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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

Tuesday, 24 May 2022

Legislative Assembly

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ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

The meeting commenced at 9.00 am.

Division 21: WA Health, \$6 403 163 000 —

Mrs L.A. Munday, Chair.

Ms A. Sanderson, Minister for Health.

Dr D. Russell-Weisz, Director General.

Ms A. Kelly, Deputy Director General.

Dr A. Robertson, Chief Health Officer.

Mr R. Anderson, Assistant Director General, Purchasing and System Performance.

Dr J. Williamson, Assistant Director General, Clinical Excellence.

Ms L. MacLeod, Chief Executive, East Metropolitan Health Service.

Mr P. Forden, Chief Executive, South Metropolitan Health Service.

Ms M. Vernon, Executive Services Director, WA Country Health Service.

Dr S. Bowen, Chief Executive, North Metropolitan Health Service.

Dr A. Anwar, Chief Executive, Child and Adolescent Health Service.

Mr C. Barnes, Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 3 June 2022. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system.

Ms A. SANDERSON: I will note that we have had to do some last minute swap-ins due to COVID infections, so we will do our best to answer questions.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. I give the call to the member for Vasse.

Ms L. METTAM: I will start by referring to budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the fourth point on page 311, which relates to a skilled workforce being a critical priority, recognising the sustained demand and its role and commitment in keeping the community safe. How many FTE staff is the department currently short?

Ms A. SANDERSON: It is incredibly difficult to give a global figure of how many staff vacancies there are at any one time because the department has 800 facilities across the state and employs 55 000 staff. There are clinical staff, non-clinical staff and support staff. That is an incredibly difficult question to answer in a single line. It is fair to say that certainly over the last two years since we closed the border to essentially to keep COVID out of the community, it has been challenging for recruitment, particularly internationally and when there were quarantine requirements. There have been a number of staff vacancies. Over the last two years, there has been a significant uplift in staff and recruitment. Certainly, the health service providers have recruited to 125 per cent of their allocation to ensure that we are filling those vacancies. In the two years to March 2022, the number of full-time equivalents increased by 15.6 per cent, which also includes an additional 512 FTE medical staff. They are full-time equivalents, so there are more bodies on the ground. There are 512 FTEs and 1 456 nursing staff. For 2022, WA Health is employing 1 411 nursing and midwifery graduates. I think that is the first time in a number of years that every single graduate has been offered a job.

There are ongoing efforts to recruit staff. It is certain that positions still need to be filled. Some of those positions are for junior doctors. Certainly, the WA Country Health Service faces a number of challenges with filling positions. It is not possible to say definitively how many staff vacancies there are at any one time, partly because locums and agency staff are filling those positions regularly to ensure continuity of service for those communities. Overall, since 2017, the number of health FTEs has grown by 18.7 per cent. The number of staff employed by the Department of Health has grown by nearly 20 per cent under this government. I will hand to the director general if he wants to give an overview of anything else that I have missed.

Dr D. Russell-Weisz: I think the minister summarised that very well. The only thing I will add is that we are obviously focusing on specific areas of shortage, especially in midwives and theatre nurses, and on regional and rural areas. There are a number of recruiting strategies. As the minister said, we gave health service providers permission to recruit up to 25 per cent above their normal FTE levels—this is going back quite a few months now—specifically in those areas of shortage. Recruiting in all those areas will be a focus for the next two years. It is not just us. I have talked to my colleagues in every other jurisdiction and they are feeling the same pressures. It is national and it is international. There are the same pressures everywhere. We are also trying to make it more attractive by recruiting as many nursing graduates as we can and encouraging training in the nursing and midwifery fields. Also, we are obviously training more junior doctors now at Curtin Medical School. We are trying to grow our own much more than rely on international graduates.

Ms A. SANDERSON: As an overall percentage, the FTE business-as-usual growth was 14 per cent over four years. Prior to the COVID pandemic, it was two per cent. There is a significant difference; we have uplifted the number of our staff. There is significant workforce planning going on, and part of the sustainable health review was about planning the workforce over the coming years. Delivering that has been prioritised, and we are working with the Mental Health Commission, as well as health services, on what the future workforce will look like. But there is a part for the federal government to play with international arrivals, because although we need a medium and long-term plan to grow our own, we also need an immediate uplift in staffing. Currently, it can take 18 months to emigrate from the United Kingdom, let alone from other areas in the world. The reality is that the National Health Service is providing a fast-tracked process, with a guarantee of citizenship at the end of it for the staff member and their family, and we need to be in a position to compete with that. That will be a priority discussion with the new government.

Ms L. METTAM: I note that the director general touched on the vacancies for midwives and theatre nurses. The minister has been very specific about the uplift in staff. What sorts of vacancies are we seeing? What level of vacancy is there, acknowledging that the federal government also has a role? Can the minister give us an indication of the level of shortage of actual staff across the health sector? Clearly, attracting and retaining more staff is a goal of WA Health. The minister has given the percentage of the uplift. Can she give us an idea of the percentage of the workforce shortage? If she could provide that by supplementary information, it would be welcome.

[9.10 am]

Ms A. SANDERSON: It is not possible to give the member that level of granular data. If she requires that granular data per hospital or per service, I suggest that she put that question on notice. We can give her the broad figures from the system manager and across health services. I can tell her that one of the areas of shortage is midwives. There is definitely a significant shortage, and every HSP is struggling with midwives. Every single midwife graduate has been offered a job. We are trying to encourage midwives, junior doctors and nursing staff to come back. I hope that over the next six to 12 months, as we potentially wind back some of our vaccination clinics, we can bring some of those staff back into hospitals and frontline services. That kind of question about granular data needs to be put on notice. I ask the member to be more specific about her question. There is any number of occupations across the health system and 800 sites.

Ms L. METTAM: Can the minister provide by way of supplementary information the number of vacancies for midwives across our health service providers?

Ms A. SANDERSON: No, I am not going to provide that by supplementary information. The member can put it on notice.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: As the shortage of midwives is a massive issue, particularly in regional WA, can the minister provide that breakdown? I know that women cannot have babies at Carnarvon hospital at the moment and they obviously have to go to Geraldton or Perth to have their baby, which is putting a huge amount of strain on those who have to go to Geraldton or Perth for two or three weeks. Obviously, the patient assisted travel scheme does not cover all that cost, and if they have other children, it can be quite an expensive and difficult period. Can the minister provide a breakdown of the regional hospitals that cannot provide that service at the moment? For example, women from the Gascoyne, Pilbara or Kimberley have to go to Geraldton or Perth to have their babies? Can the minister provide that breakdown so that people will have some ability to plan ahead if they know that they cannot have their child at the regional hospital in their town?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I will speak generally and then go to the director general, who may want to pass to the director of WACHS. Wherever possible, WACHS is committed to continuity of service. It has been challenging to provide

obstetric services in Carnarvon, and I am aware of the strain. Geraldton is in the same region, but it is very far away. I acknowledge the challenges that that brings. Geraldton has been doing an outstanding job of picking up the slack when St John of God Geraldton Hospital closed its maternity wards. It is doing an outstanding job and St John of God has also just reopened its maternity ward and maternity services, which is excellent.

In terms of specific information, I am happy for the member to put the question on notice. WACHS communicates regularly with the community and with patients and clients about where they will need to have their baby and the arrangements that they will need to make. It would certainly be a rare circumstance in which it was a surprise. That is certainly not my expectation. There is PATS support for women travelling to give birth, and to bring in someone to support them and accompany them. From September 2021, fewer than 30 per cent of women were provided with support, but that number has now increased to 55 per cent. We are helping to provide support for those people. I am happy to hand to the director general.

Dr D. Russell-Weisz: Obviously, there are questions about midwives and we want to re-establish those services in those communities where they have been provided before. In answer to the member's question about Carnarvon and Geraldton, it is safer to provide that service at the moment in Geraldton. We have not gone slack on any of our recruitment initiatives, and I think this is why we are concentrating on graduates. The target of 1 200 graduates for 2022 was exceeded, with a total of 1 411 graduates currently being offered employment, including 1 144 registered nurses and 78 midwives. The Belong campaign was announced by the government. We are trying to recruit midwives from overseas and we have obviously been trying to recruit midwives from over east once the border was opened. We recognise those specific shortages. Through the minister, I could see whether Ms Vernon could provide a comment about specific regional areas, or even Dr Williamson from a workforce perspective.

Ms M. Vernon: I would like to assure members that WACHS is working very hard to maintain all services. The member is correct about Carnarvon; we have not more recently maintained the birthing service, but all other services—antenatal and postnatal care—have been maintained by midwives. The challenge in Carnarvon in particular has been the medical obstetric workforce. I would also like to assure people that PATS is fully provided. In addition, for situations in which we have not been able to maintain an obstetric service, we have also made sure that 100 per cent of the travel and accommodation costs are met. We have also worked extensively with the mothers in advance, preparing them and working on their birth plan. That is the situation. The other sites have maintained their birthing service at this stage, but we constantly work to maintain those.

Ms A. SANDERSON: I am very passionate about birthing options, as most people know, particularly in regional areas. I think there is opportunity to look at how we provide better on-country birthing services and localised safe birthing services, including engaging Aboriginal medical services. There are a lot of trained midwives in our regional medical services who hand their women over to hospitals. I want to look at how we can better integrate those services so that there is more continuity of midwifery care for those women and that they feel culturally and medically safe. I can assure members that everything is done to ensure that women have the best birthing options possible.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: We asked a question in the estimates hearing last year about the proposal that was put forward by the Geraldton Universities Centre to train midwives, and it went nowhere. It could not get support from the Department of Health because it could not find placement positions in tertiary hospitals. Could the minister or one of her advisers provide an update on how that is progressing? I assume that that would be a priority if she is talking about growing our own and there is a university centre in the midwest that is looking to deliver those courses. Is that one of the options that is being pursued?

Dr D. Russell-Weisz: I do not know the detail of that. I will ask Melissa Vernon or James Williamson, who I think might be able to help the minister.

Dr J. Williamson: I think the member might be referring to the proposal from Charles Darwin University; is that right?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Yes, through the Geraldton Universities Centre auspicing the course.

[9.20 am]

Dr J. Williamson: Yes, that was looked into. One of the issues that we have is accommodating our students from universities based here in Western Australia. There are certain requirements about the number of births that each trainee midwife has to see. The birth rate in places like Geraldton is not sufficiently high to support a big expansion of the training workforce there. However, it is something that we are beginning to review. We are looking at the requirements for birthing experience during training. We do not want to dilute that, but there may be other ways in which we can deliver it. We are happy to look at those sorts of proposals on an ongoing basis.

Ms L. METTAM: I note the director general's comment about the specific shortages in the number of midwives and note that the minister is unable to give us an indication of the size of those shortages. Can she provide by way of supplementary information some sense of the level of vacancies for theatre nurses across our health service providers?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I am happy for the member to put that question on notice.

Ms L. METTAM: So the minister is unable to provide any indication of the vacancy rate for theatre nurses.

Ms A. SANDERSON: I am happy for the director general to perhaps give a global figure.

Dr D. Russell-Weisz: If the minister is happy, one of the chief executives—maybe Dr Bowen from the North Metropolitan Health Service or Ms MacLeod from the East Metropolitan Health Service—might be able to give the member an idea of what we are seeing at the moment with midwives and theatre nurses. They can give the member a picture of what they may be dealing with on a daily basis.

Dr S. Bowen: At the moment, as we have discussed, there is a vacancy rate for theatre nurses and midwives. I cannot give the member the exact vacancy rate, but all efforts have been undertaken for the last two years to recruit to those positions. Because we have reduced elective surgery previously, we certainly have had enough theatre nurses to manage demand. As we go forward, we will need a full establishment of those theatre nurses, but two years ago, we had enough theatre nurses to manage our demand and do our work. I think, going forward, as we recommence elective surgery in full, we should have enough theatre nurses, but we constantly recruit obviously, because the workforce cycles through due to age. Certainly, in Western Australia, and in north metro, there are many older theatre nurses who will look to retire, so we are constantly recruiting.

Ms L. METTAM: Can I confirm, then, that elective surgery is currently on hold because there are not enough theatre nurses?

Ms A. SANDERSON: No, that is not confirmation of that. Elective surgery is being slowly scaled up because of the furlough of staff. That is the big challenge. As of Monday, 3 500 staff across the health system were furloughed. That is the challenge with elective surgery. There is no ban or hold-off on elective surgery. We lifted that a number of weeks ago, unlike the other states and territories that have had months of bans on elective surgery. Hospitals are given the authority to flex up and down with those surgeries that they can do safely with the staff available. But there is a challenge at this point with staff vacancies, and that is why it is very difficult at this point to give granular figures. If the member wants granular figures for each area, she will need to put the question on notice, just like members do in the Legislative Council. We cannot provide that for her today. We can provide budget information for her today. The big challenge for staffing at the moment is the furlough of staff, and that is limiting our ability to fully scale up elective surgery. But there is no ban right now on elective surgery.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I understand the situation in which all those health staff are continuously out, but if the minister is aware of the global number of staff who are out every day, surely she is aware of the number of staff from each department or area who are out. Can she provide a breakdown of the number of midwives needed in regional areas? Surely she has a breakdown of that information, given that she keeps quoting the global figure. Surely she has the total number of health staff who are unable to go to work each day. I cannot see why that cannot be provided as supplementary information, because we are in budget estimates and our role is to ask those questions; our role is to try to get that information. Surely the minister has that answer without us having to wait another 45 days after putting it on notice. It is our duty as the opposition to ask for, and it is her duty as the minister to provide, that information so that the public of Western Australia is fully aware of where those gaps are. I am not saying that it is her fault, because we all know that there is an issue with COVID, but surely she can provide that detailed information. When I see all the advisers sitting there, they would all have a breakdown of the information for the areas that they are in charge of. Surely she can provide that, at least as supplementary information.

Ms A. SANDERSON: The staffing need in the health service is dynamic and the pandemic is putting enormous strain on it. Each health service provider will have a breakdown of their specific area and if the member wants that information, the best way to get it is to put the question on notice.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The minister has just said that each area has its own information and statistics on where the gaps are. Surely, in good faith, she can provide that as supplementary information to us as the opposition, with the limited numbers we have. This is our opportunity to question and to get that information so that the public of Western Australia is fully aware of those concerns and where the pressures are. The minister quoted a global figure and I think the people of Western Australia would understand and accept that. I do not think there is any reason why she cannot provide a breakdown through supplementary information rather than us having to wait for 45 days—I think it is 45 days—if we put the question on notice. Is that acceptable given that the government has the numbers in the house and it can do whatever it wants? Surely this is valuable information for the public of Western Australia.

The CHAIR: Member for North West Central, I think the minister has answered the question. Did you want to add anything, minister?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I am happy to give the member some assistance with writing the question.

Ms L. METTAM: In relation to the challenges of furloughing, has WA Health recommended that the seven-day isolation period be reduced to five days? Has there been any consideration of that or suggestion to stay home until symptoms pass?

Ms A. SANDERSON: For COVID-positive staff?

Ms L. METTAM: Yes, or for close contacts.

Ms A. SANDERSON: The critical worker policy for close contacts was changed a number of weeks ago, as the member probably remembers, so there is no requirement to isolate for seven days. People are required to wear a mask

and do a rapid antigen test every day, and that is in line with the national rules. Western Australia has come in line with the national rules. In terms of the seven-day requirement for COVID-positive people, we take advice from the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee on that. The advice at the moment is for seven days' quarantine for COVID-positive people, and we will continue to follow that advice. I am happy to throw to the DG, but hospitals are doing everything they can to bring people back. It is not the case that it is a deeply bureaucratic process. It is fair to say that it probably was. I know that a lot of work has been done by the chief executives to fast-track that process and there is now the assumption that people will return to work unless they are authorised not to because they are a close contact. I will let the DG comment.

[9.30 am]

Dr D. Russell-Weisz: We have also seen a shift in the number of people who are furloughed. A few weeks ago there were more close contacts than there were cases, but now there are more cases than there are close contacts. We have seen a really agile response from the health service providers. The chief executives all have their own processes in place to not just bring back people who are close contacts, but also encourage those people who are close contacts but are RAT negative and asymptomatic to come back. All hospitals will have to decide where these people go. There may be areas that will be able to bring people back, but the chief executives in other areas may be more circumspect about that—potentially oncology wards or whatever. They take advice from their infection prevention and control experts at the hospitals, but there has been a huge, concerted effort to say, “We need staff back. If you are a close contact and you are RAT negative and asymptomatic, you should come back.” We could ask any of the chief executives sitting here today to say how they actually do that. I think it has become more the norm now that they are bringing people back. We have to remember that some close contacts do not come back either because they are symptomatic, and they should stay at home if they are unwell, or because they are looking after COVID-positive children or caring for COVID-positive people. There is a huge effort to bring people back because we want people at work and we have demand on the system. It is more the norm now. That is all I would say.

Ms A. SANDERSON: The thing that keeps me awake at night at the moment is the furlough. We have a highly feminised workforce and they have significant caring responsibilities. The infection rate is occurring in family members and schoolchildren of parents, a lot of whom are staff in the health system. It is a very fine balance between bringing people back and ensuring not only a health-safe hospital, but also the safety of those patients.

Ms L. METTAM: Just to clarify, is the critical worker exemption utilised on a case-by-case basis across the —

Ms A. SANDERSON: I would not call it an exemption. People are coming back if they are asymptomatic, unless they are caring for children or loved ones who are sick. I think that is probably the best way to put it.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 312 of budget paper No 2. This whole section is relevant to the next line of questioning. When will all the promised 520 additional hospital beds be ready and online?

The CHAIR: Do you have a clause there, member for Vasse?

Ms L. METTAM: A clause?

The CHAIR: Are you pointing to paragraph 11?

Ms L. METTAM: It is on page 312 and it is about addressing the demand and capacity.

The CHAIR: Just generally?

Ms L. METTAM: Yes, across the health system.

Ms A. SANDERSON: Since the budget in September last year, 342 beds have become operational, and we expect to complete the 530 beds by October or November this year. Over the coming months, they will be brought online.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the minister confident that these beds will be delivered by October? I note that the parliamentary inquiry into St John Ambulance highlighted the fact that it believes that staffing challenges may be a barrier to delivering the additional 520 beds by October. How is that faring?

Ms A. SANDERSON: We have delivered 65 per cent of that commitment in six months under exceptionally difficult circumstances. I have to give credit to the infrastructure team at the department for really driving that. That has been an outstanding effort. In six months, we have delivered 65 per cent of those beds and I am as confident as I can be that we will deliver the remaining 35 per cent.

Ms L. METTAM: If possible, can I please get a breakdown of the beds provided under contract with private providers versus the public system? Further to that, from October, once all these beds are online, what will be the ongoing arrangement for the beds in the private health system?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I am happy for the director general to answer that.

Dr D. Russell-Weisz: If I could just clarify the question, is the member referring to the up to 20 contracted beds that we have at, for example, South Perth Hospital?

Ms L. METTAM: Yes.

Dr D. Russell-Weisz: The majority of these are our beds. The majority of the 530 beds are public beds. The chief executives have been recruiting to those beds once they are infrastructure ready, because the funding is behind them. There is a very small number within the private sector —

Ms L. METTAM: Is that the 42 beds?

Dr D. Russell-Weisz: At this stage, they form part of the 530 beds and they will continue. As an example, the North Metropolitan Health Service has used South Perth on and off through the years. We use up to about 20 beds there. It is not a brand new system. We used it about 10 or 15 years ago. They were not used until recently and we imagine that that will continue. The vast majority—I would say 95 per cent—would be in the public sector, such as the 30-bed pods that we are putting in at Osborne Park, Rockingham, Bentley and Bunbury. Once they are established, they will be there and they will be there for good.

Ms A. SANDERSON: I think this is all publicly available information. I think there are 26 beds at Hollywood Private Hospital and 20 beds at South Perth, with ongoing funding.

Ms L. METTAM: Will the arrangement with WA Health for those beds continue?

The CHAIR: Member for Vasse, could you direct your question through the minister to the director general.

Ms L. METTAM: I have seen two different figures of 32 and 42 private beds across the health system. What is the ongoing arrangement for those beds?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Just to be clear, they operate just like state beds. The physical beds are leased, but they are staffed by Department of Health staff. The patients like that very much. It is quite nice for them. I do not think there have been any complaints about people being in Hollywood Private Hospital. But the global figure is 26 and 20.

Ms L. METTAM: Over the past two years, has St John Ambulance asked to implement a business continuity plan that included any thresholds around ramping?

Ms A. SANDERSON: To my knowledge, no. The business continuity plan is not about hospital ramping; it is about its capacity to deliver an ambulance to an individual who needs an ambulance.

Ms L. METTAM: There is an understanding that if 25 per cent of the fleet is ramped, there is some undertaking between St John and the state government on ramping. Is that not the case?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I seek clarification from the member about where she got that understanding from.

The CHAIR: Can you clarify your question a bit further?

Ms L. METTAM: I will ask it in a different way. Why did the director general tell St John Ambulance to retract warnings sent out that it will not be ramping over the weekend and will drop patients at emergency departments if safe to do so?

[9.40 am]

The CHAIR: Member for Vasse, this is not related to the state budget, so I need you to change your question.

Ms L. METTAM: It relates to the capacity issues that we are seeing across the health system.

The CHAIR: Can you word it in a capacity-type format then?

Ms L. METTAM: Okay; I will ask it in a different way. Are there currently any arrangements between St John Ambulance and the state government that relate directly to ramping? I will ask a different question.

The CHAIR: Okay. Thank you, member for Vasse.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: Before we move on to another person in this capacity, might I ask a question?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I have a further question on this particular point.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: I am happy for the member to go first.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 312, under “Addressing Demand and Capacity Pressures on the Health System”. I will go back to my electorate, because it seems like the forgotten electorate in the Western Australian Parliament, particularly its health system. In places like Yalgoo and Kew, there is a constant gap when they do not have a nurse there, even prior to the COVID pandemic. There has always been a capacity problem, which puts lives at risk in those towns. I think there are six or eight single nursing posts left in WA—Coral Bay, Yalgoo, Kew, Sandstone and maybe the Kimberley. There are not many left in the state. Places like Coral Bay are under a huge amount of pressure from visitors and tourists. I think the number of nurses in Coral Bay has been increased to two during the school holidays, but there is still a huge amount of pressure. There are gaps in Yalgoo and Kew in particular, where it is a struggle to get volunteers for the ambulance service as it has an aging population. As I said, it is putting lives at risk. It has been well reported that people have to go to mine sites to get a COVID test rather than to the Yalgoo nursing post. Is there any funding to provide those towns with cover from at least one nurse, but, ideally, to ensure that that single nurse has the confidence of staying there and will not get burnout? Is the minister looking at putting two nurses in those towns to cover the load and to reduce burnout, and obviously for safety reasons as well?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The member has asked a good question. I make the point that it is not about funding. There is adequate funding to cover the staffing of these posts. It is attracting the staff that is the challenge. I know that WACHS does everything possible, and certainly the government does everything it can to support it in that. There are a number of initiatives. There is a working group with other HSPs that helps to provide staff to fill the gaps in those regional and country areas.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: That is the issue. They are not getting that relief. Sometimes they do not have anyone for two to three weeks, and the community does not even know that.

Ms A. SANDERSON: We cannot force people. People have to voluntarily put their hand up to go. Everything is done to encourage people, including financial incentives. There are nursing incentive payments that range from \$120 to \$250 a day. We are working through retention payments and incentives for staff. We cannot forcibly deploy people into communities, as much as that would be appealing sometimes. We do not operate like the Australian Defence Force. These individuals need to want to go, essentially. Staff who are there get sick and they are entitled to leave. We put enormous resources into providing nursing locums and agency staff to ensure clinical safety and the safety of those communities. In the instance of the gentleman who needed to have a PCR test, the clinical staff and WACHS worked very, very hard and closely with him to ensure that he could get a test at a local mine site by using all of their local availability. I give huge credit to the staff on the ground who did that to ensure that that gentleman could get a test. The point is that it is not about funding; it is about staff. The funding is there; it is about how we actually get staff on the ground. I am happy for the director general to comment.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: In Shark Bay, for example —

Ms A. SANDERSON: I have not finished.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: — it is now a five-week wait to see a doctor.

The CHAIR: Member for North West Central, the minister is still speaking.

Ms A. SANDERSON: Through the director general, if the member wants an answer?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Yes, please.

Ms M. Vernon: Thank you, through the minister.

The CHAIR: Yes, go ahead.

Ms M. Vernon: Thank you. I totally understand the position of small communities, and in particular Yalgoo. As the Minister has indicated, it is not about funding, it is about access to nursing and the workforce generally. One of the important things that we are starting to work on is to try to work with a local workforce, because sometimes the clinical demand does not require two nurses to be there. We have a got a shortage, but we do not necessarily —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: That is because everyone has to go to Geraldton.

The CHAIR: Member for North West Central.

Ms A. SANDERSON: Do not be rude.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am not being rude. I am just stating a fact.

Ms M. Vernon: Sometimes the demand does not require that. A range of services go to Yalgoo as well. What WACHS is doing is going to work with a number of the local organisations—the development commission, for example—to start to look at what blended models we can use and what will attract people to stay out there. It is not just about the money. We have really looked at that. Day in and day, out we are trying to maintain those services, as the minister has indicated, through the agency and others while we seek to look at and employ these other models.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Further to that question, so it is not about money —

The CHAIR: Sorry, Member for Northwest Central—further question; go ahead.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: So it is not about money to attract nurses to these areas. The police department went through not having single police based at stations for mental health reasons, burnout—the whole works—yet in the Department of Health we still have single nurses at nursing posts, which has the same problems. If it is not a money problem has the minister looked at, or will the minister look at putting at least paying for two nurses to provide that ability for two professionals in the community to wax and wane off each other so they are not working 24/7? They could then actually have some respite and be involved in the community, rather than be on call 24/7. That leads to the minister's response that it is very hard to staff because of those reasons. Will the department change its model and put two staff into these hard-to-staff areas for the reasons that I have just outlined if it is not about money?

The CHAIR: Minister.

Ms A. SANDERSON: I make the point that certainly under the new work health and safety legislation we will have to review those nursing posts. That will have to be part of that review, but I do not think the member listened to the answer. Melissa Vernon answered the question very well. It is not about money; it is about actually finding the people to go there.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Did the minister listen to my further question?

The CHAIR: Member for Mount Lawley, do you have any further questions on this one?

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: I do have a further question, chair, on addressing the issue of demand and capacity. Just on the \$11.4 million, minister, \$74.1 million is needed to expand the options for discharging patients who remain in hospital for longer than is clinically required. Can the minister tell me about the \$74 million required to address long-stay patients and how it will help, primarily, NDIS patients and aged-care patients?

The CHAIR: Minister.

[9.50 am]

Ms A. SANDERSON: Yes. I thank the member for the question. One of the challenges around freeing access to beds in hospitals is long-stay patients. Typically, they are and should be—not always, but typically—NDIS and residential aged-care patients. Aged-care patients who have fallen probably make up a large proportion of that. We have some of the lowest number of residential aged-care beds per capita. Because of that, the state government has purchased a number of transition-care beds. I have to credit the sector for working exceptionally well with us in purchasing those beds. At any given time, there are 100 to 130 patients in our hospitals, either in psychiatric wards or in general medical wards, who need to be elsewhere, and they do not want to be there either. At every hospital that I visit, I meet staff who have a patient on their wards, particularly in mental health wards, who the staff are generally arguing with the NDIS about how the hospital can essentially release those people from hospital and give them a better life. Psychosocial packages have been immensely challenging for the NDIS, I think, and a lot more work needs to be done on that. There are patients in high-acuity psychiatric units for eight, 10 or 12 months. That is not providing quality of life for those patients. A team is established within the department that can case manage each and every individual patient. The team supports them and brings in other agencies, when required, to help relieve some of that pressure. The team works with the family on the best circumstances for that patient to move them out. I meet people regularly who say their mum was in Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital for four months, which is not good for anyone. We really need to do a lot better here. With the change of federal government, we certainly will be seeking to potentially embed an NDIS representative in hospital service providers to help work through those NDIS packages and issues. We will be working with the new Minister for Health and Ageing around aged care and ensuring that we are upping our number of beds in Western Australia and providing better aged-care transition placements for those patients.

Ms L. METTAM: Right. I will have another go. Capacity issues in hospitals are impacting St John Ambulance and causing ramping, which prompted St John to publicly warn that it would not be ramping but dropping and leaving patients over the weekend. Is this actually permitted under the contract between WA Health and St John?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I will make a couple of points about St John. Is the member referring to the email that was sent on Friday that was then retracted by St John?

Ms L. METTAM: I am just referring to the practice and the notion that there might be thresholds attached to ramping, and the suggestion of the practice of St John leaving patients once there was a ramping threshold, and issues raised through the media in relation to this.

Ms A. SANDERSON: There are a number of contractual arrangements with St John that support St John and compensate St John for ramping and for the hours ramped. For fear of being told off by SSO and wading into commercial-in-confidence matters, I am going to defer to the DG, and he can answer.

Dr D. Russell-Weisz: Thanks, minister. Obviously, there is a contract in place and there are payments. There are contracts and demand payments in place, and there have been for a while, on the increasing demand for St John. I think St John has said quite publicly that this is not a funding issue. In relation to what the member referred to last week, St John has a business continuity plan itself. There is no doubt about that. What was sent out that day, I think, certainly confused some of the sites—we saw that it confused some of the sites—and it conflated a number of issues that were not actually related to ramping. What has been done in relation to that is we have made sure St John has a very, very clear business continuity plan. I cannot go through it today, but St John has its own business continuity plan with different levels. As the member would be aware, the state government has placed two senior police and two senior health staff to assist St John Ambulance. One of the things that we are looking at with St John is its business continuity plan. I do not want to precis the member wrongly, but there is no ability for St John to drop patients off without any approval from the hospital. It actually says in its business continuity plan that approval is required from the hospital to do such a thing. Naturally, St John has to have a business continuity plan that looks at the percentage of ambulances that are ramped and are busy in the community. St John has that in place, but it works very closely with the Department of Health and very closely on the ground with the health service providers. One of the things that we have done is put St John liaison managers in hospitals so that that work can consistently go on whether the demand is high or low.

