retailers and the landscape gardening sector. It is an important contributor to the local Wanneroo economy, as well as to the broader economy. Rainfall levels in the state's south west, including Perth, have significantly declined in the last 30 years. That has enhanced competition for limited groundwater, meaning it is becoming an increasingly important issue for Wanneroo growers. The sum of \$600 000 has been approved for the water efficiency infrastructure, technology and soil amendment grants program—these are all part of that program—and \$150 000 to support the City of Wanneroo's local planning processes to maintain and protect agriculture in north Wanneroo, consistent with the North Wanneroo Agriculture and Water Taskforce's recommendations. This is also an example of the government fulfilling its election commitment to support north Wanneroo agriculture. It is an important consideration, given the issues that face that agricultural area.

Mr R.S. LOVE: When the minister said that the largest part of that allocation will go towards more efficient water infrastructure, given the scale of some of the operations in that area, it is not a very large amount of money for that entire region. Does the minister think that will actually be effective in addressing what is a very serious water situation in that area due to the over-allocation of the Gngangara mound?

[7.20 pm]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: As I said, I am advised that the North Wanneroo Agriculture and Water Taskforce made a series of recommendations, and the grants program that sits within this strategy was a direct result of the recommendations of that task force. As we know, the water issues that have faced and continue to face the growers' area are compounded by climate change impacts. We know that rainfall has decreased and reliance on groundwater continues to be problematic because there are issues with the groundwater. These grants and targeted commitments are influenced by the recommendations of the task force. Consultation with growers has been an important part of the process.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to the table "Spending Changes" at page 221 and the heading "Election Commitments". One of the line items under that heading at page 222 is "Small Commitments", which has a figure of \$13.379 million. Can the minister clarify what these small commitments are?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Small commitments shows a figure of \$2.644 million in 2020–21 and then a figure of \$13 379 million in 2021–22. On 10 May 2021, cabinet endorsed the Expenditure Review Committee's recommendations on the agency allocation of funding of the small grants program. That program approved 510 small grants to various regions in Western Australia. I will go through them very quickly. There were nine grants to the Gascoyne, totalling \$633 000; 54 grants to the goldfields–Esperance region, totalling \$1 354 500; 41 grants to the great southern, totalling just over \$1.3 million; 45 grants to the Kimberley, totalling nearly a million; 26 grants to the midwest, totalling \$1.2 million; 88 grants to the Peel region, a very important region, totalling \$2.3 million; 86 grants to the Pilbara, totalling nearly \$1.2 million; 105 grants to the south west, totalling just over \$4 million; 41 grants to the wheatbelt, totalling \$2.2 million; and 15 metro grants, totalling \$744 000. As at 16 September, last week, 406 of those 510 grants have been executed, with \$7.1 million paid to recipients; and five of the projects have been completed. That is the breakdown, if you like, of those small grants, and it looks as though every region has done pretty well.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: From that breakdown, it sounds as though they were distributed through the development commissions. Did all those various applications have business cases?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: My understanding is that grants under \$200 000 are subject to a funding agreement and then for anything above that figure a more complex business case was required.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer again to the table "Spending Changes" and the heading on page 222, "New Initiatives". I want to ask a question on the line item "Carbon Farming and Land Restoration Program", which is about halfway

down the page, just under “COVID-19 Response”. I refer to the expression-of-interest process that is underway. Can the minister tell me how the co-benefits will be assessed and how activities that are excluded from funding will be monitored and audited?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes. I am very happy to ask Mr Binning to respond to that question from the member.

Mr C. Binning: The land restoration fund has a documented set of criteria for each benefit and they range between Aboriginal engagement, salinity mitigation, biodiversity conservation, farm activity and carbon capture. Projects are assessed against those defined criteria by technical experts. They are then referred to a global panel that looks at their overall value and assesses the net benefits relative to the cost of the carbon capture. Projects are also evaluated against their overarching feasibility and practicality and the ability to secure the outcomes in the long term. They are then ranked and recommended to the minister for funding. Essentially, three streams are available. One stream provides funding for up-front works, with the value of the grant to be repaid in ACCUs—Australian carbon credit units—as they are accumulated. The second stream seeks soil carbon projects in lower rainfall areas. The final stream is for more innovative projects for which methodology does not currently exist.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is the minister confident that we have processes in place to measure the results of a program like this from start to finish? It is a very hard one to quantify, quite frankly. I guess the question is: what processes have been put in place to measure carbon capture benefits et cetera?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am happy for Mr Binning to respond.

Mr C. Binning: In relation to carbon capture, the projects must use an established methodology that is recognised by the Clean Energy Regulator, which is the commonwealth body that oversights these things. Those standards are really quite rigorous and involve a commitment to ongoing monitoring. The credits are essentially dependent on that monitoring occurring. In addition, the projects that are citing other benefits that I mentioned earlier will have an ongoing monitoring regime proposed as part of the expression-of-interest process.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: With the imminent shutdown of the forest harvesting industry in the south west, is this project targeted at that area at all? Further, there appears to be a significant drop-off in funding in the forward estimates. It is a two-part question, if you like.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The answer to the first part of the question is that I am advised no; that is not relevant to the old-growth forest decision recently announced by the government. I do need to highlight that this particular program is part of a suite of measures that support the Western Australian government’s climate policy, which this government takes very seriously. In many respects, because of the lack of leadership nationally in the climate change debate, Western Australia, as demonstrated by Mr Binning’s answer, has a range of programs, including this one, that are very rigorous and well referenced to standards. I am confident that this will be an important program as part of a suite of climate change-related responses by the government as part of its climate change policy.

[7.30 pm]

Mr R.S. LOVE: In the item the member for Roe referred to, the carbon farming and land restoration program, there appears to be about \$8.5 million across the forward estimates along with what has already been expended, yet the third paragraph under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency” on page 223 refers to a \$15 million carbon farming and land restoration program. The member for Roe pointed out that the expenditure seems to drop off through the forward estimates. Is there more to this program further forward? Where is the other \$6 million or so?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am happy for Mr Binning to respond.

Mr C. Binning: I am advised that the remaining funding will sit on the balance sheet of the Rural Business Development Corporation. The reason is that that is the value that is anticipated to be generated in carbon credit units. They are marketable. The principle behind the scheme is that a landowner applies and they get funding up-front to undertake the work. But then as the carbon credits are accumulated, they are repaid to the Rural Business Development Corporation, which holds them and sells them for the benefit of the state or holds them as an asset of the state. Funding falls off in the forward estimates simply because the initial phase of the program is exhausted over the forward estimates. This is a new program. We will learn an enormous amount through the delivery of the program. It will be evaluated and the government will consider its successes.

Mr R.S. LOVE: That would imply that the carbon credits are held by the state, not by the landowner, if they are returning that money to the corporation.

Mr C. Binning: I have just been corrected by our chief financial officer that they will be held on DPIRD’s balance sheet initially. The funding will be recouped in part to government through the provision of Australian carbon credit units. Depending on the nature of the project, it is likely to generate carbon credits that are in excess of the initial funding that was provided. As a result, the carbon benefits will be shared between the state, which has provided the up-front funding, and the landowner, who will generate carbon credits over and above. The numbers seen in the estimates reflect our first estimate of that balance of funding between those carbon credits that will be held on our balance sheet or pay for benefits from the land managers. In the process of identifying the projects, we will find the reality of that division.

Mr R.S. LOVE: My understanding is that there was a similarly named program in Queensland that this had been modelled on, but I am not so sure that that is the same process of retention of the carbon credits by the state. Can Mr Binning comment on whether this is a model that is followed in other states and has been successful?

Mr C. Binning: The member is quite correct that the experience with the Queensland fund was drawn upon in the design of this program. I do not have with me today the detail of the arrangement through which those credits are held. If the member would like it, I would have to follow that up.

