

Division 42: Water and Environmental Regulation — Services 4 to 9, Environment, \$99 083 000 —

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Mr R.R. Whitby, Parliamentary Secretary representing the Minister for Environment.

Mr M.C. Rowe, Director General.

Mr A. Sutton, Executive Director, EPA Services Division.

Mr P.H. Brown, Executive Director, Regional Delivery.

Mr P.J. Stewart, Acting Executive Director, Corporate Services.

Dr N.E.F. Goyal, Executive Director, Science and Planning.

Ms S. McEvoy, Executive Director, Strategic Policy.

Mr P.J. Hawker, Acting Chief Finance Officer.

Mr D. Forster, Principal Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, and I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information will be provided. I will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by Friday, 30 October 2020. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge that through the online questions system.

Member for North West Central.

[4.30 pm]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 649 of budget paper No 2. I have a question mark here. Of course, with the history of Carnegie Clean Energy, we have to question the funds that are being put here. The clean energy future fund has an allocation of \$2 million in the 2020–21 budget and a further \$8 million in the subsequent budgets. One of the new initiatives is the clean energy future fund, which is allocated \$2 million in 2020–21, and another \$7.28 million in the forward estimates. Are they the same funds or are they different funds that have the same name?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: The spending changes table under “New initiatives” is the funding that was pre-COVID, then of course COVID came along and at the top of that table is the list of appropriations to boost spending. So it is actually additional money that has been allocated as part of the COVID WA recovery plan.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: So the \$680 000 extra is the top-up money or is it \$10 million new money?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: The \$10 million is the additional money.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I just want to clarify this so I have it right: under new initiatives, clean energy future fund, is \$7.28 million of existing money, and then there is the COVID-19 WA recovery plan with the same name, clean energy future fund, where there is \$10 million of new money, so it is \$17.28 million?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: That is correct. Those were boosted as part of the WA COVID recovery plan.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Can the parliamentary secretary please tell me what the \$17.28 million is allocated for? Like I said, concerning after what happened with Carnegie Wave Energy and the waste of taxpayers' money in Albany by the Minister for Regional Development, Alannah MacTiernan, we are all a bit sceptical when the government announces these global figures of clean energy future fund, so can the parliamentary secretary please detail what the money is for?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Certainly, member, I would be delighted to because it is a very important program and it will bring a lot of benefits and it will be very stimulatory to our economy. It will create jobs and be good for the economy. The fund supports Western Australia's low carbon transitioning by facilitating individual clean energy projects and accelerating technology innovation. These projects will contribute to the government's aspiration to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. As I said, the \$10 million is in addition under the COVID-19

recovery plan. Clean energy operators can apply for funding of between \$250 000 and \$2 million for each clean energy project. Successful applicants for the first round of funding is expected to be announced shortly. The projects are supported by the fund to contribute to significant cost effective reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. The priority projects are facilities that are at the fringe of and not connected to the south west interconnected system or the north west interconnected system and significant facilities under the national greenhouse and energy reporting act. So it is \$10 million extra funding to support Western Australia's economic recovery while reducing emissions. It is about innovation, and it is about supporting alternative sources of energy. As I say, it is about stimulating and kickstarting our economy and given the location of these projects it should be welcomed by people who represent regional Western Australia, I would have thought.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Although the parliamentary secretary says there is \$4 million in this 2020–21 budget, obviously that is not a huge amount of money when dealing with the grid issues. Kalbarri is one of those towns that suffers from the edge of grid issues on the SWIS. Would that be one town that the government is prioritising to ensure that it is reliable and sustainable power, especially when we have all these tourists who are wandering out yonder because they have nowhere else to go. It puts a huge amount of pressure on the power supply in Kalbarri and often leads to power going down, costing small businesses a huge amount of money when they have food and beverage in their fridges and freezers to cater for this influx. Will this money support towns like Kalbarri?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: The process for the money to be allocated is a competitive process so the government itself cannot determine who will be the particular winners out of this. They have to put up, obviously, an appropriate case, but certainly this project is targeting towns like Kalbarri and towns that the member suggests need this assistance. That is where we are hoping that the money will go, but we are not going to allocate it in a way that is not competitive and fair to every applicant.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Just to be clear, this total amount of money, the \$17.28 million, is purely to go towards projects that are yet to be applied for, and none of that money has been allocated to other clean energy future projects?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: The advice I have is that the application process has already been opened and has concluded for, the first round, and those applicants will be assessed and hopefully we should be hearing about who will be receiving funds by the end of the year.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Just to be clear, there are no government initiated initiatives here; this is waiting for other groups to come from the outside and apply for the funding?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Yes, this is allocating to the private sector.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Does the parliamentary secretary want to clarify that because it is actually quite important.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Just a point of clarification, it is non-government agencies—I think that was the issue the member was raising—but it is certainly open to not-for-profits and local government.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Kalbarri's service is government operated, or contracted out. It will not be able to access these funds. As the parliamentary secretary pointed out in his first response, where the north west interconnected grid fails, Kalbarri is on the edge of the grid. Will they be able to apply —