Ms A. SANDERSON: I make the point that there are three levels of the business continuity plan.

Ms L. METTAM: Yes.

Ms A. SANDERSON: Business continuity plan 1 is to activate critical workers, then there is using outside agencies to support on the ground—Department of Fire and Emergency Services—and then there is level 3. I think the email was referring to level 3. The issue with that is that levels 1 and 2 had not been activated to their full extent, and they require approval from the State Health Incident Coordination Centre to activate each of those levels. That is why we have put people in place—some of our best logistics experts, both health and police—to support SHICC to activate each of those levels prior to having to do anything that would be as extreme as leaving patients, frankly.

Ms L. METTAM: Did the DG or the minister overrule a decision by St John to leave patients or to trigger the third stage of that continuity plan over the weekend?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The email was not approved by the CEO. It was not a decision of St John to do that.

Ms L. METTAM: Right.

Ms A. SANDERSON: And it was later retracted.

The CHAIR: Any further questions?

Ms L. METTAM: Further question. The minister referred to the efforts of DFES to fill in the gap this week and provide some support to St John and ambulance services. What sort of training and what sort of investment has WA Health had to undertake in that effort?

Ms A. SANDERSON: St John has received significant investment from the Western Australian government over the last two years to prepare for COVID, more than probably the health service providers in terms of an increase in funding. St John has had around a 16 per cent increase in funding for the last two years, which would include the demand payment and also the Electronic Transfer of Care payments, which is essentially compensation for hours ramped. There has been significant investment from the state government. Over four years, in fact, it has increased by 32 per cent. St John is a private organisation and is required to reinvest that into employing more paramedics, buying more ambulances and providing better services to the community for the contract that it has entered into with the state. How it does that is a matter for it. St John Ambulance is doing the DFES training, so exactly what the training involves is a question for St John. I understand that it is donning and doffing PPE and driving an ambulance as opposed to a fire truck, which is probably a little bit different, and ensuring that it has basic first-aid skills in supporting its paid paramedics on the ground. All the paramedics have advanced first-aid training and they all have emergency driving capability. It is familiarity with the vehicles.

Ms L. METTAM: Further question. Actually, this is a different question.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Member for Riverton, do you have a new question or a further question?

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I have a further question on this, chair.

The CHAIR: Go ahead.

Dr J. KRISHNAN: Thank you. Minister, this question is regarding the emergency access package. I refer to the \$251.7 million package for reducing pressure on emergency departments set out on page 312 of budget paper No 2. What are the 17 initiatives included in this package and how will these address the immediate and long-term causes of ambulance ramping?

A member interjected: Put it on notice.

[10.00 am]

Dr J. KRISHNAN: What for?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I thank the member for the question. Being a long-time clinician, I know that he has a keen interest in and passion for the health of our community. The emergency access package was developed in consultation with clinicians, hospitals, health service providers and people on the ground. It is a coherent package and a range of policies that will help manage some of the drivers of that demand. Ultimately, demand is increasing significantly. Category 2 presentations to emergency departments are up by around 22 per cent. Not only are more people coming in, but also people are sicker and their episodes of care are longer and more complex and require more specialities. Managing that episode of care is becoming harder within those hospitals and the patients are staying for longer. The emergency department waiting room nurses were an important recommendation of the inquiry into the circumstances around Aishwarya's death. That has been in place in a number of emergency departments already. They waited for this budget. It certainly has been in place in Perth Children's Hospital, which has entirely reconfigured its internal waiting room.

The emergency access response is around working through what capacities are available and how it aligns with the sustainable health review and the work that we need to do there. There is a business case for the state health operations centre, and I think there is an enormous opportunity to better coordinate all those services and responses that we need to implement around emergency access.

There is an \$18 million investment in real-time data, to understand exactly what the system is doing at any one time and to be able to coordinate that centrally, and \$59 million for 120 aged-care beds. We are also expanding the complex

needs coordination team, which I talked about in answer to a previous question, and we have the long-stay patient fund. We are also providing transitional accommodation funding and disability transitional care funding. How we manage paediatric eating disorders is also in development. We have a lot of kids who are staying in hospital for a long time and they need better support in their communities. Virtual emergency medicine has been operating at Fiona Stanley Hospital for quite some time, certainly for the last year. There have been various iterations of it across other hospitals that have been very successful, so we are working through expanding those initiatives. That enables patients to be triaged as they come in. Often, they are able to be admitted directly to a ward or to another form of care; therefore, avoiding the emergency department altogether. There are a number of other initiatives, but a range of complexities is driving these demands, including mental health. A significant number of mental health beds are coming online.

Ms L. METTAM: I have a further question on the ED nurses for the 15 hospitals. Which hospitals have they been placed in? When were they placed there? Where are the gaps in this commitment of \$55.8 million?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I will let the director general talk to that.

Dr D. Russell-Weisz: Through the minister, I can say that the emergency department nurses have been rolled out in the majority of our hospitals. There may be one or two hospitals where they are not present the whole time, but we started with Perth Children's Hospital, obviously. Emergency department nurses as well as the core Residential Care Line nurses have been rolled out in all metro and regional hospitals. They are in the majority of hospitals. There may be times when we have acute staff shortages when they are not there, but they are present in the majority of hospitals right around the metro and outer metropolitan areas.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the minister able to state which hospitals are yet to fulfil this commitment?

Ms A. SANDERSON: It depends on any day-to-day basis. I think the major metropolitan hospitals have them. I cannot tell the member exactly, but we can provide that information.

Ms L. METTAM: Further question.

The CHAIR: Did you want that information, member for Vasse?

Ms L. METTAM: Yes, please.

The CHAIR: To be right. Could you confirm exactly what you are after, member for Vasse?

Ms L. METTAM: We would like to know which hospitals do not currently have the 24/7 presence of ED waiting room nurses, as committed to as part of the \$55.8 million commitment.

Ms A. SANDERSON: I make the point that the \$55 million commitment is in this budget, which has not been passed yet by Parliament. The nurses that are in place now are being absorbed by the current health budget. The commitment will start when the budget is in place.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is it a financial thing?

Ms A. SANDERSON: No. That is not what I said. Those nurses are being absorbed by the current budget.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: So the minister is waiting on finances for this budget to be able to fulfil her commitment.

Ms A. SANDERSON: Do not verbal me, member.

The CHAIR: Sorry, but I think member for Vasse was asking the question to the minister.

Ms A. SANDERSON: Yes. We are happy to provide that information, understanding that that information is based on the current budget. The commitment will start when this budget is released to the HSPs and they employ and recruit fully into those positions.

Ms L. METTAM: Of those ED waiting room nurses that have been committed—appreciating that the funding is yet to be delivered because of the budget process—can the minister confirm whether those nurses are 24/7 waiting room nurses, and that they will not be called away to undertake other roles but are committed to those emergency departments 24/7?

Ms A. SANDERSON: That is the commitment.

The CHAIR: Can I just confirm before we go any further that B1 is to state which hospitals do not have 24/7 emergency department nurses. Is that correct?

Ms L. METTAM: Correct.

Ms A. SANDERSON: I am going to assist the member. That is as of today's date.

The CHAIR: As of today's date.

Ms A. SANDERSON: It changes from day to day, depending on operational needs.

The CHAIR: As of whatever the date is today—24 May. Any further questions to that?

[*Supplementary Information No B1.*]

The CHAIR: Any further questions to that?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I have a further question. It is not on that topic, but it is on the same page. I refer to “Addressing Demand and Capacity Pressures on the Health System” on page 312. We spoke before about Carnarvon hospital, as an example of not having an adequate amount of midwives to carry out the function of the hospital and having to send people away to give birth in Geraldton or Perth. Is it hard to staff a lot of regional towns, particularly Carnarvon or, say, Kununurra, because of the crime associated with the town and nurses not feeling safe? Has the department lost quite a few nurses because of the crime situation, particularly in Carnarvon, and is it finding it hard to attract and retain staff because of the crime situation? Also, has that meant the department has had to up the security to give some comfort to the remaining nurses who are in town?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The security and safety of our staff is an absolute priority. There are any number of reasons that those posts and those positions are hard to staff, including people's individual circumstances. We have in this budget put \$5 million towards immediate upgrades, including security upgrades, for staff accommodation, which is an important factor in their security and safety.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Does that apply particularly to Carnarvon? I will hone in on Carnarvon, but there are other regional areas, like the Kimberley, where crime is out of control in a lot of these regional communities. Is crime a factor in losing nurses in towns like Carnarvon and in attracting nurses to towns like Carnarvon because nurses do not feel safe?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Challenging social issues are a factor in attracting and retaining any number of public service staff.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Minister, the issue of crime is plaguing the state's ability to staff our health systems in regional WA. I see that the minister's advisers are all nodding at me. Can the minister confirm that one of the major issues of not being able to attract and retain staff in a town like Carnarvon is the escalating crime situation, and has the minister increased the amount of money towards making sure that those remaining staff feel safe through increased security?

[10.10 am]

Ms A. SANDERSON: Chair, this budget provides \$5 million for immediate upgrades to accommodation, including security upgrades. There are any number of factors involved in attracting —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is one of those factors crime?

The CHAIR: The minister is answering the question.

Ms A. SANDERSON: — and retaining staff, including challenging social circumstances.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is that a yes?

If crime is a major problem —

Ms A. SANDERSON: I will not be verbally by the member.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: — in attracting and retaining staff in regional Western Australia?

The CHAIR: I think the minister has answered. Moving on. Member for Vasse, do you have a further question to this or a new question?

Ms L. METTAM: I have a new question.

I refer to the \$64 million commitment for the line item “Joondalup Health Campus Development Stage 2” on page 326 of volume 1 of budget paper No 2. What works will be completed as part of stage 2 of the Joondalup Health Campus? Is a medi-hotel part of this stage?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Joondalup Health Campus stage 2 is a commitment from the commonwealth and state governments. It includes a 102-bed mental health unit; 30 additional beds, 25 beds to meet future demand, and 47 replacement beds; 12 new emergency department beds comprising 10 bays and two isolation rooms; one specialised behavioural assessment urgent care clinic located within the expanded ED; refurbishments to the emergency assessment unit located within the expanded ED; a new 112-bed public ward block; a 30-bed medical surgery; a 16-bed cardiac care unit, with 16 additional and 10 relocated beds, of which 16 shelled beds will also meet future demand; a new theatre; a new cardiac catheterisation lab and relocation of existing cath lab; refurbished discharge lounge; increased parking bays for staff and public; and upgraded staff facilities and upgraded associated services.

The member asked specifically about the medi-hotel. When looking at the drivers of demand at Joondalup Health Campus, we could see there were a range of drivers and it was determined that alternative models needed to be explored for Joondalup to manage those drivers, including more mental health beds. The addition of 102 mental health beds is a far greater contribution to the drivers and the community in the northern suburbs. They are more expensive to staff and more expensive to run, but they will be better overall for the community. We need to be agile in our response to the drivers of demand there. This will be a game changer in the northern suburbs; 102 beds is an extraordinary number.

Ms L. METTAM: When will the mental health beds be operational? I know that the former Minister for Health in last year's estimates said 110 mental health beds were part of the investment. When will the mental health unit—and the minister is stating 102 mental health beds—be operational?

Ms A. SANDERSON: We expect them to be fully operational by February 2026.

The CHAIR: Member for Churchlands, is that a further question or a new question?

Ms C.M. TONKIN: It is a further question.

The CHAIR: Go ahead.

Ms C.M. TONKIN: Thanks. I refer to the asset investment program on page 326. Can the minister advise how the record investment in Geraldton Health Campus and the redevelopment of the Bunbury hospital will ensure regional patients have access to quality care?

The CHAIR: Sorry, member for Churchlands, but that is a new question. I will just park that. The member for Vasse is on Joondalup. Go ahead, member for Vasse.

Ms L. METTAM: Is the operating theatre just one operating theatre? What was the thinking around that? I understand the original commitment was for eight theatres, and now it is just one.

Ms A. SANDERSON: I think the original requested scope from Ramsay Health Care was for eight. I am not sure the original commitment was eight.

Ms L. METTAM: Minister Cook made the announcement for eight.

Ms A. SANDERSON: I will make a comment before I go to the DG. He might want to throw to Shirley—Dr Bowen. The beds will need to come online over a period of time, particularly the mental health beds. Managing a large cohort of mental health patients requires careful management. It is going to be a mix of mental health patients, so there will be older adults and young people's beds. The security and staffing of all of those will need to be managed. Those beds will come online over time; we will not just open them all. There will not be 102 beds open overnight just like that, so we have to make sure that the unit is functioning and staffed appropriately. Director General.

Dr D. Russell-Weisz: Thank you. I might pass to Dr Bowen in a minute, through the minister. There really has been no change to scope of the redevelopment in the last year. The Joondalup Health Campus redevelopment has been planned for some time and has been under construction—I am going to think—over the last 18 months, with the carpark starting first, and then, as the minister has mentioned, the whole suite of new services or expanded services. Obviously, the Joondalup Health Campus also has a private hospital and the theatres lock onto the public hospital. There has not been any overt decision to change the scope in the last 12 months.

The CHAIR: Did you want Dr Bowen —

Ms L. METTAM: Sorry. Yes.

Ms A. SANDERSON: Dr Bowen.

Dr S. Bowen: I can confirm that there has been no change in the scope of the work that is being done currently at Joondalup. It is progressing very well. As the minister has said, the very latest time we would expect those beds to come online would be February 2026, although it is thought that the mental health beds in particular would come on before that, because they are in an earlier stage of the development and progressing extremely well. There are beds in the emergency department that are for mental health patients in particular. It is a quieter environment. They are all complete and operational now.

Ms A. SANDERSON: Through the chair, the announcement from the former minister in August 2021 states “a new theatre”, so I am not sure where the member has got eight theatres from.

Ms L. METTAM: I am referring to the 2017 commitment.

Dr S. Bowen: And there is only one additional theatre.

Ms L. METTAM: Yes.

Ms C.M. TONKIN: I go back to my question regarding the asset investment program table on page 326. Can the minister advise how the record investment in Geraldton Health Campus and the redevelopment of Bunbury hospital will ensure regional patients have access to quality care?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Good question.

Ms A. SANDERSON: Thanks for the question, member for Churchlands. The Department of Health is embarking on, I think, possibly the biggest asset investment program in its history in this short time, certainly as part of our COVID recovery program, to ensure a pipeline of work for both the regions and the metropolitan area. But there are around 800 sites across Western Australia and some of them are in need of redevelopment. Geraldton hospital is one of those. The biggest redevelopment since the Gallop government will occur immediately with an uplift of

\$49.4 million. There was a significant cost increase due to labour and construction cost increases over the last 12 months in particular. But, importantly, it will provide state-of-the-art facilities for the whole midwest community who currently have to travel to Perth if they have acute mental health issues. There will be a 12-bed short-stay mental health unit, which will complement the step-up, step-down unit that is already operating in Geraldton and was opened recently by this government. There is also an expanded emergency department a new intensive care unit and improved amenities. The intensive care unit will be the second intensive care unit in the regions, and will, importantly, provide training pathways and opportunities for staff locally to stay in place to work in intensive care. A number of them have expressed a desire to do that.

This is part of our election commitment, as is the Bunbury redevelopment, which is a \$200 million investment that will contemporise Bunbury regional hospital, which has had quite a shift from a local country hospital to what is now a regional health campus, expanding the general medical, surgical, maternity inpatient units and the acute psychiatric intensive care and high-dependency unit. We are also just about to open around 200 parking bays. When you become the Minister for Health, you become the minister for parking, I have discovered! I think that if we fixed all the hospital and health service parking issues, we could fix what people perceive as many of the issues in the health service. We are expanding the birthing unit, ambulatory services and community mental health services. This is really significant for those local communities and we are excited to be part of that.

[10.20 am]

Mr R.S. LOVE: I note the expenditures that the minister just pointed out in answer to the question from the member for Churchlands. I wonder whether the minister has any further progress to report on the development of oncology services in Geraldton. The minister was asked about this in the last session of Parliament. I am wondering whether any reconsideration has been given to where that funding has not been provided as part of this project.

Ms A. SANDERSON: The federal election has passed, so I think we know that there has been a change of government federally. I make the point, as I did when I previously answered this question, that the commitment made by the federal member was half a commitment to that community. The cost of providing the oncology services is around \$18 million to \$20 million. The commitment from the member was for \$10 million and she has summarily failed to provide the remainder of that commitment, despite requests from my predecessor in this role, who had written to her and requested that she provide the remainder.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: We have had a change of federal government, so the state government should be able to get the rest of the money.

The CHAIR: The minister is answering, member for North West Central.

Ms A. SANDERSON: This government is not making half a commitment to Geraldton. This government is providing the entirety of the funding for the redevelopment for Geraldton to the tune of \$122—\$122 million; I wish it cost \$120 and so does the Treasurer! As I have said previously, we are not ruling it out as part of stage 2, because the government and I understand the need for localised oncology services. There is no question about that. It is just a shame that Melissa Price does not.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Given the result of last Saturday, will the minister undertake to go to her federal colleagues and seek further funding to ensure the oncology unit is developed? It is not the member for Durack who provided that funding; it was the federal government. Will the minister go to the federal government now and ask the new Minister of Health whether there will be further funding for oncology services at Geraldton included in this development?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I am more than happy to do that because I understand the value of oncology services locally, which is why we have provided them in Albany. We will be providing one of the most outstanding oncology regional centres. I note that in the eight and a half years that members opposite were in government, they did not provide it; nor did they provide a penny towards the Geraldton Health Campus redevelopment. The member's pleas to assist his federal colleagues come too late, because we have seen the result of the election. I know that we now have a federal government that, despite an appalling budget situation, actually understands the value of public health care and regional public health care. I feel enormous relief for the entire country, but particularly for the Western Australian health system, that we now at least have a federal government that is not going to make half a commitment but will support the states in delivering public health.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Is the minister going to go to the federal government?

The CHAIR: Are there further questions?

Mr R.S. LOVE: I have a new question. Turning to another situation in the midwest in terms of the provision of health assets, I refer to page 327 and the item "Primary Health Centres Demonstration Program". There is funding of \$7.789 million this year and \$508 000 next year. This is funding for two projects, as I understand it. One is in Dongara, which has already commenced, and the other is in the town of Mullewa. Mullewa was announced back in 2016. The Premier indicated in a letter last year that there had been a change of scope in the Mullewa project—an additional scope had been added—yet the amount of money has not changed; it is still at the same level as it was in last year's budget, despite the fact that the minister has just made the point that in Geraldton, cost escalations

have meant that the government had to fund another significant amount of money to get that project up and running. What is the delivery time line for the Mullewa community hospital? Is that amount of money going to be revised because of the acknowledged cost uplifts in the last year or two and the change of scope as outlined by the Premier?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The government is committed to delivering all of its election commitments. There have been cost escalations and we are working through the processes of government to manage those cost escalations. Mullewa will be part of future discussions around providing the funding to manage those cost escalations, and I will continue to work with the Treasurer and the Expenditure Review Committee on how we do that.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Despite the fact that the money for the Mullewa project is in the budget, albeit it is not enough, there is no clear indication that that project will get underway this year.

Ms A. SANDERSON: That is not necessarily the case. The project can commence in a range of forms, but, as I have said, we have the biggest asset investment program in the history of the state for the Department of Health. We are committed to delivering our election promises. But this government goes through a proper budgeting process, unlike the previous government. We have a proper budgeting process—all requests for funding have to go through the ERC process and cabinet. We have already done that successfully with a range of health projects that are subject to the asset investment program, and Geraldton is a great example of that. I will continue to advocate for what we need to deliver that project.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I point out to the minister that this project has been funded and in the budget since 2016. In the entire time of this government, there has been no progress on the redevelopment of Mullewa Hospital, except for a lot of different plans. A lot of professional planners have made a lot of money out of developing plans, but nobody has put one brick on the ground in Mullewa. When is the government going to start the program?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The fact that it is in the budget shows our commitment to delivering the project, and the fact that we are prepared to broaden the scope —

Mr R.S. LOVE: It has been in the budget for five years.

Ms A. SANDERSON: — shows our commitment to delivering the project. I will work through the proper processes of government to ensure that we are able to do that.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 326 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. Under the asset investment program, I refer to the new women's and babies' hospital and an \$8.3 million commitment towards the business case. I note that there is nothing in the forward estimates. When is construction expected to begin on this important project?

[10.30 am]

Ms S. SANDERSON: This is an incredibly important project and one for which I am very excited to be the minister. We are in the process of developing this project. There is \$10.2 million approved in this budget for the business case, drawn down from the \$1.8 billion that was approved in the previous budget towards that project. We are in the process of doing the project definition plan, which will determine the funding and time frames required to achieve the model. We need that PDP to be completed before we can provide the exact time frame. This is a priority. We understand that King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women has significantly ageing infrastructure. This is a very exciting prospect for Western Australia. I want to ensure that women are front and centre of the development of this project. It is important that we work with clinicians and consult with them, but, ultimately, it will be a women's hospital for birthing, and I want to see women and midwives front and centre of how we develop that hospital.

Ms L. METTAM: When does the minister anticipate construction will begin? Is it anticipated that construction will begin this year or will it be 2026, like the Joondalup mental health beds? When is construction anticipated to begin?

Ms S. SANDERSON: The business case will be approved by the end of the year and we expect forward works to be starting towards the end of next year, but we have to go through the business case process—the proper processes of government.

Ms L. METTAM: Is it anticipated that the number of beds for the women's and babies' hospital will be expanded?

Ms S. SANDERSON: Director general.

Dr D. Russell-Weisz: We expect an expansion of beds in the new hospital. We are going through the business case at the same time as the PDP; it is happening at the same time. That basically will fast-track it. The clinical modelling is being done for the number of beds. We think there is going to be an expansion of the number of beds, not only in the main hospital but also in terms of the neonatal beds. The number of beds that will be added to the hospital has not quite been determined. There is also a lot of work going on with planning on the site. The government has made the decision to put the site to the north of G Block. Obviously, we want to make the best use of the site in relation to patients from the new women's hospital using services that are currently at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital. But the clinical modelling will be part of the business case and it is expected there will be more beds.

Ms S. SANDERSON: The final determination is yet to be made but there will be more beds. The early indication is that it will represent an increase of around 28 neonatal and 60 inpatient beds.

Ms L. METTAM: I have read reports that the family birth centre, or something like the family birth centre, may not be part of the scope of this project in the initial stages. Can the minister provide some clarification around that?

Ms S. SANDERSON: There are a range of services in the King Edward Memorial Hospital campus. Whether there is physically room, whether it is clinically appropriate, and whether that is what women want to move to the QEII site as a family birthing centre are all being worked through. There are potentially alternative sites that would provide the option for obstetric care where needed on site with the family birth centre. No decision has been made around the family birth centre going there. I will give the member a vibe of how I feel. I am not sure that it should be in a tertiary health campus because that is not why people choose a family birth centre; they want a different kind of birth. But it will be close to obstetric services should they need them.

Ms L. METTAM: I have two sets of questions relating to a similar topic. I refer to page 329 and the item “Paediatric Eating Disorders Unit at Perth Children’s Hospital”, for which \$200 000 is committed in this year’s budget. An election commitment in 2021 was for \$31 million for a statewide eating disorder specialist service. Where are the plans for this currently at and what is this \$200 000 committed to?

Ms S. SANDERSON: The line item in this budget is around the paediatric eating disorders unit. The child and adolescent mental health service is undertaking a reform program that was basically initiated after the Chief Psychiatrist’s review of the care and treatment of Kate Savage and CAMHS eating disorder service model. That highlighted the need for an expansion of that service. There has been a significant increase. Funding has been approved to support the business case for CAMHS to provide an inpatient mental health–led eating disorder unit, as well as for some minor infrastructure modifications to the service. We are experiencing a significant increase in eating disorder referrals. Work is going on on the model of care provided for paediatric patients. The \$31 million was for people aged 16 and over—I am looking at the Mental Health Commissioner. That is not a line item of this budget; that is under the Mental Health Commission, which we will deal with later and I can then go into more detail around how that is being rolled out. We also secured additional funding from the federal government in the last national mental health agreement to expand that. That commitment is now almost \$40 million. We can deal with that under the Mental Health Commission if the member likes. I might ask Dr Anwar to expand on the paediatric services.

Dr A. Anwar: Post-COVID, we have seen a very acute and steep rise in the number of presentations of children with eating disorders. They fall across a spectrum of illness. Those who need acute nutritional supplementation and nutritional replacement fall into two categories. The first cohort can be discharged and often looked after in the day program or through an outpatient service, but there is a cohort of children who require longer inpatient bed care. This money will help provide some minor modifications on the medical ward so that children can have access to both acute mental health intervention and support from the psychiatry team. It will also allow us to develop a business case for a future larger inpatient bed base that is bespoke and meets the change in pattern of disease presentation going forward. The total sum provided by government is in the quantum of \$750 000—\$500 000 for developing a business case, and \$200 000 for modifications to the ward to allow us to better meet the needs of this cohort of children.

Ms A. SANDERSON: I make the point that the \$500 000 is being absorbed by the existing budget.

Dr A. Anwar: Yes.

Ms A. SANDERSON: This is just an extra appropriation to make up that amount.

Ms L. METTAM: The minister spoke about the spike in presentations, which I understand is also COVID-related. What was demand like in 2021 for eating disorder referrals or admissions at Perth Children’s Hospital?

[10.40 am]

Dr A. Anwar: I apologise; I do not have the absolute numbers here, but I can provide those. The number of inpatient beds taken up by children requiring nutritional supplementation prior to COVID ranged somewhere between eight and 10 inpatient beds. Post-COVID, that number rose to well over 20 and close to 30 inpatients. I can provide those numbers as a percentage rise, but I do not have it on me at this point in time.

Ms A. SANDERSON: Chair, I have got that.

The CHAIR: Okay. Minister?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Between 2019 and 2020, there was a 48 per cent increase in referrals to Perth Children’s Hospital and it experienced a 42 per cent increase in bed days for patients with an eating disorder. It is significant.

Ms L. METTAM: This may be something that we deal with under the division on the Mental Health Commission, but I note that the federal government had committed to a residential facility for eating disorders in 2019. Have any plans for such a facility progressed?

Ms A. SANDERSON: That was an election commitment of the member for Canning and the federal Liberal government with no consultation with the state government, which actually delivers these services. It was determined that a residential facility is not appropriate in that area. We are working through the state delivery of care and support

for people with eating disorders, and we have certainly achieved an increase in funding from the federal government to provide that. When we work through the Mental Health Commission, we can outline the expansion of eating disorder services in south metro, east metro and north metro.

Ms L. METTAM: This question might get bumped along to the Mental Health Commission division as well, but with reference to page 95 of budget paper No 3 and the \$750 000 for interim minor works to develop the business case for the paediatric eating disorder unit at Perth Children's Hospital, can the minister confirm when she anticipates that project will be completed and whether this is part of the \$31 million commitment?

Ms A. SANDERSON: It is separate from the \$31 million commitment. I will hand it to Dr Anwar behind me.

Dr A. Anwar: That is going to be in part subject to working with the infants, children and adolescents task force. We are going to be working with the implementation team in the Mental Health Commission to re-explore the model of care and therefore dovetail its business case into that.

Mr V. CATANIA: I am going to try and package three questions into one. I refer to pages 326 and 327 and the works in progress. We all hear about bricks and mortar. We have ageing hospitals like the Meekatharra Hospital, which I think it was built in 1959, Laverton Hospital and Tom Price Hospital, I have had a look at the budget; like I said, I am just trying to catch all three in the one question. Can the minister provide detail of where the Meekatharra, Laverton, and Tom Price hospitals are at? Can the minister provide information on when these hospitals will be completed and be able to take in patients and be operational? Having new facilities will be critical for attracting and retaining staff. The Meekatharra Hospital has a lean; someone in a wheelchair can roll from one end of the hospital to the other. That is the state of disrepair of that hospital. These three hospitals had commitments from a previous government, but we are now five years on and it will perhaps take another two or three years, so we may be looking at 10 years before we actually see patients being processed through the Meekatharra Hospital, Laverton Hospital and Tom Price Hospital. Can the minister provide an update?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The government is certainly honouring its election commitment on Meekatharra and has allocated \$48.9 million in capital funding. The purpose is to reinvigorate it as a central health service hub for the Murchison district. It will certainly address ageing infrastructure, as the member has outlined, at the existing hospital. It will consolidate acute care, emergency services, the Royal Flying Doctor Service, and residential aged care, with population health, mental health and community aged care and other primary care services in one facility. The approved business case is for a consolidated new built health service with acute care and other primary care services. The architects have been awarded the contract for the provision of architectural services, and the project definition planning will start this month. Once that is done, we will have a time frame for completion of Meekatharra. The member also asked about Laverton and Tom Price. Tom Price is subject to ongoing work with the WA Country Health Service. We are working with our partners on delivering that. There is currently \$23.5 million allocated for the new Laverton project, and the commonwealth has also contributed to that. It will provide two flexible overnight beds, one resuscitation bay, acute treatment rooms, two community-supported home dialysis bays, and ambulatory care. It is true that market conditions are challenging at the moment in delivering those, and there is currently a slight shortfall in funding for Laverton.

Mr V. CATANIA: Sorry, a slight shortfall?

Ms A. SANDERSON: There is currently a slight shortfall in funding based on current market conditions, and we will go through the proper processes.

Mr V. CATANIA: Is that for Laverton?

Ms A. SANDERSON: For Laverton. We will go through the proper processes of government to make up that shortfall.

Mr V. CATANIA: Is there no completion date as yet for the Meekatharra, Laverton and Tom Price hospital projects simply because they have to go through that process or further down the line —

Ms A. SANDERSON: Certainly, with Meekatharra, we are required to complete the business case and project definition plan, and that will provide the time frame. That needs to be endorsed by government. The other two are subject to further funding being required to ensure the delivery of the projects, and we will work through the processes of government to do that.

Mr V. CATANIA: How short is the government on the funding for Laverton Hospital? There is \$23 million for the total project in the budget.

Ms A. SANDERSON: It is \$23.5 million.

Mr V. CATANIA: How short is it?