Mr R.S. LOVE: In the model that exists there—correct me if I am wrong—there is a co-payment for both the actual carbon credits and environmental improvements. The rationale is that small-scale carbon projects are almost impossible to get off the ground because of the complexity of the registration process et cetera, which is the service the department is providing, but now that I have learnt how the department is setting this up, I am unsure just how successful this will be. Will the department monitor the uptake and perhaps be willing to reassess the retention of carbon rights by the state into the future, or at least the mix it is using? As a farmer, what is described there does not keep me awake at night with excitement. Is there a process whereby this will be assessed in terms of uptake and perhaps reassessed in terms of the conditions, if the uptake is quite small?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The program is new. Obviously, the delivery and implementation of the program will also be guided by uptake and ongoing evaluation of the program's effectiveness, and that will help to shape the program into the future. It is an important new initiative, effectively. As I said earlier, it is part of a suite of programs, projects and initiatives focused on addressing the climate change challenge through our Western Australian climate policy.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The third paragraph—the same significant issues paragraph—refers to the carbon resilience fund, which my colleague raised earlier. Is the climate resilience fund purely a grant round or an assistance round for outside agencies, farmers et cetera to use, or does the department consider that that is a fund that it might also tap into in terms of research and innovation in the space of climate resilience?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The agriculture climate resilience fund and the carbon farming and land restoration program are both \$15 million commitments that are focused on supporting the primary industries in responding to the climate change challenge. The department is absolutely focused on working with farmers and producers and in the natural resource management sectors to meet the challenges that we face with climate change going forward. It is an important collaboration and partnership that the government has committed substantial funding to in both of these programs. It is a demonstration of the government's commitment to working with the agriculture sector in the role it needs to play, and will play, and how it responds to the climate change challenge. I am confident, and I know the minister who I am representing here tonight recognises clearly, that the industries that her portfolios cover will play a critical role in the overall response of the state to the climate change challenge, which I think most people recognise is a real challenge to our economy, our lifestyle and, indeed, our existence into the future.

[7.40 pm]

Mr R.S. LOVE: I have a further question on the carbon farming and land restoration program. What methodologies are acceptable to that program? Is any methodology acceptable to the federal government or through ACCUs, or is there some specific program?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am happy for Mr Binning to respond.

Mr C. Binning: Under the first stream of programs, both soil program and vegetation carbon projects would need to utilise a methodology that is recognised by the Clean Energy Regulator. Under the second funding stream, innovative projects that point to new methods and new ways of catching carbon would be recognised. In those cases, ACCUs would not accumulate but a more rigorous monitoring and verification process would be put in place, with the anticipation that successful projects would inform future methodologies.

Mr R.S. LOVE: In effect, there is some level of research and capacity built into the program to enable new methodologies to eventually be adopted. Is Mr Binning saying that some payments would be made on the basis of some forecast of the sequestration of carbon and some bespoke method of measurement which, over time, the department would hope would then be accepted by the regulator?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am happy for Mr Binning to respond.

Mr C. Binning: Under the second stream, our focus is to encourage innovation and new insight but in partnership with land managers through real on-ground works. The principle applies that a project proposes something innovative, a methodology for verifying the carbon captured is proposed and that is then tracked and monitored over the life of the project, with an emphasis on the monitoring, the research learnings and also the insights for the development of new methodologies.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I have one further question on this same paragraph, going back to the resilience fund. Could the minister perhaps outline some examples of what might be expected to be funded in that area? I am at a bit of a loss to understand the difference between the two. Perhaps the minister could give some examples of what we are talking about.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am happy for Mr Binning to respond.

Mr C. Binning: A key priority of the fund will be to explore the potential of Western Australian soils to store carbon. This issue is hotly contested and favoured throughout the scientific community.

Mr R.S. LOVE: To clarify, is that the Western Australian agriculture climate resilience fund?

Mr C. Binning: Yes. There will be initial work, as has already been outlined, through the soil masterclasses, which explore different ways in which farmers are seeking to secure and sequester carbon in the soil profile. Further work will involve research data in field testing around the potential of Western Australian soils to capture soil carbon.

The other thing that the fund will do is provide opportunities for leverage with federal government funding, including through the national drought fund.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I want to ask a question about the line item “Enhancing Biosecurity and Emergency Response” on page 222. A little further up the page is the line item “Biosecurity Incidents and Emergency Response”, which was allocated nearly \$12 million last year. That has now disappeared. Does this new line item replace the original one?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Obviously, our WA biosecurity system is critical in terms of maintaining and growing the state’s prosperity, given that the state’s \$11 billion agriculture and fisheries industries and its natural resources underpin important industries. WA is currently struggling to address increasing biosecurity threats to some of its assets. The 2018 *Opinion on ministerial notification: DPIRD capability review* showed that its biosecurity operations were being placed under further stress. Total funding of \$15.1 million was approved over the next four years to implement phase 1 of the project. I understand that over the next four years, this commitment of \$15.1 million will increase our capability and capacity in emergency preparedness for biosecurity threats. It will also assist in boosting our early detection surveillance capacity, which will then enable us to respond to biosecurity incidents and incursions. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the impact that biosecurity incursions can have on industries and communities, and also underpins the importance of early detection and rapid response to pest and disease incursions.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I understand that 22 new FTEs are proposed. How many of those will be regionally based and in what locations?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am advised that the funding will support 22 FTEs. Their role will be to increase the department’s emergency preparedness for future responses to biosecurity incidents. That will include responding to incidents and emergencies and developing testing and response plans to known significant threats. The allocation of those FTEs is ultimately for the determination of the director general and the department. I am happy for Mr Addis, the director general, to add further to my answer.

Mr R. Addis: Biosecurity is one of our functions that is more regionally deployed on average. Although we have not yet defined exactly where these 22 new FTEs will be based, I expect that trend to continue. Obviously, the surveillance stuff is materially regionally based. That is all yet to be defined.

I might make a comment on the importance of the new resources. As a department, we have struggled with the increasing incidence of biosecurity responses in recent years. It has gone from being every now and again to being constantly in response mode, and sometimes having multiple responses in train at any one time. Part of this new resource and these new FTEs gives us a dedicated response capacity so we do not have to dip into other functions to respond all the time. It is a pretty important step forward for us. We need to make sure that we make it a winner.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Will the positions be focused solely on biosecurity or will some animal welfare duties be blended in there?

[7.50 pm]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am advised that it is all biosecurity-focused.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Okay, thank you. Can the minister confirm that there has been no reduction in the ordinary recurrent budget allocation for biosecurity, obviously net of this \$15.1 million over the forward estimates? Are there any other changes?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The commitment, which includes the FTE commitment, continues into the forward estimates and effectively means more bodies on the ground, doing the important work associated with protecting our assets in a biosecurity context. I was interested to see the swift and effective responses and efforts to eradicate the Queensland fruit fly, which of course had a direct cost-saving benefit for the industry. The department made efforts in 2020 to focus on up to six biosecurity incidents including the Queensland fruit fly. That alone has saved the state’s horticultural industry an estimated \$38 million annually in lost production and market access. Mr Addis, the minister and the government have taken the issue of biosecurity very, very seriously and have resourced it in this budget. Efforts to respond to biosecurity challenges like the Queensland fruit fly demonstrate how important it is and what it can do to mitigate losses in various industries—in the case of fruit fly, the particular produce that is susceptible to that pest.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is the minister comfortable with the protocols that are in place to coordinate with the federal government for any biosecurity emergency responses or the like that are required, in which both state and federal jurisdictions need to work together?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I will make an initial comment, then I will ask Mr Addis to respond. Obviously, the state will always seek to work in collaboration with the federal authorities, including the federal government, in respect of biosecurity issues. Clearly, a strong policy position is important. In many ways, Western Australia is fortunate, which I think has been demonstrated in the COVID experience, in that our natural barriers with the eastern seaboard have worked in our favour, and they can also work in our favour in terms of other biosecurity issues. Minister MacTiernan fiercely defends the state's position, but also advocates strongly for collaboration with the federal government and federal authorities with regard to biosecurity.

Ultimately, we can see a range of examples around the world in which nations are not as advantaged as we are, being an island nation. I have always been interested in the whole issue around bees, for example. I think the issues affecting bees are fascinating, and their importance to the agricultural sector. I will ask Mr Addis to add to my meandering comments on this matter.

Mr R. Addis: Thank you, minister. In recent times I suppose the relationship between the commonwealth and state biosecurity regimes has gained some focus, particularly through national incursions like the khapra beetle, which we have been grappling with for the last 12 months or so. As the minister alluded to, Minister MacTiernan has pushed very hard for biosecurity to be top of the priority list nationally with her interstate and commonwealth colleagues, and I think we have seen that being picked up; it is now one of the top four issues on the agriculture ministers' agenda. We have also seen some additional investment and effort from the federal government in terms of its biosecurity capabilities, which we think is well and truly welcome and somewhat overdue. We are working very closely with the commonwealth on these issues. As I said, it has come into sharper focus recently. It might be worth getting a bit more specific commentary from Mia Carbon, who is the executive director of biosecurity.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am happy to ask Ms Carbon to make some additional comments regarding this matter.

Ms M. Carbon: There are well-established mechanisms in place for managing biosecurity risks across impacted governments and industry, including cost-sharing arrangements that we regularly exercise with the commonwealth government to manage biosecurity risks in Western Australia.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I think perhaps what the member for Roe was referring to was some incidents where there were problems with negotiating our way out of a biosecurity situation. We had potato psyllid some years ago and there was no way of getting our product sold, as I recall. There was a bit of a breakdown there between the commonwealth and state agencies, at that stage. Has that been addressed?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am happy for Mr Addis to respond.

