

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES AND FINANCIAL OPERATIONS
ANSWERS TO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS**

Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions

Hon Steve Martin MLC asked:

1. I refer to Budget Paper No. 2, Vol. 2, page 707, service number 8, 'Implementation of the Forest Management Plan.'
 - (a) When considering the implementation of the new Forest Management Plan has the Department investigated the viability of establishing tuart plantations in WA to ensure hardwood supply in the future;
 - (b) If yes to a), what is the outcome of these considerations; and
 - (c) If no to a), will the Department commit to investigating the viability of tuart plantations in WA?

Answer

It is not a function of the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions to investigate the viability of or to establish plantations of forest products.

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2. I refer to comments made by Dr Stanley in the Department's Hearing on the 20 October where she acknowledged that she is aware of Richard McLellan's PhD studies. The Department is not currently harvesting to the full quota of wild sandalwood.

- (a) Will the department formally lower the quota of wild sandalwood that can be harvested, in light of both the threat of wild sandalwood extinction and the decreased demand for wild sandalwood; and

Answer

The current quota for sandalwood permitted to be taken from the wild is established through the *Sandalwood (Limitation of Removal of Sandalwood) Order 2015* (Sandalwood Order). This provides for up to 2500 tonnes of sandalwood to be taken each year from the wild, made up of up to 1250 tonnes of green (live) sandalwood and the remainder dead sandalwood. The full quota does not need to be harvested in any one year.

- (b) When will the quota be lowered?

Answer

The Sandalwood Order remains in place until June 2026, unless it is amended or repealed. Consideration will be given to whether to reduce the sandalwood quota as part of an intended review of the Sandalwood Order, which is anticipated to occur during 2025.

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3. I refer to the community survey referenced by the Hon Stephen Dawson in the Department's Hearing on the 20 October.

(a) Is there a line item in the Budget for this survey;

Answer
Yes.

i. If yes to (a), which line item; and

Answer
It was funded through the allocation for development of the next Forest Management Plan (under New Initiatives on page 705).

ii. If no to (a), how was this survey funded and why was it not included as part of the budget

Answer
Not applicable.

(b) Is the use of a survey part of the standard process when planning for an updated Forest Management Plan; and

Answer
Opportunities for stakeholders and the broader community to have input into a new Forest Management Plan may be provided in a range of ways, which could include surveys, discussion papers, face-to-face meetings or workshops, and the statutory public comment period required under the *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984*.

(c) Was the survey used to justify the decision to ban native hardwood harvesting, despite formal consultations with Forest Management Plan stakeholders not yet having taken place?

Answer
No. The Government made its decision to preserve our south west native forests for future generations on the basis of the impacts of climate change, the lower than predicted timber yield and the importance of retaining existing forest systems for their biodiversity value and carbon storage.

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4. I refer to budget paper No 2, volume 2, page 707, paragraph 15 which refers to the compilation of a stakeholder register in preparation for stakeholder engagement and consultation ahead of the next Forest Management Plan.

(a) Which stakeholders are currently listed on the register;

Answer

The Stakeholder Register is being continuously updated. Stakeholders include industry groups, professional and advocacy peak bodies, environmental and conservation groups, local government authorities, State Government agencies, non-government organisations, private businesses and private individuals.

(b) Have all stakeholders been invited to contribute to the planning of the upcoming Forest Management Plan; and

Answer

Stakeholders will be formally contacted to contribute to the development of the next Forest Management Plan when the consultation opportunities are made available, which is anticipated to be before the end of this year.

(c) Has the Department ensured that representatives of secondary forestry industries are included as stakeholders, including—but not limited to:

- (i) Local furniture manufacturers;
- (ii) Local construction businesses;
- (iii) Firewood suppliers; and
- (iv) Native playground suppliers?

Answer

There is a range of secondary forestry industries represented on the Stakeholder Register. To date, stakeholders have been identified through several mechanisms including previous consultations relating to forest management, direct contact with the Conservation and Parks Commission or Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, and contact with Members of Parliament expressing an interest in forest management. Identification of stakeholders is ongoing.



5. I refer to comments made by Dr Stanley in the Department's Hearing on the 20 October where she said, "the stakeholder consultation that is referred to in the budget papers is more in respect to the development of the next forest management plan and we will be conducting both targeted and broader consultation and stakeholder engagement over the next few months."

(a) Which stakeholders were substantially consulted before the announcement of the ban on native hardwood harvesting;

Answer:

The Minister for Environment and the Minister for Forestry meet regularly with stakeholders, including industry. This was a carefully considered decision by the McGowan Government, and all stakeholders were provided with the same opportunities. In the development of the next Forest Management Plan (FMP), extensive consultation with industry and other stakeholders will occur over an extended period of 12 to 18 months.