Ms A. SANDERSON: We are working through that. It is not a huge amount, but we are working through the processes in government.

The CHAIR: We will break for 10 minutes and come back at 11.00 am.

Meeting suspended from 10.47 to 11.00 am

[Ms A.E. Kent took the chair.]

The CHAIR: Good morning. I remind members that we are still on division 21 until 12 noon. I give the call to the member for Vasse.

Ms L. METTAM: I appreciate the time, and we would like to move to the Mental Health Commission shortly. I refer to page 314 of budget paper No 2, volume 1 and the funding attached to the future health research and innovation fund under point 21. It states that the future health research and innovation fund received \$36.4 million this financial year, and it will drop to \$25.8 million in 2024–25. Will the fund be topped up or will projects just miss out?

Ms A. SANDERSON: As this is not in my portfolio, but it is in the budget paper, I will ask the director general to answer.

Dr D. Russell-Weisz: Just to recap, the future health research and innovation fund, also known as the FHRI fund, is a landmark initiative of the WA state government. The current estimate from 2021 through to 2023 is \$80 million in support of health and medical research. More than \$55 million has been awarded to approximately 350 recipients since its establishment in mid-2020. The future health research and innovation fund has been getting an appropriation each year. That has been going out with advice and determination from now the Minister for Medical Research, but via the Future Health Research and Innovation Fund Advisory Council.

In relation to the money in the budget, the WA future health research and innovation fund receives a certain percentage, and the forward estimates are based on the percentage of interest. In 2022–23, \$32.3 million in forecast interest earnings is expected to be paid into the account, with \$36.4 million forecast to be drawn to fund a range of medical health research and innovation programs. The out years currently do show a decline of forecast expenditure due to lower payments from the future health research and innovation fund from \$36.4 million to \$29.9 million. That is purely based on the current forecast of future investment returns, which are purely a point in time only. It depends on the investment returns; they are likely to be slightly higher now than when that was forecast. There is so much more money going into the future health research and innovation fund that we will work with Treasury on those funds. At this stage, we have not had advice that they will be topped up but we expect the interest to increase.

Ms L. METTAM: I have a further question, but it has been answered in part. When the future health research and innovation fund was originally committed to or announced, there was anticipation across the sector that it would effectively be a \$40 million commitment to those funds. To what extent are those funds vulnerable to the level of interest payment? What assurance can the minister provide that, going forward, there will be a commitment of effectively \$40 million in that program?

Ms A. SANDERSON: It is only indicative. Outside of the next financial year, it is really very much indicative; it is not set in stone. Treasury is currently reviewing the government's framework around the fund, including investment options and how it could be potentially increased.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I turn to page 331 and the total cost of services. I am asking it here because I have no idea where else to find the money I am looking for, which is for the service contracts for Silver Chain to operate certain health centres, such as Lancelin and Leeman in my electorate and in others. I was wondering whether the minister could provide detail around both the cost of the Silver Chain service and the service expectation from the contracts that Silver Chain has within those medical centres. I am quite happy to take it as supplementary information.

Ms A. SANDERSON: A review is being undertaken between the department, Silver Chain and the relevant health service providers. They are working to support reform around those community-based services. The approved estimated service agreement for last year, 2021–22, was \$92 million, including GST. Depending on the reform outcomes, the service agreement may need to be extended past 2023 to ensure operational sustainability. Is the member asking specifically about the country contracts and not the metropolitan contracts, or both?

Mr R.S. LOVE: I was more interested in where the local health centres are actually staffed or run under contract.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Can the minister provide a breakdown of both?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The information I just provided the member is for metropolitan services. Through the director general, I will hand over to Ms Vernon.

Ms M. Vernon: I would like to outline what we are doing with the Silver Chain contracts. We are currently working with Silver Chain, particularly around its remote area nursing posts. For country in particular, it has contracts around the delivery of remote nursing services. The member will be well aware of some of those in Shark Bay and Lancelin, and some are in the inner wheatbelt. We are working with Silver Chain around the service model, what is required into the future, and how it would like to work with us collaboratively around maintaining those nursing posts in particular. Again, it has the same challenges as we have around workforce and the delivery of a number of services into those very small communities in the case of some of the wheatbelt ones.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: In terms of Silver Chain, I brought up about the single nursing post and the issues of Shark Bay. We keep hearing about small populations or small towns, but in the case of Denham and Shark Bay, there is often triple or quadruple the resident population there. Traffic from people who go through Shark Bay could be 200 000 or

300 000, which puts a huge amount of pressure on those nursing posts, particularly in Denham, and the Silver Chain. We often hear that these towns are small and that their population is very small, but they are actually not. The level of services that needs to be provided by the Silver Chain to visitors and tourists at the Coral Bay nursing post or in Exmouth—these tourism hotspots—is probably greater than a larger town has to provide.

I just want to make sure that the language is correct. Because it is a small town does not mean that it does not have people presenting to the Silver Chain and not many issues.

[11.10 am]

The CHAIR: Member for North West Central, that is not a question, really. You are making a statement.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is the minister able to change the thinking of the health department and say that there is a large population that visits places like Denham, and that the Silver Chain provides a huge amount of services to the travelling public?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I challenge the member's assumption that the department does not think deeply about these communities.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I did not say that.

Ms A. SANDERSON: I absolutely challenge that.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I did not say that.

Ms A. SANDERSON: And that it does not think about the needs and requirements of the communities. That is completely wrong and it is rude, frankly. It is rude.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Minister, I just said that everyone says it is a small town, so therefore there are not enough people to have another nurse there.

Ms A. SANDERSON: Many of the staff who manage these sites also live locally or have come from regional towns, so it is wrong to make the assumption that the department does not think about these towns and the reality that they face as well.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: No-one is saying that.

Ms A. SANDERSON: That is exactly what the member said.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: My question relates to overall health expenditure on page 309 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. With respect to overall expenditure in the health system, how does this budget compare to when the McGowan government came into office in 2017, and what does it mean for investment over the forward estimates?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I thank the member for the question. This is certainly the best budget that the health portfolio has ever seen.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: In your opinion.

Ms A. SANDERSON: Well, the numbers do not lie.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: It is a fact.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is a fact?

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: The numbers do not lie.

Ms A. SANDERSON: In terms of actual numbers, they do not lie. It is the most significant investment in long-term infrastructure investment as well as an increase in ongoing funding for the budget. This budget commits \$2.5 billion to health and mental health; it is a significant uplift in funding. It takes the new investment in WA's health system to \$5.7 billion in eight months—in eight months—if we include the midyear review. The annual health budget has grown from \$8.8 billion to \$11.6 billion. That is a 30 per cent increase since we were elected—30 per cent since we took government. In this year alone, expenditure will grow by 13 per cent, so it is significant. We know that demand is increasing and complexity is increasing. It is not just about money. Although funding and resourcing is absolutely critical, there are more complex issues at play that are driving some of the issues in our system, including staffing and the international challenge around recruiting staffing that every single health service in the world is experiencing. We are in a global competition to staff our health services; there is no question about that. Since the last budget in September, 342 beds have been added to the system, which will bring 530 by the end of this year. That is the equivalent of a new tertiary hospital. The major hospital redevelopments are underway. The women's and babies' hospital is underway. This government has a deep commitment to our public health service and I am very proud of this budget.

Ms L. METTAM: My next question relates to page 310 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the WA comprehensive cancer centre. When will the business case planning for the comprehensive cancer centre begin and when will a decision on funding be made?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The business case will begin as soon as the money is appropriated; there is \$2.5 million for planning. As the member knows, the former federal government committed \$375 million in its last budget towards the comprehensive cancer centre to be developed by the Harry Perkins Institute of Medical Research and built at QEII in Nedlands. The state government has provided \$2.5 million for planning and development, so as soon as the money is appropriated, that business case can begin. As soon as the business case is complete, we will then understand the circumstances under which Western Australia will engage with the project.

Ms L. METTAM: Okay. We are happy to go to the Mental Health Commission now.

The CHAIR: Okay.

The appropriation was recommended.

Division 22: Mental Health Commission, \$969 673 000 —

Mrs L.A. Munday, Chair.

Ms A. Sanderson, Minister for Mental Health.

Ms J. McGrath, Mental Health Commissioner.

Mr L. Hale, Deputy Commissioner.

Ms K. Lazenby, Deputy Commissioner, System Development.

Ms S. Davison, Chief Medical Officer, Mental Health.

Mr L. Bechelli, Assistant Director, Treatment Services.

Ms L. Lombardini, Assistant Director, Support Services.

Mr M. Canney, Strategic Management Accountant.

Ms R. Marton, Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 3 June 2022. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system.

I give the call to the member for Vasse.

Ms L. METTAM: My question relates to page 338 and the \$31 million eating disorder election commitment that is referred to, I guess, in part in item 5 under the significant issues impacting the agency. As the minister is aware, I attempted to ask this question in the health section but was directed to the Mental Health Commission. Where is that project at and what progress has been made?

[11.20 am]

Ms A. SANDERSON: I can give an overview and then perhaps the Mental Health Commissioner can give the member some more specifics about the planning and rollout of that project. The government currently provides \$4.6 million towards community treatment eating disorder services for under 18s through CAMHS. The election commitment in 2021 was to expand services to adult statewide services through the \$31.7 million. That was becoming an area of significant need—an increase. As part of the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement, we also secured a further \$8.5 million from the federal government to establish a third statewide eating disorder community hub within east metro. This will see a hub service within three metropolitan catchment areas, so that is south, north and east. There will be \$16 million for community treatment services, which is over and above the inpatient services provided by patients requiring immediate hospital services. At the moment, there is a small number of therapy and support programs, most with private services and all having very long waitlists, many of up to eight months.

New services from 2022–23 will include three dedicated multidisciplinary area-based statewide services located in the north, south and east metro areas, providing a triage service; three intensive day programs; intensive clinical monitoring to provide support to people in the community; and specialist multidisciplinary outpatient clinics, including a stepdown service for inpatients with eating disorders. Patient transition coordinators will also be located

at each HSP to coordinate the care for people living with eating disorders. There will also be an increase in community services, including community treatment and support services, as well as early identification, intervention and prevention, which all form part of the expansion. We are expecting services to commence this financial year, 2022–23. The current service for those aged 16 and over is managed by the WA public sector. They are generally admitted to the general adult mental health units if appropriate. There are no dedicated adult beds, as the member knows. The WA Eating Disorders Outreach and Consultation Service is a statewide service that provides specialist care for over 16s, but it is currently under quite significant pressure. The Department of Health has also received \$4 million for the development of residential eating disorder treatment. As I said, we are seeking to provide a more comprehensive statewide service that links in with best practice and the model of care that we deliver in WA. Did I miss anything?

Ms L. METTAM: Can the minister explain the hub? I thought the minister mentioned it was in east metro; will that be attached to a hospital or will it be a separate location?

Ms A. SANDERSON: There will be hubs in the north, south and east. Initially, it was north and south. The additional federal funding has enabled us to deliver a hub in the east as well, so we will have the whole metropolitan area covered. I will ask the commissioner to outline how the hub will work.

Ms J. McGrath: As mentioned, the original plan was to roll out the hubs in just the north and the south initially. Now, with this latest announcement, we can do the one in the east as well. We hope that all those services will start this financial year—the north and south hubs will probably begin a little bit earlier than the east one, given that we have just found out that we will be able to roll that one out earlier than next year. As mentioned by the minister, each of those hubs will have three components. Those hubs will do triaging and intensive clinical monitoring, and will have a specialist multi-disciplinary outpatient clinic and intensive day programs. A lot of work has been done with the HSPs over the last six months on this model of service.

Ms L. METTAM: How many FTE are committed or attached to this commitment?

Ms A. SANDERSON: It will be determined by need. Ongoing funding is committed in the budget, but the number of FTEs and what that model of service will look like will depend on service requirements.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Minister, I turn to page 337 and the heading “New Initiatives”, specifically the line item “Relieving Immediate Rural and Remote Pressures”, which has an expenditure of \$4.277 million this year and similar funding in the out years. Can the minister give some indication of the scope of services that will be provided and whether there is any information regarding the geographical spread of the target areas? I have some follow-ups around that once I get the answer.

Ms A. SANDERSON: I welcome questions on this; it is an area of acute need across the country, particularly in regional areas. We have targeted our investment in this area in regional areas in particular to help try to relieve some of the pressure that they and families are feeling. I want to be clear that this—I will probably get into trouble for saying this—is the first of a number of investments that we are going to have to make over a number of years to rollout this reform. I give credit to the Mental Health Commission—it wants to see an immediate uplift in service. It is not just giving a commitment to recruiting people and then trying to find them. Where we will see an uplift—I can outline where that is—is where there is already an existing FTE who can increase their numbers, or someone who has just graduated and can take a position. We expect to be able to fill these positions almost immediately. In the child and adolescent mental health service in Esperance, there will be one FTE, a clinical nurse specialist; in the goldfields whole-of-region register—we can provide this if information if the member would like—there will be a registrar; in the great southern, Albany, there will be one FTE, a consultant psychiatrist; in the great southern whole of region, there will be one FTE, a clinical nurse specialist; in East Kimberley, there will be one FTE, a registrar; in the midwest, in Geraldton, there will be one FTE for infant mental health; in the midwest, Geraldton, there will be one FTE, a clinical nurse specialist; in the Pilbara, CAMHS in Karratha will have a one FTE, senior medical officer; in the south west whole of region, there will be one FTE, a consultant psychiatrist and a clinical nurse FTE; in the wheatbelt whole of region, there will be a CAMHS consultant psychiatrist, who will be 0.6 FTE; in the wheatbelt whole of region, there will be one FTE. We have tried to spread them across every region so that every region will receive an uplift, but it is a realistic uplift of an increase in the number of people already on the ground. It is my intention that this is the first of a number of investments.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I think the minister mentioned the midwest, but in looking at the situation of those areas affected by cyclone Seroja, 16 local governments were affected. The Shire of Northampton was one of those most greatly affected. I am told by people in the shire that, at the moment, no additional mental health services have been provided to the Shire of Northampton. I appreciate that there might be trouble sourcing people, but there does not seem to be any additional support going there and it does not appear that any additional support is going to the local high school, for instance. I am wondering what, specifically, there might be in that to assist those areas that were affected by the cyclone—not only the Shire of Northampton, but including the Shire of Northampton.

Ms A. SANDERSON: I will just clarify: is the member now asking about adult mental health services?

Mr R.S. LOVE: Sorry, I cannot—

Ms A. SANDERSON: Sorry. I just want to clarify whether you are now asking about adult mental health services?

Mr R.S. LOVE: It is mainly adult.

Ms A. SANDERSON: This is a new question.

The CHAIR: Is that a supplementary question to the last question?

Mr R.S. LOVE: No, I asked about the school as well, so the question is also about —

Ms A. SANDERSON: I am happy to provide information in answer to the member's question, but I think he is asking about the Ministerial Taskforce into Public Mental Health Services for Infants, Children and Adolescents aged 0-18 years in Western Australia.

The CHAIR: That is a different area.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Is it? Okay.

[11.30 am]

Ms C.M. TONKIN: I have a question that, again, concerns services in rural and remote areas. I refer to page 338, the "Spending Changes" table, specifically the line item "Continuation of the Mental Health Emergency Telehealth Service". Can the minister advise what the WA government is doing to ensure that this important resource for rural and remote areas continues?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Thank you. This feeds into an important provision for services for adults and youth—namely, the mental health emergency teleservices—which was previously funded by the commonwealth government. It provided three years of funding to establish a specialist telehealth service for acute mental health out of the Health Innovation Fund. When I was sworn in as minister, I was briefed early that the federal government had stopped this funding. Of all the times in our state's history, it declined to continue the funding of that service, which has provided a really important bedrock of our mental health services in the community. The state government has stepped in to provide \$5.1 million to continue delivery for that community. Obviously, one of the significant commitments from the federal Labor Party was to continue psychiatric telehealth for the regions and allow that to be bulkbilled for those practitioners. It was one of the first things on my agenda. I raised it with the former Liberal minister as part of the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement. It left a \$20 million hole in our budget. It was unmoveable on this issue and absolutely refused to continue to provide that service. It will be a significant part of the agenda of the first meeting of health state and territory ministers and the federal government. Having said that, we have ensured that it continues for two years with funding from the state, but we will be seeking a continuation of that funding from the commonwealth.

Ms L. METTAM: I am not sure whether that was an extension of the question about the infants, children, and adolescent task force and the immediate response.

The CHAIR: No, this is a new question. That was specifically about telehealth.

Ms L. METTAM: This question relates to the original question asked by the member for Moore and the 11.6 FTE. Can I confirm when the minister anticipates that those additional staff will be employed? I take from the minister's original response that they are the most easily employed and that she anticipates they will be employed straight away.

Ms A. SANDERSON: Absolutely. The health service providers were notified of the budget outcomes and I anticipate that WACHS will be implementing that as soon as possible.

Ms L. METTAM: Can I also confirm that the minister will provide a list of those positions at the various locations across regional WA as well?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I will provide that by way of supplementary information.

Ms L. METTAM: Okay; thank you.

The CHAIR: The minister agrees to provide that supplementary information.

[*Supplementary Information No B2.*]

The CHAIR: Could the minister please state for Hansard exactly what she will be providing?

Ms A. SANDERSON: A breakdown of the 11.6 frontline FTEs and community CAMHS in regional Western Australia.

Ms L. METTAM: This may be provided in the question or the minister may be able to answer it. Are there any psychiatrists in the make-up of these workers?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Yes.

Ms L. METTAM: Where will they be based?

Ms A. SANDERSON: There are three in that make-up, and this is determined by need on the ground, the ability to fill the role and a range of factors. There is a range of both allied and clinical support here for youth mental health, and it is based on who we can put into those positions now, essentially. Psychiatrists are exceptionally difficult

to recruit due to a worldwide shortage. As part of the ICA, we are also looking at significantly bulking up our peer support workforce, which is a really important aspect of rolling out the ICA, so that young people and their families have that kind of peer support work to rely on in their journey.

Ms L. METTAM: As the ministerial task force report highlights, there is a significant gap—a chronic under-resourcing—of child psychiatrists, which the minister has identified and recognised. What work is being undertaken to address this worldwide shortage? What incentives is the government providing to attract psychiatrists to the state?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I will let the Mental Health Commissioner outline some of the detailed programs, but it is not up to the Western Australian government to address the worldwide shortage; we need to address the shortage that we have here. To put the question in context, it is not a matter of underfunding because there are not that many, and it is through both the private and the public sector. This is not an issue of underfunding; rather, it is an issue of increased demand and not keeping up with the current workforce. There is significant work going on, particularly around rural psychiatry pathways, to uplift the number of psychiatrists, and we are working with the college to do that. I will pass to the Mental Health Commissioner to outline some of that.

Ms J. McGrath: Thanks, minister. Over the last six months, the Mental Health Commission been working with the Department of Health through its mental health workforce planning project, which is looking at the whole mental health workforce, the pipeline, the development et cetera of all staff required, as mentioned in the earlier session today. Part of that will be about psychiatrists and how we build that pipeline, and that will be a combination of growing our own and trying to attract from overseas. The commonwealth is also taking a role in that. As part of our recent bilateral negotiations, the final agreement has some shared responsibilities and some that the commonwealth will take a lead in in terms of some of that planning. In particular, it will work with the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists et cetera around those pipelines. It will also particularly look at attraction in rural areas. We have got the same issues all across Australia, so it will take that lead role and we will feed into that work.

Mr R.S. LOVE: This is an excellent opportunity for the opposition to get some clarity on a lot of important issues. I refer to page 124, “Major Spending Changes Since the Mid-Year Review”, “WA Country Health Services Mental Health” and the line item for the emergency telehealth service of only \$5.1 million for this year. Could the minister explain what that amounts to and why it is only for the first year?

Ms A. SANDERSON: If the member had listened to the opposition’s question, he would have the answer to his. I literally just outlined that.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Sorry?

Ms A. SANDERSON: If the member had just listened to the opposition’s question, he would have the answer to this question. I will go through it again.

The CHAIR: The minister has just provided it. I will move on. Does the Member for Riverton have a question?

Mr R.S. LOVE: I think I was actually next in line.

Ms A. SANDERSON: I am happy to provide it again, chair.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I do not know what the minister’s point is.

Ms A. SANDERSON: My point is that I just outlined that in quite a lot of detail. The commonwealth previously provided funding for the emergency telehealth service for special and acute mental health and AOD support services for rural and remote areas. This is a really critical part of our delivering mental health services to regional areas, as the member would know as a regional member. When I was first sworn in, I was briefed almost immediately that the commonwealth had declined to continue that funding despite it being a time of increased presentations, increased stress and increased strain, particularly in regional areas. The commonwealth just stopped providing that funding. It was totally immune to representations as part of the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement. We worked incredibly hard to get that \$20 million hole in our budget filled because, ultimately, the commonwealth Liberal–National government blew \$20 million out of regional mental health. It was absolutely unmovable in reinstating that funding so the state government stepped in and provided \$5.1 million over the course of the next two years so that we can continue that really important service. We stepped in when the commonwealth stepped out. A new federal government has just been elected and it made a very early commitment to reinstate psychiatric telehealth on the Medicare Benefits Schedule and provide the WA Country Health Service emergency and regional emergency telehealth service. I expect it to be on top of the agenda of our next state and territories health ministers’ meeting, which I anticipate will be some time in June. We will be looking for the commonwealth to reinstate that funding. But in the meantime, the state has stepped in to ensure its continuity.

[11.40 am]

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I refer to page 338, “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”, specifically the heading “Community Mental Health Treatment Services”, and the government’s commitment to an emergency department reform package. There is an increasing number of repeat ED presentations at Western Australian hospitals by people with mental health and alcohol and other drug-related issues. What is the WA government doing to address this?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I thank the member for his question. Obviously, recognising the challenge of reducing mental health and AOD presentations in our emergency departments is part of our emergency department access package, ensuring that there are alternative models of care for those people who need support, rather than having them front up to an ED because there is nowhere else for them to go. In her report, the Office of the Auditor General identified that 10 per cent of people use around 90 per cent of hospital care and 50 per cent of emergency resources, and alcohol and drug dependency is a significant part of that.

The active recovery teams were launched a couple of years ago, I believe. This pilot provides 90 days of care for someone and is focused on coordination and responsive-tailored treatment. When someone is discharged from a rehab facility, if you like, they are provided with 90 days of support to minimise the opportunity for relapse and to support them with a range of their needs, including getting employment, rebuilding relationships and finding housing. In one case study under the pilot, one person presented to an ED seven times in 12 months with a mental health issue. They were accepted into the active recovery team program. They had no mental health ED presentations while in the program and no ED presentations in the 90 days after completing the program.

There is a lot of evidence behind this. We have provided another \$10.78 million to continue this trial and we expect that it will service around 300 people in Perth and 100 people in regional areas over the next 12 months. There are seven ART sites now operating in the metro area and two in the regions. This is part of our emergency access plan, but also an important part of our mental health and drug and alcohol plan, too.

Ms L. METTAM: Just a further question in relation to that. Of the 147 new mental health inpatient beds, how many are expected to be operational this financial year?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The member referred to 147 beds in that question. There are also an additional 52 coming online this year. They are already in the appropriation. There is the 40-bed transition unit that will be opening in St James this year and taking its first clients in June, I believe. The 12-bed unit at Royal Perth Hospital will also open in June. There will be those beds and also 30 beds at Joondalup Health Campus will open in 2024; 40 beds at Fremantle Hospital in 2024; 16 beds at Geraldton Health Campus as part of its redevelopment in around 2024; six beds at Bunbury Hospital at South West Health Campus commencing in 2026–27; six beds at Midland Public Hospital in 2023–24; 30 beds at Peel Health Campus, depending on the redevelopment; 10 beds at Armadale-Kelmscott Memorial Hospital in 2025–26; and nine beds at Rockingham General Hospital in 2024. Selby House will have eight beds, and we are working through the commencement of those beds.

There is also the expansion of the youth mental treatment services and eight beds for mental health and alcohol other drugs for youth homeless, the 20-bed community care with the comp unit for people with complex illness and the establishment of the step-up, step-down services around those regional areas. A significant number of beds are coming online between now and 2026.

Ms L. METTAM: The minister may be able to provide this by way of supplementary information, but can I get the total commitment for mental health inpatient beds in the metropolitan region and the WA Country Health Service? I heard what the minister read out and the detail that was provided. Another way to ask is: are any of those beds in regional WA or Bunbury?

Ms A. SANDERSON: There is a range, and all of those are outlined in government announcements in media releases. It is all public information.

Ms L. METTAM: What would be anticipated as the average length of stay for a mental health bed such as what has been proposed?

Ms A. SANDERSON: That is like asking: how long is a piece of string? It depends on whether it is a transition bed, whether it is a drug and alcohol or whether it is acute. There is no fit-for-purpose length of stay. Step-up, step-down facilities generally have around a 28-day stay. Acute facilities have shorter stays. As I said, there are some who have been in acute facilities from eight months to 12 years. I just cannot answer that question with a single number.

Mr R.S. LOVE: In terms of the question I asked earlier, which was somehow ruled out of order because it was to do with a different program, I will rephrase it. I refer to page 337, “Appropriations, Expenses, and Cash Assets” and the delivery of services costs. Can the minister outline any funding that is going into the Northampton area and other areas affected by tropical cyclone Seroja to assist victims to recover and maintain good mental health?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Support for the community welfare and outreach program is delivered by the Department of Communities and would be a line item for that department. I can advise that the assessment of need was undertaken and a \$9 million community welfare outreach program was designed across the relevant local governments, and that is in Communities’ budget. The program is a two-year package funded jointly by the commonwealth and state disaster recovery to support the social wellbeing of people who have been severely affected by the impacts of Seroja. It services 16 affected local governments by funding positions, service provision and other activities that enable welfare outreach and recovery and resilience-building to support those impacted communities. There are multiagency recovery teams, which includes Communities, the Australian Red Cross and DFES, and they operate from static or mobile recovery hubs, including Kalbarri, Northampton, Waroona and Mingenew.

[11.50 am]

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 342 in budget paper 2, volume 1, “Readmissions to hospital within 28 days of discharge from acute specialised mental health units”. I note that the department continues to fail to meet this key performance indicator, with readmissions at 15.5 per cent and 14.4 per cent in 2021–22. Can the minister provide some guidance on why this is unable to be met?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The 12 per cent, I understand, is a national target and, obviously, an important aspiration. Mental health is complex and there are a multitude of factors that impact on people’s readmissions. The fact that we are investing record amounts in our mental health system and providing multidisciplinary teams shows that we are willing to do everything we can to meet this target—there is no question about that. The rollout of step-up, step-down facilities to support people to build lives, get employment and find accommodation and housing is an important part of that and we have significant commitments around rolling out those facilities. Many of them have already been rolled out. The active recovery teams will play a very big role in reducing admissions within that 28 days. We are looking at new models of care, like hospital in the home and readmissions, so supporting people in the community rather than in a mental health facility. The reform around infant child and adolescent mental health will, I sincerely hope, prevent children from being admitted into psychiatric units. The best possible care we can provide for those children and their families is for those children in their home and in their community. We do need to shift that focus from the acute to the community, and that is what we are doing with this budget.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Minister, one of the challenges is mental health, particularly in regional areas, and we often do not have the facilities to cater for someone who needs assistance. What we see in places like Carnarvon is a patient who needs to go to Graylands or seek other treatment. They can be taken there by the police and can stay anywhere between a day and eight days, if not longer, which, obviously, takes up resources. Sometimes they cannot get down to Graylands to get the treatment or they go down there and then within 48 hours or 72 hours, they are back in a town like Carnarvon, and, unfortunately, many have suicided simply because there is no service in a town like Carnarvon that provides for people who need assistance. Is the department looking at any ways to improve that model? When someone is sedated or in a hospital bed and they are taking up that hospital bed for eight days waiting for a flying doctor service to fly down to Perth, they then have to find their own way back, often to Carnarvon and often, unfortunately, a large number of people commit suicide simply because the treatment is not there. What does the minister say to that?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I have in quite some detail just outlined a lot of the regional programs to both the member for Moore and the member for Churchlands and what we are doing around continuing emergency mental health programs for the regions, which was cut by the federal Liberal government and which the state has stepped in to continue. I absolutely acknowledge the challenges for individuals and their families, particularly in regional areas, who are suffering acute mental health episodes. A range of facilities have been developed and committed to, and regional step-up, step-down facilities are important part of that mix. The new mental health beds in Geraldton are also an important part of that mix. There is also the police and health co-response for emergency mental health, which has been operating in Geraldton more recently. It has worked very, very well and is continuing to work well. It is about those agencies understanding each other better and how police interact with mental health patients. Central coordination is also really key. The member is right about the challenge of an individual who is sedated, put on an RFDS flight and ends up in Graylands and is discharged into not many supports, so providing that ongoing support, and support through the patient assisted travel scheme, is critical. But having a central coordination, a state health operation centre that helps to coordinate the Royal Flying Doctor Service, St John Ambulance, the hospital system, the emergency departments and all of those things together, will help with that patient journey. It will significantly help. It is not just about money and services; it is actually about coordination and systems. At the moment, we have three services that run parallel with each other. They talk to each other, but they are not necessarily coordinated. If a nurse in Geraldton needs to have an acutely mentally ill patient transferred, their job is to ring each of those patient transfer services to try and find that service, whereas, really, that should not be that nurse’s job. We want them nursing; we want them doing patient care. We want to take that burden from them and find a better way of coordinating those services.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I just want to make a further statement on that, minister. Carnarvon and the Gascoyne have one of the highest suicide rates in this state simply because the services are not there when it comes to assisting, whether they are drug and alcohol or mental health issues.

The CHAIR: Is it a question, member for North West Central?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am pleading with the minister. Services are needed in Carnarvon. Geraldton is 475 kilometres away and often a person is flown to Perth, like I said, to Graylands. Geraldton really does not play a part in the mental health needs of the Gascoyne in particular. I just wanted to make that statement.