Mr R. Addis: Yes, the tomato potato psyllid incident started, I think, in 2016, from memory. That clearly was a challenge for WA and other states. It took some significant working through, and I think as a result of that we certainly reflected upon our approach to our biosecurity function, and particularly to the way in which we worked with our jurisdictional colleagues on those sorts of things. I think relations are, in that regard, significantly better than they perhaps were at that time, and we are very conscious that we have to maintain that. Again, Mia Carbon has been involved from the get-go with that process, so it might be something she has further comment on.

Ms M. Carbon: Domestic trade is not determined by the commonwealth government; it is determined by the relevant jurisdictional government. It certainly is the case that when a new quarantine pest or disease is detected in one jurisdiction, other jurisdictions have the ability to put up border controls to protect themselves from the incursion of that pest or disease. Those border controls need to be scientifically valid and supported by evidence of absence of the pest or disease in that jurisdiction, so it is quite common that early on in a response, there are quite strict controls, and they reduce with time as the combat jurisdiction deals with that pest and as more surveillance is done in other jurisdictions. Western Australia also has the ability to exercise that to protect our industries from biosecurity incursions that occur elsewhere in the country. But absolutely, we work nationally to try to minimise the impacts of those incursions on both industry and consumers, wherever possible.

Mr M. HUGHES: I refer to page 222. I would like the minister to outline the application of the funding for growth in partnerships for wine and oats. How will this funding help drive the sectors?

[8.00 pm]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It is an important initiative. The budget provides \$13.1 million to drive the growth of two priority sectors—that is, wine and oats—in partnership with industry. The wine industry export growth partnership is a \$6 million project to boost wine exports and create local jobs. This budget will deliver over \$3 million to fund the election commitment to establish the partnership, with industry matching the funding to deliver the five-year program. The program is aimed at driving export competitiveness to increase the value of Western Australian wine exports. It is focused on driving that to \$117 million annually by 2025. This represents a 50 per cent increase, so it is an important aspiration. In the first phase of the project, Wines of Western Australia will commission a study to identify market and consumer trends to determine the best way to position WA's premium wines in international markets. It will also conduct workshops and extension activities to encourage more Western Australian wine producers to consider export opportunities. The partnership will also boost the research capacity in terms of WA wine quality and provenance.

The \$10.1 million processed oats industry growth partnership is focused on increasing local processing to double the value of oat grain in the oat grain industry. That funding will leverage co-investment from the Grains Research and Development Corporation, InterGrain, AgriFutures Australia and the oat-processing sector. Earlier this year, it was announced that WA-based cereal breeder InterGrain will lead the national oat-breeding program, with Western Australia to become a centre of excellence in oat research and development, so it is very significant. Again, it is a very significant and important election commitment and new funding.

Mr M. HUGHES: I am particularly interested in how we will engage with wine producers. Will the department make contact with individual producers? How will that be dealt with?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: There are a number of wine producers in Western Australia, some of them very well-known and some of them emerging. I am advised that the aim will be to engage wine producers in a variety of ways. There has already been the first phase of a project, which involved some workshops that were effectively focused on enhancing the aspiration of wine producers to look at export as a genuine option for their wine-growing business. I am assuming that many of our wine producers, particularly some of the emerging ones, have focused on the domestic market. But we know that our wines are some of the best in the world and sought after. Indeed, opening up opportunities for our Western Australian wine producers into export markets internationally is a very worthy aspiration and, of course, there is funding in this program to support that. There are some wine industry cooperatives—Wines of WA. Working with organisations such as that will be important. I think it is very exciting.

Mr M. HUGHES: I want to make sure —

The CHAIR: Member for Kalamunda, wait for me to give you the call.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to service 6, “Agricultural and Fisheries Biosecurity and Integrity” on page 229, which states —

This service focuses on maintaining and enhancing Western Australia’s biosecurity status and meeting national and international commitments. It also includes integrity matters such as animal welfare ...

From looking at the cost of services, I see that there seems to be quite a spike in last year’s estimated actual amount over the budgeted amount. I am wondering what the reason is for that. I see that there is a note at the bottom of the page that refers to the net cost of service, but also the total cost of service is there. Is that an increase? Can the minister enlighten me on the reason for that?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The increase in the total cost of service from the 2020–21 budget figure to the 2020–21 estimated actual figure is mainly attributable to an increase in the number and cost of emergency incidents, with the main cost relating to the Dalkeith and Coolbellup Queensland fruit fly outbreaks, which got quite a lot of attention. The Dalkeith and Coolbellup Qfly outbreaks cost \$11 million. It also includes grants of \$2 million to those affected by tropical cyclone Seroja.

Regarding the difference between the estimated actual figure and the 2021–22 budget target, I think it is important to note that, by their very nature, emergency incidents are not budgeted, and this is reflected in the decrease from the 2020–21 estimated actual figure to the 2021–22 budget target. I hope that explains that variation in the figures.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The minister mentioned that those emergencies took some of the extra funding and there is a smaller amount budgeted for this year. Given the recent news about the bovine Johne’s disease find, if you like, in Western Australia and the change in status of that disease in Western Australia, I am wondering whether there is any consideration at the moment about what extra impost that might have on the cost of services since the budget was written?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I think the expertise of Ms Carbon will be appropriate to answer the question.

Ms M. Carbon: The current regulatory program for bovine Johne’s disease in Western Australia is already industry determined and industry funded, so there will be no change in the net cost of service as a result of that. The department will be working very closely with industry to develop a support package around information for WA cattle industries, but that will be managed within our normal services.

Mr R.S. LOVE: That was in relation to direct costs for the cost of services for biosecurity, but on this matter, it also refers to meeting international commitments and standards. Are there any implications for the industry from loss of markets or potential impacts on things like particular live export markets, for instance, from the declaration or the change in status of Johne’s disease?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am sure Ms Carbon will be able to contribute with an answer to this one.

Ms M. Carbon: There is no impact on access to markets at an industry level. Some of our export markets have requirements for Johne’s disease at a property or herd level, but loss of the JD status of Western Australia at a state level will not impact those markets. It is also important to recognise that Johne’s disease is already endemic in sheep in Western Australia and has been for some time. Our international markets do not differentiate between the strain of Johne’s disease. Market requirements are set at a disease level, so any Western Australian cattle producers who are impacted by the sheep strain will already have those market access implications.

[8.10 pm]

Mr R.S. LOVE: I have one further question on bovine Johne's disease. Does it in any way preclude trade from the tropics of Western Australia to the south or does the change of status apply right across the state?

Ms M. Carbon: Currently, the Johne's disease regulatory control program operates at a state level and the change in regulation will also be at a state level. There is no suggestion that there will be any intrastate movement conditions.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: On page 222 is line item "Western Australian Wild Dog Action Plan 2021-2025" and a budget estimate and forward estimate for each year of \$2.3 million. On page 232 is line item "Wild Dog Action Plan" with a budget estimate this year of \$3 million followed by three lots of \$1 million. Can someone clarify the differences in that expenditure?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I thank the member. I am advised that the first figure is recurrent and the second figure is capital.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have a further question. Noting funding issues that have been raised by the Carnarvon Rangelands Biosecurity Association with the Minister for Agriculture and Food, can the minister confirm that funding has been allocated to offset the reduction in the declared pest rate?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Does the member have a budget line for that?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: No. It is really under the "Wild Dog Action Plan" line item.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Is it specific to Carnarvon? Can the member give us more detail?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: My understanding is that there has been a reduction in funding and that the Carnarvon Rangelands Biosecurity Association needs funding to meet its biosecurity commitments for the forthcoming financial year.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Although the member did not necessarily make the correct reference, because I like him, I will ask Mr Addis to respond to his question in a broad context.

Mr R. Addis: I think the member is referring to the reduction in declared pest rates based on the Valuer-General's elevated pastoral lease fee valuations that have been subject to objections from a significant number of landholders. The effective declared pest rate for some recognised biosecurity groups has been reduced more significantly than anticipated. The Carnarvon Rangelands Biosecurity Association being a case in point. We are working pretty hard. We could not foresee that and nor could the RBGs. It has been out of our hands, so we have been in react-and-respond mode. We have done our best to work with those RBGs to mitigate it. We are working to try to cover some of the gap. Although we are somewhat optimistic that we can help to close the gap, we are not quite there yet. I think that is pretty much where we are at.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have a further question. Minister, earlier today I brought up the state barrier fence and the Esperance extension. Can the minister outline why there have been significant delays to the completion of this project—it is not really "completion"; the project has barely begun.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Does the member have a line item reference?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It is under the "Wild Dog Action Plan" line item.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Is it specifically about the barrier fence?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It is on page 222 or 223; whatever page the minister would like.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I will ask Mr Addis to respond to the question.

