

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ESTIMATES AND FINANCIAL OPERATIONS**

2011–12 BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARINGS

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 15 JUNE 2011**

**SESSION TWO
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND CONSERVATION**

Members

**Hon Giz Watson (Chair)
Hon Philip Gardiner (Deputy Chair)
Hon Liz Behjat
Hon Ken Travers
Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich**

Hearing commenced at 4.17 pm

HON HELEN MORTON, MLC

Minister for Mental Health representing the Minister for Environment, examined:

MR KEIRAN MCNAMARA

Director General, Department of Environment and Conservation, sworn and examined:

MR ROBERT ATKINS

Deputy Director General, Environment, Department of Environment and Conservation, sworn and examined:

MR JIM SHARP

Deputy Director General, Parks and Conservation, Department of Environment and Conservation, sworn and examined:

MR PETER DANS

Director, Regional Services, Department of Environment and Conservation, sworn and examined:

DR JOHN BYRNE

Director, Corporate Services, Department of Environment and Conservation, sworn and examined:

The DEPUTY CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I welcome you to today's hearing. Before we begin, I must ask the public servants to take either the oath or an affirmation. If you prefer to take the oath, please place your hand on the Bible in front of you.

[Witnesses took the oath or affirmation.]

The DEPUTY CHAIR: You will have signed a document entitled "Information for Witnesses". Have you read and understood that document?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: This hearing is being held in public, although there is discretion available to the committee to hear evidence in private either of its own or at the witnesses' request. If for some reason you wish to make a confidential statement during today's proceedings, you should request that the evidence be taken in closed session before answering the question. Government agencies and departments have an important role and duty in assisting Parliament to scrutinise the budget papers on behalf of the people of Western Australia, and the committee values your assistance. These proceedings are being recorded by Hansard. A transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. It will greatly assist Hansard if whether referring to the budget statements, volumes or the consolidated account estimates, members give the page number, item, program, amount and so on in preface to their questions. If supplementary information is to be provided, I ask your cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the committee's clerk within 10 working days of receipt of the questions. Should you be unable to meet this deadline, please advise the committee's clerk immediately. An example of the required Hansard style for the documents has been provided to your advisers. The committee reminds agency representatives to respond to questions in a succinct manner and to limit the extent of personal observations. For the benefit of members and

Hansard, I ask the minister to introduce her advisers to the committee and for each adviser to please state their full name, contact address and capacity in which they appear before the committee.

[The witnesses were introduced.]

Hon HELEN MORTON: Dr Byrne is profoundly deaf and these proceedings will be transcribed for him by a Hansard reporter.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Does the minister or any witness wish to provide an opening statement?

Hon HELEN MORTON: No.

Hon GIZ WATSON: I have a number of questions. I take you to major spending changes on page 817. The first two items are to do with the Kimberley. The first item is the establishment and management of the Camden Sound and Eighty Mile Beach marine parks. I wonder whether the minister can provide a breakdown of how that expenditure will be made.

Hon HELEN MORTON: I will ask Jim Sharp to answer that question.

Mr Sharp: Through the Chair, the breakdown of what has been allocated in the budget year by year has not been finally determined because the management plans for those marine parks have not been finalised.

Hon GIZ WATSON: But it includes the establishment as well as the actual management. The line item says “establishment and management”.

Mr Sharp: That is correct.

Hon GIZ WATSON: Is there a breakdown between how much is in the establishment phase and how much is in the management phase?

Mr Sharp: That is right. The establishment is being pursued in terms of the existing budget through this current financial year plus some resources were allocated in this current financial year for the planning for the establishment of the marine parks. Last year, \$300 000 extra was allocated and that has been used for the establishment of the marine parks. The breakdown of what is needed for the establishment phase—in other words, the planning phase—and the actual creation and management of the water management is yet to be determined.

[4.20 pm]

Hon GIZ WATSON: And what is the timeline for when you would have that information on that breakdown?

Mr Sharp: We would expect that following the gazettal of the Camden Sound marine park and following the finalisation and gazettal of the management plan for the Eighty Mile Beach marine park—the Eighty Mile Beach marine park is at the phase where it has yet to be released as an indicative management plan—the budget would be allocated in specific proportions.