The CHAIR: I will take it as a statement. Member for Mount Lawley, a quick question, please.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: Yes, sure. It follows on from what the minister was just saying about coordinating the efforts of police and mental health. I refer the minister to pages 337 and 338 under the “Spending Changes” table,

and the ongoing funding for “Perth Sobering Up and Low Medical Withdrawal Services” and new funding for the “Cardiff Model of Violence Prevention Pilot”. Antisocial behaviour in Perth and Northbridge has been in the news a lot lately. Can the minister advise how these initiatives help reduce community harm?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Thank you, member for Mount Lawley. Perth sobering-up and low medical withdrawal services are an important part of the issues that we are seeing in Northbridge. The Cardiff model for violence prevention has been a well-understood and evidence-based program, which is about sharing data and resources between agencies. The government is committing \$7.3 million to continue the sobering-up centre for the Salvation Army, as well as \$3.5 million to develop and implement the alcohol-related violence prevention program at Royal Perth Hospital to reduce those alcohol-related ED presentations.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 338 and the step-up, step-down facility in Karratha. The six-bed facility was announced in 2017. When will it be finished and where is this project at?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Completion is expected in 2024. We are just about to go to tender on that project. Some spending changes were required. Essentially, a site has been secured in Karratha and we expect that the service will be delivered by Richmond Wellbeing, which will have the contract. There has been extensive consultation around this with the City of Karratha, nearby schools and local community groups. Certainly, we expect it to be commissioned in 2024.

The appropriation was recommended.

Division 23: Health and Disability Services Complaints Office, \$3 928 000 —

The appropriation was recommended.

Meeting suspended from 12.00 to 1.00 pm

Division 15: Primary Industries and Regional Development — Services 1 to 7, Agriculture and Food, \$622 103 000 —

Ms A.E. Kent, Chair.

Dr A.D. Buti, Minister for Finance representing the Minister for Agriculture and Food.

Mr T. Hill, Acting Director General.

Mr L. O’Connell, Acting Deputy Director General, Industry and Economic Development.

Mr C. Binning, Acting Deputy Director General, Primary Industries Development.

Ms H. Brayford, Deputy Director General, Sustainability and Biosecurity.

Dr M. Carbon, Executive Director, Biosecurity.

Ms M. Taylor, Chief Finance Officer.

Mr C. Thurley, Chief of Staff, Minister for Agriculture and Food.

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

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: The estimates committees will be reported by Hansard and the daily proof will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. The chair will allow for as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point. Consideration is restricted to items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must relate to a page number, item, or amount related to the current division. A member should preface their questions with these details. Some divisions are the responsibility of more than one minister. Ministers should only be examined in relation to their portfolio responsibilities. A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agreed to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by the close of business Friday, 3 June 2022. If the minister suggests a matter to be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system.

We are dealing with division 15. Member for North West Central.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Minister, I understand that this is not your normal portfolio, so I will go easy. I refer to page 219 under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency.” The second point states —

The Department is addressing the workforce shortages with additional funding of \$7.5 million allocated in 2021 under the Reconnect WA program ...

Was a detailed assessment undertaken of the effectiveness of the program to date as part of the budget submission process?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Mr Hill to say who should answer that question.

Mr T. Hill: Thanks, Minister Buti. I will go to Carl Binning.

Mr C. Binning: The program is administered as part of COVID recovery. The program has been successful in relocating people and attracting people to the regions. It is bound by the COVID process. I am unaware of a detailed ongoing assessment, but I can report uptake of the current round.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Mr Binning said that the program is successful. How is the government measuring that success? Can the minister please elaborate on how it is being measured? How does the government know that people are going to the regions? Who are the people going to the regions?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will throw to Mr Binning in a minute. I do not think we need to know every single characteristic of each person who is going there.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: That is not what I asked.

Dr A.D. BUTI: But obviously Mr Binning might be able to elaborate.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Are they from overseas? Are they interstate?

Dr A.D. BUTI: They would not have come from overseas until more recently, because the borders were closed under the former federal government and former Prime Minister Morrison. It is nice to say “former Prime Minister Morrison”. Obviously, there were international border closures. They have now been opened, so one would expect that the traditional backpackers, who have been a constant and reliable source of labour for the regions, will come back into play, but I ask Mr Binning to elaborate.

Mr C. Binning: The success of the program has really been measured in the context of the overall ability of our primary industries in the first instance to be able to continue their work. That has been extremely challenging during the COVID period. But I would note that this year, there was a record harvest of 24 million tonnes, and the harvest was brought in thanks to the hard work of our regional communities. This program has contributed workers to that program. In the latest round, there have been 410 applications, of which a total of 180 have been approved, 155 are pending and 73 have been declined. They are relatively evenly distributed across the regions, with the south west leading with 39.5 per cent and the wheatbelt with 18 per cent. Goldfields–Esperance has 11.3 per cent and the Kimberley has 10.7 per cent. The distribution will vary over the course of the year depending on where the work pressures are. It will build up in places like Carnarvon now as the growing season rolls in and then conclude in the March–April period in the south west with the wine industry.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am glad that Carnarvon was mentioned, because I have a media statement here dated Tuesday, 24 May, released by Ministers Hon Alannah MacTiernan and Hon Roger Cook about this Reconnect WA package. It goes through the areas to which people can apply to go. The media statement is about The Paid Escape—often tourism leads into agriculture and agriculture leads into tourism—and it states —

The Paid Escape website advertises jobs across WA in a wide range of regional areas including Albany, Bunbury and the South-West, Broome, Esperance, Exmouth, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie, Karratha, Kununurra, Mandurah and Peel, Margaret River, Merredin, Northam and Port Hedland.

There is a bit of a gap between some of these towns. Given that Carnarvon is a tourism destination but also obviously has horticulture, pastoral, and fishing industries, why has Carnarvon not been included in this list?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I do not know about the media statement. But as the member read in that media statement —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am happy to show you.

Dr A.D. BUTI: No. But as you read yourself, member, it said “including”. The list was not exclusive; it just said, “This is a list.” Maybe Carnarvon should have been included. But as Mr Binning told the member, Carnarvon is in the program, so he can rest assured that Carnarvon has not been forgotten. Do you want to add anything, Mr Binning?

Mr C. Binning: Member, the threshold criteria is 100 kilometres from outside of Perth—that is the destination—so all parts of regional Western Australia will qualify under the program. The new part of the program has also been extended to include tourism and hospitality.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I take that as a bit of a faux pas in today’s joint media statement.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am more worried about the budget than the media statement.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: In regards to this program, which is part of the budget, it was stated that 175 people have been successful in this Reconnect program and that it has been successful. Given that the agriculture sector has been wanting up to, I think, 10 000 or 7 000 employees, let alone the hospitality sector, which needs maybe 20 000 employees right across Western Australia, how can it be said that 175 workers going into regional WA is successful when tens of thousands of people are needed to come in?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Member, I do not think it was ever envisaged that this program would attract 10 000 people. As the member would very well know, there is a skills shortage in most industries in Western Australia and Australia. The reason we have a skill shortage is due to the outstanding economic management of the Western Australian government. The program has been successful, because as Mr Binning told you —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Nothing to do with borders being closed?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As Mr Binning has told the member, the program has attracted a number of applicants, a number of whom have been successful. It will continue. As the member knows, in the normal course of events, international tourists and backpackers will come back into play. The borders have not been open that long. Yes, there is a dire shortage of labour in the regions, as there is in the city. Any program such as this, which is seeking to attract workers, should be congratulated, and hopefully it will continue.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I have a further question. Minister, clearly 175 —

The CHAIR: Member for North West Central, can you just wait until I give you the call before asking the question? Member for North West Central.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Minister, clearly 175 workers is not enough when we have a shortage of tens of thousands of skilled workers. Is the minister saying that this is a successful program delivering workers to regional WA?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes, I do.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I think everyone in this room will beg to differ.

[1.10 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 228 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. Halfway down the page, it states —
investment of \$5 million in the Wild Dog Action Plan ...

While the minister is looking it up, I know he is expecting questions on sheep and cattle but this question is about wild dogs, emus and kangaroos. Can I have some detail on what sort of fencing will be completed under this plan?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Before I pass this question on to whomever, as the member knows, this plan includes actions to build the capacity of industry to manage the threat to livestock, the completion and upgrade of a state barrier fence, centres for exclusion cell fencing, funding for contracts, wild dog control and sterilisation of dogs in Aboriginal communities. Projects have been utilised in the Indigenous land use agreements down Esperance way. Construction in Esperance has recently commenced, with a capital budget of \$2.033 million to be carried over 2021–22 to 2022–23. I will ask Mia Carbon to elaborate.

Dr M. Carbon: The wild dog action plan and state natural resource management funding provides funding for repair, replacement and extension of the fence. Once the program that is detailed in the budget papers is complete, the entire fence will be built to wild dog standards for the first time.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer the minister to the Esperance–Ravensthorpe dog fence scenario, which commenced several years ago. The majority of the fencing materials are still sitting in the yard in Esperance. Can the minister give a guarantee that this will be completed by 2025–26 when the out year funding is completed?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am looking at the budget line item that the member referred to, which refers to the expenditure of that money for the wild dog action plan. I am sure the member would appreciate that I am in no position to give any guarantees. If he wants to write to the minister concerned, he should feel free.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Will any of the \$5 million budgeted for the wild dog action plan part of completing the Murchison vermin cell. I think the fence that covers 53 pastoral stations. Also, is there any funding to provide any cell network within that vermin cell project?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I refer to Dr Carbon to elaborate.

Dr M. Carbon: There has been significant investment in cell fencing in the pastoral regions of Western Australia. Under the current wild dog action plan, there are no further plans to extend that funding beyond what has already been agreed.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The Murchison vermin cell that is in the Mt Magnet–Murchison area has been completed. Can you give me a breakdown of the cost of the completion of works of the Murchison vermin cell that the department has given?

Dr A.D. BUTI: If the member wants to put that question on notice, he may.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am happy to take it as a supplementary.

Dr A.D. BUTI: If the minister wants to put that question on notice, he may.

The CHAIR: Sorry, minister; what was the decision?

Dr A.D. BUTI: If the member wants to put the question on notice, he may.

The CHAIR: Okay. Does the minister agree to provide supplementary information —

Dr A.D. BUTI: No.

The CHAIR: So a question on notice?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the minister confirm whether any thought has been given to contracting out the extension of the Esperance barrier fence to farmers and other contractors in order to complete it in a timely manner?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I defer to Dr Carbon.

Dr M. Carbon: A number of options have been looked at for the completion of the Esperance extension, including a cell fence option that would involve people completing the cell on their own land with materials supplied under this program. That results in a fence that is then not a state asset and not on a reserve, so it is not necessarily the best long-term option. That is absolutely an option that has been put to growers in the region. Currently, there is a preference to continue with the current construction plans to ensure that we have a state-managed asset on a reserve for the entire length of the extension.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Minister, it could basically be a blend of different arrangements to complete the fence in a timely manner, given that we are already three to four years behind schedule to stop the incursion of wild dogs.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Dr Carbon, correct me if I am wrong, but I think you basically said that you are looking at all possible options. Is that correct?

Dr M. Carbon: That is correct. There is already a blend of construction types underway, looking at road reserves and crown land.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Will there be any gaps left in the fence? Will this completely close off the south west land division or areas behind the fence or will there still be a gap in the fence between the coast and the rest of the state barrier fence?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Dr Carbon whether she can elaborate on that.

Dr M. Carbon: There will be some small gaps remaining in the fence due to things like rivers and heritage sites, which cannot be fenced.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to the line item “Severe Tropical Cyclone Seroja—Assistance Package” on page 219 of budget paper No 2. I assume this is the money that was being administered by the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development mainly for rural recovery. I would like to have an understanding of the disbursements of the \$26.4 million that is outlined. Will this money fund a number of grants or packages that are known and certain or is there still some uncertainty about the amount of money that will be expended out of that \$26.4 million in the coming year?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As the member would realise, and I am sure hopefully appreciate, the government has been committed to continuing to support recovery efforts with regards to the effects of cyclone Seroja. and Under the commonwealth disaster recovery funding arrangements, the commonwealth and state governments are jointly funding a package to provide relief measures for primary producers across 16 local government areas whose assets or prime production were affected by cyclone Seroja. To date, more than \$730 000 has been paid to primary producers under the various grants. The government is committed to continue to support those who were affected by cyclone Seroja.

[1.20 pm]

Ms L. DALTON: I refer to page 219 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the spending changes related to biosecurity. Can the minister outline how the investment is supporting the state’s ability to respond to biosecurity threats?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As the member would appreciate, biosecurity risks are increasing from year to year due to many factors, such as volumes of trade, climate change, and changing land usage. In 2021, the department concurrently managed six biosecurity incidents, including the Queensland fruit fly, red imported fire ants and the kharpa beetle. The successful eradication of the Queensland fruit fly alone saved WA’s horticulture industry and economy an estimated \$38 million for the year in lost production and market access. Our government is investing in addition \$15.1 million between 2021–22 and 2024–25 to reinforce the state’s biosecurity capabilities and how to protect our agriculture and fisheries industries as well as our natural environment and way of life. An additional 22 FTE biosecurity positions will strengthen the department’s capability and capacity to respond. Separately, an independent review of the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007 has commenced, which will ensure that WA has legislation that can meet future needs and challenges. In addition to the review of the act, the department is also developing a biosecurity road map, which will identify the changes required to ensure that WA has a fit-for-purpose sustainable biosecurity system into the future.

Mr R.S. LOVE: In relation to the Biosecurity Management Act that the minister just referred to, there appears to be a recoup of money mentioned in the budget documents on that same page under “Other”—“*Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007—Declared Pest Control Activities*”. Why are those amounts of money mentioned? Can the minister explain what that line item refers to?

Dr A.D. BUTI: With regards to the biosecurity and funding, there has been no reduction in the expenditure for existing recognised biosecurity groups. The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development advised that this line item also includes a forecasting error of \$4.6 million over the forward estimates period, which will be corrected in the mid-year budget review process. The actual reduction forecasts spent over the forward estimates

period is \$3.6 million rather than \$8.2 million as stated. This reproduction reflects the removal of the funding provisions for the Carnarvon Growers Association recognised by biosecurity groups, and Warren Biosecurity Inc. There has not been any reduction in expenditure for existing recognised biosecurity groups.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to the national water grid fund mentioned on page 218 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. Given the recent and recurrent declarations in both Grass Patch and Salmon Gums in the Esperance region of water deficient, can the minister confirm whether any funding has been allocated through the national water grid fund to improve the catchment for the Grass Patch dam?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I do not think it is for the purpose the member is stating. As he would know, in May 2021, the then deputy prime minister announced a new funding pathway for small infrastructure projects—the national water grid connections funding pathway—and requested that WA submit a package of proposals for funding of up to \$20 million for construction projects by 30 June 2021. The commonwealth required at least matched funding by the state with inclusion of a third-party contribution permitted. Accepted projects needed to be delivered by 30 June 2023. Three projects have been submitted by the department, which were accepted for funding of \$7.2 million across the three years from 2021–22 to 2023–24. Those three projects are the Cave Springs Road tail water return system, the Gascoyne irrigation scheme and modernisation, and the Wongutha independent water security pilot.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 232 and the line item “Agriculture Senior Officers Committee”, which has seen significant changes in funding over the forward estimates. Can the minister explain to me what this committee does, and also what are the changes in funding?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The Agriculture Senior Officers Committee is responsible for biosecurity issues. There is obviously a commonwealth Agriculture Senior Officials Committee that is responsible for biosecurity under the national cost sharing arrangement. Ms Brayford might want to elaborate on the funding of this committee in relation to biosecurity issues.

Ms H. Brayford: As part of the 2022–23 bilateral budget process, the Expenditure Review Committee approved bringing forward \$2.342 million of funding from 2022–23 into 2021–22 to provide the Queensland government with support with its red imported fire ant eradication program. That has resulted in the estimated actual to be \$2.342 million higher than budget. That is part of a national agreement to support Queensland’s efforts to deal with the red imported fire ant, which is a very significant pest.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The minister may need to correct me if I am not on the right portfolio. I refer to paragraph 11 on page 220 of budget paper No 2 relating to recreational fishing.

Dr A.D. BUTI: No, that is a bit fishy, mate!

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I turn to the fourth line of paragraph 1 under “Explanation of Significant Movements” and the reference to “Carnarvon Flood Mitigation Works Stage 2”. I think that comes under the department.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes. What was the member’s question?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: My question relates to the decrease in the total cost of service relating to the Carnarvon flood mitigation. Early last year—it was in January or February—Carnarvon experienced a flood. It has not been tested. We built a levee system in 2013, which was made up of 17.5 kilometres of levees to protect the horticulture and agriculture industries and try to mitigate flooding in the future, which removes topsoil, causes havoc for the horticulturists, especially those with crops, and causes damage to the soil. The first flood in 10 years had an impact. The levee system worked up to 80 per cent, maybe more. I think the minister will be going to Carnarvon on Thursday, so he might be able to understand where I am going here. There is a bridge over the Gascoyne River called the Bibbawarra Road Crossing. Everything west of the bridge was affected, but the east was fine. I think 37 plantations were affected by the flood mitigation not working or not adequate enough to be able to protect those plantations. Is there any scope in the funding set out in the budget papers to look at ways in which those plantations can be protected? A lot of submissions have been put forward to complete the flood mitigation works because they could not be completed until there was another flood to see whether what was built would work.

[1.30 pm]

Dr A.D. BUTI: As the member would appreciate, the government has committed a million-dollar fund to assist fruit and vegetable growers affected by the Carnarvon floods in 2021. The Carnarvon Flood Plain Management Working Group has prepared a report and outlined recommendations for improving management in this area for the horticultural industry. That report is currently under consideration. The preparation of that report included funding to undertake surveys and a new model to understand how the flood mitigation infrastructure constructed in 2015 is impacting existing properties and to assess new structure options to reduce impacts on properties. The member raised some good points, and they are all being considered as we try to better the management of the flood issues in Carnarvon.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: On the same page, page 223, it states —

This service facilitates high-impact regional development and primary industry initiatives that contribute to economic growth, diversification, job creation and strong communities, with a focus on attracting the investment needed to grow regional Western Australia.

The minister will not know the answer to this question, but his advisers will. The Gascoyne food bowl initiative seeks to increase the horticulture area by 400 hectares. Can the minister or his advisers provide an update on that 400 hectares? Does that land need to be developed? Has it all been sold; and, if so, when will the 400 hectares be developed and be in production?

Dr A.D. BUTI: We are unable to provide additional information to what is in the budget papers, but I am sure if the member put the question on notice, a minister will respond.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: This is a major initiative by all political parties in government over a period of time to develop 400 hectares. It is significant to the Carnarvon region, significant to the food bowl and significant to agriculture in this state. Tens of millions of dollars have been spent on this project. The Minister for Agriculture and Food has been advocating and announcing proponents who have purchased part of the 400 hectares. I think that it is important that we know where our taxpayers' money has gone and whether this land has been sold, is going to be developed and what hurdles, if any, are preventing this land from being developed so we can increase the amount of horticulture and food supply and security to Western Australia and the world.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Mr Liam O'Connell to answer this question.

Mr L. O'Connell: Thank you, member, for the question. As the member would be aware, there has been very significant investment over an extended period of time by various state governments to expand the food bowl and the supporting infrastructure as well. There was an expression of interest by three successful proponents, which were announced in the last year. They were Fruitico, Durmo Quality Produce and 4 Ways Fresh. My understanding—we may need to take this on notice—is that negotiations and discussions are ongoing. Some further development conversations are happening. Yes, we are happy to provide some additional information.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am happy to take it as a supplementary.

Dr A.D. BUTI: If the member wants to put it on notice, we will provide the information.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to the third line item on page 219 of budget paper No 2, "Sustainable Pastoral Land Management". There is an amount of money in the out years of 2024–25 and 2025–26. What is the purpose of that program and how will that be taken forward?

Dr A.D. BUTI: There have been substantial pastoral land reforms and land management projects. In 2017, the Office of the Auditor General reviewed the conditions of the state's pastoral lands and regulatory efforts. As the member would know, in some of those areas, economic sustainability is a pastoral concern. We are considering how we can engage better with respect to the use of that pastoral land. Money has been provided for three years to enable the hiring and training of additional staff needed to implement risk space management of the pastoral estate, which is one of the key processes needed for pastoral land reform. These staff enable increased monitoring activities, making better use of remotely sensed data and the development of new onground methodologies to measure rangeland conditions that will support and improve compliance outcome. That will cost \$2 million. Additional funding of \$1.1 million a year will enable the retention of these newly trained staff to continue the program of work already initiated to further develop and improve pastoral land reform outcomes.

Mr S.N. AUBREY: I refer to the fourth line item, "Western Australia Agricultural Collaboration" on page 219 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. Can the minister outline how the government is increasing the state's research and development capacity?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As the member would realise, this is an area that the Minister for Agriculture and Food is very passionate about. She was involved in the government investing heavily to rebuild our agricultural research and development capability. Unfortunately, it was decimated under the previous government. We know that ongoing research and development is crucial to ensuring that the agricultural food sector can continue to deliver economic benefits and local jobs for Western Australians. In this budget, we are investing an additional \$25 million over three years to create a new Western Australia agricultural collaboration and spur the next generation of advances in the state's agricultural food sector. It is really exciting that this collaboration is bringing together departments, the CSIRO, the University of Western Australia, Curtin University and Murdoch University to strengthen research, development and extension capabilities. This investment will allow Western Australian agricultural research to go to a new level and provide real opportunities to give back a fair share of grower funds and ensure research is designed to meet the geographical and marketing conditions in WA.

There is a strong focus on providing opportunities for the next generation of leading scientists by supporting doctorate students and creating postgraduate positions and early career pathways for researchers. The investment builds on initiatives already underway, such as the \$15 million agriculture climate resilience fund; the \$15 million Carbon Farming and Land Restoration Program; upgraded research facilities at South Perth, Carnarvon, Merredin and Northam; a \$4.2 million investment in carbon capture and emissions reduction science; a \$3.8 million 20-pen sheep feed intake facility at Katanning research station; and a \$10.1 million investment into the oats industry growth partnership. The minister is incredibly passionate about this area. It is absolutely fantastic to have this collaboration between the department, the sector, CSIRO and the various universities in Western Australia.

[1.40 pm]

Mr R.S. LOVE: Can the minister give me some idea of how the priorities for that project will be decided? What will be the governance or the method of determining what is the best use of the industry and what involvement will grain growers and other farmers have?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The universities involved in the collaboration also have to bring funding to the table. They will have their priorities, which have to match the state's priorities. The overarching priority of the minister is how we use research in this area to create better opportunities for the agriculture and food sector that will provide a long-term economic benefit for the state. The various priorities and criteria will be worked out in due course as the program is rolled out and the various research priorities are identified.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to the sixth item, "Agricultural and Fisheries Biosecurity and Integrity" at the bottom of page 221 of budget paper No 2. To be honest, this is probably close to the most important function in relation to ag biosecurity. The 2021–22 estimated actual was \$9.872 million. However, we see a drop in this budget year of \$4 million and not a lot of change in the out years. Why are we not seeing a gradual important increase in this biosecurity element?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will talk about a couple of factors and then ask Ms Brayford to elaborate. The decrease in the 2020–21 actuals from the 2021–22 budget was due to an increase in costs in the number of emergency incidents, with the main component related to the Queensland fruit fly incident in Dalkeith and Coolbellup, amounting to \$11 million in 2020–21. By their very nature, emergency incidents are not budgeted, hence reflecting the decrease in 2021–22. There was an increase in the 2021–22 budget from the estimated actuals. I ask Ms Brayford to elaborate.

Ms H. Brayford: I think the member asked about the difference between the 2021–22 estimated actual and the 2022–23 budget target. That decrease is mainly attributable to the funding being brought forward from the red imported fire ant eradication program that I spoke about earlier; a decrease in emergency response funding which reflects the emergency responses over a number of financial years, and it is difficult to appropriately schedule those; and also a reduction in the declared pest rate that we spoke about earlier—the error that is contained in there and the closure of the Carnarvon recognised biosecurity group and the decision to not progress the Warren RBG. They are the three reasons for that decrease.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I notice that the previous page, page 219, refers to three programs that appear to have been dropped off the list.

Dr A.D. BUTI: What line are you referring to, member?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It is right near the top of page 219. Under "Ongoing Initiatives" is the line item "Biosecurity Incidents and Emergency Responses", and then "African Black Sugar Ant", "Ehrlichia Canis Pilot Program" and "Polyphagous Shot Hole Borer". Funding seems to have dropped away for those three elements, but I notice the red imported fire ant eradication program is continuing. Why have those three been dropped right off in the forward estimates?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Dr Carbon if she can answer that question.

Dr M. Carbon: These line items refer to current biosecurity responses. Obviously, they are for a finite time. They are budgeted the way they are because they are the nationally agreed programs that end in a certain year. The intent is certainly that that is the end of the response because we have undertaken eradication and reached proof of freedom. If it looks like that will not be achieved as we get closer to the end of that program, those programs are extended.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to page 220 of budget paper No 2 and the list of issues impacting the agency. The tenth issue relates to the Soil and Land Conservation Council. Where in the budget documents would I find funding for the Soil and Land Conservation Council to take forward the soil health strategy? If the funding is not mentioned discretely within the budget, can the minister give me some level of understanding of the amount of money within the budget of the organisation's activities that will be appropriate to the Soil and Land Conservation Council?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is in the consolidated budget of the Department, so that is why it is not in the budget papers.

Mr R.S. LOVE: That is fine. It is not an individual line item, but it is part of the budgeted expenditures, so therefore subject to this discussion. Could the minister ask the advisers whether they could provide some indication of the level of resource that the Soil and Land Conservation Council will have through the department's own resources?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask one of the advisers to elaborate, but I can assure the member that the department is supportive of ensuring appropriate maintenance or oversight of the land use with regard to the state's soil. The department has oversight of the Soil and Land Conservation Council and is leading the way in developing management practices to maximise soil productivity and minimise land degradation. The Western Australian soil health strategy, which was released last December, will guide future activities for the management, protection and improvement of the state's vast soil and land resources over the next 10 years. Ms Brayford may like to elaborate.

Ms H. Brayford: In response to the question, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development provides a full secretariat service to the Soil and Land Conservation Council. We provide executive support and

secretarial services and policy support as required. Also, the Commissioner of Soil and Land Conservation, which is a statutory officeholder, works closely with the council and has been involved in the sorts of initiatives that the minister described, particularly around the soil health strategy.

The CHAIR: Before I throw to the member for North West Central, I am just looking at the time. We are still on division 15 and we have not gone to division 18. Is that okay? Are members happy? I give the call to the member for North West Central for a further question on division 15.

Mr V. CATANIA: I turn to the asset investment program on page 228 of budget paper No 2. Paragraph 2.5 refers to the investment of \$5 million in the wild dog action plan. I asked a question about the Murchison vermin cell. For the minister's information, it has or will be completed shortly. It has taken a very long time. It is all very well completing the Murchison vermin cell. When we were in government, we put in about \$1.2 million into that cell, as did the federal government. I think the state government has put in \$500 000. I cannot remember the amount off the top of my head, but it was very little. Are there any funds to be able to clear the Murchison vermin cell? I think it comprises 53 pastoral stations. Is there any funding in this wild dog action plan to fund the RBGs or to fund doggers to clear the cell to actually make it work? There is no point just doing the fence unless there is a program to actually clear and rid the 53 properties of dogs that are causing the problems. Is there any funding to provide that financial support or pay for doggers to clear the Murchison vermin cell?

[1.50 pm]

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Dr Carbon to answer.

Dr M. Carbon: The wild dog action plan includes funding to complete and upgrade the state barrier fence, which we have already talked about. Those previous incentives for exclusion and cell fencing include the Murchison regional vermin cell. It includes funding for sterilisation of dogs in Aboriginal communities. Yes, it also includes funding for recognised biosecurity groups to employ licensed pest management technicians, or doggers, to undertake dog control. The Murchison regional vermin cell, in partnership with their local recognised biosecurity group, can choose to target that funding within the cell or to their other areas of highest risk.

Mr V. CATANIA: The Murchison vermin cell group or the RBG can apply for the funding needed to be able to get the doggers or employ people to clear, bait or whatever is needed, within the cell itself. They can apply for that funding and the government will supply that amount of money?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes, that is what Dr Carbon said.

Dr M. Carbon: The funding is distributed on an annual basis to the recognised biosecurity groups.

Mr V. CATANIA: Is it new funding to be able to rid the cell of dogs or is it just the normal funding that one will receive as an RBG?

Dr M. Carbon: It is funding under the wild dog action plan. It is separate from the funding that recognised biosecurity groups receive from the declared pest account, which is the declared pest rate plus the state government-matched funds. This is separate and additional funding that recognised biosecurity groups receive annually for the employment of doggers.

The appropriation was recommended.

Division 18: Rural Business Development Corporation, \$315 000 —

Ms A.E. Kent, Chair.

Dr A.D. Buti, Minister for Finance representing the Minister for Agriculture and Food.

Mr T. Hill, Acting Director General.

Mr L. O'Connell, Acting Deputy Director General, Industry and Economic Development.

Mr C. Binning, Acting Deputy Director General, Primary Industries Development.

Ms H. Brayford, Deputy Director General, Sustainability and Biosecurity.

Ms M. Taylor, Chief Finance Officer.

Dr M. Carbon, Executive Director, Biosecurity.

Mr C. Thurley, Chief of Staff, Minister for Agriculture and Food.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: I give the call to the member for Moore.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to "Statement of Cashflows" on page 280 of budget paper No 2. Item 7 refers to the issue of the settlement of Australian carbon credit units. There is a funding mechanism through the carbon farming initiative where, I think, the government pays farmers. It then owns the rights to the carbon credit, which then flows back to

the corporation, which I understand is the holder and mover of money. I think that is the way the system works. When does the government expect to see—I can see nothing in the budget in terms of cash flow in the near future—returns flow back from the sale of ACCUs into the RBDC?

DR A.D. BUTI: I will ask Mr Binning if he could answer that question.

Mr C. Binning: Under the carbon farming and land restoration program, the farmers will enter into agreements with the RBDC. They will receive funding upfront to implement works that will sequester carbon. The first six of those projects have been funded, and additional projects will be funded over the forward estimates. Those projects will have a life span of between five and 10 years. They will be registered with the Clean Energy Regulator, which is the regulator of the Australian carbon credits. The carbon credits will accumulate according to the works on the ground and how successful they are. We would expect the first credits to come in somewhere between three and five years from today and then progressively accumulate.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Are any of the projects that have been funded actually developing carbon credits at the moment? How far down the track does the government expect it will be before projects are hitting the ground in terms of their own expenditures?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Mr Binning if he can answer that.