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Sorry, who is "they"?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is not Horizon, it is Western Power that has Kalbarri under the NWIS system, but I think there is potentially a private company that may run it. Will Kalbarri, which has a problem with power, be able to access these funds to ensure that they have regular power supply?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I would not be quick to write off any particular town as benefiting from this. It really depends on which agencies—when I say "agencies" it could be a not-for-profit, it could be a local government, it could be a commercial concern, it could be an Aboriginal community. So without knowing who is interested, and I certainly do not know, it is open to all those types of entities. I would have thought that every town would be in the same situation in terms of —

[4.40 pm]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am not going through it, but edge of grid stuff is the edge of grid of the south west interconnected system, which is Western Power, and then you have the edge of grid of the northern interconnected system, so it is those towns at the end of that system that miss out on power going all the way from the start to the finish. The finish, the end, gets less power.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: So the member is talking about towns that are actually within the system —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Yes.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: — within the grid, but because they are at the end of the line they have issues?

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Mr V.A. CATANIA: Yes, which is what the definition is for those funds, that is all.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: The point is, it is funding for facilities that are at the fringe of or not connected to, so I guess it will be covered in that example, potentially.

Mr W.R. MARMION: Just following on, the selection process for these projects: first of all, how much is allocated for round 1? Who is on the selection panel and do they recommend to the minister? How does the process work?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I might refer this to my counsel, director general.

Mr M. Rowe: And I might refer it to the relevant executive, who will be Sarah McEvoy.

Ms S. McEvoy: Yes, a range of government agencies are on a panel recommending to the relevant ministers the programs or the proposals that would be funded. As the parliamentary secretary said, that still under way. That includes people with technical expertise in energy as well as policy advisers and the process is also able to access specialist expertise if required.

Mr W.R. MARMION: My other question is: does that panel make a recommendation to a minister or the director general? What is the final sign off and if it goes to the minister, does the minister take it to cabinet?

Ms S. McEvoy: It is a joint decision not dissimilar to the way it was for the low emissions energy development fund. It is a joint decision by the ministers for environment and energy.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to the table at the top of page 650 headed “Ongoing Initiatives” and to the resourcing of the Port Hedland dust program, which sees it going up to a bit over half a million a year. One, can the parliamentary secretary tell me what that program comprises; and, two, if it is monitoring, why is that not being paid for by industry?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I will go to the second point of the question first, because I have forgotten the first part! The immediate future is for the state to take control of monitoring, to establish the integrity of the monitoring process. We need a head power to negotiate, and we need to negotiate with the private sector up there and the mining companies involved to agree to take on the monitoring and pay for the monitoring. So initially we will be taking that on and establishing that rigorous process. But the intent is to move that responsibility for cost to the sector itself. What was the first part?

Dr D.J. HONEY: The first part was what was the extent of that program.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Okay. I will refer to the director general.

Mr M. Rowe: Thank you very much. So the program consists of a number of elements. Post the government response to the Port Hedland dust task force, there were a number of commitments given in relation our department’s responsibilities in that area. One was to produce best practice dust guidelines and so that is one of the activities we are doing as an organisation. The consultants who are working on that are on the ground in Port Hedland this week. The other one, as the parliamentary secretary said, is to resume responsibility for the monitoring in Port Hedland. The tender process will commence in November and should conclude in the first quarter of next year and then as the parliamentary secretary has indicated, in time, industry will be responsible for the cost of that part of it. We are also reviewing all the licences up there with the expectation that industry will have no net increase in dust emissions even though they may want to increase their exports from the port, so there are a variety of elements to that program for which that funding is directed.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Who is responsible for the maintenance of the dust monitors?

Mr M. Rowe: So at the moment it is, I guess—how would you describe it? A conglomerate of the companies are represented through the Port Hedland Industries Council, so the industries up there, the various mining companies that export through the port are part of the Port Hedland Industries Council. As we said, in time, as part of the government’s response to the task force, my agency will become responsible for dust monitoring in Port Hedland, so we will assume responsibility for the nine existing sites that are there. We have already been up and done an audit of those sites, and the tender process will determine how best to actually resource the monitoring going forward in that space. Currently PHIC is responsible for the monitoring. It publishes the monitoring data and information. In time that will become my department’s responsibility to do that.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Can the parliamentary secretary confirm that at least one of those monitors was not working for approximately eight months? How can that happen?

The CHAIR: Member for North West Central, it is not related to this, so I will give the parliamentary secretary the option whether he wants to answer it specifically.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is a very, very important question.

Ms C.M. ROWE: It does not matter; it is still not —

The CHAIR: Member for Belmont, thank you.

Ms C.M. ROWE: Sorry.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I am not sure if it sits in budget estimates, but I am happy for the director general to respond.

Mr M. Rowe: So, yes, it is correct to say that one of those monitors was not operating correctly for a period of time. The department was advised by PHIC some time after they had their first suspicions that that was the case. That did not please me greatly—the member might have read about that in the news—because it did potentially call into question the integrity of the dust monitoring program. So from my perspective, it just adds to the importance of the government resuming responsibility for that effort in order to ensure the community, industry and other stakeholders, of the integrity of that monitoring network. Having said that, the monitoring, the particular piece of equipment was corrected, it was tested, as we understand it, and is now operating correctly to the best of my knowledge. So industry identified that issue. They probably should have told us earlier; nevertheless, the issue is now corrected and we understand that the dust monitoring network is operating effectively now. We are still very keen to resume responsibility for that as soon as possible.