Mr R. Addis: I will probably ask Ms Carbon to fill in any gaps I do not cover properly. Clearly, the Esperance barrier fence is a very high priority and that is reflected in the funding committed to this task. I think the member is pointing to the importance growers down that part of the state put on this infrastructure. It is a complex task. Multiple forms of land tenure are required to be freed up to complete the Esperance extension. There are multiple native title groups to consult, and environmental and heritage processes and approvals that are required. It has proven to be very complex. We are making really good progress, certainly on the larger part, with the Tjaltjraak traditional owners, who are constructively engaged. The eastern end of the extension fence is on part of Ngadju native title. We have been experiencing what I describe as administrative difficulties. It has been very difficult to engage with them, so we are looking at plan B options to ensure that the western and smaller part of the extension can be completed. We are optimistic that we will make significant progress in the next short while on the larger chunk and we will be able to get moving with construction. We have continuing concerns about the western end. As I said, we need to make sure that we have backup plans in place for the other part.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am happy for Ms Carbon to add.

Ms M. Carbon: Following the construction of the initial 63 kilometres of fence extension, construction has paused while native title negotiations have been underway. They have been progressing well and we hope to be able to continue that construction soon. In the meantime, we have undertaken procurement for options to build on the existing road reserves that do not require native title. We have also been working with local sheep producers to look at the option of a cell fence for some producers on the eastern end to allow for progress of that construction as well.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have a further question. I can only translate to the minister the level of frustration of landholders in that area while they continue to experience incursions of wild dogs, the relative expense and cost of losing stock, and the frustration with the delays to this program. Is the minister satisfied with the performance of the department in its negotiations with native title holders and the community in general?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I think Mr Addis and Ms Carbon have highlighted the complexities of the situation being faced here, obviously bearing in mind the seriousness of the impact of wild dogs on agricultural land more broadly. Since 2017, the government has funded over \$20 million in this area. That is an indication of the government's serious consideration of this challenge. Both Mr Addis and Ms Carbon have highlighted the complexities of dealing with native title and land access issues—they can be complex in nature—and also, as Ms Carbon highlighted, the attempts to progress works whilst those negotiations are ongoing and/or being finalised. I am very confident that the department recognises the seriousness of this issue. It has been supported by the resourcing of this government since 2017 with regard to budget allocations. We are very hopeful that issues around native title or Indigenous land use access can be resolved as soon as possible. It seems that there have been some governance or capacity issues that have been highlighted by some of the stakeholders. But I am very confident that the department is doing everything it can to address the issues faced by growers in that particular part of the state.

[8.20 pm]

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to page 222 and the fifth line item from the bottom “Natural Resource Management Program (Administered)”. The program has allocations of \$1.5 million in the out years. I seem to recall that that line item relates to natural resource management programs in the city. If we turn to page 232, under works in progress, we find the regional natural resource management program, which has steeply declining allocations. In fact, there is no allocation for that program beyond 2023. Has the state given any consideration to an ongoing commitment that supports natural resource management programs or is that something that will cease to happen in regional Western Australia?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The member referred to the “Natural Resource Management Program (Administered)”, which is the line item that is fifth from the bottom of the page.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Yes, fifth from the bottom of page 222.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It shows figures of \$1.5 million in the out years from 2022 —

Mr R.S. LOVE: I think that program is a metropolitan-based program. What will happen in the country areas when their allocation ceases on 1 July 2023?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I might ask Mr Addis to make a further comment, but I am advised that the first line item that member has referred to on page 222 related to the grants scheme. The second line item is capital for the state barrier fence with an estimated total cost of \$9.8 million. The first item includes \$6.2 million from royalties for regions—regional—and 20 per cent, or \$1.5 million, from consolidated funds.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Did the minister just say that the regional natural resource program is for the state barrier fence?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes, the figure on page 232 is the estimated capital allocation.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Is that in addition to the Western Australian wild dog action plan?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes, it is.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 234, the income section, which is about a third of the way down the page, and regulatory fees and fines. I notice that the 2021–22 budget predicts an increase from around \$37 million up to \$52 million. Can the minister outline what increases are expected due to that roughly \$15 million increase?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am advised that the increase from the 2020–21 budget to the 2020–21 estimated actual is largely due to the receipt of commercial access fees from the west coast rock lobster managed fisheries licensees prior to the new fishing season, which commenced on 1 July 2021. The increase from the 2020–21 estimated actual to the 2021–22 budget estimate is due to the normalisation of fisheries' access fees in that financial year of 2021–22. It should be noted that the early receipt of the access fees in June 2021 will result in a below budget result in 2021–22.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I heard what the minister said about normalisation, but that is a \$15 million increase, and then there is another \$8 million increase in 2024–25. Can the minister tell me what that is down to?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I might ask Mr Addis to clarify the answer to the second question.

Mr R. Addis: The changes in last year's actuals and the following two years relate to the deferral and subsequent recovery of deferred, largely commercial, fishing fees. We do not have the details with us of what the elevated number is towards the end of the out years in 2024–25.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I suggest that the member puts that query in the form of a question on notice to the Minister for Fisheries.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I turn to page 241 of the same volume that we have been looking at the whole time. Under expenses, I refer to the last line item “State Contribution to Natural Resource Management”. I hope that this is where I might find a contribution to natural resource management by the state government to those community groups and others in regional Western Australia. What is this allocation for?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The state natural resource management program has grant-funded projects that run over two or three years. Not all grants are fully paid in the year of allocation. Payments are made on evidence of milestones achieved across all years of each grant. This has led to a lag time in actual expenditure reflecting the funding allocation. Milestones occur over the life of a project, and as payments are attached to successful completion, they are also paid over the life of the project.

Is there an appropriate officer who might be able to give further clarification on the natural resource management question? I defer to Mr O’Connell.

[8.30 pm]

Mr L. O’Connell: We are aware of three active grant programs—community stewardship grants, which have ongoing annual funding; community collaboration grants, which have one-off funding for 2021–22; and core business grants, which also have one-off funding for 2020–21. The largest grant by some distance is the first one, the community stewardship grants, which have annual funding of \$7.75 million.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Under the heading “COVID-19 Response” on page 222 is the line item “Future Drought Fund—Farm Business Resilience and Regional Drought Resilience Planning Programs” and a budget estimate of \$3.561 million. We have had one wet winter and the funding seems to have disappeared in the out years. I am wondering what the logic is.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am happy for Mr Binning to respond to that line of inquiry.

Mr C. Binning: This funding represents the state’s contribution to programs that are being delivered through the commonwealth government’s future drought fund, which is a new \$5 billion investment fund designed to secure continuous funding for drought resilience initiatives. The funding is initially for a trial two-year period. Once again, those programs will be evaluated. The commonwealth’s appetite to continue to invest will also be evaluated, and at that time, if required, further appropriation will be sought.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Would there be a further appetite to continue with this, with or without federal assistance?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I will ask Mr Addis to make a comment and Mr Binning as well, if necessary.

Mr R. Addis: We welcome the commonwealth contributing in this space. Broadly speaking, the WA farm sector is at the resilient end of the resilience spectrum in terms of Australia’s national agriculture sector. We have done a lot of the hard yards over the last couple of decades, in particular. We would consider future initiatives like this in the context as things emerge. We certainly think that our farmers have done a great job in building resilience and adapting on the go. They certainly do not have the sort of catch-up that is required in some of the east coast states.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Mr Binning, did you have anything further to add?

Mr C. Binning: I can only comment that Western Australia has a long history of resourcing farm business planning and drought resilience planning. That is an ongoing program that the department is certainly strongly committed to. The other comment I would make is that the commonwealth’s future drought fund is a very large fund. It will yield in excess of \$100 million of funding per annum across the forward estimates. There is a lot to learn about how that fund will operate and how to maximise opportunities for Western Australia. We will be actively participating in that process.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I am trying to understand the relationship between the commonwealth fund and this allocation. Is this some sort of show of good faith that we are putting money in ourselves? I am unsure of the partnership arrangement that the minister has spoken about between the commonwealth and the state, and also the fact that there is an appropriation determination on page 240 for that set amount. It just does not seem to explain to me what we are going to get on the ground for this expenditure.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Mr Binning may be able to clarify.

Mr C. Binning: As I understand it, the funding represented in the budget represents the state’s matching contribution. Those funds will be matched by the commonwealth.

Mr R.S. LOVE: So at the moment, \$7 million is available?

Mr C. Binning: I do not want to mislead the member, so I am happy to take that on notice. That is my understanding, but I need to confirm it.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am happy to provide supplementary information to the member. It is essentially the dollar figure allocated by the state in relation to the future drought fund.