Mr C. Binning: The six projects were announced earlier this year. We would expect those projects to begin work. If they are vegetation projects, there will be planning. Then there will generally be some fencing and then the plants will be put in place. They will begin to aggregate carbon. As I said, we would expect then to start to generate credits in three to five years.

In the case of soil carbon projects, the initial focus over the first 12 to 18 months will be establishing a baseline of carbon levels within the soil profile. Again, in that interval of somewhere between three and five years, the second set of sampling will occur and the uplift in carbon in the soil profile will then be credited it.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Okay, thank you. I have a different question.

The CHAIR: Further question?

Mr R.S. LOVE: Yes, a different question I just want to ask. “Statement of Financial Position” on page 281 shows the current cash assets, cash at bank, basically sitting at just over \$4 million right the way through the forward estimates. I am wondering why this money sits there and never seems to move backwards or forwards.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I’ll ask Ms Taylor if she could elaborate.

Ms M. Taylor: Thanks, minister. The cash assets, the \$4 million that is sitting there, is the money that we received from the commonwealth, and we draw down on that money to administer the loan scheme. That administration cost is reducing as to the number of loans we have outstanding in that area reducing as well.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to page 277, “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”, which talks about five loans that are outstanding where they appear to be deemed irregular. I wonder, is there a provision for bad debt somewhere? Where would I find that reflected in your financial statement?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The corporation currently administers five schemes, and for commonwealth, the government-initiated funding concession and loan schemes. I am not sure what the member is actually asking.

Mr R.S. LOVE: In other words, if the debt is not repaid, it has no effect on the corporation. It has only an effect on the federal government. Is that the answer?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Ms Taylor.

Ms M. Taylor: Thank you, minister. The loans have only just become difficult to recover, so at the end of this financial year we will look at whether we need to create a doubtful debt. The member is correct: if we do, the risk will not sit with the state government; the risk will sit with the commonwealth.

The appropriation was recommended.

[2.00 pm]

Division 36: Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries — Services 1, 3 and 5 to 15, Culture and the Arts; Sport and Recreation, \$479 618 000 —

Mrs L.A. Munday, Chair.

Dr A.D. Buti, Minister for Finance representing the Minister for Culture and the Arts; Sport and Recreation.

Ms L. Chopping, Director General.

Ms K. Ellwood, Executive Director, Sport and Recreation.

Ms S. Magadza, Executive Director, Culture and the Arts.

Ms L. Fanciulli, Executive Director, Infrastructure.

Mr L. Carren, Chief Finance Officer.

Mr M. Cunningham, Director, Investment Research and Policy.

Mr C. Klymovich, Director, Programs, Infrastructure.

Mr C. White, Director, Programs, Infrastructure.

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

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: Members, I am just going to read the statement while everyone is moving through.

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

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 3 June 2022. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system.

I give the call to the member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 565 and the KidSport program. I remember last year that the former Minister for Sport and Recreation, who happens to be here today, was keen to tell us how there was a significant uptake in the number of vouchers and declared there was no reduction in the KidSport program, but we seem to have had a reduction from the estimated actual to the budget year, which is \$4.6 million. It seems to be on the downhill slide. Can the minister enlighten us about why this has not been improved?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is a very good program. I will ask Ms Chopping to directly answer the member's question.

Ms L. Chopping: Thank you, minister. The Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries continues to work with local governments in the community to continue to deliver a streamlined, consistent and accessible KidSport program. Since the program commenced—it celebrated its 10-year anniversary last year—KidSport has provided over \$38 million in funding support and 266 529 vouchers for children to participate in physical activities. A review of the program will be conducted during 2022–23 to determine the future structure of the program, including a review of the voucher value, the possibility of additional vouchers, and the current funding model to ensure that the program continues to provide the best outcomes for the community. I do not know whether the minister wants me to go into further detail.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes.

Ms L. Chopping: Okay. The budget of \$7 824 000 includes unspent funding from 2020–21 due to COVID-19 impacts on junior sport participation. This additional funding provided eligible children with access to up to \$300 KidSport funding in the 2021 calendar year, so 2021–22 has seen a significant increase in families accessing KidSport vouchers to support registration for sport all year round, with over 12 000 children accessing the additional funding that was available in the second half of 2021.

The extra funding also enabled more swim schools to be included in the KidSport program, and these continue to be a positive engagement, with increasing numbers of swim schools registering for the KidSport program. The department has approved a further 18 swim schools in 2021–22, with a total of 70 swim schools now accepting KidSport vouchers across the state. From the 3 700 KidSport swimming lesson vouchers that were funded in 2021–22, we have seen more than \$645 000 help over 3 000 children access swimming lessons. In 2021–22, swimming lessons became the third most accessed sport in the program, with more than 14 per cent of swimming lesson vouchers going to children identifying with disability.

Over 30 000 KidSport vouchers were funded in 2021–22 for more than 23 000 Western Australian children, and these vouchers equated to over \$4.6 million provided directly to eligible community sporting clubs and swim schools. Specifically, for regional children, over 10 000 vouchers were funded, resulting in \$1.44 million paid into regional community sporting clubs. In 2021–22, the KidSport program reported positive demand from a diverse community, seeing an increase in children with disability accessing the program. This includes over 2 300 vouchers accessed by children with a disability, 4 000 vouchers to applicants self-identifying as Aboriginal and over 1 600 vouchers to children from culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thanks very much for that comprehensive response. In fairness, last year the government gave two vouchers per family, which was a good thing. Was there any thought given to increasing the value of those vouchers in the forthcoming budget?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The budget is the budget, and the member has the budget in front of him.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The minister will be well aware that the scouts, girl guides and others were excluded from the KidSport voucher program a year or two back. Given the cost-of-living pressures and given the downstream health benefits and the like of activity for our children, has the government given any thought to re-including scouts and girl guides and so on in the KidSport voucher program?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I do not think the budget process is really to engage in the internal thinking and minds of ministers and governments, but anyway, in regard to the member's question, as has been the case under the current government, for the girl guides or scouts to be able to apply for KidSport grants, they have to be a KidSport-approved club and meet the criteria, which have a requirement to engage in a recognised sport and activity for a minimum of eight weeks.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer again to page 565. The regional athlete support program's funding is ceasing after this financial year. I just quote the Minister for Sport and Recreation of last year, who said —

... it is an incredibly important program ... I would be surprised if the program did not continue in one form or another.

Can someone enlighten me as to why this program appears to be ceasing, given the previous minister's responses?
[2.10 pm]

Dr A.D. BUTI: As the member knows, this is a statewide program that recognises talent development networks that support regionally based athletes, coaches and officials. Due to the size of the state, it supports their development and progression along the sporting pathway in their home environment, allowing them to train at home rather than in Perth. There are various elements to the program, such as funding of regional academies and programs, the athlete travel subsidy scheme, and the regional athlete education program. It is a statewide initiative, it has been running since 2013, and it has been a very, very good program. It is funding that comes from royalties for regions, so it will have to be applied and considered in the normal process.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Has the program ceased or is it being funded from a different source?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It was secured through royalties for regions for a three-year period from 2021 to 2022–23, and we will see what happens after that.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Despite the minister's strong support for the program last year, this government does not appear to rate our regional athletes. Are they second-class citizens?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Of course not.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I cannot fathom why this program would not be continuing.

Dr A.D. BUTI: As I said, it is not being discontinued. A business case will have to be prepared and submitted, and that will enable the program to continue beyond 2023–24. That is what a responsible government would do; it would look at the program. We do not just continue funding a program; we look at the benefits of it, a business case is prepared and submitted, and then a consideration is given as to whether that program will continue.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Who prepares the business case? Does that emanate from the department or is there some sort of regional group advocating for this?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries will work with the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development on the preparation of the business case.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 564, under "Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies", the line item, "Guide Dogs WA Breeding Program". In 2021–22 there is \$5 million, in 2021–22 another \$5 million, and then there is no further funding for the guide dogs breeding program.

Dr A.D. BUTI: A 2021 state election commitment of \$5 million was made to Guide Dogs WA to assist in setting up a world-class breeding program in multiple locations across the state and to re-establish cadet training, and this grant has been paid in full. That was the election commitment: \$5 million.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: No further funding for the guide dogs breeding program?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I jumped the gun then. It comes under the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries, so the member had better leave that for local government.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to the same page, page 564, and the line item "Community Sporting and Recreation Facilities Fund", halfway down the page. Minister, we appear to have gone from a 2021–22 budget of 16.4 million and actual of \$14.6 million. This year is budgeted for \$12.7 million, and then \$11.47 million in the out years. Can the minister enlighten me as to why we seem to have had a reduction of about 30 per cent from that point over the forward estimates?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Ms Chopping to answer this.

Ms L. Chopping: My apologies, I have been handed the wrong note, minister. If I can get the correct note from the executor director. Can the member repeat the question?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The initial 2021–22 budget was \$16.47 million, the 2021–22 actual was \$4.6 million, and then the budget for 2022–23 is dropping to \$12.7 million, and then dropping to \$11.47 million over the out years. Over that period, we have had about a 30 per cent drop in CSRFF funding. What is the explanation for that?

Ms L. Chopping: The community sporting and recreation facilities fund program has operated for over 45 years. During the 2020–21 election, the government committed to increasing CSRFF funding by \$500 000 per annum to \$12.5 million, to develop important infrastructure and facilities for the WA community. This additional \$2 million over four years was an extra \$500 000 per year, which is spent exclusively on new and refurbished gender-neutral changeroom facilities to support women's participation. That amount is in addition to the existing \$500 000 per annum allocated to female facilities. This means that at least \$1 million has now been quarantined within the fund to be spent on projects that support women's participation through the development of new changerooms. The budget papers indicate that \$16.471 million was available in 2021–22, \$12.742 million in 2022–23, and there is \$11.471 million in the forward estimates. However, this is a reflection of re-profiled cashflow money from previous funding rounds. There is a range of examples of projects but, essentially, funding of up to one third of project costs can be provided to a local government or non-profit sporting group, and there are three CSRFF rounds a year, one annual and forward planning round for projects over \$300 000, and two small grant rounds for projects under \$300 000. Annual projects are expected to be completed within one year. Forward planning costs can have up to a three-year delivery time frame. The funding through the CSRFF program is provided on a reimbursement basis and allocated over a three-year triennium and, therefore, cash flows are regularly adjusted to reflect the progress of funded projects. I can elaborate.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thank you very much for that response. I understand how important the CSRFF grant is, not only to regional sporting clubs but to metropolitan clubs as well. I understand the re-profiling and the female changeroom fund et cetera, which is very important. Has the government got in the back of its mind the potential for this to be increased over time, given that at times funding has been up to over \$20 million with the supplementation of royalties for regions funding? Is there an opportunity in future for this really important fund to be increased back to its original levels?

Dr A.D. BUTI: We are dealing with this budget and we are dealing with the line items in this budget. What future governments, or this government, may decide in the future, they will decide it in the future.

[2.20 pm]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Minister, I refer to page 564 and the table headed, “Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies”. The line item “Baldivis Indoor Recreation Centre” has an actual of \$1 million for 2020–21, and then goes up to \$8.5 million for 2021–22. The 2021–22 estimated actual is \$6.5 million, and then it goes up to \$2.5 million for 2022–23. The way I see it, it is a \$500 000 blowout from the original amount. Going down to the item, “Collie Mineworkers Memorial Pool Enclosure”, the actual was \$1 million. The budget is for \$850 000 in 2021–22, and another \$850 000 for 2022–23. That is \$1.7 million, and \$700 000 over the budget. It was previously put in the budget estimates. The 2020–21 actual for “Ellenbrook Community Hub” is \$1.5 million. It then goes to \$2 million for 2021–22, \$250 000 for 2021–22, and \$1.75 million for 2022–23. That is also \$4 million, or \$2.5 million over the original. Can the minister explain why there has been those blowouts just over those three projects that I have managed to see?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As the member knows, we live in a particularly tight labour situation. There are supply chain issues and there is cost escalation for construction and building.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Did the minister say, in Labor seats?

Dr A.D. BUTI: What is that?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: In Labor seats, did the minister say?

Dr A.D. BUTI: No. Well, it would be hard not to be in a Labor seat, because the opposition has been decimated, but anyway, we will move on. I said shortage of labour. There is no shortage of Labor members, but there is shortage of labour supply! There have been cost escalations, as the member knows, and that is what happens. I must say I am very surprised that the member would ask a question about budget blowouts, because I never thought he worried about that sort of issue.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Back when we were in government and there were cost blowouts during boom times, these are the kinds of questions we got. This is taking away the ability to fund particular projects—for example, lights at my town oval in Carnarvon, because of these cost blowouts impacting on future projects.

Dr A.D. BUTI: No, that is just not true. It is not true at all.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I know the minister is not the relevant minister, but it seems like the minister is just signing off on these projects that are blowing out, and slipping in an amount of money simply because they are Labor-held seats, and probably because the government can avoid a lot of scrutiny. That is just three that I have looked at. I am sure if I were to go further into it, I would find more that have blown out.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am wondering what interpretation the member is making with regard to the budget papers and the information before him. There is not a blowout as such. This is the way the budget is allocated.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Just a little bit.

Dr A.D. BUTI: This is the way the funding is allocated over a period of time, and that is what happens. If there is an increasing cost, as the member knows, there are cost escalations in construction in Western Australian. I mean, would the member prefer that we do not build things?

Ms L. DALTON: I refer to the “Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies”, and the line item on page 565. “Lotterywest Back to Sport COVID-19 Relief Program”. Can the minister please provide an update on this program?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I thank the member. The Lotterywest Back to Sport COVID-19 relief program is an important \$5 million program. It is a two-year commitment that includes support for additional KidSport vouchers and a direct funding subsidy for grassroots sport and recreation clubs. The Back to Sport subsidy clubs align with the KidSport program, whereby they are eligible to apply for a \$500 subsidy to assist with managing COVID-19 safety protocols and processes, and encourage volunteers back to the club environment. An amount of \$540 000 in subsidies were provided to 1 080 clubs in 2020–21. In addition, KidSport vouchers to the tune of \$543 992 provided 3 627 vouchers to eligible children in 2021, and the remaining funding for the 2021–22 financial year will support approximately 20 000 KidSport vouchers to eligible children. A COVID-19 cleaning subsidy to the tune of \$1.65 million will be provided directly to sport and active recreational clubs to support their COVID-19 safety practices.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 564 and the line item, “East Fremantle Oval Precinct”, about three quarters of the way down the page. My understanding is that this was a \$20 million project, of which we saw \$2 million for 2021–22 and \$18 million for 2022–23. Then there was a grievance from the member for Bicton one Thursday morning and now, funnily enough, there is an extra \$5 million in the budget for the East Fremantle Oval precinct. Can the minister explain to me what that extra \$5 million is required for?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The member mentioned the member for Bicton, an outstanding local member, and this is an important project. Yes, the member is correct: it was \$20 million initially, but an additional \$5 million has been provided to take the state government’s contribution to \$25 million, and this for the much-needed redevelopment of the East Fremantle Oval sporting precinct. The redevelopment was expected to cost \$26.5 million when the election commitment was made, but it has since increased to \$32.5 million due to the current market conditions and rising construction costs. What would the member want us to do? Not fund the extra so it could not take place?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am just asking what the extra \$5 million is for.

Dr A.D. BUTI: It reflects an increase in the market conditions and the rising construction costs.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Minister, I cannot find the South Fremantle Oval redevelopment plan here.

Dr A.D. BUTI: As the member and I are both diehard South Fremantle supporters, we would love that to happen in due course. The South Fremantle footy club has got to get its act together, too.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 568 and the table headed “Details of Administered Transactions”. Under “Other”, the line item “Rugby WA Loan” shows a loan of two lots. I assume that is two lots of \$1.015 million. Can the minister explain what that is about?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will be corrected if I need to by Ms Chopping, but that was due to a debt that was owed by Rugby WA. We believe that rather than WA Rugby repaying that debt, it could utilise the money for the development of rugby to the benefit of Western Australians and young Western Australians. We have provided, by way of a Treasurer bank loan from the state government, the amount of \$2 million, and we think it was a wise decision. Rugby WA has endured a lot of pain over the last few years, and we believe it is a very well-run organisation.

It is more beneficial to the community that it can use that money to advance various rugby programs.

[2.30 pm]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: At what interest rate has the loan been made, and has Rugby WA made any repayments so far on a loan amount?

Dr A.D. BUTI: We just wiped it.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Sorry? The government has wiped it?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Yes. Okay.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 565 and the line item, “Stephen Michael Foundation”.

Dr A.D. BUTI: A great foundation, as the member well knows.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I read with disappointment that there is no further budget in the out years for the Stephen Michael Foundation.

Dr A.D. BUTI: There was a commitment made at the time for funding for it for a period of time. As in due course with a lot of government funding, we provide funding for a certain period of time and then we reassess and consider whether funding should continue. As the member knows, the Stephen Michael Foundation was established in 2017.

It was a commitment by this government, when we were in opposition, to fund this foundation, and when we got into government, we duly honoured our commitment. The foundation has done some great work and we have continued to support it up to the end of 2022–23 financial year. A review of the program will be undertaken in due course.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Both the minister and I know how valuable the Stephen Michael Foundation is to places like Narrogin, Carnarvon, and many others. Outside of the \$5.7 billion surplus, was there a representation from the Stephen Michael Foundation for funding for ongoing support?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I do not know whether I can provide further information on that, but I will ask. I am sure that in due course the Stephen Michael Foundation will come to the government and make its case, its pitch. We were in opposition in 2017, and it came about through the commitments of members such as the member for Fremantle and also the member for Armadale and others to this foundation, if we were to get into government, and then we extended the funding. In due course there will be a review and we will see what happens.

The CHAIR: Can I just bring it to the member's attention that we still have six divisions to go in an hour and a half. That is all.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Sorry?

The CHAIR: Six divisions to go in an hour and a half.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have just got a couple of others, if I can.

The CHAIR: Yes, sure.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am sure the member would like to go on.

The CHAIR: Member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 564 and the line "Good Faith Television Series". There is an amount of \$4 million in last year's figures and nothing in the forward estimates. Can the minister enlighten me as to how that series went and what the KPIs are? Obviously there is no funding going forward; I assume it was a one-off project.

Dr A.D. BUTI: For the *Good Faith* TV series, the state government consolidated screen production attractions and commitments to help secure screen production in Western Australia. The budget was originally allocated to the production title *Good Faith*. That was unable to proceed as planned and this money has been consolidated back into the screen production incentive fund to secure other productions for the state.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Yes, culture and arts. I thank the minister. I have a new question on page 564 in relation to ongoing initiatives and the WA museum, the new Boola Bardip Museum. Regarding the increase in operational funding, there is a sharp increase in 2024–25. Normal operating expenditure is around that \$600 000 to \$800 000, but it goes up to \$5.4 million in 2024–25.

Dr A.D. BUTI: There was an increase in funding over the forward estimates to meet increased operational costs for the new museum, including a significant refresh of audiovisual displays, content and artwork.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I have got a question about ongoing initiatives. The Art Gallery of Western Australia has operational funding in 2021–22 of 142 000 and in 2022–23 of 217 000, but there is no further funding in the forward estimates. Can the minister explain why there is no further funding for the Art Gallery of Western Australia?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Is the member talking about the operational funding?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Yes.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The additional funding across 2021–22 and 2022–23 will meet the additional operational costs for the new rooftop gallery spaces created as part of the elevated rooftop development. This is in respect of the gallery component of the rooftop facility, not the revenue generating part.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 560 and subparagraph 2.9 —

\$500,000 for the planning development for the State Hockey Centre;

I understand that there have been competing attempts from other states in relation to the state hockey centre. Does this mean that WA has now been secured as the future place for Australian hockey?

Dr A.D. BUTI: No, not yet, but hopefully it will be. That is why the state government has committed to doing its utmost to ensure that we do retain the national elite program. The state government is very committed to this and we hope that Western Australia will secure the future of the national program.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is it planned to be around the current Curtin University site or elsewhere?

Dr A.D. BUTI: No, at Curtin University.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The minister will know about this next question as we worked on the Public Accounts Committee's inquiry into the West Australian Football Commission. I refer to page 546, under "New Initiatives," and the "AFL Kimberley Partnership". Over five years, \$5 million will go towards the Kimberley partnership. I presume that will be done with the AFL as well. Firstly, how much is the AFL putting in?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It will put in \$500 million.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is that \$5 million each?

Dr A.D. BUTI: No, sorry. It is \$500 000 per year over five years.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is that what the AFL is putting in?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes, and the state government is putting \$500 000. It is \$1 million per year between the two for five years.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: What is the reason for the funding or what is the funding hoping to achieve?

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is a good point. I will give the member a bit of history. When Western Australia—Optus Stadium—secured the AFL grand final last year, the AFL was very appreciative that we were able to hold it in Western Australia due to the state government's great management of the COVID pandemic. We also wanted to ensure that that was not the only benefit to Western Australia, so together there was an agreement that we should provide further funding towards football in the Kimberley region. This was seen as an appropriate area because football can be used for many things in the Kimberley, including to improve other aspects of people's lives. Some of the areas that the funding will be used for will include engagement through community, high quality football facilities, pathways and sustainable travel. It will focus on localised engagement and delivery opportunities, which will benefit participants through sport. The WAFC, the AFL and the WA government, through the department, are looking at the best way to utilise the money.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: What is the criteria or measurement that is being used to ensure that the \$1.5 million is actually —

Dr A.D. BUTI: No, it is \$1 million per year for five years.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is that \$1 million from the state?

Dr A.D. BUTI: No. It is \$500 000 from the state and \$500 000 from the AFL. It is \$1 million per year, together, for five years.

[2.40 pm]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is not clear in the budget that it is \$500 000 from the state and \$500 000 from the AFL.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Ms Chopping to answer that.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: No, that is fine. If that is the case —

Dr A.D. BUTI: Just wait, member.

Ms L. Chopping: The intention initially was that the AFL money would come to the state and there would be a single funding agreement with the West Australian Football Commission to deliver the partnership. Since the budget papers were printed, there has been a late change to that agreement because the agreement is in the final stages. The AFL is now making its \$500 000 contribution directly, so it will not flow through the department. The budget will be corrected at the midyear review.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: In terms of the objectives and outcomes, who will oversee the results and will they be reviewed after a period of time such as the first or the second year? Who does that review? Is it the AFL or is it the department?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is the department.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is there a checklist or criteria that it needs to meet to continue the funding?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The department and the AFL will decide on the criteria or the funding. We know how the funding will be utilised and the department will be responsible for monitoring whether the intended results are achieved over that period of time.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: What are the intended results to be achieved? It just seems like a program. I am not saying that the Kimberley do not deserve it because, as I said, we have had an inquiry into the difficulties with regional sport. It is sometimes easier for the Kimberley league than, for example, the Gascoyne league that has to travel larger distances. It also has a high Indigenous population and a high Indigenous crime rate, much like the Kimberley. I am struggling to understand why the Kimberley was singled out when the Gascoyne has the same issues. That is why I want to know what the funding criteria is and if it has or has not been developed because it seems that this money is being pushed in a political sense rather than working out the best way to get that engagement in AFL that will hopefully lead to better outcomes, because sport plays a critical role in being able to move forward as a community.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes, the member is 100 per cent right; the Gascoyne area is very important as are the goldfields the southwest. All the regional areas are very important, but the AFL had a particular interest in the Kimberley region and there were existing programs there. I think the AFL thought that it would be easier to leverage off those programs. Hopefully, we get another grand final in the next few years and we can —

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: In 2059.

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is right, under the MCG agreement. I do not deny that the Gascoyne region needs it. The point is that the AFL was very keen on the Kimberley region and this was an opportunity that was too good not to take up, and that is why we have the Kimberley program.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: This is my last question. I am concerned that there is no criteria around that funding —

Dr A.D. BUTI: There will be.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: — and there is no vision on what the outcomes will be. I hope that this money is not going to be wasted in fuel rather than actually getting the outcomes that everyone wants to work towards. If those outcomes can be provided, that would be great, so that we have visibility over the taxpayers' money and the deal that has been done with the AFL.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I understand what the member has said. When I was the Minister for Sport and Recreation, I was also very keen to ensure that we set up a program that would have criteria that could be measured. A government steering committee has been established with representatives from the commission, the AFL, the department, Garnduwa and West Australian Country Football League to provide strategic oversight of the program.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have just two quick questions and then we will move on to division 37, if we can.

The CHAIR: Yes, member for Roe, go ahead.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 561 and the screen production facility, which is about four or five line items down from the top. In 2021–22, \$5.7 million was spent. Can the minister tell me what that expenditure was for?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Ms Chopping to correct me or to elaborate, but part of that money was spent on the market-let proposal process that was required for that project.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What is the current progress of this project?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is in progress.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the minister underline for me what kind of surveys and studies were undertaken in selecting the Victoria Quay site?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The surveys undertaken in selecting the Victoria Quay site were a part of the market-let proposal, which is still in progress.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is the Victoria Quay site going to happen or has the government moved on to another site?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As the member would know, in market-led proposals there are areas of confidentiality. All I would say is that we will let the process continue and the market-led proposal will continue. When a decision can be made, it will be made public.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Who is the proponent and what has happened with the business case, or have we actually moved on to another site?

Dr A.D. BUTI: This is a market-led proposal and at this stage that information is confidential.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is the government still persevering with the Victoria Quay site?

Dr A.D. BUTI: We are in the market-led proposal and that remains confidential.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have a final new question. I refer to page 546, "Perth Cultural Centre Precinct—Increased Security". It is about a third of the way down the page. That figure has basically doubled in this year's budget. Can the minister enlighten us as to why that is and what does that provide?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The expenditure of \$3.6 million for increased security was approved to provide a 24-hour security presence over that precinct when before we did not have that.

The appropriation was recommended.

[2.50 pm]

Division 37: Western Australian Sports Centre Trust, \$123 819 000 —

Mrs L.A. Munday, Chair.

Dr A.D. Buti, Minister for Finance representing the Minister for Sport and Recreation.

Mr D. Etherton, Chief Executive Officer.

Mr N. Lucas, Chief Financial Officer.

Mrs J. Carren, Director, Strategy and Partnerships.

Mr G. Hamley, Chief of Staff, Minister for Sport and Recreation.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 3 June 2022. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system.

Member for Roe, when you are ready.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 571 and the Optus Stadium rooftop attraction. How is this progressing? Has it been completed and how is it performing?

Dr A.D. BUTI: No, it is definitely performing. One of the great regrets of not being the sports minister anymore is that I did not get a chance to be at its opening. I am not sure whether Minister Templeman did—I think he might be scared of heights—but it is fully operative. Mr Etherton would like to say something.

Mr D. Etherton: With regard to the launch, we have actually had two events there. The first launch was for able-bodied customers. We have since updated some of the equipment to allow people in wheelchairs to also conduct the rooftop walk and we launched that a couple of weeks ago so that was fantastic.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am sure an invitation could be made to the member, as the opposition sports spokesperson.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I hope that Mr Etherton was leading by example on Sunday afternoon up there in the rain.

Dr A.D. BUTI: In the winch.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: On that same page, page 571, I refer to “Infrastructure Upgrades”. The sixth paragraph is about public safety and security aspects. VenuesWest is working with the Western Australia Police Force on infrastructure upgrades to mitigate security risks. Can the minister enlighten us on what that entails? We are talking about national threat levels and relevant security agencies. Is this in relation to terrorism or normal security measures?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Unless Mr Etherton wants to add anything, for security reasons it would not be responsible of us to disclose the issues about that. The member can be rest assured that VenuesWest is working to ensure that appropriate security is provided.

Mr D. Etherton: I will just add two quick things. Without going into detail, as the minister said, hostile vehicle mitigation and CCTV are two of the core pieces of infrastructure that we are implementing in that regard.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Page 575 outlines the asset investment program and subparagraph 1.2 reads —

\$4.5 million to upgrade or replace technology infrastructure including ticketing management systems at Optus Stadium;

Can we have some detail on that and also how long will that play out for?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I defer to Mr Etherton.

Mr D. Etherton: In the midyear review we will update that description because it is narrower than what we are actually spending that money on. The \$4.5 million for projects at Optus Stadium are wide and varied. When we opened the venue, a lot of money was spent on kitchen, catering and ticketing equipment et cetera. Over time, all that depreciates and deteriorates and we need to replace. It is quite a broad program of infrastructure. The member will remember from our discussions previously that some equipment was put in by us and also by the design, build, finance and maintain regime. This money is for the equipment that we put into the asset after it was, in essence, built.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I have a question that follows on from this. I refer to page 571, “Strategic Asset Program” and the seventh paragraph —

The findings from a full asset condition assessment audit of the portfolio are being utilised to prioritise VenuesWest’s capital investment planning.

...

The condition of assets is critical to enable compliance with world-class training and competition standards ...

Is the minister able to table or provide by way of supplementary information the strategic asset program and what VenuesWest has asked for from the government to maintain these assets in terms of cost and time frames?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will not be providing supplementary information, but I can give the member some initial information and Mr Etherton might want to elaborate. Some of that work involves making energy savings and the installation of photovoltaic cells, LED lights and smart metering. Amenities in several facilities are to be upgraded, including

shade and toilet facilities and air-conditioning. Improvements will also be made to disability access to HBF Stadium, including installing a lift. These investments will deliver improved accessibility, amenities, safety and athlete training in key venues. Local companies will generally be sourced to complete the works. Does Mr Etherton want to add anything?

Mr D. Etherton: Yes. I will point the member to page 575 where there is an explicit line in response to the building condition audit and the capital works funding that has been provided in response to that application. The member will see about three-quarters of the way down amounts of \$590 000, \$1.04 million, \$739 000 and \$2.915 million. That is the government's response to the building condition audit.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I understand that. I just want to make sure that what VenuesWest is putting forward is what the government is actually funding. I asked for a list of the works under the strategic asset program and the cost to upkeep VenuesWest's assets to see whether there is any discrepancy between the two.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Is the member joking with that question? Does he honestly believe that governments provide members with all correspondence between agencies and governments?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am asking —

Dr A.D. BUTI: This has been agreed to. This is in the budget and I am not —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am just asking if it is possible to get a copy.

