

Division 42: Water and Environmental Regulation — Services 4 to 9, Environment; Climate Action, \$164 530 000 —

Mr D.A.E. Scaife, Chair.

Ms A. Sanderson, Minister for Environment; Climate Action.

Mrs M. Andrews, Director General.

Mr A. Sutton, Executive Director, EPA Services.

Mr S. Cowie, Executive Director, Compliance and Enforcement.

Ms K.A. Faulkner, Executive Director, Regulatory Services.

Dr N.E.F. Goyal, Executive Director, Strategy and Engagement.

Dr S. Meredith, Executive Director, Science and Planning.

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

Ms S. McEvoy, Executive Director, Strategic Policy.

Mr P.J. Hawker, Manager, Financial Planning.

Mr C. Barnes, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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

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

I do not want to hold up things any further, but I want to make the point that we did not have a quorum at 8.30 pm. There were no government members in the chamber. This is really the opposition's time to interrogate the budget. Given that there are six of them in the entire Legislative Assembly, two of whom were here to ask questions, in future I expect government members to be in the chamber on time.

I give the call to the member for North West Central.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 681 and addressing impacts of climate change on water resources and availability. Paragraph 4 states —

Addressing the impacts of climate change on the State's water resources, particularly in the South West of the State, is a key focus of the Department's activities. With less water available from traditional sources, meeting the water demands of a growing population and economy is increasingly reliant on improvements to water use efficiency, water trading and development of alternative non-potable water sources.

Can the minister elaborate on what is meant by that? I note in the budget that a future desalination plant was announced. Is that what this is talking about in terms of future water sources, or is it the south west Yarragadee? Can the minister elaborate on paragraph 4?

Ms A. SANDERSON: This is a question for the Minister for Water.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to page 680 of budget paper No 2, volume 2. In the spending changes table, under new initiatives, is the line item "Western Australian Climate Policy". It lists the expenditure throughout the forward estimates and the little bit from last year. Is this part of the \$750 million announcement or is it a separate pre-existing fund? Is this the fund that will be used to help coordinate climate change policy as per significant issue 1?

Ms A. SANDERSON: It is a fund for the climate policy from 2020, but there are items in this new initiative block, if you like, that are not part of the climate policy. For example, the national partnership on recycling and infrastructure is not part of the climate policy. There are aspects of it that form part of that \$750 million announcement, such as electric vehicle charging and the WA climate policy funding, but those other line items are not part of the climate policy.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I draw the minister's attention to paragraph 1 under "Significant Issues Impacting the Agency". It refers to overseeing the implementation of the Western Australian climate policy. Will that fund be used to develop and implement the climate policy?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Yes, that fund will help to implement the climate policy, but not in its entirety.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The same paragraph states that the minister's department —

... coordinates climate change policy and oversees the implementation of the Western Australian Climate Policy and State Electric Vehicle Strategy to deliver the ... commitments for enhanced climate resilience and a low carbon, clean energy State.

Does that mean that the minister's department has an oversight role of the activities of other departments and government instrumentalities such as the Water Corporation?

[8.40 pm]

Ms A. SANDERSON: Climate action is a whole-of-government activity. It is across sectors and it is across government. Climate action is in every portfolio because government agencies need to reduce emissions and they need to work with their stakeholders and commercial operators to reduce emissions. It is a collaborative approach. The department is taking a coordinated approach on a range of issues, but departments themselves are also driving their own climate initiatives. The Department of Transport, for example, has its own initiatives. The Department of Health has its own sustainability and climate initiatives, as does the Department of Education and so on and so forth. And hydrogen is being driven by the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation because it is a state development issue. It is complex and it is across government. It is not that the government is leading necessarily; it is coordinating.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I am trying to establish exactly what the hierarchy is for climate policy in this state. If every department runs off willy-nilly and makes their own climate policies, there is no point in having a policy.

Ms A. SANDERSON: Correct.

Mr R.S. LOVE: What is the minister's role in ensuring that those policies actually adhere to a coherent government objective?