Mr R.S. LOVE: And its relationship to a matching commonwealth grant.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Right; and referencing it of course to the regional drought resilience fund.

The CHAIR: The minister has agreed to provide supplementary information. Could you restate what that information is?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes, I will attempt to do that. I am happy to provide the financial contribution, in a dollar figure, by the state in relation to the regional drought resilience future drought fund and the farm business resilience and regional drought resilience program.

[Supplementary Information No B7.]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to “Total Appropriations” on page 221. The budget estimate for 2021–22 is \$285 463 000, but the 2024–25 forward estimate drops to \$197 million. Can the minister explain that 30 per cent drop in total appropriations to this area?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I will seek some clarification, but I think that it relates to the expiration of some project-related appropriations. I will ask Mr Addis to comment.

Mr R. Addis: My understanding is that the shift, which is in the order of \$80 million, between the budget estimate for 2021–22 and the final out year will broadly consist of about \$45 million of carried-forward expenditure, largely on the royalties for regions program, plus new commitments, largely election commitments. From memory, it is about \$40 million; our chief financial officer is saying it is \$31 million. In combination, the \$45 million of carried-forward royalties for regions expenditure into the current year’s budget and the extra election commitments, about \$35 million, largely explains the shift of \$80 million.

[8.40 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I guess I would not mind some more clarity, because on the surface, it really is not a good look. It looks like, basically, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development is taking a 30 per cent hit without being able to get any real clarity on what makes it up, and the number seems to constantly drop from one year to the next. On the surface of it, it does not look good. Capital appropriations are also dropping.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I point the member to the 2019–20 figure of \$196 374 000. Mr Addis has given an explanation of the additional expenditure that takes the budget estimate through to a high of \$243 331 000 in 2021–22. The difference between 2019–20 to 2024–25 is a consistent base level. It simply peaks in that 2021–22 budget estimate for the reasons given by Mr Addis.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is there a way of clarifying or pinpointing the differences in the form of royalties for regions and election commitments? Is there some way of providing some information to clarify that?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I will just consult. I am happy to get an answer for the member. I just want to make sure that we get the right answer.

At this point in time, I do not think we can add anything further. Some of the contributing factors are election commitments that have been made and are incorporated in that figure. Those commitments appear in the budget papers but at other places, or are referenced. Rather than take it as supplementary information, I suggest that the member might consider a targeted question on notice.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Turning to page 223 and the significant issues impacting the agency, the tenth dot point states —

...an extensive legislative reform program in the areas of animal welfare, biosecurity and aquatic resource management. The independent review of the Animal Welfare Act 2002 has been finalised with the Department now working to implement the Government’s response.

In terms of the department’s role in responding to that, is there an expectation that that matter will require significant expenditure at some point in the future? Do we have any idea of the increased number of inspections, for instance, that might be required and where in the budget that is considered?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I will ask Ms Brayford to respond. To make some broader comments, the department has an extensive legislative reform program in animal welfare, biosecurity and aquatic resource management. The member referred to the independent review of the Animal Welfare Act. The independent review has been finalised, with the department now working to implement the government’s response. I ask Ms Brayford if she could add further to the member’s line of inquiry.

Ms H. Brayford: The government’s response to the Animal Welfare Act review provides funding of \$2.8 million over four years to the department, which covers three key elements. One is funding to support the legislative reform program to implement the appropriate recommendations from the independent panel in terms of amendments to the Animal Welfare Act. There is also funding for an Animal Welfare Advisory Committee to provide advice to the minister on animal welfare matters. There is also funding to support the development of an ethics committee process so that community projects can seek ethics approval to support their scientific licences. They are the three key elements of the funding to support the government’s response.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The tenth dot point also refers to a review of what is known as the BAM act—the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act. It says that an independent panel is to be appointed. Do we know when the review of the act may be complete and when the panel will have done its work and prepared a report?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am advised that the expectation is that the outcomes of that will be expected by the end of next year.

Mr P. LILBURNE: Good evening, minister.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Good evening.

Mr P. LILBURNE: I thank the minister this evening for his candour in answering these inquiries about various areas in the portfolios that the minister administers. I also thank the advisers in their various capacities for their time this evening; it is very much appreciated.

I have a very keen interest in biosecurity matters. In my university studies, environmental management was one of my areas. I would like to refer the minister to page 222 of the budget papers, volume 2, and the new funding for “Biosecurity Incidents and Emergency Response”. Could the minister please outline how this funding will help protect our valuable agricultural industries going into the future?

[8.50 pm]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I thank the member. A number of questions on biosecurity have been asked, which highlights for all members in this place the importance of a robust biosecurity system for WA. As has been highlighted, some additional moneys have been appropriated in this budget to reinforce our state’s biosecurity capabilities. An amount of \$15.1 million has been committed. It is important to understand the ongoing threats of biosecurity to the state. We know that there has been a number of incidents in recent years and, of course, more recently, which have threatened production and, in many ways, whole industries. They will be ongoing and that is why we need a robust system in place to respond to challenges when they occur.

We are providing additional funding effectively to enhance our early warning and detection systems. That will boost our emergency preparedness and build a response capacity and capability. As we have highlighted, the fund includes the commitment of new officers, or full-time equivalents, in the department. I remember doing estimates for Minister MacTiernan a couple of budgets ago when we highlighted the effort by this government to re-resource the department and its work after it had been allowed to decline under the previous government’s administration. We are putting in additional full-time biosecurity jobs in DPIRD. Mr Addis has already highlighted that it would be expected that a number of those would be in the regions, as is the nature of the business. We would also focus some of the funding to develop preparedness and surveillance plans for higher priority plant and animal pests and diseases. They include aquatic pests, which could have a significant impact on our state’s primary industries and trade. These include African swine fever, the khapra beetle and white spot in prawns, as well as environmental pests such as myrtle rust and red imported fire ants. We can be very proud of the government’s response to biosecurity. It is an issue that we need to be very cognisant of as we go forward, but ultimately it is about protecting Western Australia’s produce and agricultural and other produce industries and maintaining our very high standards and respect for our high-quality produce into the future.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to the ninth paragraph on page 203 of budget paper No 2 under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”. How is the department progressing its strategy to grow its presence in regional Western Australia?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am happy for the director general to respond. It is obviously an important strategy for the department.

Mr R. Addis: I thank the member for the question. We will expand on where we got to this morning. From the get-go of this new department, we have strived to maintain and strengthen our regional footprint. Between 36 and 38 per cent of our workforce is regionally based, which is far and away the most significant, particularly of any of the economy-facing departments, which is a great strength and attribute for this department. Through the past three years we have sought to place, where possible, key new roles in regions. We have had a number of agribusiness and food and trade positions based regionally. Some of our investment management roles have been placed regionally. In Mr O’Connell’s pillar alone about 28 of our newly placed roles have been regionally based, which makes a significant difference. We have also sought to maintain and support the role of the commissions in that regard. We would like to continue to incrementally grow both the number of people based regionally and also the leadership content we have based in the regions. As the department for primary industries and regions we think it is critical for us to have senior people contributing to key decisions that are based in the regions. We have work to do in that regard; we know that. It is a never-ending process and we remain committed to doing that, but it is an incremental process.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I am interested in the ninth paragraph on page 223, which mentions the department is progressing plans for a permanent long-term metropolitan facility. Can the minister share with us some detail on where that might be? I know there is some very good land available in the Gosnells and Thornlie areas.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I like your style, member!

The department is progressing plans for a permanent long-term metropolitan facility. That is my understanding. It is an ongoing process that includes potential site selection. It remains a priority with the department to address the accommodation needs for metropolitan-based staff. It is important also to emphasise the answer to the previous question about growing staffing in our regional areas. It is also a concern when we see the loss of a significant number of staff from the department, as we saw in the previous regime. Many of them were from the regions. Through Minister MacTiernan the government has been focused on addressing what was allowed to be a decline under the previous regime and has worked very hard. There have been a couple of references throughout this evening to staffing levels increasing and also increased numbers being delivered to regional Western Australia. I do not think we are in a position to announce tonight the “where”—we have not been given permission—but it remains a priority for the department and for the minister. I have always been pushing for Mandurah, of course. As a regional community, it makes sense. Mr Addis.

Mr R. Addis: Nor have I been given permission to announce the “where”. However, there is provision in this budget to complete the detailed planning for future sites and a biosecurity diagnostic facility, which is much needed. They are facilities that cannot be easily leased on the market, so it is a critical and special purpose. A bit of infrastructure is involved so we are working hard with the relevant agencies to progress that and move that agenda forward.