Dr A.D. BUTI: No. This is —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: If the answer is no, the answer is no; I was just asking.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am surprised by the question, to tell you the truth.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: If you do not ask, you do not get.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes, that is right.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 575, about three or four lines from the bottom, "Funds Included in Department of Treasury—Major State Infrastructure". An amount of \$22.5 million was attributed to the settlement of the Optus Stadium contract dispute. In last year's budget papers, it was \$23.5 million. Can the minister explain why there is a discrepancy? Is this now settled and are there any other unsettled disputes to cover?

[3.00 pm]

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Mr Etherton to answer this.

Mr D. Etherton: Over time, negotiations change the amount and, no, it has not settled. A deed has not been signed yet, but I understand it is very close to settling and, no, we do not envisage any other major issues or any issues with that settlement after it has finished. It is a full and final settlement.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have a new question. I refer to the same page and subparagraph 1.3 —

\$2.6 million to replace the athletics track and other minor works at the athletics stadium;

Given that it is a pretty new venue, can we have some detail on what the \$2.6 million is for?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is for the planned replacement of the athletics track. It was always expected that this would happen.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Given that it is a relatively new venue, the replacement of the athletics track seems to have come up pretty quickly.

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is about 10 years old and it is utilised extensively. This government committed to a high quality facility. We could have let it go, I suppose, and let it run into the ground, but we committed to having a first-class athletics track.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is it actually wear and tear or has a new surface come to light that would improve the standard of athletics?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Mr Etherton to explain.

Mr D. Etherton: The member might recall that originally the track was replaced very soon after we opened because there was a failure in the track that was provided. This is a planned replacement of the track. It has lasted the seven years that we expected it to last. It was in a deteriorated state and we are replacing the track. We would have done it a year earlier if not for the COVID-19 pandemic and we could not get the installers to come in. But it was a planned replacement. Each asset has a life. The life of some assets is 40 years and for others it is five years. In the case of an athletics track, it has a life of around seven years. There is nothing abnormal about this.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I reckon that The member would even be able to do 100 metres in 13 seconds on the new track.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I appreciate that response. I will happily move to the Western Australian Institute of Sport, if that is okay.

The appropriation was recommended.

Western Australian Institute of Sport —

Mrs L.A. Munday, Chair.

Dr A.D. Buti, Minister for Finance representing the Minister for Sport and Recreation.

Mr S. Lawrence, Chief Executive Officer.

Mr D. Fitzpatrick, Manager, Corporate Services.

Mr G. Hamley, Chief of Staff, Minister for Sport and Recreation.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 3 June 2022. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system.

The CHAIR: Member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I will be very brief, as I was last year. On page 580, we have the budgeted figure of \$143 000 for asset replacement cover for each year. Can the minister explain what this actually covers?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Mr Lawrence to answer.

Mr S. Lawrence: Each year we plan to replace some of the operational assets such as treadmills, cameras and other sports technology that is required to make a scientific assessments of the athletes.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: On page 565 the Western Australian Institute of Sport receives \$2.416 million each year from the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries. How many athletes does WAIS oversee?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I think it is 219, but I will ask Mr Lawrence if that is right.

Mr S. Lawrence: On direct scholarships, we have somewhere between around 210 to 250 athletes; it varies during the year because each sport has its own cycle. In addition to that, we support another 150 athletes in performance pathways leading up to scholarship programs. These are athletes who we work with in collaboration with state sporting associations. Our facilities are also used by the national hockey program that is based in Perth as well as various professional teams that are based on the precinct.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: How many FTE are there at the WA Institute of Sport?

Mr S. Lawrence: The current FTE is 53.6.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Has the institute modelled how participation rates may rise or fall based on access to major sporting events?

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is really not within the purview of the Western Australian Institute of Sport, so, no.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does the minister think that hosting a major international sporting event such as the Commonwealth Games would actually improve participation rates in WA?

Dr A.D. BUTI: We are talking about the Western Australian Institute of Sport's role in the development and training of elite athletes. That question is not really relevant.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Are they not the ones who go to the Commonwealth Games?

The CHAIR: Is that a question, member for North West Central?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have a further question.

The CHAIR: Is that a different question, member for Roe?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I would have thought it was relevant considering a lot of the athletes who train at the Western Australian Institute of Sport aspire to go to the Commonwealth Games and the Olympic Games and the like.

Dr A.D. BUTI: What budget line item is the member referring to?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It is WA Institute of Sport, and \$2.4 million is budgeted. That is really where I am coming from, I guess. It is an aspirational thing flowing on from that, minister. Regardless of that, I think we will leave it at that and move on; if that is all right? Thanks, Mr Lawrence.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Actually, that was probably longer than last year.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It was longer—I know.

The CHAIR: That completes the examination of the Western Australian Institute of Sport off-budget authority.

Division 43: Planning, Lands and Heritage — Service 3, Heritage, \$16 162 000 —

Mrs L.A. Munday, Chair.

Dr A.D. Buti, Minister for Finance representing the Minister for Heritage.

Mr A. Kannis, Director General.

Mr B. Harvey, Executive Director, Heritage Services.

Mr S. McLeod, Chief Finance Officer.

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

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 3 June 2022. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system.

The first question goes to the member for Vasse.

[3.10 pm]

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 737 of budget paper No 2, volume 2 and the increase of 16 FTEs for the implementation of the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2021. Are these staff permanent or contracted?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Member, I do not think that is in this division. We are looking at heritage. That will be dealt with tomorrow.

Ms L. METTAM: Is this division 43?

Dr A.D. BUTI: This is, yes. That will be in tomorrow's session.

The CHAIR: Yes, this is service 3.

Ms L. METTAM: Okay.

Ms C.M. TONKIN: I have a question, and I have a vested interest because I believe an ancestor of mine might have been involved in the construction of Fremantle Prison. I refer to page 738, the asset investment program and new works in the 2022–23 state budget. What benefits will the overall \$12.6 million invested in Fremantle Prison have on improving our state's heritage and tourism offerings?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Thank you, member, for the question. The 2022–23 budget provides the largest single injection of capital funding into Fremantle Prison since it opened as a heritage tourism site in 1992. As it is our state's only built World Heritage site, we have a responsibility to the community to protect and preserve this iconic WA building. The budget allocation will ensure that maintenance works and repairs can occur, such as upgrades to the prison's hydraulic and drainage, fire and emergency safety and electrical systems. By preserving the heritage fabric of the site, we will continue to uphold our UNESCO World Heritage listing, which has positive reputational impacts for the state. These works will encourage increased community and tourism engagement, and improve accessibility for visitors with disabilities. Fremantle Prison makes a direct contribution of \$19.1 million annually to the Western Australian economy, including 122 FTE jobs through direct operations and tourism. The 2022–23 state budget offers significant investment into Fremantle Prison's already award-winning tourism offerings that will boost visitation and result in a stronger WA economy.

The CHAIR: I just realised, Minister Buti, you have been in the chair since 1.00 pm. Do you need a break or are you all right?

DR A.D. BUTI: We make them tough in Armadale! We will keep going; thanks very much, chair.

Ms L. METTAM: I have a different question, of course. I refer to page 741 and the cultural and heritage assets program under the details of controlled grants and subsidies. My question relates to severe tropical cyclone Seroja. Why does 2021–22 have an underspend of \$539 000 and what specific projects will that \$961 000 commitment be spent on?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Mr Harvey, are you happy to provide some information?

Mr B. Harvey: Certainly. Thank you for the question. There was an allocation of funding, about \$2 million, to assist with grants for heritage restoration after tropical cyclone Seroja that have been spread over a couple of financial years. That is essentially the split for that funding plus an administrative component on top of those figures.

Ms L. METTAM: Can the minister confirm that there was an underspend in 2021–22?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes. Mr Harvey will answer.

Mr B. Harvey: Yes, there was. We have not had as many applications as we anticipated coming out of the process. We have had staff up there to promote and advertise the program. We have discovered that in many cases the insurance coverage for a particular building was sufficient to repair or restore it to what it was originally. Also, people have not been able to put in claims because of the lack of professional services or tradies up there to do the work. So, in actual fact, we have had a much lower application rate than had been expected at this point in time.

Ms L. METTAM: What projects will the \$961 000 in this year's budget be specifically committed to and why is there no future funding going forward?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Mr Harvey to respond. It is not that there is no future funding. That is the allocation in this budget process but it is not an indication that there will not be any future funding. Anyway, I will ask Mr Harvey to answer that.

Mr B. Harvey: Member, the \$961 000 is the next allocation of funding to that and it will be dependent upon the number of applications that are received. There is a \$20 000 cap on applications, for any applications. It was really, as I said, that we were expecting far more applications than we have received so far. That is the funding that is available for any applications that we do receive.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 741, the “Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies” table and the line item “Cossack Townsite”. As a former local member for that area, I thought it would have progressed by now. I understand that the government gave Cossack to the Ngarluma Yindjibarndi Foundation Ltd. It was chosen as the preferred proponent in December 2020. Could the minister perhaps give an update on where that project sits?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I might ask for some elaboration, but as the member knows, being a former member for this area, it is on the state Register of Heritage Places. The site is constrained and the City of Karratha decided not to proceed with the current arrangements due to ongoing management costs and unresolved planning and land management issues. Various negotiations and discussions have taken place, but noting these constraining works are being carried out, the department has sought approval to extend the caretaker contract until 30 June this year at a cost of \$0.46 million per annum. Because the town site is highly constrained, the land is not serviced. It is subject to natural hazards, including coastal erosion and an inundation risk, limiting the town site's potential developmental footprint. Funding of \$0.12 million is allocated each year for the conservation of the historic Cossack town site. The department recently obtained development application approval for a number of heritage works at the site. A tender document will be prepared to engage a builder.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: In 2020, the government announced that NYFL—that is, the Ngarluma Yindjibarndi Foundation—in conjunction with the City of Karratha would look at developing that site. Is the minister saying that after two years the City of Karratha has now pulled out and no development is going to take place as per the media release back in 2020? Is that correct?

[3.20 pm]

Dr A.D. BUTI: The arrangement with NYFL has been extended to 30 September this year and, as I mentioned, the department has obtained development application approval for a number of heritage works. It is a difficult issue and the City of Karratha has made its own decision on it. I mean, it has made its decision.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Minister, I understand it is a very, very difficult piece of land and a very historic piece of land as well that is valuable to our heritage. What is the department doing to assist NYFL to come up with a viable plan moving forward?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Part of this is under the Heritage portfolio and part of it is probably under the Lands portfolio. It is complex. I mean, as far as the Heritage portfolio is concerned, the state government will continue to provide annual funding for the conservation of the historic Cossack town site. In regard to the overall development, that really comes under the Lands portfolio.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Having been the member for that area and understanding that I have heard this all before many times, was it just an election ploy to say that we are going to do something about Cossack with the traditional owners and the City of Karratha, knowing that there is not a hope in hell that it can be developed because of all the issues the minister raised only five minutes ago? It is a media statement of nothing that was put out at the time.

Dr A.D. BUTI: No, is the answer to your question. I know that during my tenure as Minister for Lands we were working very hard on the issue. So, the answer to the member's question is no.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: As did many lands ministers before you.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Well, there you go.

The appropriation was recommended.

Division 46: Heritage Council of Western Australia, \$1 557 000 —

Mrs L.A. Munday, Chair.

Dr A.D. Buti, Minister for Finance representing the Minister for Heritage.

Mr A. Kannis, Director General.

Mr B. Harvey, Executive Director, Heritage Services.

Mr S. McLeod, Chief Finance Officer.

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

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

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I give the call to the member for Vasse.

Ms L. METTAM: I refer to page 775 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and the explanation of significant movements. Paragraph 1 states there is an expected reduction in grant funds available due to an expected rise in operational costs. How does the Heritage Council work with grant recipients to meet project expectations, noting that there are significant construction pressures at the moment and the cost of supplies is increasing?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Which page is the member looking at?

Ms L. METTAM: It is a comment under the heading “Explanation of Significant Movements”.

The CHAIR: What page are we on, member for Vasse?

Ms L. METTAM: It is page 775.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Unless I have got a different page—is the member talking about significant issues impacting the agency?

Ms L. METTAM: It is the explanation of significant movements.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Is the member referring to the heritage grants program?

Ms L. METTAM: Yes.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The paragraph states that the council “provides an annual grants program for conservation ... The grants assist in protecting the social, environmental and economic value”. Is that what the member is talking about?

Ms L. METTAM: Yes.

Dr A.D. BUTI: So what is the member’s question?

Ms L. METTAM: Given that we are in a very heated construction market at the moment, how does the Heritage Council work with grant recipients to meet project expectations, noting the pressures on delivering projects at this point and the rising cost of construction?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Thank you, member. I will ask Mr Harvey to answer that.

Mr B. Harvey: Thank you, minister. The department, on behalf of the Heritage Council, works closely with applicants prior to them submitting applications and one of the things that we discuss with them is the potential cost of the work they want to do. Applicants are obviously required to also make a funding commitment to the project, so that is also factored in there. This has been raised as a particular issue in the most recent grants program, which the Minister for Heritage, Minister Templeman, recently announced the awards for, and it is something that the department plans to take back to the Heritage Council for its consideration on how that can be considered in the future.

Ms L. METTAM: Further to that, what impact has that had on the grants that have been appropriated or delivered? Have we seen a reduction in the number of grants or has there been a delay?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Is the member asking whether there has there been a reduction in the granting of grants or the applications for grants?

Ms L. METTAM: In terms of the granting of the grants.

Mr B. Harvey: No, there has not been a reduction, member. Again, the program was oversubscribed. A measure that the Heritage Council introduced this year to try to spread the available grants was to reduce the cap from \$100 000 to \$40 000 to ensure it went further, and that was successful in terms of a greater number of grant recipients receiving the funding that they were requesting. Certainly, there has been no shortage of applications to the fund, in excess of the funding available.

The appropriation was recommended.

[3.30 pm]

Division 24: Education — International Education, \$451 000 —

Mrs L.A. Munday, Chair.

Dr A.D. Buti, Minister for Finance representing the Minister for International Education.

Ms R. Brown, Director General, Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation.

Ms J. Kirk, Acting Executive Director, Strategic Policy, Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation.

Mr R. Sansalone, Chief Financial Officer, Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation.

Ms K. Ho, Director General, Department of Training and Workforce Development.

Ms G. Husk, Acting Executive Director, Service Delivery, Department of Training and Workforce Development.

Mr A. Blagaich, Executive Director, School Curriculum and Standards, Department of Education.

Ms R. Lee, Executive Director, Strategy and Policy, Department of Education.

Mr G. Hamley, Chief of Staff, Minister for International Education.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 3 June 2022. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system.

I give the call to the member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Welcome, everyone. I refer to page 364 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the table at the top of the page. Under the heading “Other” is the line item “International Education Program”. I want to ask some questions about that program. There is \$451 000 in this year’s budget. How many students will this funding attract, or what is the projected number of students that this funding will attract?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Sorry; can the member just repeat that, please?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 364 and the table at the top of the page. “International Education Program” is the fifth line item under the heading “Other”, about three-quarters of the way down that table.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Did the member want some information on what that involves?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Yes. I am just asking for the projection of how many students that particular funding will attract.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Mr Blagaich to answer that.

Mr A. Blagaich: Thank you very much for the question. Over the course of the past few years, we have been looking at the number of schools that we are trying to get involved. Currently, there are three sections to the international education budget. There is the way that we calculate it. There is international education 1, which are the schools that we have as legacy schools. There are 11 schools in that group. There are 17 schools coming in IE 2. In IE 3, we are adding a sum total of schools that will take us up to 51 schools. So we will look at a total of 51 over the coming years. Projected numbers for those have run slow because of COVID, hence we have some additional funding there to support us as we come forward to getting up to that number of 51 schools.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What is the projected retention rate of those students who flow on to complete degrees and the like? Does the department have a figure that it works on?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Mr Blagaich, but I doubt that we would have that information. We do not have that information.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What percentage of placements end up in Perth universities?

Dr A.D. BUTI: That end up going to Perth universities?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Yes.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask whether Mr Blagaich can answer that. Probably not—but he might.

Mr A. Blagaich: Of the students who complete the Western Australian Certificate of Education offshore, we have been retaining approximately two per cent into Western Australian universities, and that is the number that we are working on increasing.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I think I will wrap up on that question for the moment.

I want to go back to page 110 of budget paper No 3. Under “COVID-19 Response”, there is the “Safe Transition Industry Support Package — International Education”. There was a \$16 million expense over 2021–22. How much has been expended under each of the following programs? The first one is the student quarantine support program.

Dr A.D. BUTI: As of February this year, the government announced the three grant programs for students, including \$8 million for the international student self-quarantine support program, \$2 million for the university service for student support program and \$6 million for the industry support program. As of 2 May of this year, 2 299 applications have been submitted for the \$2 000 payment as part of the international student self-quarantine fund. As of 2 May 2022, 34 small or medium-sized providers have applied for support through the industry support program. The evaluation of these applications is continuing, with payments totalling up to \$6 million expected to be made by 30 June this year. Payments to universities through the university services for student support program are linked to the outcome of the international student self-quarantine support program. Payments to universities are expected to be made by 30 June of this year.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does the minister have any projections of how many students have been retained due to the support of this program compared with what was likely to happen prior to the —

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is difficult because we would need to do an experiment with a control group and a non-control group. We do not usually do those sorts of things for humans because there are ethical considerations.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Has the implementation of this program through the university sector has been strongly supported by all universities and all sections of the international education sector?

Dr A.D. BUTI: My understanding is that it has been very strongly supported, yes.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Okay. I will wrap up on that one.

The appropriation was recommended.

Division 25: Training and Workforce Development — International Education, \$21 307 000 —

Mrs L.A. Munday, Chair.

Dr A.D. Buti, Minister for Finance representing the Minister for International Education.

Ms K. Ho, Director General, Department of Training and Workforce Development.

Ms G. Husk, Acting Executive Director, Service Delivery, Department of Training and Workforce Development.

Ms R. Brown, Director General, Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation.

Ms J. Kirk, Acting Executive Director, Strategic Policy, Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation.

Mr R. Sansalone, Chief Financial Officer, Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation.

Mr A. Blagaich, Executive Director, School Curriculum and Standards, Department of Education.

Ms R. Lee, Executive Director, Strategy and Policy, Department of Education.

Mr G. Hamley, Chief of Staff, Minister for International Education.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: I give the call to member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 385 and paragraph 5 under the heading “Labour Market Conditions”, which states —

With the lifting of the State’s hard border, the Department is implementing new initiatives to attract skilled migrants and international students ...

Can the minister outline what some of these initiatives are?

[3.40 pm]

Dr A.D. BUTI: I might ask Ms Ho to elaborate on that.

Ms K. Ho: Thank you, minister. There is a new budget initiative in this year’s budget—that is, the regional TAFE international student strategy. It is a \$2.4 million initiative to attract international students to live, work and study in regional Western Australia, alleviating critical skill shortages being experienced by regional businesses in targeted occupations such as aged care, disability care, child care, hospitality and tourism. The program will commence on

1 January 2023 for a two-year period. It will offer up to 200 international students a bursary of \$5 000 and support to find part-time work and accommodation from a designated officer in the TAFE colleges. The courses will be available and will align with skilled migration pathways to permanent residency. Students will be able to study with South Regional TAFE, Central Regional TAFE or North Regional TAFE.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That is very good. I have a further question on that. I note, minister, obviously those elements—aged care, child care—are well and truly needed and the \$5 000 assistance et cetera is good, but what is the time frame for how long it will be before those students end up in the workforce to assist in those industries?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Is the member asking how long it will take those students to complete their course?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Yes.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Ms Ho to answer, but, obviously, it will depend on whether they are doing it part time or full time.

Ms K. Ho: Many of those courses in those areas are one-year courses but international students are able to work part time while they are studying. We expect that through their part-time work arrangements they will be able to assist with the skills needs in each region.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is it correct that this program starts in 2023?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It starts on 1 January 2023.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Why is it starting so late when the need is right now in child care, in tourism and in aged care? It is right now. Why are we waiting? Why is the government dragging its feet until 1 January 2023?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am sure Ms Ho will add to this, but, as the member would know, most courses start at the beginning of the academic year. This budget announcement was made in May and we cannot retrospectively apply it to February this year, so that is why it will start in the next academic year.

Ms K. Ho: That is correct, minister. I would add that there is a lag time with the marketing to and recruitment of international students from overseas. We will commence marketing and recruiting students in about August for the 2023 academic year.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is well intentioned, but the reality is it is not going to affect what we need presently. Small businesses are desperate. People in regional communities are desperate because they cannot work because they cannot put their kids into day care. There is no sense of urgency. Surely, there are other incentives to get international students to come and provide some relief. It will not be all because the number of workers that is needed is too great, but by waiting until 2023, it seems like the government is missing the boat on it.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Ms Ho may want to add to this. This is about international students. It is not about preventing people from coming to work in these industries straightaway. Also, may I add, thank goodness we have a new federal government that takes these issues very seriously. We are looking at the workforce but this is about training. Part of the issue the member raised is about the workforce, which is a slightly different issue.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: No, sorry, minister; I understand what it is. It is training. We are offering international students not only a pathway, but also part-time work, whether that is in a cafe, or in a restaurant at night, or in a bar, or at the front counter of a hotel or motel. It will provide incentives to get international tourists who have been our lifeline, when it comes to backpackers and so forth. This is a welcome addition but an addition that is way too late to be able to fill the current gaps. We have been through mental health issues and small businesses are under pressure. It is huge. Anyway, I must not go on because I have another question.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 384 and spending changes. I note the line item “Regional TAFE International Student Strategy” under new initiatives has funding of \$776 000 in 2022–23, which then drops to \$622 000 and then down to \$202 000 and then to zero. Can the minister tell me what this funding in the current budget is for, and why it is dropping to zero in the out years?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Ms Ho to answer that. It is interesting that this question just shows how the previous Liberal–National government left us such bad financial books.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I cannot see that item in any line item. Where is the line item for that?

Dr A.D. BUTI: We budget for a certain period of time. We do not just continue to evaluate. We will provide funding to the end of 2024–25 and that will then be re-evaluated. We do not just keep funding going on forever. I will ask Ms Ho if she would like to answer that question.

Ms K. Ho: Thank you, minister. This is the line for the new initiative that we previously described, the \$2.4 million for the regional international TAFE student strategy. It is a two-year pilot and so, as the minister said, when that pilot has been run it will be evaluated to consider the future.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Does that include sparkies, plumbers and, given the fact that there is a shortage in the building industry, apprentices? We could get international students to come and do that now. They would not have to wait until 1 January. There is a huge need now.

Dr A.D. BUTI: All right. I will ask Ms Ho if she wants to answer that. But, look, the member is getting mixed up here between students and workforce. If you are going to bring these students in to do a sparky course, that is going to take a number of years as well. We cannot just bring in students and say, “You become a sparky straightaway”. They will be either a qualified sparky or not, and they can come from overseas. This is a program about students, not the workforce, as such. Anyway, Ms Ho, do you want to answer the question? But really, the member’s question is not properly directed.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: No. With all due respect, minister, this is about someone who wants to come from overseas who does not necessarily need to go down a particular path. They can go and get a trade and be training on the job by 1 January if they started now.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Nothing is preventing them doing that.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The need is now.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes, and we are not stopping them from doing that.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am talking about providing incentives. What I am trying to say is that if the government provides the same incentives for the building industry to the hospitality industry with apprentices, it could fulfil whatever the government has as its criteria.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Ms Ho.

Ms K. Ho: The trades mentioned are achieved through four-year apprenticeships in general and they are not generally offered to international students. There is a four-year lag to have a fully qualified tradesperson. There are a range of other initiatives that do not relate to international education to address the needs in the construction trades.

[3.50 pm]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I think the lag is in the decision-making by the government.

Dr A.D. BUTI: May I just add that the issue is the dire need for people to move into these areas that have been identified, such as child care and aged care. They do not need an incentive to become sparkies; people are becoming sparkies.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 392, “Recruitment and Management of International Students”. I note the FTE growing from 32 to 51 in the next budget year. Can the minister enlighten us as to what those FTE will be doing?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Ms Ho to answer that.

Ms K. Ho: The growth in the FTE reflects the recovery of the service delivery. As international students increase, staff at TAFE International WA will increase to service that business.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Okay. In light of that, what is the expected increase in international students over the forward estimates?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Does Ms Ho have any comments on that?

Ms K. Ho: Yes, I have; thank you. We are forecasting TAFE college students for 2022–23 at 1 450, rising to 1 700 the following year, 2 486 in the following year and in the 2025–26 year to 3 030. They are the TAFE students. I have got figures for English language intensive courses for overseas students as well. Are you interested in those? For 2022–23, we have 100, then rising to 200 in 2023–24, 200 in 2024–25 and 200 in 2025–26.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Okay, thank you.

The appropriation was recommended.

Division 14: Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation — Service 1, International Education, \$153 756 000 —

Mrs L.A. Munday, Chair.

Dr A.D. Buti, Minister for Finance representing the Minister for International Education.

Ms R. Brown, Director General.

Ms K. Ho, Director General, Department of Training and Workforce Development.

Ms G. Husk, Acting Executive Director, Service Delivery.

Mr R. Sansalone, Chief Financial Officer.

Mr A. Blagaich, Executive Director, School Curriculum and Standards.

Ms R. Lee, Executive Director, Strategy and Policy.

Ms J. Kirk, Acting Executive Director, Strategic Policy.

Mr G. Hamley, Chief of Staff, Minister for International Education.

The CHAIR: If we could change any advisers—no? We are all good to go straight up?

Dr A.D. BUTI: We will stay.

The CHAIR: We do not need any introduction; we can just go straight into it?

Dr A.D. BUTI: We can go straight in.

The CHAIR: I call the member for Roe and then the member for Vasse.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 197, line item “International Education”, under “COVID–19 Response”. There was \$13.8 million for 2021–22 and that moves to \$5.09 million in 2022–23. Firstly, how many international students studied in WA in the financial year relating to the \$13.8 million being spent on the COVID response?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As of the week ending 21 March this year, there are approximately 15 573 international students. As of 9 May, there are 16 747 onshore student visa holders in Australia studying. How can that be? That does not make sense. Just wait a minute, thanks.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Further question.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Wait; I am just trying to give the member the correct answer.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Sorry.

Dr A.D. BUTI: There are about 16 747 international students in Western Australia as of 9 May 2022.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Okay; thanks, minister. What has been the average student numbers in WA over the last 10 years?

Dr A.D. BUTI: If the member wants to put that on notice, we will give him an answer.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Okay. I refer to “International Education” and the StudyPerth campaign. What has been spent each year on attraction over the previous three years?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Which line item is the member looking at?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It is part of the “International Education” line and the \$16 million, basically.

Dr A.D. BUTI: For the StudyPerth program, since 2005, we have spent about \$1.3 million per annum. In 2019, the WA government agreed to fund StudyPerth an additional \$1.5 million annually for three years to support the implementation of the strategy. The additional funding was in addition to base funding of the \$1.3 million that has historically been provided on an annual grant. In 2021, the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation negotiated a new one-year funding agreement worth \$2.8 million that replaced the government’s existing grants and contract with StudyPerth.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: How many students are forecast to arrive in WA over the next financial year?

Dr A.D. BUTI: We do not have that information.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: On page 198, under “New Initiatives”, we have “International Education” again with the “Building Student Pipeline” and “Industry Support” line items. Has anything been done on housing options for international students?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The government allocated student accommodation subsidies in 2022–23 to the tune of \$3.75 million.

The appropriation was recommended

Division 47: National Trust of Australia (WA), \$3 620 000 —

The appropriation was recommended

Meeting suspended from 4.00 to 4.30 pm

[4.30 pm]

Division 36: Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries — Service 2, Local Government, \$14 494 000 —

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Ms R. Saffioti, Minister for Transport representing the Minister for Local Government.

Ms L. Chopping, Director General.

Ms D. Merritt, Executive Director, Regulatory Reform.

Mr T. Fraser, Executive Director.

Mr L. Carren, Chief Financial Officer.

Mr C. White, Director, Programs, Infrastructure.

Mr B. Hennessey, Acting Chief of Staff, Minister for Local Government.

Ms J. Colli, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: The estimates committees will be reported by Hansard and the daily proof *Hansard* will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point. Consideration is restricted to items for which a vote of money is

proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must relate to a page number, item or amount related to the current division, and members should preface their questions with these details. Some divisions are the responsibility of more than one minister. Ministers shall only be examined in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 3 June 2022. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I am representing Minister John Carey today.

The CHAIR: Thank you, minister. I give the call to the member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I think this first question for the Minister for Transport is sort of in her mode anyway. I refer to page 546, under “Ongoing Initiatives”, and under that section is the line item “Off-Road Vehicle Special Purpose Account”. There is \$538 000 in the 2022–23 budget that then drops down in the subsequent three years. How will those funds be spent?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: This is a joint initiative between the Department of Transport and this department of local government. I think everyone recognises the increased activity of off-road vehicles. We are trying to create a system of registration. In this instance that funding is allocated between the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries working with the Department of Transport about how we can have a more efficient registration process. There is an existing paper-based system, which is a key hurdle for attracting registrations. This is about creating a new system, fixing the registration system and working with the Department of Transport in creating a new electronic registration system.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Considering the off-road vehicle fees that are collected annually, can the minister please advise where these funds are going? Are they being disbursed into the off-road vehicle account?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Yes, they are and they are being expended on particular projects. For example, in recent years, funds from the account have been used to create a beginners flat track trail at Pinjar, upgrading the trails at the York and Pinjar off-road vehicle areas, improving road access and signage at the Lancelin off-road vehicle area, and, pending approval, other projects around the state. Funds have also been expended to develop a concept plan for a new area in the metropolitan area and undertaking new site assessments for potential areas. This has been an issue for many, many years. The Department of Transport, together with this agency, is working on how we can create new areas for off-road vehicles and also have a better registration system.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: How much is actually in the off-road vehicle special purpose account at the moment?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Page 546 shows the expenditure of the funds. In relation to the current amount sitting in the account, I might need to take that on notice. Approximately \$770 000 is in the account.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The minister mentioned the Lancelin site. Can she enlighten us about the future of the Lancelin site and concept plans?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: For this financial year, \$73 000 has been approved to enhance road access to the Lancelin off-road vehicle area and to develop a concept plan for Metro Road, which is in the Shire of Brookton, a potential off-road area gazetted site.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the minister tell me when the Back on Track strategy will be implemented?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: We can provide some further information, but as I understand it, it is an ongoing program that we are delivering. These sort of projects help deliver that strategy, and as I said, this is an area both the transport agency and this agency are working on together. I will throw to Tim Fraser to provide some more information on that strategy.