Ms A. SANDERSON: One of the characteristics of this government is that cabinet ministers work closely together and departments work together collaboratively. When we came to government in 2017, there were directors general who had never met each other. The previous culture had been very much siloed departments driving a single agenda through government. That was one of the reasons the previous government could not deal with complex issues, frankly. Climate is possibly one of the most complex, important and pressing issues that we have to deal with as a community. There is enormous capacity and goodwill across the sector to drive climate initiatives through every single department. My role as climate action minister is to coordinate those initiatives so that we are working together to drive those initiatives through those departments, working closely with their ministers. One of the mechanisms we are using is through the ministerial climate task force, and we are working together collaboratively as a cabinet.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Given the Minister for Climate Action is the lead minister across all government departments, and ministers are not working in silos and everyone is singing *Kumbaya* around the camp fire and the minister has strong climate change policies, does the government know what its carbon footprint is? Including all departments, does the government have a target to reduce its carbon footprint? Firstly, what is the size of the government's carbon footprint? Does the government have a target for its own departments to reduce carbon emissions? Does the Minister for Climate Action, as the lead minister, have a government target?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I will correct one of the member's assertions, and that is that I am the lead minister for every department on climate. That is not correct.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Lead minister in terms of climate change.

Ms A. SANDERSON: Of climate, correct; that is right. That is the structure. Yes, we are working through the government's own footprint. We have some initial calculations, but we are working through what that is. We will be making announcements later in the year. Our commitment is clear and that is net zero emissions by 2050. We have made it public that government needs to be a leader in this space, if we are going to expect the private sector to reduce their emissions, and there is work to do. I think it is pre-emptive to make any announcement or provide any interim targets before COP26—the twenty-sixth UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties—this year, which will set new international standards. We will not be making any announcement about what the government's targets are, and our pathway down, until after COP26, or what the implications of any new international targets are. Essentially, states have to go about this in their own way because the federal government has completely vacated the space and thinks it can rely entirely on technology. That is not acceptable to the community. Every other state and territory is now having to bypass the commonwealth and work together on emissions reduction. We want to see some leadership, particularly from the Nationals in the commonwealth government, on climate change. That is what the community needs to see.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Does the minister have a figure of what government is spending to be able to meet that net zero target in 2050? Does the minister have an amount that is being spent across agencies? I know that the minister is not responsible, but surely she would have some sort of understanding of a financial number attached to climate change action by this government?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Our approach will be to develop the lowest cost abatement for the private sector and the government, but it also has to be effective. Essentially, it depends on the pathway. The government could spend a huge amount of money and come in earlier, if you like, but we are working through diligently and responsibly to make sure that we have a cost-effective pathway for the taxpayer. I do not have a number for every single department. My approach as minister is to work within government to set those targets. We are doing that, but we need guidance from the international community in order to do that. It is up to ministers to determine the best way to get there. I am not going to determine particular quotas for X or it has to make up some of this; ministers need to take ownership of their own departments in how they get their emission reductions.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I do not think anyone would expect the minister, as a small section of the government, to be able to determine the best way for every organisation to achieve their targets. But surely the Minister for Climate Action is the principal person to enable the setting of the targets and the government's requirements. The minister said earlier that she will not implement any intermediate targets at the moment. Does the minister think that she will set any intermediate targets along the way?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I said that we are not announcing any; that is quite different. I did not say we are not implementing any intermediate targets; I said we are not prepared to announce any intermediate targets before the international meeting in October and November.

Mr R.S. LOVE: But the minister is not opposed to setting interim targets post that meeting?

Ms A. SANDERSON: We will be setting interim targets.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The government will be?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Yes; correct.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Does the minister have any idea how long that process will be after that? Is there a plan in terms of a time line on this?

Ms A. SANDERSON: It is not fixed. I would hope that we would have some interim government targets by the end of the year. We will be working with the private sector in developing emissions reduction plans over the next two years to work with them on setting their interim targets. Really, it needs to be from the bottom up. We have given that commitment to sectors that those targets will be developed with them. Government will be leading on setting targets and that is why I want ours to come first. We will work with private sector organisations, like those in the resources and building sectors, to develop their targets. No-one, apart from the federal government, is coming kicking and screaming to this argument anymore. We are at a point at which everyone understands—mostly; 97 per cent of the population—not only the environmental imperative but also the business imperative. People want to understand and organisations want to understand the climate risk in their supply chains. They want to be able to say to customers, “We are net zero; we have a plan to be net zero; this is how we are demonstrating it.” There is a lot of goodwill in the private sector to do this.