The CHAIR: It should be said that some excellent land and an enviable lifestyle are available around the Cockburn Central area as well! Are there further or new questions?

Mr R.S. LOVE: Is the decision that the permanent facility must be in the metropolitan area? I could not quite hear what the minister was saying.

[9.00 pm]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: There are significant components of the work of the agency. Traditionally, there has been a presence in the metropolitan area, so that will remain. It is now in the process of identifying, ultimately, a site for the provision of accommodation for metropolitan-based staff and the associated units of work that are attached to that. As we have already highlighted, we have been working very hard to reverse the decline that the member for Moore, as an agricultural region-based member, allowed to happen under the previous government. We are making very good inroads. We are resourcing the department and resourcing the programs associated with the department—biosecurity is one of many examples—and we will continue to do that. Included in that is the identification of a new site.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Paragraph 9 refers to a long-term metropolitan facility that supports the protection of Western Australia from biosecurity threats and drives research to grow the state’s primary industries. That implies that the location of the site has some ramifications for the ability of the department to do those two things. What are the parameters for the department’s selection of a site? Is there a defined set of parameters that the site must meet or is it simply a piece of government land that is convenient to grab?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Before I ask Mr Addis to respond, I wish to highlight two critical factors in that paragraph. One is the plan for a permanent long-term metropolitan facility and also the progression of the strategy to continue to grow the presence of the department in regional Western Australia. Both are key priorities. Both are focused on ensuring that Western Australia’s biosecurity response and other issues associated with the work of the department are resourced and addressed in the most effective manner. Again, these important plans build on this government’s approach to restoring the resourcing and focusing on the importance of the agricultural sector in the economic story of Western Australia. The government is very proud of that. We came off a decline that the member’s side of politics oversaw in its term of government over eight and a half years. We are restoring that. We are building resources and focusing. Matters regarding the site selection will have a range of criteria and parameters for consideration. Mr Addis may wish to make a brief comment.

Mr R. Addis: A couple of key parameters are relevant to the member’s question. I start by pointing out that roughly two-thirds of the facilities are biosecurity diagnostics focused and, in particular for those functions, they need to be centrally located and close to the airport. It is unfortunately the case that most of our biosecurity finds occur in the metropolitan area. It is pretty important functionally for those diagnostic laboratories to be centrally located.

As far as the R&D functions go, there is a strong benefit to be had by being adjacent and connected to the universities, which are largely Perth based. That is an important parameter. Beyond that, we have a terrific network of regional based R&D research stations from the north of the state to the far south in Esperance. For instance, the Northam Grains Research Facilities is really hitting its straps. It is pretty much full now. It carries a heavy load. It is the case that the bulk of our labs-based agricultural R&D is already through that regional network of research stations. Having a component, modest as it may be, in that space that is metro and connects us to the universities is pretty strategically inbuilt.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The premise that Mr Addis just outlined would seem to me to suit Kensington. Why is the department not doing it there?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I understand that a range of issues are associated with the Kensington site. That is why a process to determine a new site has been the course of action.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The actual upgrades to the laboratories at Kensington have commenced. Can the minister give me an indication of that progress and when that upgrade or program of development will be complete at Kensington?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am happy for Mr Addis to respond to that, in terms of the time line.

Mr R. Addis: There are largely two primary streams of work happening to make sure that we have functional facilities that support business continuity for the next few years. At Kensington, firstly, where possible, we are making good the existing facilities by doing some remediation to the roof to make it more waterproof, which is proving possible in all cases, and putting in some wall and floor treatments to make sure that they are fit for purpose and not subject to the same asbestos risks that we encountered last year. That is well advanced and almost complete. Also, about 1 000 square metres of temporary lab facilities are being installed. They are well out of the ground. I do not think we have started structural construction yet but the foundations and site works are well progressed. That will be ready to start the certification process, which takes several months, before it can be readily occupied and used before the onset of winter next year.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I turn briefly to a different matter—the Digital Farm program, on page 237. It is a telecommunications infrastructure program of sorts. It has been rolled out in several tranches. I see that the budgeted amounts in 2021 are way under the actuals. Anecdotally, I know of some delays—I am told 12 months around Dandaragan—in the implementation of that program. Can the minister give me an update on the rollout of the Digital Farm program, both the original one and rounds 2 and 3?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am happy to make a preliminary comment, and there may be some more additional information. The Digital Farm project is part of the agricultural telecommunications infrastructure fund, which aims to support the application and use of new technologies in regional areas to provide digital connectivity to farming regions. The ATIF will contribute to the productivity gains and industry sectors, such as agriculture and food processing, as well as professional services through grants and a subsidies budget of \$771 000, which has been allocated in 2021–22, with an additional \$809 000 in 2020–21 re-cashflow to 2021–22.

There are eight recipients of the Digital Farm grants program, delivering 20 projects through three rounds of funding. This will enable approximately 2 340 WA farming businesses across 110 square kilometres to use smart farming technologies, such as cloud-based data sharing and decision-making tools to improve productivity and outputs.

When completed, this Digital Farm grants program will cover approximately 55 per cent of the grain belt. It will include Kununurra, Carnarvon and parts of the south west. The status of round 2 of the Digital Farm project is that a grants subsidies budget of \$300 000 has been allocated for 2021–22, with an additional \$1.35 million re-cashflowed from 2020–21 to 2021–22. With regard to round 3 of the Digital Farm project, a grants subsidies budget of \$7 million has been allocated for 2021–22, and an additional \$3.25 million will be re-cashflowed from 2020–21 to 2022–23. I hope that gives the member an update on the status of those rounds and the fund more broadly.

[9.10 pm]

Mr R.S. LOVE: I do not think it addresses whether the program is actually rolling out to schedule in the sense of those under-expenditures, if you like, between what was budgeted and what was actually spent, and whether there have been significant delays in rolling out the program.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am advised that there are no significant delays that we can report with the rollout. The commitment, though, is a very important one, and is significant in its budget allocation. I do not think there is any more to add to that.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Funding in round 3 of the Digital Farm project is \$7 million over two years, which is a substantial increase on what had been on offer before, in any particular year. There were smaller allocations. Has there been a change to the criteria for the selection of projects that may be funded under this program, or is a larger program envisaged or might a particular partner be selected?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: No; I am advised that there has been no significant or substantial change to the criteria or the process. I think the additional allocation of funding the member highlighted reflects the general success of the program since its inception. The continued rollout is very desirable, given the success of the first two rounds.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to the third line item from the top of page 232, “Katanning Sheep Transition”. Can the minister provide some more detail on this project?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: On the Katanning sheep transition?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Yes.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The Katanning sheep transition has a total commitment of \$1.5 million and focuses on the development of a central testing facility to increase opportunities for the Department of Primary Industries and

Regional Development to attract national and international research funds for the measurement of feed intake and greenhouse gas emissions from sheep. Such a facility will also provide opportunities to collaborate with our state universities to research the merits of different feed types and environmental and genetic factors that can improve efficiencies for the Western Australian sheep industry. The project was originally budgeted at \$1.1 million in 2020–21 and \$400 000 in 2021–22. In terms of its current status, extensive groundworks and construction have already been completed, with a \$325 000 fit-out requiring carryover funding from the 2020–21 to 2021–22 budget. It seems that the Katanning sheep transition initiative is on target in terms of delivery.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I see that there is no further funding in the out years. The department is obviously expecting to have some important information or evaluation available by the end of this financial year.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: This is capital works—essentially, the construction of a shed-like structure. This particular line item is a capital investment.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to the fourth paragraph under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency” on page 223, which deals with initiatives to bring in labour and deal with the social and economic disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. It states, in part —

The Department is coordinating several initiatives in response to this challenge, including via the Seasonal Worker Programme, the Pacific Labour Scheme and the Regional Travel and Accommodation Support Scheme.

I am wondering what happened to the proposal to bring labour in through Bladin Village in the Northern Territory. Is that something the department looked at and worked on trying to bring to fruition when it was suggested by the federal government?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I will ask Mr Addis to respond to that particular line of inquiry.

Mr R. Addis: Obviously, a lot of effort has gone into a range of measures to alleviate the workforce shortages that have resulted from the various border closures. Through the seasonal worker program, I think we are heading towards about 1 500 new workers into Western Australia, which has been very well received, as well as Work Out Yonder and similar incentive programs.

In terms of the reference to Bladin Village, the state government has been advocating that the commonwealth government look at opportunities to set up essentially dedicated quarantine facilities, starting with Christmas Island and other potential facilities. More recently, the commonwealth started to talk about the possibility of Bladin Village, which is a facility in the Northern Territory. It is controlled by the Northern Territory government more so than by the commonwealth government. I understand that the commonwealth government has been talking to the NT government, but from what we can perceive, it is not there yet in terms of achieving an agreed way to stand that up as a facility for this purpose. If that happens, either at Bladin Point or some other place around the country, we would be keen to collaborate and cooperate with whatever jurisdiction that happens in. If it happens in WA, that would be extra good. We are on the front foot with it, but it ultimately depends on the commonwealth government finding a way to actually get something going.