Mr W.R. MARMION: On the same line item, is the resourcing sufficient so that the department can actually analyse the data—I wonder if this is being done—and monitor when the ships are being loaded and also incorporate ambient dust so it can do a proper analysis, maybe an algorithm around how the dust changes, depending on the volume of ships, where they are loading, where the wind is coming from? It is quite a complicated analysis but I was wondering whether that is going to be part of the resourcing.

The CHAIR: Once again, we are on the edge of what we are discussing.

Mr W.R. MARMION: Yes, it is to do with resourcing.

The CHAIR: I appreciate that, but once again it is discretion. Director general.

[4.50 pm]

Mr M. Rowe: As I said, in time this exercise will be paid for by industry, so that is important to bear in mind. We have used a variety of techniques in the past to understand what is going on with dust in Port Hedland, and the member might be familiar with Lidar monitoring that was done for a period of time up there. Now, of course, Lidar has its own limitations as well, because in some cases marine aerosols can be confused with dust and other things, nevertheless, it does give us an indication of indicative dust sources which is important. The member would also be aware that in Port Hedland the matter is complicated by the fact it is a pretty dusty town in any event. It has background and ambient dust that exists in addition to the dust that is created as a result of the industry that occurs in that area. So I think the question is: do we have sufficient resourcing for our monitoring to be able to distinguish that clearly going forward? I do not know that I can answer that question in all honesty. I am not the expert in that space and I am not sure we have the relevant people with us this afternoon who may be able to answer that question.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I turn to the “Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Strategy 2030” at the bottom of page 650. I had some reasonably extensive correspondence from a company that is involved in taking waste materials and recycling them and they were greatly concerned that sham operators were taking large volumes of waste, declaring that waste as recyclable material, but in fact only a very small percentage of that waste was actually recyclable, and then they were dumping that waste. Their assertion was, and this is a reputable company, that this is a common practice that is undermining reputable operators in that space. I did actually raise that specific issue with the minister, and he looked into it. I have had further information that whilst that has occurred it has not actually changed. I will give an example. For example, a company is taking waste at \$26 a cubic metre. It is landfilled. They are not paying the landfill levy for that because it was taken as recyclable waste. I wondered about the extent of enforcement, and if there have been any detection of levy avoidance and if there have been any prosecutions for levy avoidance in the last 12 months?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Are we straying a bit away from budget estimates on this one, because the member has raised it with the minister directly?

Dr D.J. HONEY: Well, it is to do with the waste avoidance resource recovery strategy because the assertion is that it is being avoided. This is the only place I can see that I can raise this.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I would ask Mr Cowie, perhaps, to respond who may be able to offer some insight, but if there is a specific issue that is recurring, I suggest that the member write to the minister.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I have done that.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Or let the minister know again.

Mr S. Cowie: The landfill levy is payable on waste that is generated in the metropolitan area, and when it is disposed to landfill, so if it is recyclable waste and it is being recycled, there is no levy payable on that. But once it is disposed to landfill, the levy is payable. If it is taken to a landfill site outside the metropolitan area, that levy is still payable and there are a number of landfill sites that do receive metropolitan waste and pay the levy. There are significant penalties, including daily interest for failing to pay the levy, for companies who take waste and do not declare the

levy. We undertake a number of compliance inspections and investigations to determine if there are people who are not paying the levy. The levy is payable by the person who landfills that material, so it is the landfill that is responsible for paying for the levy. In the 2019–20 year of the budget, the previous year, we undertook 74 inspections of landfill premises and 52 inspections of other prescribed premises used for the purpose of processing waste, to target compliance with the landfill levy to ensure that the waste was recorded correctly. We also undertake a number of investigations, both overt and covert, to determine whether the levy is being paid. At the moment there are several investigations ongoing to look at whether levy is being paid. To answer the member's question, there were no prosecutions this year for non-payment of levy, but there are some investigations which are continuing.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 651 and the native vegetation policy and the suggestion that it will be reviewed and implementation change to this policy made. Will that require any regulatory or statutory changes?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: The answer is no.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: There will be no regulatory or statutory changes. Does this mean that the rule for clearing of native title vegetation, for which farmland is exempt, will be maintained?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Can I clarify: did the member say “native title” or “vegetation”?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Native vegetation; sorry. I have “native title” in my head. I am continuing on from last night!

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Thank you, member. There is no proposal for any changes to that.