[8.50 pm]

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation's role in coordinating and ensuring that all government departments are marching together. In terms of the minister's ability to coordinate and to ensure that programs are in place to achieve targets, what is the minister's role in situations such as the Water Corporation's failure to announce targets for its Binningup plant? Does the minister see the need to purchase carbon credits? Would the minister make a recommendation? How will the government react to that situation? Would such a recommendation require funding from the Water Corporation to make good?

The CHAIR: I will treat that as a new question but it needs a line item, member.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to page 680, “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”, specifically “Climate Change” and this department's role in coordinating a response to climate change policy and the implementation of the commitments.

The CHAIR: And the question is specifically about coordination with the Water Corporation? Can you repeat the question?

Mr R.S. LOVE: There has been a revelation about the Water Corporation—I am sure the minister is aware; she was nodding her head when I mentioned it—so, as an example of how this department operates, I am asking whether, in a situation like what has just been announced, it will have a role in addressing that.

Ms A. SANDERSON: It does not relate to a line item, but I will indulge because although it does not relate to my role as Minister for Climate Action, it relates to my role as the Minister for Environment and compliance, because

this is about compliance with ministerial statements that were set for the Water Corporation. We take compliance very, very seriously. Although it relates to its carbon footprint, it operationally relates to my role of compliance as part of the environment portfolio. I refer to the director general, who can run through some of those compliance issues.

Mrs M. Andrews: Thank you, minister. My responsibility as the CEO of the department is to take forward the ministerial statement conditions and ensure compliance with them. On that particular project, we are working with the Water Corporation. It has provided us with information to convince us that it is meeting its obligation under the ministerial statement. We are still working through that information. I have not reached a final view on that matter.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 680, “Election Commitments”, specifically the carbon innovation grants program. There is an increase in funding over the forward estimates. Can the minister explain when the grants will be available, who they will be available to and whether there will be a cap on the funding through the grants process in the carbon innovation grants program?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The carbon innovation grants program is around carbon sequestration, capture, utilisation and storage. It is all very early in its development. It will be critically important if we are going reach net zero as a nation. One of the most important roles that government can play around climate change is funding research into new technologies. In terms of the grants process and the requirements for application, I will defer to the director general, who may want to direct the question.

Mrs M. Andrews: I will pass to Sarah McEvoy.

Ms S. McEvoy: This is the first year of funding in the current budget so the funding has just become available. The initial steps will be to design the grants program, including all the rules around eligibility criteria, timing, processes et cetera for government approval. We anticipate that the grants program will be open either late this financial year or more likely next financial year. We are putting people on to run the program in the current financial year. That is new funding to employ a grants program manager and assistant.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: In terms of developing the carbon innovation grants program, will those grants be available to large companies? The minister spoke about carbon capture so, for example, will the grant program be available to Chevron’s Gorgon project? It has been promising to do it. I do not think it is there yet in terms of being able to put carbon back into the ground. Would it, for example, be able to access this grants program to assist it in developing the technology that is needed for carbon storage?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I would say that \$15 million is pocket change for that particular proponent and project. I think it has spent in the billions on that project. Although I do not think that it would be limited, I am not sure that it would be useful or appropriate. We are still developing the program. It would be helpful to see grants awarded to local scientists to research new and appropriate methods for Western Australia. A lot of the methodology that has been developed is very eastern states focused and is not appropriate for Western Australia. We need more investment in and investigation into blue carbon. The parameters of federal funding extend to mangroves for sequestration of carbon whereas we have more seagrass so it is more focused on what is unique for Western Australia. We would also like to see it focus on carbon farming and new areas of biosequestration methods. It is aimed more at broadening that rather than supporting one particular proponent with one particular issue.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 680, “New Initiatives”, specifically “Electric Vehicle Strategy”. Can the minister confirm the amount in this year’s budget and the following years’ budgets for this new initiative of electric vehicle strategy, which, I assume, is the state strategy of having rechargeable stations around the state? Is \$20 000 correct?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I will defer to Sarah McEvoy.

Ms S. McEvoy: The electric vehicle strategy itself is a broad strategy and, as the member said, it includes the electric vehicle charging stations, the locations of which were recently announced. The funding that is coming to the department is \$80 000 over the forward estimates —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Sorry, how much?