[9.20 pm]

Mr R.S. LOVE: Minister, is it the case that the federal government never actually secured the use of that facility in the Northern Territory and was not in a position to enable the state to use it if it had wished to do so?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am advised that we have been unable to ultimately secure support from the Northern Territory government to progress such an initiative. One of the reasons for that from a Northern Territory perspective is the ultimate cost to the territory in providing that facility and the health and security resources that would be required to support such an initiative. I think it is important to note that this whole issue regarding workforce shortages and responses is one that has been of primary concern to the minister and the government. Mr Addis has highlighted a range of measures that have been progressed. It is true that as at 15 September, 1 459 Pacific Islanders entered WA under the Seasonal Worker Programme and Pacific labour scheme. Only as late as last week, on 16 September, 161 people arrived from Tonga as part of that Pacific labour scheme. Those workers have undertaken or are undertaking quarantine and were accepted over and above our international arrivals cap.

The other thing it is important to note is that some other more localised initiatives have been delivered, including short training courses for harvest workers through the Muresk Institute and some regional TAFEs. Two courses have been fully subscribed at Muresk and a third is filling fast. Efforts are being made also through the Work and Wander Out Yonder program. A new round of the regional travel and accommodation scheme commenced on 9 September, just over a week or so ago, with \$1 million in funding available to anyone who moves more than 100 kilometres to the regions to take up eligible primary industry roles. They do not all get \$1 million, by the way—that is the total figure that is available. It includes successful applicants receiving an allowance of up to \$500 for travel and \$40 a night for accommodation for up to 12 weeks. There is a range of measures. The minister has been working particularly hard to try to address this challenge.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I have another question about Bladin Village. Were any costings drawn up or was there any examination of what it would cost? Was there any formal process whereby the Western Australian government or the department actually looked at what it would be and how that cost recovery could be shared? There was some talk that the industry might be willing to put in some money as well.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The proposal in the Northern Territory is in the Northern Territory, and therefore the issues that are ultimately governed by the territory in terms of access to its land and to the proposal are problematic. Obviously, the department has done preliminary work over time on such facilities in Western Australia. However, the entity to which the member referred is in the Northern Territory, so the state of Western Australia cannot force the territory or any other state to provide a resource or service that it may not be interested in providing.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The minister was quoted on radio as saying that it would cost \$20 million. Our calculations were more like \$4 million or \$5 million. Regardless of what our calculations were, it indicates to me that the minister was working on some sort of draft proposal. Given she was quoting a figure of \$20 million, I am assuming some work was done by the department to draft up a plan with expenses for the state government.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am advised that, essentially, quotes were sought from private providers to stand up the facility, but the indicative quotes received to date vary in price. They range up to \$20 million for a four-to-six-week quarantine period. After negotiations regarding Bladin Village, which has been referred to, had commenced, we then became aware that the federal government had been working on its own proposal to use Bladin Village for economic cohorts. Essentially, we have to be realistic about the circumstance of getting a facility up and running at a cost that is, essentially, very high. We believe that, ultimately, it should be within the commonwealth's realm to stand up this facility. I think that reflects the accuracy of the minister's comments about the \$20 million figure.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: As has been quoted, the grain crop is potentially worth \$7 billion. The commonwealth said it would provide that facility and it was up to the state government to draft a plan and put it together. I ask the minister whether he felt that, in proportion, getting that skilled labour across to take off our \$7 billion grain crop would be a good investment? With the minister quoting \$20 million, I would have thought there was a draft plan somewhere in the mixture and it was probably decided by other powers that it would not be suitable to go ahead with.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I think we have to look at the history of this whole issue. We know that in July, the minister wrote to the commonwealth seeking the commonwealth's leadership in this whole matter. The Premier as well has indicated to the commonwealth that there are facilities such as those on Christmas Island, for example, that could be made available for provision of quarantine opportunities for workers who are required. Of course, it became very clear that the federal government was not going to entertain that; it was not going to look at its own federally owned facilities to assist in addressing this challenge. Because that became clear, the minister, and the government then sought to look at other options, including, of course, the Bladin Village option in the Northern Territory. Included in that are the costings.

Ultimately, the issue around Bladin Village related to the urgency of the commonwealth to negotiate with the Northern Territory. I think that in many respects the commonwealth has been less than helpful in genuinely exploring options such as Christmas Island. On a range of quarantine-related matters, the Premier has been highlighting that the commonwealth has facilities that we believe could be made available, but the fact they have been ruled out by the commonwealth is certainly not helpful in the broader context of quarantine facilities being made available for the needs of getting our harvest underway and taking crops off.

[9.30 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The member mentioned a range of quotes. I assume \$20 million was on the high side. Can the minister let us know what range of quotes were on the lower side, perhaps, or the medium side?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: My understanding is that the quotes ranged from several million dollars to \$20 million. The reality is that in many respects if the commonwealth had been more cooperative and responsive earlier, we might be in a different situation today.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Minister, if the quotes ranged from a few million dollars to \$20 million, would the state have been justified to press on with a quote of several million dollars, which would have allowed further skilled labour in to help get off our \$7 billion crop?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: That still does not satisfy the Northern Territory's health and security requirements, does it? Those matters are ultimately between the commonwealth and the Northern Territory in the case of a facility there.

This also goes to the question of who is fundamentally responsible for quarantine. It is national security because that responsibility falls clearly and squarely in the lap of the federal government. It is my personal view that the commonwealth has not been at all helpful in taking clear responsibility for the provision and operation of quarantine facilities. We know that there have been more recent announcements regarding a proposal, I think, for a quarantine facility in the north of Perth and one west of Melbourne. But one of the unfortunate late responses of the commonwealth was to recognise that quarantine responsibility and, ultimately, national border issues are, in fact, clearly under the jurisdiction of the commonwealth, and I think that it was found wanting.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The minister talks about the commonwealth and quarantine, yet 1 500-odd Pacific Islanders have come in to help our horticultural industry, for which somehow the state managed to work out the quarantine arrangements. I am curious about the difference between that and if we had double-vaccinated skilled workers coming in from northern Europe. If we have health and security advice from the Northern Territory government, is the minister able to table that advice?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: No, I am not. But I reiterate that matters pertaining to the Northern Territory are matters for the Northern Territory to ultimately negotiate with the commonwealth, including, of course, as is its right, any concerns it may have for resourcing and ensuring that both health and security matters are addressed appropriately; and, in that case, it would need to be satisfied that they can be addressed and that would need to be supported by the commonwealth.

I cannot speak for the Northern Territory government on the matters that it negotiates with the commonwealth. However, I make the simple point that it is a pity that there was not an earlier response from the federal government in foreseeing such challenges as we are facing now. That would have been very helpful rather than ruling out its capacity to make existing quarantine facilities available as an option or, indeed, acting earlier on the provision of new facilities so we do not face the problems that we have. The reality is that we will probably face COVID and other ultimate pandemic threats in the future. That is why future facilities like the one proposed north of Perth, the one proposed in Melbourne, and I think the one proposed or talked about in Queensland, will be infrastructure, if built in a timely way—I do not have any information to say that they will not be delivered by the commonwealth—and facilities that will be available for any future threats. The reality is we have to get a harvest off in the next month or so, and we have done everything that we possibly can, in my view, to try to address the challenge we are facing. I have indicated a number of examples of those in answering the member's questions this evening.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I will ask a final question to wrap up. I want to confirm whether the state has had any formal correspondence from the Northern Territory outlining its concerns; and, if not, has the commonwealth flagged any formal concerns from the Northern Territory government around health and security?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: There have been conversations between agencies on this issue, but in terms of a formal approach, I am advised, to my knowledge tonight, that no formal approach has been made.

The appropriation was recommended.

Division 18: Rural Business Development Corporation, \$236 000 —

Mr D.A.E. Scaife, Chair.

Mr D.A. Templeman, Minister for Tourism representing the Minister for Agriculture and Food.

Mr R. Addis, Chief Executive Officer.

Ms A. Taylor, Chief Financial Officer.

Mr C. Binning, Deputy Director General, Primary Industries Development, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development.

Mr G. Hamley, Chief of Staff, Minister for Tourism.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. It is the intention of the chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 1 October 2021. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

Minister, is there any change or any further introduction of advisers?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The only advisers we will need for this division are the director general and the CFO. Mr Addis will be appearing in this division as the chief executive officer of the Rural Business Development Corporation. I ask Mr Binning to stay for the division after this one.