Mr T. Fraser: Thank you, minister, and I thank the member for the question. The Back on Track strategy is also part of what the off-road vehicle ministerial advisory committee has been working on, identifying not only the new sites but also working so that the committee, over the next six months, is developing up sites, working with a consultant to identify sites to further develop the expansion of the ORV in the area, and also developing up a maintenance program as part of that strategy. One of the key areas, such as Lancelin and others, has been ongoing maintenance and safety. As part of that strategy, the committee is actually working to develop new areas and identifying those as dedicated ORV. That work is ongoing through the committee at the moment.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thank you very much. I am sure they will be pleased to hear that. The progress of the online registration account, has that been developed or is that progressing well?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Yes, it is currently being developed. I do not have an exact date on when it is going to be finalised but that registration process is underway.

[4.40 pm]

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to page 546 of budget paper No 2, volume 2 and the second item under “Service Summary”, “Regulation and Support of Local Government”. I note that there is a decline in the costs or the resources for the regulation support of local government in 2022–23 as opposed to 2021–22.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Sorry, what page—546?

Mr R.S. LOVE: Page 550. Did I say 546? It is page 550; I am sorry. Under the second line item, “Regulation and Support of Local Government”, we see a decline of some millions of dollars in support for local government. What is the reason for that reduction of what seems to be a fairly long-term established trend of \$16 million in 2021, \$18 million in 2022 and roughly \$14.5 million in this current budget year?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Just to clarify, the member is asking for the reduction of funding or the change in funding from \$18.42 million in 2021–22 to \$14.4 million in 2022–23?

Mr R.S. LOVE: Yes.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: This relates to the ending or finalisation of some significant projects. In 2021–22, for example, significant funds were allocated for the consultation and drafting of legislation for the puppy farming transition and project funding. That funding was allocated in 2021–22 and does not exist next year. There are no cuts in normal operational funding, but more specific projects that have a finite life. That is what happened in 2021–22.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Further to that—this pertains back to page 546, because there is a regulatory reform package in there—does that form part of the second line item that we just discussed, that \$14 million, or is that separate from that and in some way different?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: The regulatory reform, that spending change shown on page 546, crosses a number of different service sectors, for example, the local government sector and liquor, racing and gaming. There is money allocated for reform that is allocated across the different service sectors across the department. As I said, the movements from year to year is specifically the end of finite election commitments. There was \$1.2 million allocated for all consultation and preparedness for the puppy farming legislation. That has a finite life as we move into the establishment of that system.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Pertaining to my original point on regulation and the fall in support of local government in the second line item on page 550, the minister has explained a couple of programs that have come to an end or been developed, but at the same time, we are about to launch a review of the act and a complete overhaul of the way local government operates with a reduction in resources for the department. Already, the expectation is that there will be a development of an inspectorate and moderators and a whole range of matters that will be an ongoing responsibility of the department.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Sure.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Whichever way they are delivered, whether it is a standalone inspectorate or whether it has a staff housed within the department, that work will have to be done. How does that correspond with the reduction in resources being made available to the department in this budget?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Firstly, there has been no reduction made available to the resources of the department; this area is not receiving any budget cuts. We are saying that the movement in that expenditure reflects the end of finite programs. They are one-off programs or election commitments that had funding attached and do not exist in the forward estimates. There are no cuts to the operational funding of the department. In respect to funding of specific reform initiatives that will come out on the finalisation of the local government reform program, that funding will be considered once that reform program is finalised. As the member outlined, there is a number of different proposals or options that are being considered. Once those are finalised and brought through to Parliament, we will be funding those appropriately through either midyear review or budget processes. We will need to finalise all the consultation and formalise the final program of reform and then, further funding will be provided.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Yes. I thank the minister for that. That is a good explanation, but the minister will be seeking further funding. Is that written in the budget documents somewhere that there will be an expectation of extra funding? I would have thought that would have been reflected in the budget rather than just be something drawn out by discussing estimates.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: No; I think it is like all concepts. Normally, once final legislation is approved and we have an understanding of what is actually involved, we are then able to do the detailed estimates and provide funding. As I understand, that is the normal case of drafting legislation. There are also existing systems that may be, in a sense—what is the word?—replaced with new systems. I am not sure of all the detail but there will definitely be new processes. How that is funded and additional funds will be considered as part of future processes. That is pretty much the norm in relation to when legislation is brought in. We normally have to understand what the legislation entails, exactly what are the budget requirements and also the impact on existing FTE and any requirements for new FTE. That is a normal thing for new processes. For example, as part of planning reform, I have not injected funds for new processes that have not yet been agreed, so, as a result, that happens through the normal budget and midyear review processes.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: On page 560, at paragraph 2.7 it has \$250 000 for the Western Australia centralised registration system for the puppy farming initiative. What is the time frame around that implementation?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: As we know, the legislation received royal assent at the end of last year. I think one of the immediate impacts was to remove the requirement of the muzzling of greyhounds, as I recall.

The CHAIR: Yes, there was.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: We are now going through ensuring that the regulations and the registration process are put in place. I do not have a definite time for when that is likely to happen, but work is underway in establishing a registration process.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Yes, I remember the Deputy Speaker's speech on that. Regarding the funds for local governments to administer the system as part of the arrangement—which was concerning to our local governments as they will be loaded up with implementing the system—will they be receiving moneys from the department to administer this system?

[4.50 pm]

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I am seeking advice on that matter. My advice is that we do not expect a significant increase in workload for local governments, there are existing arrangements through their rangers and other processes are in place. In fact, it could be said that through a centralised registration system there may be better clarity in monitoring this issue in the suburbs. Local governments, councils and rangers already get a number of calls in relation to pounds. I know, for example, in my electorate, there was a very significant issue in what people thought about the conduct of a pound where dogs, in particular, were dropped off. There is already an existing compliance program that local governments undertake, and we expect that their existing arrangements will be able to support the new registration system.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: With all due respect, that was not the feedback that we were getting from our local governments during that debate. Has a fee been resolved in consultation with the department and local governments? I just do not think it will be able to be absorbed into the ranger duties.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: As I said, initially it was not felt that there will be significant workload. Further consultation is happening about the registration system, so there is continued consultation. Also I have further notes saying that local government already manages registration and accepts fees. They will continue to accept the registration fees for animals, but, as I said, we do not expect the workload to change significantly. There is further consultation happening but, in my experience in working with local government on transport, for example, the state does a lot of work in some spaces, and this would be just a core part of business that local governments should and will be undertaking.

Mr R.S. LOVE: This question could be thrown out as being out of line or not in the right spot, but we are already talking about dogs. I refer to page 564, third from the bottom of all those controlled grants and subsidies is a program for guide dog breeding. I have no idea in which of the many parts of the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries I would ask the question about the guide dogs, so I will ask the question. There was \$5 million allocated in a particular year and nothing since. Were guide dogs successfully bred and why are there no more guide dogs to be bred? There is no more in the budget.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: This was implementation of an election commitment to Guide Dogs WA to assist in setting up a world-class breeding program. The grant has been paid. The funding is to assist Guide Dogs WA to meet the growing demand for not only guide dogs but also specialised autism assistant dogs, therapy dogs, dementia dogs, court dogs and post-traumatic stress disorder dogs, and to resume a cadet training program. The funding is intended to cover the building fit out; specialised staffing costs; breeding program setup and running costs; cadet training program; increased fleet for fit-for-purpose vehicles; international working guide dog register database fees; specialised whelping and puppy equipment; bed costs; purchase of top-quality breeding females and associated travel costs; and other costs to assist with that program. This payment has been made in full to Guide Dogs WA. It was a one-off funding injection to assist it into breeding more guide dogs and associated dogs in WA.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I do not want to sort of conflate the stopped puppy farming and the sterilisation of dogs with the guide dog breeding programs. It is pretty ironic, really, but congratulations for achieving that program. The Nationals support that policy and we are greatly pleased to see it happen.

Turning to the service summary again on page 550, there is the second line item, "Regulation and Support of Local Government", and again, I refer to the decline, whether or not it is a cut; the minister may not accept the decline in funding in that area. I am talking about the changes that will be forced on local governments to implement the government's desire to see them transition from the federal to the state industrial relations system. Local governments have told me that they believe that will collectively cost local government in the order of about \$15 million just to implement. I am wondering whether there will be any support for the sector through the department in making that transition which is, in effect, being brought about by legislation of the government and not the desire of local government, but they accept that is the way the government wants to go. I would have thought it would probably be incumbent on the government to provide some support to develop that transition process.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: This policy has been implemented outside this portfolio through the Minister for Industrial Relations portfolio. It will be under Bill Johnston. I note that many CEOs of local governments are paid more than the Premier. So, in relation to costs for the taxpayers, I would say there is a concern across a number of different issues in relation to payments that have been made to people in local government.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I again refer to page 564. The Connecting Country program and the commitment to Aboriginal wellbeing are referred to about halfway down the page.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Sorry, member; that is in culture and the arts. That is not in this service, sorry.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Okay, very well. If that is the case, I refer to “All Abilities Playground Forrestfield” on the same page. It was budgeted for \$1 million in 2021–22, but it was not delivered. I am assuming the local member did not go out there and knock it up himself! Can the minister confirm that this project has been delayed?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Sorry; that is in sport and recreation. It is a bit tricky.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I would just like to ask a question on salaries and allowances. Could the minister detail the number of staff employed within the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries and provide a breakdown. The table under “Regulation and Support of Local Government” shows the number of full-time equivalent employees.

The CHAIR: What page?

Mr R.S. LOVE: This is on page 553.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr R.S. LOVE: It refers to “Supporting local governments to fulfil their statutory obligations”. FTEs are mentioned in that service table. What I would like to know is: when the minister gives a figure of an employee, are they hybridised? Are they working in different areas of the department? An inspector or a regulator or the like might be working in, say, liquor or gambling or local government. I am trying to get an understanding of whether these positions are wholly centred on local government or whether they are involved in a variety of different services areas throughout the larger department.

[5.00 pm]

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I might ask Ms Chopping to provide more information, but as I understand it, the allocation of resources is against each service sector or each area, and then corporate services goes across that agency. I will ask Ms Chopping to provide more details.

Ms L. Chopping: Thanks, minister, for the referral and thanks, member, for the question. Currently, we have the actual FTE allocated to regulation and support of local government for 2022–23 as 63 FTE. With the exception of supervisors or managers whose responsibility is to look after the recruitment of staff, which arguably is not a core function of the regulation of local government—they do occupational health and safety or the other things that managers look after—those staff are dedicated to the regulation of local government, including the support function, the legislation and policy function, and audit and a range of other functions that they undertake purely for local government. There are some other areas of the department that support local government functions, including the regulatory reform unit that we talked about previously. Some of our other policy coordination functions that arguably are actually supporting local government are not a part of that FTE. The minister is correct in saying that there is an allocation for corporate services—HR and those kinds of things—that does not show up in that FTE allocation.

Mr R.S. LOVE: To confirm, these people are fully employed in the business of service 2, “Regulation and Support of Local Government”. When I look at the budget, the net cost of service seems to decline to \$12.191 million. I am still on the same table on page 553. It is the line just above “Employees (Full-time Equivalents)”. There is a decline of about \$2.6 million and the number of employees increases by nine. I am just wondering how that comes about. There seems to be an inverse relationship between the amount of money the department has and the number of employees, which is a bit of a magic pudding arrangement, really, I would have thought.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: It goes to my point I raised earlier that there is the base funding of the area, which is the ongoing programs. Then there are finite programs that may be election commitments or specific projects that are project or program-based. Normally, they do not involve FTEs or they involve expenditure, for example, for consultancies, surveys, engagement, all those types of programs. When they cease, the funding falls. In a sense, the number falls, but the operational funding of the agency continues. We are not seeing a reduction in the number of FTE because they were finite programs that normally do not involve FTEs or permanent employees as part of that funding.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Can the minister perhaps provide some guidance on where these nine extra persons will be employed? Is it to do with the new legislation or is there some other reason that we suddenly need nine more members of staff in this department?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: They will be involved in implementing regulatory reform programs and the work to implement the centralised registration program. They are the two key areas, particularly, the regulatory reform.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does the minister have figures on the number of staff who commenced over the last financial year and who ceased either permanently or temporarily over the last —

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: No. I do not have that information, sorry.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is the minister able to provide that information?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: What is the member seeking? Is it the same person who started and finished or just the number of people —

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: No. Just how many numbers commenced and how many ceased, and whether it was permanent or temporary.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: By way of supplementary information, we will provide the number of people appointed in the agency and the number of people who resigned from that agency. Is that it?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That is correct; it is the number of people who left, yes.

[Supplementary Information No B3.]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: How many formal exit interviews were conducted over the past 12 months?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I do not have that on hand—formal exit interviews?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Yes, given staff turnover.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Is this the standard question the member has to ask every agency? Is this what has been distributed to the member?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: No. Given staff turnover over the last 12 months —

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I do not know whether there has been staff turnover.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That is my understanding. I have another question on that: given my understanding of staff turnover, has a whole-of-department culture survey been conducted over the last 12 months?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I will refer to Ms Chopping. She will provide an answer.

Ms L. Chopping: We have a vacancy rate of two per cent for the department, which I would assert is no significant variation to any other public service agency in this state. Obviously, in many different areas there is difficulty in employing staff. That said, I can say from our anecdotal experience at the department that we have people knocking down the door to come and work for us. We have high-quality and high-calibre candidates applying for positions and being recruited into the department. A number of temporary positions have been established because we need to get to a certainty position around structure following the local government reforms, for example. But that said, definitely from where I sit, there are definitely people wanting to come and work at the department from local government. Many people from the local government sector are applying for jobs in the department at the moment. As a government agency, we are fortunate to have many people wanting to come and work with us. In terms of people leaving the department from the local government area, I can think of a notable one or two in senior positions, and those people have generally moved on to higher paying jobs as CEOs of local governments; obviously, there is a crossover in the high-calibre candidates there.

[5.10 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: My final question is: Within the department's four or five different areas—I think the member for Moore alluded to this earlier—are there any people who can flow from one section of the department to another? Can someone from sport and recreation go across to culture and the arts or across to local government? Does that take place within the department?

Ms L. Chopping: Definitely, there are opportunities for people to apply for expression of interest processes internally. We strongly encourage people to develop themselves professionally by applying for those opportunities, particularly when there is a higher level involved in a different part of the department. I, personally, am very keen to see the department come together as a single Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries. I am very encouraging of people moving between the different areas and for collaboration between local government, sport and rec, culture and the arts, the Office of Multicultural Interests and, to a lesser degree, our racing, gaming and liquor area because the nature of its work is different. Yes, definitely, there are opportunities for internal enrichment and opportunities for secondment in and secondment out. We take a collaborative approach to the way that we develop people in the organisation.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thank you for that answer.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to the outcomes and key effectiveness indicators on page 551. For a service area that was once a standalone department, there seems to be only one indicator of its performance and that is —

Outcome: Local governments are supported to meet legislative requirements of the Local Government Act:

Percentage of local governments where actions were taken in support of compliance with the legislative framework

That is talking about support and compliance with the legislative framework. Why is this figure of 20 per cent considered to be a key indicator for this particular measure? Is it an indicator of the performance of the department in simply ticking a box or does it indicate something deeper?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: First of all, there will be a continuing review of the key performance indicators and the effectiveness indicators. I actually recall—maybe it was when I was in opposition—there used to be hundreds of performance indicators that were pretty meaningless in the budget papers. I am looking at a former Treasury officer, back there in the gallery, and I have to say I think that is true. In opposition, I remember there were pages and pages of effectiveness indicators that meant nothing and actually did not serve a purpose. A review was undertaken—I think it was under the coalition government—of performance indicators to make sure that they were more targeted and narrower and actually meant something.

This indicator shows the percentage of local governments that had action taken against their elected members or employees in the financial year. Records are collated of all actions, including the issuing of letters of improvement, as well as other compliance actions, complaints and audit inquiries. These figures are then converted to a percentage, so I think that we want to see it as a low number, would we not? This is a measure of how local governments are performing, so we do not want to see that figure too high—the lower, the better.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Thank you for that explanation. I suppose that, in some sort of backhanded way, it might achieve the aim of having better local government, but it seems a very negative approach to take in terms of an indicator, to indicate how many times you have had to rap someone over the knuckles and to say, “Well, that’s a good thing.”

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I think it is more than rapping people over their knuckles. I am not sure whether the member is living in the real world about some of the conduct of some of these local governments, but some of it is pretty appalling.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Yes. It does seem to be a rather negative way of doing it. I wonder whether there would be some consideration for finding some more positive indicators with the coming reforms.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Remember that this is a compliance and regulatory activity undertaken by the government. The state government’s role is to make sure that local governments are performing properly. We can give merit awards, but I think this is a pretty good function as well.

The appropriation was recommended.

Metropolitan Cemeteries Board —

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Ms R. Saffioti, Minister for Transport representing the Minister for Local Government.

Mr J. Fortuna, Acting Chief Executive Officer.

Mr A. Birch, Governance Officer.

Mr D. Thirumurthy, Acting Chief Finance Officer.

Mr B. Hennessey, Acting Chief of Staff, Minister for Local Government.

Ms J. Colli, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 3 June 2022. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system.

I give the call to the member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to the asset investment program on page 582. Paragraph 1 obviously points out the \$40 million-odd lined up over the forward estimates. Could the minister please outline some of the key projects in the new works program?

[5.20 pm]

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: There are a number of different projects. Some of them are more significant, and one of the new investment decisions has been the Fremantle mausoleum stage 2. The Metropolitan Cemeteries Board will commence planning and designing of the Fremantle mausoleum stage 2, comprising an additional 900 crypt and niche spaces, which will provide stock for approximately nine years based on the Fremantle catchment area. That was one of the big commitments. They are very expensive, as I know, in relation to the construction of the mausoleums, so that was probably the most significant investment decision in the forward works.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the minister update me on the progress of the Karrakatta Cemetery renewal?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: As we know, this is an ongoing program in which the board is undertaking renewal of certain parts of the Karrakatta cemetery. It allows Karrakatta to be continually used for years to come, and it is basically

a long-term approach to ensure the viability and sustainability for cemeteries. This is an ongoing program, and processes have been put in place to ensure that it is done in a very sensitive way, making sure that families are very much both consulted on and informed of the processes. I know there were some issues, and I remember just being a bystander and watching some of the concerns that were raised earlier. The processes have changed so that there is a greater assurance of having families consulted as part of this process. I ask Mr Fortuna to speak.

Mr J. Fortuna: Thank you, minister. Currently, a few sections of Karrakatta are going through renewal. It takes some time to work through the process. The process may take 18 months or so to work through. We are currently working our way through several sections, about four currently, and we are starting a new section under Anglican ZK. We are working through that process at the moment, so that program will commence probably in 2023. We are working through an organised, agreed and approved program.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I appreciate those answers. As the minister acknowledged, there have been issues in the past. Could the minister enlighten me on what the biggest differences have been from then until now as far as the consultation process with family members, community engagement, or whatever we like go? What are the big changes that the board has made to help those families?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Again, I will refer that to Mr Fortuna. I will say my family went through being part of that renewal program on two occasions, so I understand the issues that families raise, but I also know that the board is doing a lot of work to ensure that families are consulted appropriately. Does Mr Fortuna want to describe it? I think there is improved consultation with families and a greater time in which the process is undertaken, and also assurances about the retention of key assets such as headstones and so forth.

Mr J. Fortuna: The cemetery renewal program commences by having a subcommittee of the board, which is called the Monument and Assessment Advisory Committee, which looks specifically grave by grave at a particular section. That committee is made up of a couple of board members, genealogists, members from the Office of War Graves, historians and representatives from the National Trust. It is a broad committee and it makes recommendations to the board on which plots should be retained and which plots can be renewed.

The big impact we have with cemetery renewal is in relation to headstones. Because renewal itself does not affect the remains, we do not ever tamper with the remains. We create new graves and new plots between existing graves. Therefore, the issue in contention is really about the headstones. Historically—I am talking about 20-odd years ago or more—our processes were not that great. The flaw was with our consultation, but at the same time it was difficult because we used paper-based systems and we need to find families. The areas that we are looking at are quite old. They are not just 25 years old. They are a bit older than that. The graves we are looking at are potentially 75 years—plus, so finding families is quite difficult.

The Metropolitan Cemeteries Board has invested a little bit of money into our systems, and we now have a system that can capture contacts of the deceased. If someone wants to report to the MCB that they are a contact for a particular grave, we put that into the system. If a grave is in a renewal area, we will then use that database to advise the contacts who have put their name down that the area is being considered for renewal, and then they can make a decision based on that. Our consultation phase is over about an 18-month period. A period of 12 to 18 months is a legislative requirement. The MCB adds a further three months so that we can ensure that the community does have an opportunity to be aware of what is actually occurring within the cemetery. We put up signs in that period within the cemetery so that when we have visitors or people attend funerals, they will see those signs and they will see the areas being considered for renewal. They very easily mark out what the MCB is proposing, and people are more than welcome to attend our front offices and make inquiries about what is occurring. We advertise in the papers, on our websites, and all that sort of stuff. It is broad, but I think our issues with consultations have been addressed now, and we want to hear from the community in that regard.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thank you for that answer. I have just one final, slightly unrelated question, but, out of curiosity, every time we go to a larger funeral at Karrakatta, Pinnaroo and, to a lesser extent, Fremantle, there seems to be seating for about 100 people and about 400 people have to stand up. In the board's asset investment program, is it looking at a way of improving that scenario? It seems to me to be a challenge for any larger funeral in pretty well all of those locations where most of the people at the service are actually standing up.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: This question is in relation to the chapels on the site. There is some funding for improvements, but I do not think they are for expansions. I will ask Mr Fortuna to comment.

[5.30 pm]

Mr J. Fortuna: In the existing forward estimates period, we are looking at refurbishment. If we have an opportunity to provide additional seating, that is what we will do. We need to be mindful of all the requirements for conducting a funeral service as well as some occupational safety issues. Going forward, in our longer term AIP, we have plans to extend the capacity of our chapels. It is one thing that we have been looking at because the smaller chapels are being used, but, as the member pointed out, they are overflowing. We are currently doing a refurbishment at Pinnaroo. That will cause some disruption to attendance, but we will still be mindful of providing a carefully planned funeral service and work with our stakeholders, which are our funeral directors, as well as the families.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thanks for that, it is a frustration of mine.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to page 582 of the budget papers. The total cost of the asset investment program is \$11 million this year and \$10.8 million next year. These funds are entirely sourced from the board's own revenues within the operations of the cemeteries. Is the board maintaining a steady liquidity situation and is its balance sheet maintaining a steady path with these expenditures, or does it have to incur some liabilities?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: If the member looks at page 582 and the asset investment program, he will see that it shows the total cost of assets investment and then it shows how it is funded, and it is funded by internal funds and balances. All the asset investments are funded from the internal balances of the cemetery board.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Yes, with respect, that is not what I asked. I know it is internal funds and balances, but is it running down the liquidity of the board or is it maintaining a steady balance sheet?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: There are no new borrowings, but I will ask Mr Fortuna to provide further advice on the net balance of the accounts.

Mr J. Fortuna: The MCB is a self-funded statutory authority, so all our revenues go back to pay for operational costs, which include the maintenance of our infrastructure. Also, any profits that we make are diverted to the funding of the asset investment plan, which also includes the long-term maintenance and long-term upgrade of our infrastructure. Our infrastructure includes the chapels, the mausoleums, the gardens, the grounds, the driveways, the pathways and all our amenities. Our business model is that any surpluses are reinvested wholly back into the operating and development of our cemeteries within the metropolitan area.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I have a question on sustainability going forward. Does the board envisage having to find extra sites? With the renewal program around the Karrakatta area for instance, will the board maintain sufficient ground for its operations for the foreseeable future?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I will provide comment on that. The Metropolitan Cemeteries Board has been working with the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage for a number of years to identify sites for a potential new cemetery. That work is ongoing. In relation to the existing sites, we have the renewal program, but also the mausoleums provide a desired way for many people, in a sense, to be entombed and they are far more efficient with space requirements. For example, the Fremantle mausoleum will reduce the demand for new space and will meet demand for the next nine years for those who want to end up in the mausoleum.

There is a number of different initiatives but work is being undertaken to identify a new site. But in doing that, first of all, the space has to be sufficient and also the board has to check a number of other issues. Soil quality, watertables and so forth all have to be assessed before a new site can be determined.

The CHAIR: That completes the examination of the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board.

Division 43: Planning, Lands and Heritage — Service 2, Lands, \$71 472 000—

Mrs L.A. Munday, Chair.

Ms R. Saffioti, Minister for Planning representing the Minister for Lands.

Mr A. Kannis, Director General.

Mr M. Darcey, Assistant Director General, Land Use Management.

Mr S. McLeod, Chief Finance Officer.

Ms A. Gibson, Executive Director, Land Use Management.

Mr B. Hennessey, Acting Chief of Staff, Minister for Lands.

Mr E. Carmody, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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Any questions? The member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thank you, Deputy Speaker. I refer to page 730 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and item 3, “Land Supply and Social Housing”, which states —

Work is also underway to deconstrain and divest surplus land owned by the Crown and the Western Australian Planning Commission for social housing development and other strategic planning ...

What are some of the areas that have been identified, and how many of those areas have been identified for social housing?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: This relates to the housing diversity pipeline. Work is being undertaken through a cross-government committee, chaired by the Minister for Lands together with myself as the Minister for Planning, with representatives from DevelopmentWA, the Department of Communities and the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage. The aim is to identify unutilised land or, as we call it in business, “lazy land”, or government surplus land, and go to the market to get expressions of interest about its development. I think there are currently 12 sites, including two in regional WA, and this is the first tranche. We are seeing not only the government sector but also councils that may know of, have a management order of or own freehold land and are keen to participate in the next round. We try to identify land that is not very productive. We have gone out to the market through a registration of interest process. We will now go through a formal tender process to get proposals to develop on those pieces of land with the aim of having a certain percentage of social housing. We are also very keen to engage the community housing sector, which has access to a number of commonwealth programs. We are looking at different types of initiatives. They may include the government selling the land or giving the land to the proponent, leasing the land, or a number of different mechanisms. We asked for the market to tell us what it wants, what incentives it wants for each block, and also what it can deliver in terms of social housing.

[5.40 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Has the minister sensed that there is a large amount of interest from the private sector or the community in general to take these developments forward to social housing, or is the interest going towards other projects?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: No, we have seen a lot of interest. I think 60 submissions have been received. I said 12—I think there are 11, but there is another one at Smith Street, so there are 12 including Smith Street and 11 are going through this particular process. We have seen a lot of interest at the registration of interest stage. Like I said, there were 60 submissions. As Minister Carey and myself have outlined a number of times, this is a new way of trying to create new housing opportunities whereby we have identified sites and are trying to de-risk those sites in terms of the cost of the land, the planning regimes underpinning them and maybe other infrastructure costs. We are trying to de-risk. In return, we will get a real community benefit through social housing. There is a lot of interest and now our challenge is to crystallise that interest into activity. Of course, the market is pretty hot at the moment, but we are trying to get a commitment to as many of these projects as possible over the next six to 12 months so that we can get that activity underway as soon as possible. The implementation time frame of the projects will vary, as will the percentage and type of social housing. Importantly, one of the key drivers is to have social housing diversity by delivering not only four by twos, but also two by ones. We need housing dedicated to older people and people with disabilities. We need a real diversity of supply to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to live in what are very exciting precincts.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is the government also providing encouragement in the form of some sort of headworks subsidy or the like to encourage these people to join in with the government to improve social housing?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: We have not provided up-front funding for these areas, but we are asking the market to tell us what it can deliver, and there will then be a formal assessment process. Someone may come up and say, “If you provide the water infrastructure, we can build you 10 storeys and provide 20 two-by-one accessible units.” That may be compared with someone who does not request any headworks but will build five storeys and provide 10 units. Assessments will be made, and we are developing an assessment tool so that we can have a very clear assessment framework to see what will deliver the most benefit. As I said, this is something that both the minister and I are very passionate about. People come forward to us as ministers to tell us about their great ideas. We are now asking them for their great ideas and how can they convert those ideas into activity. This is really a test of the industry and how innovative and proactive it can be. It is quite funny, because in this process we get a lot of people asking us what the project involves. We are leaving it to the market to see how much it can deliver on behalf of taxpayers and how much we can leverage out of these sites.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to the Government Regional Officers’ Housing situation. As the minister knows, there is a shortage in every area—south west, north west or wherever. Is the government working to alleviate the scenario in conjunction with these 12 areas that the minister is potentially working on?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: The initial tranche is to target social and community housing. As I said, this is the first range of land. I do not visit many councils that do not tell me about a block of land that has been sitting there doing nothing, and they want to try to get something happening with it. We see this as something that will continue to grow and develop. We will be tackling GRO housing. There are some interesting ideas being put forward by councils, and we are very keen to look at how we can develop more GRO housing in partnership with the market and those councils.