Ms S. McEvoy: It is \$80 000, and it is primarily for things like demonstration days and helping fleet managers and others understand how to incorporate electric vehicles into their fleets—those kind of considerations. It is not the main funding for the infrastructure across Western Australia.

Ms A. SANDERSON: The \$20 million for the charging stations, the infrastructure, will go to Horizon and Synergy directly, because they are rolling out the infrastructure.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: What is the \$80 000 for?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The \$80 000 over the forward estimates is for what Sarah McEvoy described—education and coordination. But the actual infrastructure—the bulk of the \$20 million—will go to the utilities to roll out the infrastructure, and that is in their budget.

[9.00 pm]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The figure of \$80 000 seems a very small amount for education. Does the minister think that is enough funding to educate industry or people in general to move towards electric vehicles?

The CHAIR: Can I just clarify that the line item we are dealing with is the electric vehicle strategy line item on page 680 as distinct from, as the minister has outlined, funding for the infrastructure.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: My question was what you just said, chair.

Ms A. SANDERSON: It is for the ongoing management and development of the strategy, not the rollout of the infrastructure. The utilities have their own promotional budget, so as part of the rollout, they will be providing a lot of promotional materials about where the chargers are and how to use them.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Still, it is \$20 000 for each financial year up to \$80 000 to develop a strategy. I think we have all been involved in developing strategies for which one does not get much change out of \$30 000, \$40 000 or \$50 000 on a very small project. I would imagine this is a larger strategy. Does the minister think that the \$80 000 is well short of what is needed to develop a strategy?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The strategy is already done, member.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The strategy is complete?

Ms A. SANDERSON: We are now rolling it out.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Does the funding towards the strategy help to inform how electric vehicles will be charged for the use of the roads and the facility into the future, or is that a separate discussion altogether?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Work is being done by the utilities at the moment on what the tariffs will be and a range of work is being undertaken by both utilities, in particular Synergy, around habits, charging and how to manage the impact of electric vehicles on the grid. Potentially, if it is unmanaged, we will have a range of issues—for example, an explosion of solar panels where there is no line of sight and no ability for the grid to manage them. That work is being undertaken now by the utilities as is appropriate under the direction of government.

Mr R.S. LOVE: That rather proves the point of the need for coordination in climate change policy.

Ms A. SANDERSON: That is correct.

Mr R.S. LOVE: That is fine for Synergy or some other utility such as Western Power —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Horizon.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Horizon in some places, not all. It is fine for utilities to be doing that for their own costs. However, a big contributor to federal and state finances is the fuel excises and the returns to roads through that. It would seem that in the future there could be an inequitable distribution between rich people who can afford Teslas and poor people who are driving old Hyundais who are paying for the roads for the rich people to drive on; therein lies a key part of the coordination need for government. Is the minister having a role in conversations around making sure that those utilities are talking to the road providers to understand the effect of electric vehicles on the maintenance of that asset?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I agree with the member about the potential inequities of the explosion of EVs and those being left behind. Yes, it highlights the role of government in managing the national policies, the national regulations and the national guidelines, and what we have right now is a total vacuum. States are moving in this space because encouraging the uptake of electric vehicles and the decarbonising of transport is a key climate initiative. States are going off and doing their own thing that is appropriate in their state with no national guidance whatsoever. Making it worse is that the federal government is at least 10 years behind European fuel emissions standards, which means that we get the high-emitting cars because the federal government allows them to come here and those people on lower incomes are left with those cars. It is an enormous inequity and it is one that continues to be created by the Liberal–National government in Canberra, without question. I completely agree with the premise of the member’s question. The state has limited leaders available to it in that space, but we cannot be left behind and we need to encourage the uptake of EVs.

In terms of working across government, an EV working group is managed by DWER and it has Transport and the utilities on it. I do not have the exact list in front of me, but a working group is coordinating the rollout of this.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I have a question on the offset program. A line item under “Ongoing Initiative” is “Establishing and Maintaining Vegetation Offsets Account”, with \$1 million this year and \$1 million next year. Given that there is already an offset account, as far as I understand, can the minister outline what that will achieve?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The environmental offsets counterbalance the impacts of the clearing of native vegetation and it is an important part of the approvals process. It can include financial contributions for the purpose of establishing and maintaining vegetation. The pooling of funds for monetary contributions allows for the purchase of larger and more significant areas of land; however, the process of identifying and purchasing these can be lengthy.