Hon GIZ WATSON: Right. And there is no broadbrush understanding of how much the new management plan is going to be managing fisheries and how much is managing recreational activities—none of that sort of —

Mr Sharp: We do not have that available. That would be finalised when the plan is finalised.

Hon GIZ WATSON: In terms of the Kimberley science and conservation strategy, do you have a breakdown of how that money is going to be expended?

Mr McNamara: It is probably easiest to look to the final year in the forward estimates when the terrestrial initiatives amount to \$3 million for that year. The breakdown for the conservation reserve corridor, which is a landscape-scale conservation initiative focused particularly on, but not restricted to, the area between the Prince Regent National Park and the Drysdale River National Park, is that \$1 million is allocated to that in the final out year. Another \$1 million is allocated to conservation efforts on the islands. There are about 2 500 islands in the Kimberley, and there will

be an extra effort to protect the values of those islands, including improved quarantine against things like cane toads.

Hon GIZ WATSON: Can I just clarify: it includes quarantine provisions for cane toads on the islands?

Mr McNamara: There will be extra efforts to protect the values of those islands, and one of the measures that needs to be taken on those islands, because of their special values and because they are free of many of the threats on the mainland, is to keep them free of feral animals and those sorts of threats. Hitchhiking cane toads on pleasure boats and so on are a threat, so one element of that spending will be the appropriate level of patrolling and surveillance to be careful about the values of those islands and to protect them on an ongoing basis. The third element, which is also \$1 million, is new landscape conservation linkages in other parts of the Kimberley—for example, partnership approaches with the Australian Wildlife Conservancy down in the Mornington part of the Kimberley, with other pastoralists, and particularly with Indigenous communities in parts of the Kimberley. Those three together make up the \$3 million, which is the final out year figure against that item, and the other figures for this coming year and the first two years before the final out year are those same initiatives in varying proportions as they scale up.

Hon GIZ WATSON: If I could just go into that a little further. For example, looking at increased emphasis on threatened species on islands in the Kimberley, has there been a kind of analysis of the comparative threats of different activities from different animals? Is that sort of level of detail in there, or is this just a kind of broadbrush thing at this stage, because I assume that what you would do is work out where the threats are coming from and what is high, what is low and what is medium? Is that sort of information available?

Mr McNamara: There has been a huge amount of work over many years on the importance of islands in Western Australia in terms of their conservation value, and there are many species in this nation, indeed, that would be extinct if it were not for their survival on Western Australian islands, free of some of the threats. We have actually conducted, with both state and some commonwealth assistance in terms of funding over the last number of years, a biological survey of selected islands, so we have increased our knowledge of the species that occur there—in some cases the species occur only on those islands—and we have got a much more systematic knowledge base now than we had a couple of years ago on the values of different islands across the Kimberley. So we are well equipped, I think, to now start to hit the ground running with a program of protection, of some further survey work, of some eradication of introduced species on some of those islands, of making sure that fire regimes are not such that they cause damage on those islands, and also addressing things like weeds. Those are some of the areas that we will be focusing on.

Hon GIZ WATSON: Is there a document that says, “Here are the values; here are the identified threats; here is the response in the Kimberley”? I am well aware of the value of island refuges, and I accept that there is a lot of work being done on it, but I assume, if you are targeting the Kimberley, you would have some sort of a document that evaluated the values and the threats and the relative priorities and how you would spend your money, if you are about to do it. Is that correct?

Mr McNamara: There is more work to be done, and the work will be ongoing forever at some level. But there is a publication going back to about 1991 by the former Department of Conservation and Land Management that talks about the values and the threats to some of those islands. There has been subsequent work. Indeed, Dr Andrew Burbidge, who retired from CALM some years ago, did a piece of work for the Conservation Commission about the values of islands that documents a lot of that, and the Kimberley science and conservation strategy itself, which is the government’s election commitment, is due to be released in the very near future and will paint the broad outline of all of these initiatives.

[4.30 pm]

Hon GIZ WATSON: Do you know when that will be released?

Mr McNamara: In the near future.