Dr D.J. HONEY: In relation to native vegetation, the parliamentary secretary may be aware that CSIRO published a study, I think it was actually two years ago now, on the loss of tree canopy in the metropolitan area, and it was in the order of around 70 000 hectares, I think, over 10 years. Is any work being done to look at that issue? The parliamentary secretary might know that it is an issue I am passionate about, as much as anything else, for the impact on Carnaby's black-cockatoos and other cockatoos, which seem to me to be forced into smaller and smaller bush areas in the metropolitan area. Is there any policy or any work being done to protect the native vegetation, in particular the tree canopy in the metropolitan areas?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Thanks, member. The member has actually hit on something that I think is really important. I think I might have said at previous estimates hearings that this is one of my pet concerns about urban development. An amount of tree canopy and native vegetation is lost with development, so I really think we need to look at this area and to preserve as much as we can. As the member knows, there are obvious advantages for having urban canopy; not only is the visual aspect significant, but also the canopy cools the environment in which residences are built and provides an environment for native wildlife. Some developers already do it very well; others, much less so. I think we are getting into another portfolio area. Certainly, the planning portfolio is looking at how we can retain more urban canopy in residential development, so this really comes under its bailiwick. I will refer to the director general, who will be able to speak as far as we can in terms of this portfolio area about this issue.

Mr M. Rowe: Thank you very much. As part of the development of the policy, we are very conscious of the fact that we live in a very diverse state, for a start, and what might work in the Kimberley may not necessarily work in the south coast or even metropolitan Perth, so understanding that it is probably appropriate to take a bioregional approach to thinking about native vegetation makes a bit of sense in a state like ours. Obviously, as the parliamentary secretary has said, in the metropolitan setting, a lot of the decisions around native vegetation arise out of subdivision approvals that happen through the planning system, and they do not necessarily fall under the Environmental Protection Act in that sense, so they are exempted by virtue of the way that the two pieces of legislation work. Having said that, from time to time there will be some native vegetation clearing proposals in metropolitan Perth that come under the Environmental Protection Act, whether that is under part 4 for significant assessments by the EPA or under part 5 if it is a native vegetation clearing application. One thing that the policy focused on through the discussion process was the need to better understand the extent of clearing. It is true to say that because clearing is authorised under a multitude of portfolios and different statutory frameworks, we do not have a good collective understanding of the extent of clearing that is occurring, and that has been a key consideration for the minister and the parliamentary secretary in asking us to think about how we can have a better whole-of-government approach to understanding what is actually going on when it comes to clearing in the metropolitan area.

The parliamentary secretary also mentioned the work that the planning portfolio is doing on the urban tree canopy. That department has done some urban tree canopy strategy work in conjunction with the Western Australian Local Government Association and other local governments. Some work is happening at multiple levels both in the strategic sense about what can be done to preserve the urban tree canopy and in a policy sense about what we collectively need to do to better understand the extent of clearing, and what that might mean in a bioregional context.

[5.00 pm]

Mr W.R. MARMION: My first question is on page 651 and the Waterwise Perth action plan. I would like some clarification on the wording in the seventh point, which states that “Perth's reliance on groundwater cannot continue”,

Extract from Hansard

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Mr Vincent Catania; Mr Reece Whitby; Mr Bill Marmion; Dr David Honey; Chair; Ms Cassandra Rowe; Mr John Carey

and outlines a plan to reduce groundwater use by 10 per cent. How does that relate to the recharging that is being done by Water Corp? My understanding is that the recharging quantity that goes into the groundwater has approval to be outsourced. Can the parliamentary secretary please clarify that?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: That is an issue under the water portfolio and Minister Kelly. This is the environmental portfolio. We should leave it to the right area.

Mr W.R. MARMION: Yes; that is fair enough.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Parliamentary secretary, I refer to page 654, “Explanation of Significant Movements”, and the fifth point, which states —

... it is likely that industry has engaged in more stockpiling of C&D waste in lieu of disposal which has contributed to the decrease in the quantity of C&D disposed of to landfill thus increasing the overall diversion rate.

It is suggested that potentially, there may be stockpiling due to the prohibitive costs of the waste levy itself. Does the parliamentary secretary think that that is causing these stockpiles to occur?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Thanks, member. Shortly, I will refer the member to an adviser who can give him a clearer picture and explanation of that point, but I want to make one point about construction and demolition waste. We are actually moving to a much better process of recycling a lot of that, so, in a way, this issue will dissipate over time. That is the good news. If the member is familiar with Kwinana Freeway, as I am, and the recent widening of that freeway, I think all the road base in that was recycled C and D waste, and I think that was the first time that we have actually used that material as a road base. This makes absolute sense in terms of savings to the taxpayer, and it is actually a quality product for use as road base. Although there might be an issue here, I think the good news broadly is that we are heading in new directions with recycling and better management of waste in terms of the recycling and the circular economy. One of the big good-news stories has been the use of C and D waste in building and road bases and I think in other infrastructure, too. Local governments are starting to use it for car parks. Of course, it means that we are not mining finite resources, whether sand or limestone, so there are some good savings there. I will get Sarah McEvoy to comment on the particular point that the member raised.