(b) Why was the ban on native hardwood harvesting announced prior to the commencement of formal discussions about the upcoming Forest Management Plan; and

Answer:

The process for the next FMP requires an understanding of what timber may be available. The announcement made by the Premier and the Ministers for Environment; Climate Action and Forestry on 8 September 2021 provides this clarity and the basis for the development of the next FMP. The FMP is a broad document that provides the overall policy framework for protecting and managing land under the *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984* in south west forests. This includes an array of both biodiversity and forest-based industry outcomes, including those for recreation, water, tourism, timber harvest, apiary and mining.

(c) Why is the consultation with stakeholders taking place after the announcement of the ban on native hardwood harvesting, rather than before?

Answer:

The transition away from logging native forests started with the old growth logging policy at the turn of this century. The native timber industry is significantly smaller than it once was, accounting for approximately 8% of Western Australia's overall timber industry, and the time has come to move away from large scale native commercial forestry. Given the reasons outlined in question 3(c), the Government is acting now with over two years notice before the end of the current FMP.

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Hon Dr Brad Pettit MLC asked:

1. I refer to the line item listing the Forest Management Plan as a new commitment on page 678 of the Western Australia State Budget Paper 2, Volume 2. I note the answers to previous questions regarding the lack of review of Recovery Plans for critically endangered and endangered species. I also note that the WA museum and BirdLife Australia have both confirmed the removal of pines on the Gnangara Mound as per the 2020-21 harvest plan will have a disastrous impact on the Carnaby's cockatoo population, and I ask:

- (a) What is the funding/resource allocation for reviewing and reporting the current population of Carnaby's cockatoos given the citizen science count was abandoned in 2020 due to covid;

Answer

Consideration of the population of Carnaby's cockatoo is largely based on the results of the "Great Cockey Count", a long-term citizen science survey which uses volunteers to count black-cockatoos as they come in to their evening roosts. Records submitted from across the south-west provide information on the changes over time in black cockatoo numbers in the surveyed areas. The Great Cockey Count is coordinated by BirdLife Australia with funding from various sources. The survey in 2021 was supported by funding from Alcoa Australia.

While the BirdLife Australia Great Cockey Count was not held during 2020 due to COVID-19 restrictions, the Great Cockey Count was held in March 2021 and is expected to be held for at least the next three years.


The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) support towards the Great Cockey Count consists primarily of staff time in assisting BirdLife Australia in coordinating the count and in analysing the results, as well as in participating in roost counts on the survey days.

- (b) What is the funding/resource allocation for reviewing and reporting the impact of the removal of the pines on the population of Carnaby's cockatoos; and

Answer

There is no specific funding allocated by DBCA to reviewing and reporting on any impact of harvesting of the Gnangara, Pinjar and Yanchep pine plantations on the population of Carnaby's cockatoo.

There is no requirement or expectation for continued reporting on any impact of the harvesting of the Gnangara, Pinjar and Yanchep pine plantations on Carnaby's cockatoo.



Potential impacts were considered by DBCA through previous studies and projects since the 1996 State Government decision to liquidate the plantations, including in planning for The Gnangara Park, the Gnangara Sustainability Strategy, and most recently during the draft Strategic Assessment of the Perth and Peel Regions.

- (c) What is the rationale for proceeding with removal of pines on Gnangara as per the 2020-21 harvest plan given the expected impact on the black cockatoo population, and what steps is the Government putting in place to avoid negative impacts on black cockatoo populations?

Answer

The specific detail and decisions relating to the pine plantation harvesting schedule is a matter for the Forest Products Commission.

Concerns regarding groundwater recharge that resulted in the original 1996 State Government decision to remove the pine plantations still apply and still influence Government decision-making.

There are several initiatives occurring across the Gnangara-Moore River State Forest to benefit the environmental values of this area, including Carnaby's cockatoo. This includes the retention of 'wildings', pine trees that have germinated following the pine harvest which, when mature, will provide a food resource for Carnaby's cockatoo.

DBCA has planted approximately 15,000 to 20,000 native plant seedlings in ex-plantation areas each year over the past five years.

DBCA also seeks partnerships and support of industry and community groups to achieve conservation outcomes. For example, in 2020, DBCA partnered with the Water Corporation to revegetate a 28-hectare site, and BirdLife Australia to revegetate an adjacent 25-hectare area. DBCA will continue to explore opportunities for such partnerships to return native vegetation to the former pine plantation balanced with the primary objective of maximising groundwater recharge to provide about 40 per cent of the Perth metropolitan drinking water.