Hon GIZ WATSON: In the fullness of time! On page 819, under the fourth dot point: new marine parks will be established in the capes area between Busselton and Augusta and in the Dampier Archipelago. That is a long-time favourite of mine; what is the latest time line for establishment of those two marine parks? What, if any, are the impediments to establishing them in the near future rather than the fullness of time?

Hon HELEN MORTON: We will try Jim Sharp this time!

Mr Sharp: The Capes Marine Park, as you are aware no doubt, has been through the process of being released as an indicative draft management plan. The plan is in the process of being finalised within government at the moment, so the government is arriving at a final management plan.

Hon GIZ WATSON: How long has it been with government—the draft management plan? How long has it had the draft management plan?

Mr Sharp: It has been with government for some years, but this has come to the point where there is discussion about finalising of the management plan.

Hon GIZ WATSON: Any prediction?

Hon HELEN MORTON: I am sorry; I do not think it is appropriate to ask an officer for a prediction about something like that.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Do you want to re-phrase the question?

Hon GIZ WATSON: I will ask the second question then: are there any matters that are slowing the progress of the establishment of marine parks?

Mr Sharp: My only comment would be that the government has indicated its commitment, as indicated by the fact that a budget allocation has been made for this coming financial year to start expenditure on both those parks, which indicates that there is a commitment that, within that time, the parks will be created.

Hon GIZ WATSON: So you are not aware of any impediments?

Mr Sharp: No.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Perhaps I can take up that same point while we are on the topic of the capes and Dampier. You talk about the government having made a funding allocation; this is actually royalties for regions money, is it not?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Yes, it is.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Okay, so can I take you to page 826, line item “Royalties for regions fund”, and can I ask: are these the same funds referred to on page 817? That is the third item under “Major Spending Changes”.

Hon HELEN MORTON: You went just a little bit quick. So, on page 826 —

Hon SALLY TALBOT: On page 826, under “Royalties for regions fund”. What I am asking is whether these are the same funds referred to on page 817, which is the first page of this section, the third item under “Major Spending Changes”. Are we talking about the same amounts of money there?

Hon HELEN MORTON: John, can you answer that one?

Dr Byrne: Yes, that is the same funding source.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Okay, can I ask then, how does the establishment of these two marine parks meet the criteria of the fund that is referred to in footnote (d)—the “Regional Community

Services Fund”? From what I could see from looking at that fund, that fund is largely to do with flying doctors and things like that.

Hon HELEN MORTON: I am sorry, your question is: why use royalties for regions funding?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: If you look at page 826, you will see footnote (d) refers to the “Regional Community Services Fund”. I assume that that is the regional community services fund of royalties for regions. Is that correct?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Yes.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: So how did the marine parks fit the funding criteria of that fund?

Hon HELEN MORTON: The advice I have is that the government made the decision that it was an appropriate use of royalties for regions funding. Is it your concern that it sits under a bucket called “Regional Community Services Fund”?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I am not the only one who is totally mystified by footnote (d) and how the allocation was made in line with the regional community services fund. I guess what I am asking is: is that accurate? And if it is, can you give us the explanation?

Dr Byrne: I cannot give any explanation other than that is where the people who are making the royalties for regions allocations decided it would come from. It is not really DEC’s decision to take it from that source; it is for the royalties for regions people to take it from that source.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: So DEC did not apply to royalties for regions for the money for these two marine parks?

Dr Byrne: We applied for money, but it is for the royalties for regions people to say where they make the allocation from.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Okay, thank you. Can I move to another section? I move to page 823; I have some questions about the waste levy. This is under item 5, “Environmental Sustainability”. I have some questions about the dollar figures and the FTEs allocated to each function under item 5. My understanding is there are five functions under item 5—the Waste Authority, the waste management branch, the SWIS and community grants scheme, support for the Environmental Protection and Heritage Council and something called the sustainability programs unit. Can you first of all tell me if I am on the right track?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Yes.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: My question is: how much money and how many FTEs are allocated to each of those functions, and how many FTEs are funded from the \$42 million raised by the waste levy. I guess what I am really asking is: is it 65 or 23?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Can I ask the director general to start and Robert Atkins to follow?