We are also very keen to get that diversity of supply and make sure that we have appropriate dwellings for different types of workers in the regions. I am personally in charge of the market-led proposal process, and we may utilise the MLP process or a targeted problem or opportunity statement to try to encourage more ideas on how we can develop more housing in regional WA. Just to reiterate, the minister is very happy to work with local governments on this. He is visiting a lot of regional councils. As I said, there are a lot of good ideas out there, and it is really just us trying to work with those councils to help them deliver those good ideas.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I was going to ask a new question, but the minister just said something that I want to follow-up on. The minister talked about MLPs—that is, market-led proposals. Who within the wider mix of ministers within the super-department is responsible for the oversight of those market-led proposals? I understand it used to be conducted from one department, the Department of Finance, and was transferred to the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage at some point. Which minister oversees that process? Which section or service delivery area is in charge of that process?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: It is under Planning, so it is my portfolio. I referred to it in this section because I think we need to explore all opportunities to get more regional housing, whether it be through this housing diversity pipeline, through MLPs or problem or opportunity statements, or through working with councils and supporting their projects. I think we are open to all ideas to support new regional housing initiatives.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I will move on to a new question. I refer to page 731 and the thirteenth paragraph, “Carbon Farming on Crown Land”. Could the minister please explain what funding is being allocated to support change to enable carbon farming on crown land, and what categories of crown land that might entail? Is it any particular tenure? Is it unallocated crown land as a pastoral lease or a general lease? What is the tenure of that crown land?

[5.50 pm]

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I do not have a lot of specific detail, but the continued development of WA’s carbon farming opportunities is a key element of our climate policy. As the member knows, carbon farming is a process of changing agricultural practice to increase the amount of carbon stored in the soil and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The state government is exploring opportunities for other forms of carbon farming that could be undertaken on crown land. These were built upon existing carbon farming methods that have already been approved for use in WA. The state government is progressing detailed design of the initiative announced in December 2021, which will invite competitive proposals on selected areas of unallocated crown land currently managed by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions. We currently have a system whereby we are inviting proposals on unallocated crown land for carbon farming initiatives. In addition, in parallel, we continue to progress a range of amendments to the Land Administration Act with a view to ensuring that, among other things, a new and more flexible form of non-exclusive lease-held tenure that is suitable for broad-scale uses is made available. It is expected that the new form of leasehold tenure will facilitate the practical implementation of the state’s carbon farming initiative, as well as other broadacre initiatives and proposals. I think there are two processes underway: one relates to inviting proposals for the use of unallocated crown land, and the other involves changes to the Land Administration Act to facilitate these types of initiatives on pastoral leases.

Mr R.S. LOVE: A change to the use of a pastoral lease would have native title implications. If the pastoral industry is to enable carbon farming, if it involves something different from what it has been doing before, will there be any assistance available to the industry to help it to make that change?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I will refer to Mr Darcey to comment.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I will just reiterate. As I recall, one problem was the length of tenure for some pastoral leases. That is one issue that would trigger a native title implication.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Sure. I will refer to Mr Darcey to comment.

Mr M. Darcey: Thank you, minister. The form of carbon farming that is currently available to Western Australia in the pastoral state is human-induced regeneration. That is where people remove stock from certain areas to allow carbon sequestration into the landscape. That is seen under the legislation as a pastoral purpose. It is consistent with the use of the land to graze animals and is therefore able to be used on pastoral lands. The commonwealth requires 25 years’ permanency for that process, and that is partly constraining for some pastoralists whose pastoral lease is running out. The proposed new diversification lease will have a longer potential period for that to be used, and it can be used for both carbon projects and grazing, so if people want to do a carbon project on a diversification lease, they could do both carbon farming and grazing.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Would that not trigger a native title situation? Will the department assist pastoralists to work through that? If the lease is lengthened, they are going to have to negotiate their way through that situation.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I will refer that to Mr Darcey.

Mr M. Darcey: No, because the human-induced regeneration process is seen as a pastoral purpose, so it is the same native title situation as the current pastoralism. However, a new diversification lease would require an Indigenous native agreement to be negotiated because of the change of land use.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 741 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and the line item “Cossack Townsite”. That budget item goes back to 2021–22 and flows on. How is the town site program progressing?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Was the question how much we are spending each year?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: How is the project progressing? It was announced two years ago and there does not seem to have been a lot of progress.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I think we answered this in the last session, but I will provide some further information. The Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage is working with the City of Karratha to revitalise the project. Members of the local planning scheme, which I think I approved, have recently approved to facilitate the activation and development of Cossack and Jarman Island respectively. The department is working with the Ngarluma Yindjibarndi Foundation on this development proposal for Cossack. I do not think much has progressed. I will throw it to Mr Darcey to provide any further comment.

Mr M. Darcey: Thank you, minister. The NYFL, as I will refer to it—the Ngarluma Yindjibarndi Foundation Ltd—was successful in the registration of interest process to take control of the Cossack and Jarman Island precincts. It was partly waiting for the planning changes to allow those sites to be used for low-impact tourism operations. We are currently supporting and continuing to work with that organisation to manage the built heritage assets on the Cossack town site. We are working with the NYFL to develop a business case for it to take over the area more fulsomely; that has a way to go. I think that the NYFL has a lease—it certainly has control over the land—until the end of June, and by that time we hope that it will have landed a project for low-impact ecotourism.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to page 729, the table “Spending Changes”, ongoing initiatives, and the third line item from the bottom, “Northampton Lead Tailings Project”. If I recall, that is a Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage issue. Can I just get an update on the progress of that project, when it is expected to be completed, and any other updates the minister can give me?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I refer to Mr Darcey to provide that.

Mr M. Darcey: Thank you. The Northampton lead tailings project has been successful in removing all lead tailings from the town site itself. A containment cell has been built just out of town to contain those lead tailings, and that has been completed. There was some trouble with Cyclone Seroja and there are issues with getting vegetation coverage over that containment cell, and we will continue to work on that. As part of the project, there are two other sites—the Wheal Ellen and Wanerenooka mine sites—which we will continue to look at to assess contamination and public risk. Effectively, the stages of cleaning up the lead tailings from the town and making the town safe for human habitation is complete. There are some mine closure operations still to be completed.

The appropriation was recommended.

[6.00 pm]

Division 45: Western Australian Land Information Authority, \$37 899 000 —

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Ms R. Saffioti, Minister for Transport representing the Minister for Lands.

Mr G. Dewar, Chief Finance Officer.

Mr B. Roberts, General Manager, Registration Services.

Ms T. Scully, General Manager, Location Services.

Mr G. Goldfinch, General Manager, Valuation Services.

Mr B. Hennessey, Acting Chief of Staff, Minister for Local Government.

Mr E. Carmody, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 3 June 2022. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system.

We are dealing with division 45, Western Australian Land Information Authority, Landgate. I give the call to the member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 760 and the table under “Access to Location Information”. The full-time equivalent employees are listed on the second last line in that table. I refer also to the consistent funding provided to the agency and the increase in FTEs from 16 in 2021–22 to 31 in this year’s budget. Why is there a difference between the budget and the actual for last year? Why have we seen such an increase, from 16 to 31? It has nearly doubled.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: It seems to me that there is a big increase this year from 16 to 29. I will just find out why that is the case. We may need to provide the explanation of the increase in FTE by way of supplementary information. Is that okay?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Yes, thank you.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: We are providing by way of supplementary information an explanation of the increase in FTE from 16 in 2021–22 to 31 in 2022–23.

[*Supplementary Information No B4.*]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: On page 756, the fifth paragraph outlines the number of external global and domestic challenges. Obviously, further to that, it points out the heated market with labour shortages and the demand for construction materials et cetera. When is Landgate or the WA Land Information Authority predicting the property market activity to slow?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Landgate is not a forecaster of economic activity, but I can say that there has been a significant increase in the number of documents lodged. From 2019–20 to 2020–21, there was a 39 per cent increase in documents lodged. There has also been another increase in 2021–22. I do not think Landgate is a forecaster of economic activity; its document activity more symbolises what is happening in the market, rather than forecasting what happens in the market.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: As has been pointed out, once the activity does slow, there will be a decrease in revenue from the service fee payments, document registrations and the like. Will there be a decrease in FTE if and when that does take place? It will happen at some stage.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: It is sort of a hypothetical situation. It is a bit of speculation. To quote Ross Lyon, I do not deal with hypotheticals! Anyway, all of our careers end in tears. That is my sort of view of life! I cannot speculate on that. I think that Landgate undertakes significant services, with not only the documents lodged, but also the valuations and other information it shares with industry. I think that will continue to be quite robust for a long time yet.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thanks, minister. With the Transfer of Land Amendment Bill coming through the pipeline, I note the comment in the budget papers that if it passes the Legislative Council without amendment, which I imagine it probably will, it will ensure a smooth transition. Further to that, does the minister foresee any changes to the department, given the smooth transition to the electronic lodgements and the like? Will that have any effect on the FTE count as well?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I think the impact on FTEs has primarily already been felt in relation to not only the commercialisation of some activity, but also the movement to e-conveyancing. Most of that has already been felt across Landgate, so that impact has already been absorbed.

The appropriation was recommended.

DevelopmentWA —

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Ms R. Saffioti, Minister for Transport representing the Minister for Lands.

Mr F. Marra, Chief Executive Officer.

Mrs F. Barclay, Chief Finance Officer.

Mr B. Hennessey, Acting Chief of Staff, Minister for Local Government.

Ms J. Colli, Senior Policy Adviser.

Mr E. Carmody, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 3 June 2022. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system.

I give the call to the member for North West Central.

[6.10 pm]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to the top of page 768 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, the seventh paragraph, under “2021–22 Retained Dividend”. Can the minister confirm what dividend has been retained by DevelopmentWA over the last financial period?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: For which year?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: What was the dividend for the last financial year, and what is the projection of DevelopmentWA’s dividend for the 2022–23 financial year?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: The dividends for each financial year are shown on page 766. It is \$27.9 million.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: That is for 2021–22?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Yes. It is \$27.9 million for 2021–22, \$54.2 million for 2022–23 and \$41.6 million for 2023–24. They are paid to the consolidated account. The table at page 766 shows all the payments to the consolidated account. I think the member is asking how much has been retained; is that correct?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: That is right.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: In general, 75 per cent of profits are paid as dividends and 25 per cent are retained.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Where does the 75 per cent retained profit go to? Is it towards employing more staff or developing new lots? Where does the 75 per cent go to in terms of DevelopmentWA’s expenditure? For example, does that \$54 million go into the general consolidated account?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Yes. Normally, dividends are paid to the consolidated account, but then, of course, the consolidated account also provides equity injections or subsidies for particular projects, as well. In a sense, that 75 per cent is not the full picture. That revenue goes back to the consolidated account, but, of course, the consolidated account also pays equity injections and operating subsidies for particular projects. For example, the \$166 million regional booster program was funded by operating subsidy. In a sense, last year’s \$166 million regional booster program was a reinjection of those dividends back to DevelopmentWA.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is it DevelopmentWA’s objective to make a percentage of every land deal?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: It has a commercial objective under its legislation, which is that it operates as a commercial entity with a hurdle rate of return, but the government, as the owner of Development WA, can ask or request for particular projects to be undertaken. In doing so, the government can either adjust its dividend intake or it can also provide equity injections or operating subsidies. Last year, \$166 million was reinjected into DevelopmentWA. This year, further funding will be injected for specific land release in two towns. Together with that, there is ongoing work.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I have a further question. Whereabouts is that?

The CHAIR: Hang on; the minister is still responding to your current question.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am sorry.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I think the Minister for Housing has outlined that there is \$20 million to further develop stages of residential land developments in Karratha and Kalgoorlie. That is not the total amount that is happening in regional WA; that is just the additional money that was allocated in this year’s budget.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The minister mentioned that about \$20 million has gone into developing land in Karratha.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: No, the \$20 million was for Karratha and Kalgoorlie.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It was for Karratha and Kalgoorlie, so \$10 million each, or roughly. Whatever the case is, that money goes in to develop the land. Does DevelopmentWA then get that back through the sale of the land?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: There is an understanding that the cost of land provision in those areas is probably higher than could be recouped from the sale of land, and that is why it requires a subsidy. The state government or the taxpayers subsidise the cost of, in this example, headworks and infrastructure provision. I note that the cost of providing that infrastructure in these areas is higher than could probably be recouped through land sales.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is it a subsidy to do the headworks or is it the ability to start the headworks or complete the headworks with the money that Development WA get as the government puts in as a dividend or using their profits? Does Development WA then recoup those from the sale of land? Karratha is a good example where, still, the price of land is quite high, and of course, it is very expensive to build a house on a piece of land that one purchases. So, you are saying that Development WA do not recoup those headworks charges at all? Is that correct?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Yes. It is my understanding that this assists the bringing forward, in a sense, of subdivisions. It meets subdivision costs, roads, drainage and fill, and it exceeds the sales paid for that land that would be recouped. In a sense, it is acknowledging that in many parts of regional WA, the cost of infrastructure provision in particular cannot normally be recouped as part of any land sale.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 169 of budget paper No 3.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: We do not have budget paper No 3; refer us to the item and we will find it in budget paper No 2.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: This relates to other spending by DevelopmentWA, and Yagan Square.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Yes.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: We note that \$7 million is being spent over 2021–22 and 2022–23 on public realm upgrades and site activations to Yagan Square. Can the minister outline specifically what DevelopmentWA is doing at Yagan Square?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Primarily, we are looking at the fit-out and, in a sense, the attraction of a key tenant for Yagan Square. I think that everyone is keen to see more activity in that area, which will create a safer place for the entire community. As part of that \$7 million, there will be upgrades to some infrastructure around Yagan Square. It will also ensure that we can attract a new tenant and cover the modification of Yagan Square internally to facilitate a major new tenant.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Will the budgeted \$3.85 million for this financial year be expended completely?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Yes.

[6.20 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does the department have some tenants ready and waiting for when those works are done? From what I have been reading lately, tenants seem to be departing the scene rather than arriving. Does the department have some in the background?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Yes. I think Minister Carey announced that there are current negotiations with a preferred proponent. There was a market sounding and a preferred proponent was identified. I think it is the same proponent that is behind the synagogue redevelopment in Fremantle and new venue The Beaufort, as well, so it is a very established proponent.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have a final question on this topic. Is the minister confident that that activity with the particular tenants that the department is negotiating with will stem the exodus of people from Yagan Square?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: In a sense, they have all left anyway. There has been retention of some tenants, but Yagan Square is currently ready and waiting for a new tenant. This will be a major new tenant that I think, given its experience, will attract a lot of activity. From a transport perspective, I also want to make sure that we integrate the station a little bit better with Yagan Square. Given that it is a major thoroughfare between the train station and the bus port or underground bus station, we need to make sure that whole area has constant activity and allows people to move very safely and efficiently between the train station and the bus port.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 767 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and the first paragraph under significant issues impacting the government trading enterprise and market environment and economic conditions. I refer to an election commitment the government made for workers' accommodation in Exmouth and Kalbarri. I believe that DevelopmentWA has gone out for expressions of interest for development of workers' accommodation, which is desperately needed in Exmouth as well as Kalbarri. Particularly in Exmouth, we talk about headworks charges.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I am sorry, member. This was under the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage, so I do not have that advice in front of me.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is not DevelopmentWA?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: No.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is crown lands, is it not?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Yes, it is crown lands. Sorry.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The fourth paragraph on page 767 is "Net Zero Transition" and states —

DevelopmentWA launched its first iteration of its Net Zero Transition Plan in November 2021.

Can the minister outline how DevelopmentWA will reduce its greenhouse gas emissions and engage with its partners and suppliers to collectively reduce omissions?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Sure. In November last year, DevelopmentWA launched its first net zero transition plan. The plan identifies three priority targets: identify net zero scope 1 and 2 emissions; achieve net zero scope 1 emissions by 2025; and develop a net zero culture. Scope 1 emissions are direct emissions that are released in the atmosphere from an activity owned or controlled by DevelopmentWA; scope 2 emissions are indirect but are related to the consumption of energy; and scope 3 emissions are a consequence of other activities but are generated in the wider economy from sources not owned or controlled by DevelopmentWA.

I want to make a couple of points. First, in relation to sustainability, DevelopmentWA set very ambitious targets for the recycling and re-use of demolition waste for Subiaco Oval and the Princess Margaret Hospital for Children site. For Subiaco Oval, the re-use of waste was about 98 per cent, and the same is being delivered at PMH. That demolition waste is used in roads, and, as I said, when you are driving along the Kwinana Freeway, you are driving along the two-tier stand of Subiaco Oval, which is quite funny when you think about it.

Second, DevelopmentWA is supporting and promoting infill developments, which goes a long way to supporting a reduction in the climate impact of housing. There are a couple of initiatives, but, more generally, DevelopmentWA is looking at going to net zero for scope 1 emissions by 2025, and then moving to scope 2 and 3 emissions between 2040 and 2050.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Minister, how is the progress going at the Princess Margaret Hospital for Children site?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: It is going really well. I have to say that I am impressed by how quickly we have brought some of those buildings down. The PMH site has complicated buildings, and we are making sure that we retain some of the historic parts such as the chapel and the chimney stack. We are in the final process of finalising the plans for that area. There has been a lot of consultation. The member for Cottesloe is a bit concerned about having people live near a school! But apart from that, it is going very, very well.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Minister, I refer to page 767 under significant issues impacting the government trading enterprise and market environment and economic conditions. I refer back to a place like Exmouth, which is under significant housing pressure, whether it be workers' accommodation or people wanting to live in Exmouth. Is DevelopmentWA undertaking any future land release; and, if so, whereabouts? Are there any hurdles to being able to go out to market with a land release that is desperately needed?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: An expression of interest process was launched in 2021 for parties interested in purchasing and developing superlot D within the Exmouth marina. It is a significant opportunity. Negotiations are currently underway with the preferred proponent and the native title traditional owners. It is expected to yield 25 lots. South of the town centre, Nimitz Estate is expected to yield 300 to 400 lots. This is also in final negotiations with the native title traditional owners. Therefore, a couple of proposals are underway. Some work has also been done to some of the scheme amendments that were put forward to facilitate more workers' accommodation, but that is more under the planning portfolio. I have also been looking into some other lots, from a planning or transport point of view, that may become available as well. But those two lots are two examples of current work at Exmouth.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: When the minister talks about the negotiations with traditional owners, are they in the final stages of negotiating? How long have they taken, and has that been an issue in not being able to release land? Should this have been ready, especially the Nimitz Estate, three or four years ago?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: We will just find some other information for the member. I do not have any up-to-date information about those negotiations. I can provide by way of supplementary information further information of how negotiations are proceeding with native title holders in relation to blocks for development in Exmouth.

[Supplementary Information No B5.]

The CHAIR: That completes the examination of DevelopmentWA. Thank you.

[6.30 pm]

Division 35: Communities — Services 7 to 9, Housing; Homelessness, \$1 151 511 000 —

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Ms R. Saffioti, Minister for Transport representing the Minister for Housing; Homelessness.

Mr M. Rowe, Director General.

Mr L. McIvor, Deputy Director General, Housing and Assets.

Mr M. Crevola, Chief Finance Officer.

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

Ms L. Kalasopatan, Assistant Director, Management Accounting.

Ms E. Colombera, Principal Policy Adviser.

Mr B. Hennessey, Acting Chief of Staff, Minister for Local Government.

Mr P. Isaachsen, Assistant Director General, Governance, Performance and Insights.

Ms J. Herring, Executive Director, Office of Homelessness.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by close of business on Friday, 3 June 2022. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system.

I call the member for North West Central.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Thank you, minister. I refer to page 522, “Social Housing and Homelessness”, under the seventh point, which states —

In September 2021, the Government boosted social housing investment by a record \$875 million to deliver a range of outcomes, including funding the delivery of 3,300 homes and stemming the attrition of dwellings from social housing pool by carrying out refurbishment and maintenance work to many thousands more.

How many houses out of the 3 300 are being built in Carnarvon and in the Gascoyne in general? How many houses are being refurbished as well in towns like Carnarvon?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: What year is the member talking about, sorry?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Out of those 3 300 homes, which were built because of a record investment of \$875 million into housing, how many new houses are being built in Carnarvon and the Gascoyne in general—that is, Exmouth; Carnarvon, obviously; Shark Bay, Denham; and Gascoyne Junction? How many houses are being refurbished, under that seventh point, in Carnarvon?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I do not have a breakdown of the 3 300 homes by town or region. I can provide it by way of supplementary information, but this will be a forecast because it will depend on a number of different factors, in particular —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is out of that 3 300, so if it is a forecast, it is a forecast.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Yes. It is a forecast of how many new social housing homes will be provided as part of the 3 300 new social housing stock over the next four years.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: And how many are going to be refurbished in Carnarvon as well.

The CHAIR: Can the minister repeat all of that, please, for clarity?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I will provide by way of supplementary information how many of the 3 300 forecast new homes will be in the Gascoyne, in particular Carnarvon, and how many existing social housing stock will be refurbished.

[Supplementary Information No B6.]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: My question is along a similar line. I refer to page 520 and halfway down there is “Social Housing Economic Recovery Package—New Builds”. There is \$15.9 million to 2022–23 and \$11 million in the 2023–24 out years. How many homes does the minister intend to construct in this period out of that \$27 million, or is that part of the 3 300 homes?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: It is all part of the 3 300, as I understand.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: So we will receive that in that supplementary information. Minister, how many homes were delivered under the scheme in 2021–22 from the \$6 million that was spent?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Is that of SHERP?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: On the same line, there was \$6 million estimated actual in 2021–22. How many homes were built with that money?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: This is my understanding of what I have in front of me. As the member can expect, there are a number of different subprograms and other programs, and I do not want to mislead the Parliament. What I can say is that of the 3 300 homes that have been committed to, 400 new homes have been either purchased or completed so far. In relation to SHERP, I can provide that answer by way of supplementary information, because there are different categories and I cannot hand on heart explain those categories. I would say that there has been 400 completed new properties as of 30 April 2022. There were a number under contract as well, but we can provide on the SHERP project more details of how many SHERP projects are completed or under contract for this financial year by way of supplementary information.

[Supplementary Information No B7.]

[6.40 pm]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 528, under “Expiration of Significant Movements”, paragraph 3, which states —

The 2021–22 Estimated Actual result —

And line four —

A recent increase to income eligibility will also likely add to the public housing waitlist, as more people will be deemed eligible.

When was this change made to the eligibility criteria?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: The income changes occurred in March.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: What is the income eligibility currently?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: There is quite a detailed fact sheet, which I can read out, but it will take a bit of time.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Can the minister table it?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I do not think I can table documents in estimates.

The CHAIR: No, the minister cannot.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: But I can refer the member to the website.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Yes, do that; that is fine.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: It is online, so if the member looks up Department of Communities income limits, it goes through it. It is just that there is metro, country, single, double, people with disability and it will take me the next 10 minutes to read it out.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: What was it prior to the change? Does that have that information?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I do not have this with me. Sorry; the difference is between \$20 and \$25 a week, depending on whether it was single or double.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Why was it changed? What is the reasoning?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: It was changed because there could be a situation in which people on disability pensions or on other pensions could become ineligible. As a result, we had to lift the income limit to ensure that people who already have access to public housing do not fall off or become ineligible.

Mr M. HUGHES: I refer the minister back to page 520 and the McGowan government’s commitment to regional Western Australia—the regional renewal program. Can the minister outline how that program is helping to improve social housing stock in our regions as well as growing our regional centres?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Yes, there are a number of projects that I know Minister Carey is very excited about delivering. They look at some older areas in Spalding in Geraldton, Spencer Park in Albany and Withers in Bunbury. I have visited Withers in Bunbury and Spalding in Geraldton, where we brought in a new roundabout. Those areas are where we have very old housing stock. Basically, some revitalisation and some renewal will make it much more attractive for people to live there, and people will want to move into those areas. A lot of work is underway. In Spalding 14 refurbishments have commenced and a number of refurbishments just completed. In Spencer Park, two refurbishments commenced, with eight new units in the design phase, and in Withers, two properties were awarded a contract for refurbishment. I acknowledge that some of the community amenity also needs to be improved, plus road accesses and so forth. It really is about making the existing suburb more attractive and refurbishing the existing homes to make it far more attractive and for people to live.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Right down the bottom on page 539, the second last item is “Safe Night Spaces”. I note that the funding after this budget year, going forward, seems to have disappeared and there is no surety of funding beyond this coming year. Why has this service, which was designed to protect women, been cut?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I recall this one. This funding was approved in December 2020. There was \$4.3 million to be invested over two years to support the city of Perth’s homelessness program. The program funded some safe night spaces. It was then meant to contribute funding to Common Ground, and some of the increases in Common Ground, and we took over that funding for Common Ground plus the increase in funding. Therefore, there has been a lot of different flows of funding for homelessness. But we are looking at that \$4.3 million and are redirecting it towards other homelessness initiatives. That work is underway. As I said, there are myriad different programs. There are the safe night spaces, which the city helped fund, and as a result we contributed another \$8 million to Common Ground. We fully funded Common Ground with the federal government, as I recall. We also did the homeless Boorloo Bidee Mia in the city. We did other projects and we are also retaining this money for other initiatives.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Further to the Boorloo Bidee Mia, which also almost seems to fall into the same category three or four lines above, why has this service also failed to obtain funding for the out years of 2024–25 et cetera?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Sorry. This is not the full funding. There is continued funding for Boorloo Bidee Mia. It is ongoing and fully funded. This is in relation to a specific grant and subsidy, which we will try and find what that relates to, but there is ongoing funding for that project.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It finishes in 2023–24, minister.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: There are two sets of funding; we are just trying to clarify. There is the ongoing operational funding, but I am just seeking clarification about why that does not exist in the forward estimates. There is ongoing baseline funding. This funding was for specific initiatives, specific programs, targeting particular cohorts of people—an additional investment to get the programs up and running. But I suspect, if there is further targeting, there will be other funding available. But there is ongoing funding for it; it is just that this is for specific initiatives. I might ask the director general to mention that specific initiative that this line item refers to.

[6.50 pm]

Mr M. Rowe: Thank you very much. As the minister has indicated, there is underlying funding for Boorloo Bidee Mia going forward. The grants that are mentioned there are additional funding to allow Boorloo Bidee Mia to secure some more staff so that it can take in a particular cohort of people. This is a low-barrier entry service for homelessness and that means that the people who come into that service often present with a variety of complex needs. We have worked very closely with the Wungening Aboriginal Corporation to determine how best to maximise that facility and make sure that we can safely get the right and correct number of people in there, given their requirements, so that additional funding allows them to employ additional staff to do that. Going forward, we also have a major commissioning program for all of our homelessness services across Western Australia. That will happen over the course of the next two years, and that provides another opportunity to look at funding beyond this period for services like Boorloo Bidee Mia into the future—noting, as the minister said, that into the future we will have two new Common Ground facilities that will have been constructed in both Perth and Mandurah. We will be looking at the future of Boorloo Bidee Mia in the context of the future commissioning of homelessness services for the whole of the state.

Ms M.J. HAMMAT: I refer to page 522, paragraph 9 in the McGowan government’s modular build program. Can the minister outline how funding in this area has helped to speed up delivery despite challenging market conditions?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Minister Carey is very passionate about alternative forms of building. We see modular build, particularly in parts of regional WA, as a much quicker way of delivering homes and supporting WA businesses. We aim to deliver 150 social homes to regional areas across WA, and some are already being delivered six months after being contracted. Importantly, as we said, the build time can reduce significantly. The minister has contracted for 36 module homes, worth \$16.5 million, of which we have seen delivered to Tom Price and the Kimberley, with others contracted to the Pilbara, great southern, south west, wheatbelt and midwest regions. We see this as an increased market and an increased opportunity to deliver social housing, particularly in regional WA, in a much quicker time frame, whilst supporting WA businesses.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 522, under “Social Housing and Homelessness”. The seventh paragraph states that there are 3 300 homes out of a record investment of \$875 million. How many social houses does the state have, and will have, in the 2022–23 period? What is the total number of homes that the minister anticipates will be put on the register over a period of four years? How many houses will be sold over the course of the next 12 months or the financial year of 2022–23?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: In relation to the social housing program, there is the direct social public housing, which the minister will be delivering together with grants to community organisations. One area that we have increased more recently is a specific grants program to create more community housing. The housing diversity pipeline is another way of trying to deliver more social housing. The target is 3 300 homes, but we also expect to deliver other affordable and social housing. In relation to the specific question, which was how many houses we currently have and also the sale, Minister Carey has outlined a number of times that we are looking at not selling as aggressively as in previous times, to try to hold on to stock and refurbish where possible—noting, that in some instances, refurbishment is just not possible. But I might refer to Mr McIvor to provide some more comments.

Mr L. McIvor: Thank you, minister. Yes, specifically in regard to sales, there has been a significant reduction in sales. There have been only 15 sales in the year to date of which a small number of those are provided for, and sold to, social housing tenants to enable them to enter home ownership. As far as the 3 300 homes and the total asset, there will be some level of attrition from time to time through the program, as in any large-scale program. There are approximately 42 980 properties in the social housing stock at present, with 35 000 of those being public housing and about 7 400 of those forming part of the community housing component.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Out of the 3 300 homes that the minister anticipates to build, can the minister provide a breakdown of not where those houses are going, but a global figure of metropolitan Perth and regional Western Australia?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: The 3 300 homes will be delivered through a variety of methods; for example, spot purchasing is being undertaken and will continue to be undertaken, so we will strive to deliver as many as possible. I do not

think that we have a target breakdown. The way I would describe the spot purchasing is some of that will be the opportunistic purchasing of more social housing in a particular town at any given point. The waitlist demand is currently about 70 per cent metro and 30 per cent regional, and the level of building activity will be targeted at that. I note, though, that in some instances in regional WA there are some opportunities to purchase on the market; however, we do not want to crowd out private sector investment, too, so we have to be careful about all these factors. If we can source a diversity of housing supply—for example, smaller units—the department may go and undertake some spot purchasing in the appropriate areas, and that may also affect the numbers, ultimately.

Mr M. HUGHES: I have a question on Keystart, which I have been eager to ask. I refer to page 544. Can the minister outline how the Keystart changes and the range of reforms will help improve housing affordability, increase social housing supply and help Western Australians get in their first home?

The CHAIR: No, sorry, member. That is under Keystart. That is not under this division, so you cannot ask that question. We can slowly move through this and I shall put the question.

The appropriation was recommended.

Keystart Housing Scheme Trust —

The CHAIR: For the minutes, I note that the Keystart Housing Scheme Trust was not examined.

This committee is now adjourned until 9.00 tomorrow morning.

Committee adjourned at 6.59 pm