In August 2020, the McGowan Government released the Carbon for Conservation Initiative, inviting the private sector to identify carbon farming opportunities within the State's conservation reserve system. One of the candidate sites identified for Carbon for Conservation is the northern Swan Coastal Plain area, including areas of harvested pine plantation within State forest. DBCA is currently evaluating proposals received through the Market-led Proposal policy process.

DBCA also guides and coordinates conservation efforts for black cockatoos throughout their range. DBCA, with various partners, including the WA Museum, non-government organisations, research institutions and community volunteers, is implementing actions from the recovery plan for the species. Recovery efforts include protecting and managing habitat, repair of nest hollows and installation of artificial nest hollows to improve breeding success, measures to reduce vehicle collisions with adult birds, rehabilitating injured cockatoos, and research to understand the movements and requirements of these species.

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2. I refer to the line item listing the "proportion of critically endangered and endangered taxa and ecological communities that have a recovery plan" as a Key Effectiveness Indicator for the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions on page 708 of the Western Australia State Budget Paper 2, Volume 2. There are no references to reviewing or reporting on the success of those Recovery Plans against their stated performance criteria as Key Effectiveness Indicators. I also refer to an article published by WAToday earlier this year titled "three years until Carnaby's cockatoo starvation starts, BirdLife warns" – which indicated that the Carnaby's Cockatoo Recovery Plan due to end in 2023 has been unsuccessful. I ask:

(a) What is the funding/resource allocation for reviewing and reporting the success of the Recovery Plans against stated performance criteria;

Answer

Recovery Plans provide guidance to DBCA and other organisations who undertake recovery actions for particular species. In DBCA, implementation of actions for the recovery of threatened species is delivered through funding on-ground operations and scientific research. Many actions are taken across multiple species (e.g. feral animal control) therefore it is not possible to identify all DBCA funding allocated to specific species or specific plans.

Progress against actions in Recovery Plans are discussed with other organisations at Recovery Team meetings. Recovery actions are also reviewed when plans are renewed. The success of actions to achieve conservation of species is determined through the ongoing tracking of conservation status.

(b) What is the rationale behind using "proportion of critically endangered and endangered taxa and ecological communities that have a recovery plan" if those recovery plans are largely unsuccessful; and

Answer

The listed key effectiveness indicators are endorsed by the Department of Treasury. In 2020 the Office of the Auditor General requested additional comment on the effectiveness indicator in the Annual Report.

Species and ecological communities listed as critically endangered and endangered are those most at risk of extinction and are a focus for conservation actions in the Department. Recovery Plans provide guidance for conservation of threatened plants, animals and ecological communities and are a basis for delivering conservation actions. The proportion of critically endangered and endangered species and ecological communities that have a recovery plan is representative of the Department's effectiveness in conservation of threatened plants, animals and ecological communities.

The Carnaby's Cockatoo Recovery Plan is in place until 2023 so it is too early to determine the success of recovery actions identified in the Plan.

(c) What is the rationale for using the number of recovery plans as a measure of success for the Department's outcome of "plants and animals, and the landscapes they occupy, are conserved through evidence-based conservation action" if the recovery plans are not formally implemented or monitored?

Answer

The listed key effectiveness indicators are endorsed by the Department of Treasury. Species and ecological communities listed as critically endangered and endangered are those most at risk of extinction and are a focus for conservation actions in the department. Recovery Plans provide guidance for identifying conservation actions for threatened plants, animals and ecological communities. Recovery actions are implemented through on-ground actions and scientific research.

3. I refer to item 15 referring to the Forest Management Plan 2014-23 on page 707 of the Western Australia State Budget Paper 2, Volume 2. I note the answers to previous questions regarding the lack of funding for review of Recovery Plans for critically endangered and endangered species. I note that the WA museum and BirdLife Australia have both confirmed the removal of pines on the Gnangara Mound as per the 2020-21 harvest plan will have a disastrous impact on the Carnaby's cockatoo population, and I ask:

(a) What is the funding/resource allocation for reviewing and reporting the current population of Carnaby's cockatoos given the citizen science count was abandoned in 2020 due to covid-19;

Answer

See answer to Question 1. (a) above.

(b) What is the funding funding/resource allocation for reviewing and reporting the impact of the removal of the pines on the population of Carnaby's cockatoos; and

Answer

See answer to Question 1. (b) above.