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A — Wednesday, 22 September 2021]

p234b-242a

Chair; Mr Vincent Catania; Amber-Jade Sanderson; Mr Shane Love

The department is working with the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions to identify and acquire areas that add value to the conservation estate while simultaneously fulfilling those offset obligations.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Is this an expenditure that was only temporarily suspended in 2020–21? There is no expenditure in the estimated actual in 2020–21.

Ms A. SANDERSON: I will defer to the director general, who may direct the question.

Mrs M. Andrews: I will direct the question to Peter Hawker, with some initial comments around these being spending changes as opposed to the underlying budget allocation.

Mr P.J. Hawker: This table on spending changes refers to changes only in this particular budget; there is already a budget in place for establishing and maintaining vegetation offsets.

Ms A. SANDERSON: I will direct the rest of the answer to Kelly Faulkner.

Ms K.A. Faulkner: The account has been in operation for some years. No funds were allocated to that in the previous financial year because under the Green Jobs program, which is part of the state recovery plan, \$8 million was transferred into another account for the offsets fund for recovery. Separate to that, the government contributed \$15 million for the environmental revegetation and rehabilitation fund. Dr Goyal can provide additional information about that if the member wishes, but the additional funds to go in now, the \$1 million, is to enable the purchase of, or to look at, other offsets through that fund. Last year, those offsets were delivered through the offsets fund for recovery, but we are seeking expenditure of \$1 million for the next couple of years through part V for clearing permit offsets.

[9.10 pm]

Mr R.S. LOVE: I am sorry but I still do not understand what the money is being spent on. Is it being spent on the maintenance of a registry or is it being spent on the offset?

Ms K.A. Faulkner: It is being spent on the offset. The funds in that account must be used for either the purchase of native vegetation or the maintenance of native vegetation.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Under the same heading, “Ongoing Initiative”, on page 680 is the line item “Pilbara Environmental Offsets Fund”. Can the minister explain what that fund is? The budget estimate for 2021–22 is \$1.224 million, the forward estimate for 2022–23 is \$422 000 and then it goes back up to \$1.175 million. Can the minister explain what that project is all about?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The Pilbara environmental offsets fund was established out of a range of projects in the Pilbara. It is designed to deliver environmental offsets, in partnership with the government, to traditional owners, natural resource management agencies and industry to restore and improve the ecological habitats impacted by the significant development in the Pilbara region. There was a readjustment in 2021–22 and in the forward estimates. Essentially, it relates to being able to develop the programs, getting the right people on the ground and working with the traditional owners. My focus is to make sure that money is being spent and being spent appropriately. We need to ensure that we are doing it properly. Finding appropriate staff has been somewhat challenging. The Department of Water and Environmental Regulation is currently co-designing six projects worth around \$2 million, focusing on preparing an integrated fire management. It requires significant resourcing and time to progress. The co-design process has been established and we expect delivery to ramp up significantly over the next six to 12 months. It is a fund that I get asked about when I visit the Pilbara, quite rightly, from proponents who put into it. We want to make sure that that money is being spent but it has to be spent appropriately. It requires the right staff to help deliver those programs.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Clearly, the money has not been spent appropriately and the department did not have the right staff. Can the minister elaborate on that?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I did not say that the money has not been spent appropriately and that we did not have the right staff. We are ensuring that the money is being spent appropriately and that we have the right staff. It does not mean the opposite of that.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Has there been concern about that money?