Mr McNamara: Within the FTE level of 65, the waste management branch has about 23 FTEs, and those are funded out of the landfill levy revenues. The office of the Waste Authority has several staff; I do not have the number in my head, but that is also funded out of the landfill levy revenues paid into the waste avoidance and resource recovery account, and the other staff who make up the balance of that 65 are spread across the various areas that were mentioned in the question, as well as an apportioning of executive positions, support positions and corporate positions across the service, because the department has six services and clearly, there are a range of support and corporate staff who do not have a service or program of their own, and their time is apportioned across the six major services or businesses of the department. Mr Atkins may be able to elaborate on that.

Mr Atkins: Just to confirm the detail, there are 23.2 FTE in the waste management branch and 5.2 FTE in the office of the Waste Authority, so that makes 28.4 FTE supporting the Waste Authority that is funded from Waste Authority funds, and that is approximately \$4 million of salary and operating costs for supporting the Waste Authority.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: So the other 40-odd—I had it down as 44 or 42, and you have just put it up to 28.4, so that lessens it a bit—they are not working within the five functions under environmental sustainability?

[4.40 pm]

Mr Atkins: They are, but they are not working under the Waste Authority and the waste management program.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: So they are working for the other three functions.

Mr Atkins: That is correct. As Mr McNamara pointed out, there is an apportionment of corporate services FTEs that are apportioned across all branches —

Dr Byrne: For environmental sustainability, there are about 12 FTEs in the community education function. Your question was: how is environmental sustainability funded? The waste management branch, the waste management activity and the full services for environmental sustainability are funded from the waste management levy. You can see \$42.1 million in income shown in service 5 on page 823, and \$17 million of that \$42.1 million goes to the cost of service for environmental sustainability, including the waste management fund, and the other \$24 million is used to fund other activities across the department.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: My specific question at the moment, though, is about the FTEs. What I am trying to establish is: are all 65 FTEs employed in those five functions that I read out at the beginning of my question?

Dr Byrne: Yes, but, as the deputy director general said, some of them are indirectly employed. Part of my salary is linked to that service and part of my salary is there in the 65 FTEs. The corporate service functions are included in the 65 FTEs on a pro rata basis, along with the other services.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Surely to employ them outside any of those five functions would be contrary to section 80 of the act, which specifies that the money paid into the waste account funds certain functions.

Mr Atkins: That is correct. Of the \$42 million of the forecast levy amount, \$10.5 million goes into the waste account. Only 28.4 FTEs are funded from the waste account. The Waste Authority has a service level agreement with the department to provide services and support to the Waste Authority for the waste management and resource recovery programs, and that includes the salaries of those 28.4 FTEs, plus corporate support, rent for the floor space that they occupy and all the other corporate services support. The remainder of the sustainability program is funded from CF appropriations, not from the waste account.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Thank you. In that case, can we move to some questions about the six per cent, which is the efficiency indicator for the cost of administering the waste avoidance and resource recovery account as a percentage of total funds? My question is —

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Which page number, Hon Sally Talbot?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: It is the same page—item five on page 823. My question is: for the year in question, 2011–12, what does the six per cent equate to in dollar terms? While you are thinking about that, the sub-question is: is it six per cent of \$42 million, which would be something in the region of two and a half million dollars, or is it six per cent of \$10.5 million, which would be about \$630 000?

Mr Atkins: It is six per cent of the Waste Authority's budget, which is, from memory, about \$12 million.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: It is \$10.5 million for 2011–12.

Mr Atkins: That \$10.5 million is the revenue from the waste levy that goes into the waste account for that financial year. There is already a balance in the waste account. So the Waste Authority's

projected expenditure for the business plan that is approved by the minister is generally more than the revenue that goes in, because there is an accumulated surplus in the waste account that has been accumulating for a number of years.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: You referred to the business plan approved by the minister, but we do not have a business plan yet, do we?

Mr Atkins: We do not for the 2011–12 year, no; it has not been approved yet.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: So the six per cent is six per cent of the figure that is published in the budget papers, or not?