(c) What is the rationale for proceeding with removal of pines on Gnangara as per the 2020-21 harvest plan given the expected impact on the black cockatoo population, and what steps is the Government putting in place to avoid negative impacts on black cockatoo populations?

Answer

See answer to Question 1. (c) above.

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4. I refer to the line item referring to the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions' outcome of "plants and animals, and the landscapes they occupy, are conserved through evidence-based conservation actions" on page 708 of the Western Australia State Budget Paper 2, Volume 2. I note that the only listed key effectiveness indicators are the "proportion of critically endangered and endangered taxa and ecological communities that have a recovery plan" and "area of land baited for introduced predators". I ask:

- (a) What is the funding/resource allocation for producing a State of the Environment Report, given that the last was published in 2007; and

Answer

Western Australia produced a State of the Environment Report in 2007 and has not produced one since then. Western Australia does contribute information to Australian State of the Environment Reports.

- (b) What was the rationale behind the decision to only fund the two listed key effectiveness indicators and why has no funding been allocated to the review or report on the success of recovery plans?

Answer

The listed key effectiveness indicators are endorsed by the Department of Treasury. They are representative of the Department's effectiveness in Conservation of threatened plants, animals and ecological communities, which is the overarching objective of Service 6.

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5. I refer to point 14 regarding "invasive weeds" in 'Significant Issues Impacting the Agency' on page 706 of Western Australia State Budget Paper 2, Volume 2 and ask what funding has been allocated to survey, monitor and control invasive weeds?

Answer

The funding currently allocated in the DBCA budget to survey, monitor and control invasive weeds is \$2.903 million.

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6. I refer to point 6 "Conserving Habitats, Species and Ecological Communities" on page 712 of Budget Paper 2 Volume 2. The Auditor General's 2017 report 'Rich and Rare' concluded the task facing DBCA in terms of protecting threatened species and habitats is increasing but funding and staffing provided decreased between 2009 and 2016. I ask:

- (a) Since 2016 has funding for DBCA "Conserving Habitats, Species and Ecological Communities" increased or decreased, and by how much;

Answer

The funding allocated by DBCA to Conserving Habitats, Species and Ecological Communities (Service 6) was \$72.78 million in 2016 and \$75.83 million in 2021 which represents an increase of \$3.03 million, noting that the 2021 figure includes a component of funding for the Rottneest Island Authority and the Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority, which are not included in the 2016 allocation. The figures also include an allocation of corporate overheads and depreciation as is the case for all DBCA services.

- (b) What are the current staffing levels in each of the DBCA regions; and

Answer

The current staffing levels in each of the DBCA regions is outlined in the table below, noting that staff are not generally aligned to one particular service, but will work across a number of services in the regions, including; Visitor Services and Public Programs Provided in National Parks and Other Lands and Waters (Service 5), Conserving Habitats, Species and Ecological Communities (Service 6), Research and Conservation Partnerships (Service 7), Implementation of the Forest Management Plan (Service 8), Prescribed Burning and Fire Management (Service 9) and Bushfire Suppression (Service 10).

Region	FTE
Goldfields Region	25
Kimberley Region	105
Midwest Region	108
Pilbara Region	80
South Coast Region	66
South West Region	169
Swan Region	223
Warren Region	150
Wheatbelt Region	35

- (c) What are the current funding levels in each of the DBCA regions?

Answer

The recurrent budget allocated in each of the DBCA regions which relates to Conserving Habitats, Species and Ecological Communities (Service 6), is outlined in the table below.

Region	\$ '000
Goldfields Region	805
Kimberley Region	3284
Midwest Region	6256
Pilbara Region	2974
South Coast Region	2091
South West Region	2885
Swan Region	4349
Warren Region	1134
Wheatbelt Region	2248

7. I refer to the line items for "conservation land acquisition" under other new works" on page 718 of Western Australia State Budget Paper 2, Volume 2 and ask:

- (a) Has any funding been allocated to acquire Bush Forever sites or transfer them into class A reserves;

Answer

Lands purchased using the conservation land acquisition funds are identified on an annual basis as properties of interest come onto the market. Acquisition of freehold Bush Forever sites is considered when the market value of the property is within the allocated funding.

- (b) Does the Department have a list of priority sites for acquisition; and

Answer

As per answer to 7. (a) above.

- (c) Does the Department plan to acquire land to create urban wildlife corridors?

Answer

Lands are purchased by the Department for inclusion into the conservation reserve system for a variety of reasons. There are no plans to acquire land for the sole purpose of creating an urban wildlife corridor.

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