Ms S. McEvoy: I will try to remember all of it. The levy is intended as an economic lever to discourage landfilling. That is one of its primary purposes. Currently, the regulatory and legislative framework does not give any time frame as to how long someone can stockpile material. There is a relationship between demand and when someone can actually re-use material. One of the other things is that there has been a bit of a reduction in the amount of construction and demolition waste that has been generated in the last five years or so, primarily as a result of a downturn in construction, as shown by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. When recyclers stockpile material, they are either going to re-use it, as the parliamentary secretary said, for things like civil construction for roads and so forth, or, if they are unable to find any market for it, they will have to at some point dispose of it to landfill, and then the levy would become due. A number of consultations have been out this last year, particularly one called “Closing the Loop”, which is all around how to encourage the recycling of that material in a more efficient way. Because what those people are doing with stockpiling is lawful, there is nothing in the legislative framework that prevents that, but obviously, from a departmental point of view, we would want to encourage the use of that material in a timely way.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is the parliamentary secretary concerned that there might be some illegal dumping of this waste occurring because people are trying to avoid that levy, and is that being monitored?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I would be concerned, obviously; I think we would all be concerned if that was happening. But I think, as Ms McEvoy has explained, there is often stockpiling while there is a search for a market for the material, and I think what we are seeing with the new regulations that allow the use of this material in civil construction and road base et cetera means that it is more likely that that material is going to find a market. The fact that it is sitting there being stockpiled does not necessarily mean that it will not find its way to a market. As a state government, the more we can do to encourage recycling will mean that there will be a greater chance for that market to be found and for that stockpiled material to be used.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Has the parliamentary secretary or his department heard of any reports of illegal dumping in regional areas to avoid the waste levy, particularly in rural areas at landfill sites?

The CHAIR: Once again, member, you are pushing the boundaries on the questions, but it is up to the parliamentary secretary if he wants to respond.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: My response would be that the agency does actively investigate illegal dumping.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Parliamentary secretary, I refer to page 652 and the table of government goals, desired outcomes and services. That states “Compliance with Ministerial statement implementation conditions are monitored effectively”, and it is “Compliance Monitoring Services”. I was told that there was an issue at Woodman Point.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Sorry; can the member just restate the page he is referring to?

Dr D.J. HONEY: It is page 652. It is the table with “Government Goal”, “Desired Outcomes” and “Services”. At the bottom, service 9 is “Compliance Monitoring Services to the Minister”, and that is also in the service summary table below, under the ninth expense. I was told that there has been an ongoing issue that Woodman Point has not been complying with its odour emission levels. Is that, in fact, the case; has the parliamentary secretary’s department been made aware of that; and has there had been any investigation of that?

[5.10 pm]

The CHAIR: Once again, member, the questions are not quite on target; however, I will let the parliamentary secretary have the discretion.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: The line item that the member referred to does not refer to the Woodman Point issue. I will refer to the director general to explain.

Mr M. Rowe: Thank you. Service 9 is about compliance monitoring that the department does on ministerial statements recommended by the Environmental Protection Authority and approved by the minister. There is a compliance effort that revolves around those ministerial statements. Obviously, the department also does compliance effort around other parts of the Environmental Protection Act, including part 5 of the Environmental Protection Act, and I think Woodman Point is authorised under part 5 for its operations. That is Water Corporation’s operations at Woodman Point.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Okay; Water Corp is later tonight.

Mr W.R. MARMION: My question relates to page 660, “Environmental Impact Assessment Services to the EPA”, the seventh point. I will make a general comment before I ask a specific question, which relates to the mining industry. I get a lot of grizzles about the time it takes for approvals to go through the department, and I have been quite surprised. Native title was the issue that people used to grizzle about, but it seems that in recent times they have raised environment and water as an issue. I notice that the table shows an increase in employees, and there is a note that explains that the figures include temporary agency staff, but there has been a suggestion from the mining industry that maybe the department needs more staff. This table refers to cost per standardised unit—I am not sure what that is; the parliamentary secretary might explain that—but it is not necessarily about the cost to the department. The timing is the issue for the mining industry. It would like more certainty about the time it takes to get approval.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Thank you, member. It is a very pertinent issue, particularly in this time of COVID, when we want to see more projects get off the ground. I know from sitting in meetings with the minister and his staff that the minister has been keen to progress this issue, and extra resources, including money and staff, have been invested to speed up the processes. The government is providing additional funding of \$3.3 million to the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation to help tackle the steep increase in the state’s significant proposals that require assessment by the EPA. The funding has provided an additional 14 full-time equivalent positions on a fixed-term basis to support the EPA and the Appeals Convenor so that we can get some timely advice to inform those assessments. Over \$2 million has been identified in the budget estimates of 2020–21 as being allocated to ensure this work continues, but it is a priority of the government—it was before COVID, quite frankly—to make a speedier process with less red tape, to have a more transparent system and to get projects off the ground as soon as we can. I am happy to let the director general give the member a bit more information on that.

Mr M. Rowe: Thank you very much. Since the department was established to be the one-stop shop for environmental and water approvals in the state, we have tried to create an environment whereby companies come and talk to us what we describe as “early and often” about their approvals requirements so that we are clear about the sort of requirements they have and we can try to match our resources to their time frames as best we can, recognising that often these companies are operating in quite a dynamic commercial environment as well, so some of their priorities change from time to time, depending on what the market conditions might be. We do that firstly to try to create a very good working relationship with all companies and we encourage companies of all shapes and sizes to talk to us regularly about their requirements. In some instances, companies will change their own priorities internally, and that will help us meet their requirements. The EPA services division, which supports the EPA, does tremendous work, often with very complex issues that it is required to deal with. I think it has delivered 40 major assessments in the last year, which is a significant increase on the numbers that have been dealt with in previous years, so those additional resources are really making a difference. Of course, mining companies and industry generally are probably never satisfied with the timeliness of what we do, but the EPA team in particular sets out the time frame that it agrees to provide, and on the vast majority of occasions it will meet that time frame as agreed with the companies. That is a really good outcome. In addition, we are working hard to try to improve the timeliness of our approvals across all parts of our business, which extend to part 5 approvals under the Environmental Protection Act as well as water licensing. Ostensibly, we are there to be the one-stop shop. We can probably always do better. We have a range of things in train to try to improve our effectiveness and efficiency over time. We are very open to dealing with companies should they have particular concerns about our timeliness.