Ms A. SANDERSON: No.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The minister just intimated —

Ms A. SANDERSON: To put the member’s mind at ease, no, there has not. It has been a slow start rather than an inappropriate start, if that is the inference the member is making. It has been a slow start to identify and work with the partnerships. A lot of partners are involved in delivering those projects and doing it in the right way.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Can the minister give an example of what projects the department will be undertaking in the Pilbara and whereabouts in the Pilbara is the minister talking about? Is she talking about the Pilbara in general, being Port Hedland and Karratha, or inland in the Shires of Ashburton or East Pilbara?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The fund has committed to investing in projects at Woodstock–Abydos Aboriginal Reserve, with the Budadee Aboriginal Corporation and Marillana Station. I will butcher the other names so in everyone’s interest, I will not read them. A number of projects are already engaged with those Aboriginal prescribed bodies.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I would like to ask the minister about the third paragraph under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency” on page 681 of budget paper No 2. It relates to the proposed native vegetation policy for Western Australia. We have been through quite a lengthy review of the EPA and the vegetation clearing matters surrounding that. Can the minister outline the purpose of the native vegetation policy as opposed to the existing regulations and policies around native vegetation clearance? What will the consultation process involve when that consultation draft is released? This could have a considerable impact on mining and pastoralists and farmers alike. I would like to understand something of the intention of that policy.

Ms A. SANDERSON: The policy is designed to provide coordination across government agencies around native vegetation clearing and rehabilitation and what is in existence now. It is managed by a range of different departments for different purposes. It is designed to provide coordination around that policy. I will defer to Kelly Faulkner for more information.

Ms K.A. Faulkner: The draft policy, which is currently under consultation, was released in August, with the consultation period closing in October. The draft policy aims to initiate regional planning for native vegetation, setting clear objectives and priorities for clarity and certainty, consistency and transparency with the way that native vegetation is considered in those regional settings. It recognises that the state requires more than a one-size-fits-all approach; the vegetation is biodiverse in each area. It will prompt agencies to collaborate to address the difficult challenges that result in both the cumulative loss of important native vegetation and regulatory delays, signal a commitment to improving the mapping and monitoring of native vegetation, and track state government decisions that affect it.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to the Green Jobs plan on page 683. It appears that Green Jobs is utilising the native vegetation rehabilitation scheme, which apparently has funding of \$15 million. It is utilising the \$8 million offsets funds for recovery program. I am assuming that those offsets were recovered from persons wanting to carry out vegetation clearance. There is also \$25 million for the Healthy Estuaries WA program. Can the minister explain how that program will be put together and where those persons will be put to work?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The Green Jobs program is not just across my portfolio; it is deployed in other portfolios. There have been a number of deployments to date. I will defer to Nygarie Goyal.

[9.20 pm]

Dr N.E.F. Goyal: There have been 120 jobs created so far. There was a program target of 1 000 jobs, and we are on track to meet that target.

Mr R.S. LOVE: These jobs are located under the \$8 million offsets programs—is that what the minister said?

Ms A. SANDERSON: No, they are being located under the native vegetation offsets, the healthy estuaries offsets and the Pilbara offsets. I started answering the question incompetently before I deferred to the officer, who had better information than I did.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Of the 120 jobs, how many are in regional Western Australia?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I will defer to Dr Goyal.

Dr N.E.F. Goyal: I do not have that level of information here.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Of the 120 jobs, how many are full-time; and if they are not full-time, how do we determine the job—is it X number of hours per week? How long will these jobs continue—are they short term, indefinite or permanent? For what length of time will these people be employed?

Ms A. SANDERSON: It varies, depending on the project. They are grant-based, so they are short-term, but it involves training. The funding provides for significant training for people to be able to undertake further work in the future.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Are they full-time for a short term, or part-time for a short term? What is the structure?

Ms A. SANDERSON: It would depend on the project and the needs of the project.

Mr R.S. LOVE: How much of the program, in terms of supervision and training, is being funded out of these streams? Is it coming out of some other source? The minister indicated that these jobs cover a range of portfolios and departments, but her department is the one that is tasked with coordinating this. How is it being funded in terms of delivery, rather than actual payment of the people?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I will defer to Dr Goyal.

Dr N.E.F. Goyal: In respect of the 120 jobs we have been talking about, that was through the native vegetation rehabilitation scheme. There were 11 projects under that, and those 120 jobs came under that program. Green Jobs

is made up of seven initiatives, some of which come under other departments. But as I said initially, we are on track to meet our target across the program for jobs.

Mr R.S. LOVE: What is the target in terms of timing to achieve the outcome of more than 1 000 conservation jobs?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I will defer to Dr Goyal.

Dr N.E.F. Goyal: Green Jobs is a three-year program; the 1 000 jobs are over the three-year period.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Where would I find this information? Is it on the website somewhere? Where can we find details of this program, and how will job applicants find details of this program?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I will defer to Dr Goyal.