[9.40 pm]

The CHAIR: I give the call to member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 208 and significant issues impacting the agency. Can the minister tell me about the six loans that are currently deemed to be irregular and are being monitored closely?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Are we looking at the Rural Business Development Corporation's administration of farm finance concessional loans?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: At the bottom of page 268 it states that six of the 12 concessional loans are deemed irregular and are being monitored closely.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Can Mr Addis make some clarifying remarks on the six loans that have been deemed to be irregular and are being monitored closely?

Mr R. Addis: I do not have the detailed information on those loans specifically, other than I understand that they are caught up with difficulties in refinancing the loans through the commonwealth's Regional Investment Corporation, which is not a great deal more than is in the note in the budget papers.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I was going to ask what is the value of the six loans, but I assume that the minister does not have that detail. Does the minister expect to receive the full loan repayment at the end of the loan agreement?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: There are some issues associated with those particular loans and they are being monitored closely. They will be assessed as per their individual circumstance because the parameters around the capacity for those loans to be delivered may vary according to the circumstances for each one. It is a little bit sensitive too in terms of identification. Mr Addis might be able to add a little more to that line of inquiry.

Mr R. Addis: In total there are 12 active loans. We are expecting to have full repayment on all of them. We do not envisage any non-payment. That is not to say that that may not happen in the future, but at this stage we have a pretty high debt-recovery rate and we do not expect undue problems with those items.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to paragraph 5 on page 269. We touched upon this briefly in the discussion around the Western Australian carbon farming and land restoration program. In terms of the RBDC's involvement with the carbon farming and land restoration program, how much of the budget of this organisation has been allocated towards supporting that initiative? Does the minister anticipate the allocation of further funding to directly support RBDC's involvement with the carbon farming and land restoration program?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am happy for the CEO to respond.

Mr R. Addis: None of the existing funding of the RBDC will be allocated to the new carbon farming and land restoration program. It is more that that program, which is a new initiative and was discussed in the previous division, will be administered, in part, by the RBDC and will therefore impact on its accounts in the future. That is probably all we have to add on that item.

Mr R.S. LOVE: That is pretty well what I asked: how much of the budget will be used not to actually give out grants, but to support the operations of the scheme? Some of the administrative work of the RBDC will be involved in the carbon farming and land restoration scheme. How much of the current budget would that represent?

Mr R. Addis: The RBDC is supported through the department operationally and administratively. It is certainly the case that the board of the RBDC will dedicate some of its time to contribute to the design, but particularly the oversight and governance of the carbon farming and land restoration program. The heavy-duty work to support that program is essentially done through the department's existing resources.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Can we confirm that the RBDC will be the bank? Is that the process that we heard of with regard to where the carbon credits would eventually be held and land in the future? Is that how it works?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: That is correct.

Mr R.S. LOVE: In performing that function, will it be supported by the department and not need its own administrative effort?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am happy for Mr Addis to respond.

Mr R. Addis: That is pretty much right. The RBDC will not develop any new or additional administrative or management capability outside the department.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 270 and item 1, farm business development, which is about halfway down the page. The table below lists "Employees (Full-Time Equivalents)" with nil funding. On page 19 of RBDC's annual report for 2021 it states —

The creation of DPIRD as part of the government's public sector reforms continues to impact the RBDC in a number of ways. The integration has been a lengthy process, with the loss of staff and their corporate knowledge a significant risk.

Can the minister tell me how many FTE equivalents work at the Rural Business Development Corporation or how many were lost as a result of the machinery-of-government changes?

[9.50 pm]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am happy for Mr Addis to respond.

Mr R. Addis: The reference in the RBDC's annual report is essentially to staff within the department who helped us support and service the RBDC. The RBDC did not have FTE in its own right prior to the amalgamation, and it does not now. That said, there have been disruptions, as is the normal course of things when there are such corporate restructures.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The annual report says there is a significant risk. How is that risk being managed?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The member's line of questioning relates to a report that is not attributable to a budget line item. That is probably a question to directly ask the minister through a question on notice.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: We have an annual report that says there is a significant risk and it refers to FTEs. The FTE line item in the budget has nil, nil, nil, nil. I am really referring back to the RBDC annual report, which states that the public sector reforms have impacted the RBDC in a number of ways, including the risk of losing staff, and the line item in the *Budget statements* has nil, nil, nil, nil.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: In response, as Mr Addis highlighted, the formal allocation of FTEs prior to the machinery-of-government change has not changed—it was nil before; it is still nil. However, the broader support of the work of the RBDC is essentially delivered through the department. That has not, and will not, change. The references to the annual report are noted, but I am confident that the important work of this particular corporation will continue to do the work that it is required to do in the interests of rural business development.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The member for Roe highlighted that no staff work at the RBDC as such, though some support is given. Paragraph 6 under "Significant Issues Impacting the Agency" on page 269 states —

The COVID-19 pandemic has been disruptive ... With its extensive networks ... and understanding of the social support assistance available, the Corporation is contributing intelligence and insights ...

I am wondering how an organisation that does not have anybody working for it has knowledge! Where is the repository of knowledge? Is it with the board? Is there a hell or something? Is there some sort of big computer that keeps all this knowledge and talks to us? Where is the knowledge emanating from to be disseminated back to the government?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am happy to ask Mr Addis to respond.

Mr R. Addis: The fact the staff who service and support the RBDC administratively are within DPIRD as an entity, and therefore RBDC as a legal entity does not have its own FTE, does not mean that the networks those staff have cannot be used to feed into the RBDC's thinking and work. Equally importantly, the board of the RBDC comprises a number of people who work across the regions and across the sectors, in finance, ag consultancy and the like, and therefore bring a wealth of knowledge and intelligence to the group including from the Rural Financial Counselling Network. They bring a wealth of knowledge and intelligence both for the purposes of the RBDC and also they share it with the department, which helps to augment our own intelligence which is very useful.

The appropriation was recommended.

Western Australian Meat Industry Authority—

Mr D.A.E. Scaife, Chair.

Mr D.A. Templeman, Minister for Tourism representing the Minister for Agriculture and Food.

Mr T.S. Collins, Chief Executive.

Mr M.G.S.J. Pinto, Chief Financial Officer.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. Members may raise questions about matters relating to the operations and budget of the off-budget authority. Off-budget authority officers are recognised as ministerial advisers. It is the intention of the chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 1 October 2021. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

Member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to the line item “Saleyard—2020–21 Program” on page 259. I notice we have a very consistent amount of \$450 000 every year. That is a \$50 million saleyard and I understand it would cost \$10 million to level the site and another \$40-odd million to rebuild it. We have plant and equipment to improve efficiency and workers’ safety, but should there not be some capital in there to replace some of the damaged yards as time has gone on, now that they are up to 10 or 12 years old, from memory?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am happy for Mr Collins, who is the chief executive, to make some comment.

Mr T.S. Collins: The member’s point is well made. We are currently developing a capital replacement program in collaboration with the Western Australian Meat Industry Authority board. It relates particularly to some of the weighing equipment that we have on site, which is probably the core business of the saleyard. We single weigh all of the livestock, particularly the cattle, that go through the saleyards. A capital replacement program is being developed and we intend to roll that out in the next few years. The infrastructure that is in place is definitely beginning to get tired. We are at the front end of that program now.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The Muchea saleyards sit on an area where there is a lot of development at the moment—the Muchea Industrial Park. I am wondering what planning is being done to integrate the saleyard and perhaps take advantage of some of the development around there in terms of capital growth for the organisation. Could the chief executive just give us an idea?

Mr T.S. Collins: It is a great question. At the moment, the Western Australian Meat Industry Authority Act is quite restrictive in terms of the way the site can be employed. The 75-hectare site is currently managed by the authority. The act, as drafted, restricts the authority to really do things that are wholly and exclusively within the confines of the scope of running a saleyard. Our ability to leverage that land in ways that would be complementary to the saleyards and would allow us to get the most value out of the site itself, particularly in the context of the Muchea Industrial Park structure plan that is currently sitting in draft, is restricted in that sense. The WAMIA board is very cognisant of that and has, on its agenda, amendments to the act that will unlock those issues and allow us to begin to properly exercise the site.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Has the chief executive had support from the minister here? Is the minister supportive of that approach?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am sure that the authority will liaise with the Minister for Regional Development in terms of recommendations and those will be duly considered.

The CHAIR: That completes the examination of the Western Australian Meat Industry Authority.

In that case, I thank the minister, members and advisers, particularly the staff from the department, for their attendance this evening. This committee is adjourned until 9.00 am tomorrow morning.

Committee adjourned at 10.00 pm