Mr W.R. MARMION: I thank the director general for that answer, parliamentary secretary. One of the challenges for the director general—I have had some 24 years' experience in government department agencies—is that one can give a department more money and one can actually then analyse things in more detail. I am not really encouraged by the data that is presented in the table that says the cost per standardised unit has gone up. I do not know what a standardised unit is, but that cost has gone up from \$30 000 to \$39 000. That is an indicator to me that the department is spending more resources in analysing how to handle a project perhaps than it would have done. The parliamentary secretary might want to comment on that, but I just suggest it as a note of caution for the department to keep an eye on that.

The CHAIR: Parliamentary secretary, noted?

Ms C.M. ROWE: It was not really a question. Take it as a comment.

Mr W.R. MARMION: He can comment if he would like to.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Thanks, member. That is possibly a trap, but, again, I go back to my personal experience. The minister is very demanding of KPIs. He wants results. He absolutely wants results, and those results are monitored. He gets updated on the reduction in the time to approve and reach various approval stages. I can assure you that this is not about analysing or increasing the hurdle; it is about getting projects out the door as soon as we can.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 666 and the Keep Australia Beautiful Council WA. There is an allocation of \$112 000 in 2019–20, but I cannot see any other allocation to the Keep Australia Beautiful Council in the forward estimates. With nothing going forward, does that mean that the Keep Australia Beautiful Council is finished?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Thank you, member. I might get Sarah McEvoy to explain what is going on there. I am sure we have not abandoned the people there.

Ms S. McEvoy: The department provides services to the Keep Australia Beautiful Council and has done for quite a long time since it has been housed in the various predecessors of the current agency. Through a service level agreement, we provide a number of services free of charge, and for probably 20 years or so we have also provided \$112 000—it does not seem to have been indexed, in my memory—of funding to help the KABC with a lot of things that are outside of the service level agreement but still necessary for it to do. It does get other income from things like fines, and also from a grant from the Waste Authority WA from the waste avoidance and resource recovery account. There is no reason that that funding would not be provided going forward, but it is a grant from the department rather than from government, so I guess it is not something that the government has put in its own forward estimates.

[5.20 pm]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Thank you for that answer, but, as the parliamentary secretary knows, if we look to budgets to be able to plan and go forward, it is clearly saying that the Keep Australia Beautiful Council WA is not receiving a cent after this year's budget. Not even this year's budget; it has finished.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: No, member; I think that is very misleading.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is here in black and white.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: The member has just heard Sarah McEvoy explain that there is ongoing support from the agency and government, and all sorts of financial support. It has been acknowledged that a grant was paid previously. The Keep Australia Beautiful Council is very much supported by the government and will continue to be.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: But not financially.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Of course. No; the member heard—I might get Sarah McEvoy to repeat what she just said.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am looking at it in black and white.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: The member is referring to one grant, which is not the totality of the financial support that goes to the Keep Australia Beautiful Council.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Can the parliamentary secretary explain the financial support in dollar terms?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Maybe I will get Ms McEvoy back to the podium to explain the financial support, and perhaps the member can listen, rather than prepare his supplementary.

Ms S. McEvoy: The grant from the WARR account is around \$825 000 annually, and there are also services free of charge, which I think come to around \$200 000. I would probably need the CFO to confirm the exact figure, but it is a substantial amount of money.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Can the parliamentary secretary confirm that the funding for the Keep Australia Beautiful Council WA has been cut by \$112 000 by his department under this government?

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Mr R.R. WHITBY: Thanks, member. We do not know—rather, the member does not know—because there could be another grant. The member has already heard that the organisation receives a lot more funding than that from the state government. I think it was a cash equivalence of over \$1 million.

Ms S. McEvoy: That is right.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I would not have thought that an organisation that is getting \$1 million annually from the government is not getting a cent from the government. That does not make sense.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I asked a specific question. I realise that the Keep Australia Beautiful Council gets money from other sources than government, which has not changed. But this line item through the department here says to me and to anyone reading the *Budget Statements* and the forward estimates that there has now been a cut of \$112 000 to the Keep Australia Beautiful Council WA.

Ms C.M. ROWE: Point of order, Chair.

The CHAIR: Member for North West Central, we have a point of order. Member for Belmont.

Ms C.M. ROWE: I believe that the question is repetitive. The member has asked this question and it has been answered on three occasions.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: That is not a point of order.