Dr N.E.F. Goyal: The information will be on our website. Green Jobs involves a lot of partnerships and working with community organisations, so it is about providing those opportunities on the ground.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I have been paying attention to the member for Moore and I think he has asked some pretty important questions. The minister is claiming 1 000 conservation jobs, and we are looking at adding up the money that is there. The Premier today in the Treasury hearings talked about 2 900 public service jobs at a so-called saving to the state of \$586 million. The minister is looking at \$48 million equalling 1 000 jobs. I am not sure if that is doable unless we are hoping that those 1 000 conservation jobs will involve a lot of volunteer work. Is the minister calculating these 1 000 jobs into the job creation line items in Treasury as part of the 120 000 jobs the government has supposedly produced over the last 12 months?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The 120 figure relates only to the programs that DWER is administering. They are administered across government. So, for example, Main Roads has significant rehabilitation requirements, and it has been engaging people in employment on this program. I would suggest that it is probably one of the most significant.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Will the 1 000 positions be direct employees of the government?

Ms A. SANDERSON: I will defer to Dr Goyal.

Dr N.E.F. Goyal: The estimate of 1 000 jobs was developed based on data from previous Green Army-style employment programs, using teams of 10 employees with one leading hand, with employees having completed a certificate I or II-level qualification in conservation and land management. As I said, on a dollar basis, the number of people trained and employed in the first year of the program is on track to achieve the goal of 1 000 people participating in Green Jobs. As the minister has mentioned, there are other programs in Green Jobs, administered by other departments. DWER is coordinating Green Jobs, and we lead some of those programs, but other programs include wheatbelt roadside revegetation, some riverbank funding and some work in Whiteman Park, including fauna fencing and electric fencing.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is this 1 000 new jobs or 1 000 conservation jobs in terms of providing people already in the workforce with qualifications in native vegetation rehabilitation? Are they new jobs or are they enhancing existing jobs in the public sector?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The Green Jobs plan is intended to provide opportunities for people who have been impacted by COVID—particularly people in regional areas, Aboriginal people, youth, women and people with disability. It achieves good outcomes for the environment and water resources, and helps to protect and conserve Western Australia's flora and fauna. They are grants based, essentially; they are not necessarily all employees of the government. Although DWER is leading some, they are grants based. They will essentially be employed as required, as those projects require them.

The CHAIR: Before we go on, I make the point that we have just over half an hour to go. It is obviously up to the committee how it uses its time, but there is another division to deal with.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Let us say I am an Aboriginal person living in Yalgoo and I apply for a grant to be able to access some funding and I am fortunate enough to get \$20 000. It may be a husband-and-wife team or a brother-and-sister team, or two people from Yalgoo who have applied for a grant to do some native vegetation rehabilitation in Yalgoo. It may be a \$20 000 six-month job, which is not a lot of money for a six-month period. Is that being classified as part of the 1 000 jobs in the budget line item?

[9.30 pm]

Ms A. SANDERSON: In the interests of making sure that the member gets the correct response, I will defer to Dr Goyal.

Dr N.E.F. Goyal: In terms of the scenario the member mentioned with the projects, under each of the projects, the projects report back to us on the outcomes. The outcomes per project will be the number of people who have been trained and the number of people who have been employed. As the minister mentioned, this program was designed through the WA recovery plan and is about COVID—those people who may have been out of a job due to COVID. It is about building not only capacity but also, potentially, new jobs.

Extract from *Hansard*

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A — Wednesday, 22 September 2021]

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Chair; Mr Vincent Catania; Amber-Jade Sanderson; Mr Shane Love

Mr V.A. CATANIA: What is the outcome base of the 1 000 conservation jobs? Is the minister saying it is to assist those affected by COVID? What is the outcome base in helping the environment?

Ms A. SANDERSON: The outcome is to support those revegetation programs and support revegetation where offsets are required. There is a whole range, including habitats for black cockatoos and the western ring-tailed possum habitat. They will not all necessarily be 1 000 ongoing government-employed jobs, but there will be jobs for people who did not have a job and training opportunities when people had no training opportunities, and there will be environmental outcomes. It is essentially a good program.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I cannot wait to see how it will progress into the future.

The appropriation was recommended.