The CHAIR: Thank you, member for North West Central. Thank you, member for Belmont.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Clearly there is a cut of \$112 000 —

The CHAIR: Member for North West Central, you have tried to reshape this question in multiple ways.

A member: And you are failing.

The CHAIR: You are getting the same response every single time, so make this the last attempt, please.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: No, Keep Australia Beautiful is failing by losing \$112 000.

The CHAIR: Do you have a question or not?

Ms C.M. ROWE: The parliamentary secretary has addressed this a few times.

The CHAIR: Do you have a question?

Ms C.M. ROWE: Yes, I do have a question. I am delighted to ask this question on the container deposit scheme, which has been touted for decades and decades. We finally introduced it on 1 October. It is a fantastic initiative.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: That is a preamble.

Ms C.M. ROWE: It is a preamble. We let the member have many preambles. I would really like to ask the parliamentary secretary about the benefits to the community under this scheme. I am particularly interested in this from a waste point of view.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Which budget paper No is this?

Ms C.M. ROWE: I can tell the member which budget paper it is. It is page 650, member for North West Central. It is page 650 for those who are interested. I am very interested in this because it is redirecting waste from landfill, and I have a number of facilities in my community. It is a great scheme and I would really like to hear how it is going in our community and how it is going to be benefiting not only the environment, but also many not-for-profit groups in our communities right across the state. Thank you, parliamentary secretary.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Thank you, member. This is something that I think all members, whether in government or opposition, would want to hear about because it has such a powerful impact on all our electorates.

Ms C.M. ROWE: That is right.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: All our local communities.

Mr V.A. Catania interjected.

The CHAIR: Member for North West Central, he is answering a question.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: All our communities are engaged in this, and only a very silly member of Parliament would not be supportive of and get involved with their communities on this. I can give members some breaking news. Between 1 October and close of business yesterday, 17.8 million containers have been refunded. We are at 22 October today, and 17.8 million containers have been refunded across Western Australia; we are going to get well over 20 million containers in the first month. This has been incredibly successful. We should all be able to tell our own stories about visiting container deposit locations in our electorates and elsewhere. We know that the scheme is key to reducing litter in our community and improving recycling, because the greater the quantity, the more economic it is for recycling handlers to

be involved in that business. The scheme is important from an environmental reason. We want to be more sustainable; we do not want waste going to landfill. There is also the litter issue, which is very unsightly. We know that when we visit South Australia, which has had this system in place for many years, we do not see the roadside litter that we see in other states that do not have the container deposit scheme. I think regional members will be particularly supportive because containers will not get flung out the window during those long country drives; they will be retained in the car. We know that the scheme is supporting a range of local primary and high school P&Cs. It is creating great charity opportunities for local sports clubs and other community groups. I know that in my electorate, the local operator is Community Recycling WA, which was created out of the Peel Thunder Football Club. As a result, we had former champion Hayden Ballantyne at our pop-up recycle location. When the scheme started on 1 October, the very first person to seek her refund at the Baldvis location was an 11-year-old girl named Bridie who goes to Settlers Primary School. Bridie handed over a bucket of empty containers. She had heard about the scheme and had been inspired to get some extra pocket money, and she got \$2.70. That is a modest number, but it was a start and not a bad boost to her pocket money, and I know that she has been back since to build on her savings. That has been replicated across Western Australia.

There are environmental benefits to this scheme. I have not gone into the economic benefits. There are charitable benefits. I think that even teaching kids about saving money—how they can to add their bank account and the effort that is required to earn a few dollars—is just as important as all these other advantages of the system. We have heard that the scheme has already created 680 jobs. I think that the creation of 680 jobs during the COVID pandemic is significant. As we discussed earlier, we know that people who have been unemployed for long periods or have a disability or come from a disadvantaged group have benefited from employment under the scheme. More than 1 250 community groups and charities have registered under the scheme ID process so that they can have money automatically deposited to their bank accounts. I am not sure whether members are aware of this process.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Elaborate on that. It is actually quite good.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: It is; it is fantastic.

The CHAIR: Sorry; I did not quite hear you!

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I will say it again!

[5.30 pm]

Mr R.R. WHITBY: The process is that people can encourage their P&C or footy club, as the case may be, to register online; the organisation gets an ID number; then that number is given to the organisation's supporters or fan base or school members and, wherever they are in the state, a person can deposit their empty containers and that payment will automatically go to the bank account of that sporting club or school P&C organisation. It is going to revolutionise P&C and footy club fundraising efforts. I think we really do not appreciate how valuable and significant this scheme will be to all those small community groups that scratch around to have a lamington drive or something to earn some money. It is incredibly significant and will at least put an underlying amount of money in income for P&Cs and other small sporting clubs. It will give them a decent float in their kitty to operate.

I refer to the refunds that are paid out. This is going back to when we had 11.6 million containers returned in the first two weeks, so it would have increased significantly. About \$1.51 million has been paid out on those numbers, so well over \$2 million will have been paid out to kids in pocket money or to P&Cs et cetera. That is not even through the first month. We can imagine that flow of money across a whole year, then ongoing. Obviously, it is also a boost to a lot of operators who are starting small businesses. I know that one of the scrap metal merchants near my electorate has branched out into being a drive-through container deposit location. That business has invested in plant; it has taken the lease of another property and has employed people. Organisations have also had to deal with the issue of COVID, so a lot of them have had to do the COVID-safe training. It is really inspiring to see how these companies and organisations have embraced this new scheme.

Ms C.M. ROWE: Member, we were talking earlier about employment for people with disability, which is also a big part of the container deposit scheme.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Absolutely, member.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: That is it; you just reminded me of a question.

Ms C.M. ROWE: That was not the point of it!

Mr R.R. WHITBY: We have seen people who have a disability or have been struggling to get employment who have actually got a new lease on life. I have visited the refund points and there is a real positive sense out there amongst the collectors. It is estimated that the scheme will recycle an additional 6.6 billion containers over the next 20 years. Without the scheme, it is estimated that almost 6 billion of these containers would have gone into landfill and hundreds of millions of containers would be littering our environment. This scheme has been a long time coming. Even as a kid, I can remember looking at my can of Coke and seeing that I could get 10¢ or 5¢ at the time

in South Australia but not in WA, so what is going on with our state? This is different from the old bottles of drinks that were actually recycled, which the old bottle-oh would give you money for, because this is an industry-wide operation that is not for the actual re-use of containers but for the recycling of containers.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Point of order, Chair. I appreciate how good the scheme is, but this answer has gone on now for a very long time, I think about five minutes.

Ms C.M. ROWE: I do not think there is a time limit on answers.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Yes, they are supposed to be short.

The CHAIR: Thank you, members. I am sure the parliamentary secretary is just about finished.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I am almost finished; I could speak longer. I note that government members have been very respectful in giving plenty of time to opposition questions. I think this is the first government question. To finalise, this is a scheme that has been embraced by the Western Australian community. It achieves lots of positive goals for the Western Australian community, and I implore all members and everyone in the community to get involved and be a part of it.

The CHAIR: Just before we go to further questions—the member for Cottesloe has a further question—I remind members that we still have a further division to go.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I want to put on the record that I know the member for Perth doorknocks, he goes through a lot of bins and collects money and that is how he fundraises for his campaign.

The CHAIR: The question, please.

Mr J.N. CAREY: Seriously, Chair, he has just slighted me—it is regular slighting now!

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I want to put on record that it has worked extremely well when it comes to Exmouth. I was there a week ago and in the first two weeks they had 30 000 containers. The point that I do not think has been put out there enough is that by having that ID, everyone could have the idea that the money they get for every can they give back is money going to that organisation. I think that needs to be really harped on because that is really going to change supporting groups and community groups in that fundraising sense over time. I have to give credit where credit is due, so well done.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Thanks, member.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Minister, I go back to page 653 and the percentage of commercial and industrial waste reported as diverted from recycling, which is still quite low. Above that it shows that the municipal solid waste diverted from landfill has reduced.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: How far down?

Dr D.J. HONEY: It is on page 653 in the middle of the table under the outcome on waste avoided. I was particularly interested in the industrial waste. As the parliamentary secretary's departmental heads will know, there is a fundamental issue that there is no regulatory framework as such for the re-use of secondary materials. That is a major barrier. In my previous life that was a major barrier to re-use of residue material, which I am assuming is included in the commercial and industrial waste category. I wonder if there is any work occurring to establish a regulatory framework to encourage the re-use particularly of industrial waste, or industrial material. In many cases it is not waste, but is treated as such.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I might refer that to Mr Rowe, the director general.

Mr M. Rowe: Thank you very much for the question. Yes, the member has identified an issue. Our current legislative framework is not sufficient to adequately deal with the appropriate and safe re-use of certain materials, and certain industrial by-products fall into that category. We had thought previously that our existing statutory regime would accommodate that, but on the back of the decision commonly known as the Eclipse decision, where the Supreme Court reinterpreted what we understood “waste” to mean, it appears that our current legislation does not provide for the kind of flexibility around an end-of-waste framework that we would all like to see. We would all like to see the appropriate and safe re-use of certain materials that we just cannot currently authorise under our legislation. We have been doing a lot of policy work on that. A discussion paper has gone out this year around the opportunity that presents. We have examined other jurisdictions in Australia in terms of how a suitable regime might apply and we are looking to give advice to the government about what future amendments to waste legislation might provide for and environmental protection legislation, as the case may be, to really try to encourage the re-use of all sorts of materials that currently we just cannot authorise. If I understand the member correctly, the example he is referring to might be related to Alcoa and perhaps a by-product that Alcoa was producing. In that instance, it has been able to satisfy itself against the existing waste framework that the material can be re-used. It is therefore not impossible to do it now; it is just that the statutory framework is not perhaps as enabling as it could be. The department has been doing a lot of

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consultation and a lot of policy work on that with a view to recommending to the government an appropriate and contemporary end-of-waste re-use framework for consideration. It will require legislative amendments.

Dr D.J. HONEY: When was that discussion paper released, parliamentary secretary?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Director general?

Mr M. Rowe: There is a discussion paper out at the moment, which closes on 15 November, I think. There have been previous discussion papers out about the same thing.

The CHAIR: Thank you. There are no further questions, so I will put the division.

The appropriation was recommended.

[5.40 pm]