Mr Atkins: No, it is not published in the budget papers; it is published in the Waste Authority's annual report.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: It does seem strange to publish an efficiency indicator as a percentage without indicating what the gross figure is. You can take that as an observation. I think you are saying that the gross figure is around \$800 000; is that what you are calculating it as? I had it as \$630 000, because that is six per cent of \$10.5 million. But you are saying that it is a bit more than that.

Mr Atkins: I cannot give you the figures because I do not have those figures here, but it is the cost of administering the waste avoidance and resource recovery account. In fact, it is a proportion of the cost of the 23 FTEs, because a number of those staff are charged with the responsibility of administering the account; they run the account. They manage, if you like, the regulation of levy collection revenues, and they manage the grants program that is administered by the Waste Authority program that you mentioned, which I think is the strategic waste initiative scheme. It is those staff who are actually managing those accounts and managing that part of the fund. It is not covering all the programs, obviously.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: But they are not providing the minco support; that is not those staff, is it?

Mr Atkins: No, it is not.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Neither are they working in the sustainability programs unit?

Mr Atkins: That is correct; they are not. It is the proportion that is there to administer the account itself.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: How much is in the WARR account today?

Mr Atkins: It has a balance of approximately \$16.2 million.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Could I ask whether my specific question about the FTEs associated with those five functions could be taken as additional information?

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Yes, unless that information is available.

Hon HELEN MORTON: Can you again —

Hon SALLY TALBOT: The five functions that I named were the office of the Waste Authority, the waste management branch, the SWIS and community grants scheme, the Environment Protection and Heritage Council support, and the sustainability programs unit. Could I have the FTEs associated with each of those, please?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Yes.

[Supplementary Information No B1.]

Hon SALLY TALBOT: For the purpose of charging the landfill levy, which, as we have noted, is, I think, \$42.1 million in anticipated revenue this year, how do you decide which activities to levy?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Are we on the same page?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Yes, it is the same page—page 823. I will tell you when we move off page 823. My question specifically is about whether it is a specification in the act or the regulations, or whether it is an internal decision of DEC to decide, for instance, whether clean landfill attracts the levy, particularly considering that it is exempt in other states.

Mr Atkins: The charges for the levy are prescribed in regulation under the Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Act and the Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Levy Act. Essentially, all waste that is generated in the metropolitan area and disposed of to landfill anywhere attracts the levy; in other words, if it goes to a landfill within the metropolitan area or a rural landfill, it pays the levy. Waste generated from anywhere that is deposited in a metropolitan area landfill attracts the levy. If waste comes from a rural area and goes to a metropolitan landfill, it attracts the levy. There is a levy set for inert waste. It goes into category 63 landfill and it is the higher rate that is charged on category 64 and 65 landfills, which is basically municipal solid waste or putrescible waste. That is prescribed. In terms of your clean fill question, it is any material that goes into either of those categories of landfill, whether it is clean or otherwise. As long as it meets the landfill acceptance criteria, it pays the levy. If you deposit clean fill in either a putrescible landfill or an inert landfill and it is not there with an exemption specifically for cover material, it attracts the levy.

[4.50 pm]

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Sorry; for cover material, did you say?

Mr Atkins: That is correct. Cover material is up to half a metre of clean fill that is used to cover your waste, so it is to consolidate the waste and protect it. That cover material is exempt from paying a levy, but any other material that goes into the landfill pays the levy that is prescribed for that landfill. You mentioned clean fill; for instance, if you take construction and demolition waste, which is inert waste, and that goes into the inert landfill, it pays the lower levy. If you decide to dispose of construction and demolition waste into a putrescible landfill, it pays the higher levy. The same goes for clean fill, other than that used for cover; if you want to waste clean fill by putting it into a landfill, it pays the levy. But clean fill that is used for any other purpose away from a landfill site does not, of course, attract a levy, nor does recycled and remanufactured construction and demolition waste. If that is crushed and screened to specification and used as a road base or car park foundations or whatever, which most of it is used for, that does not pay a levy because it is not being disposed of to landfill.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: What about clean fill that is used, for example, in a subdivision like the Beaconsfield subdivision, where it was then built on? Would that attract the landfill levy?

Mr Atkins: Of course not, because it is not going into a prescribed landfill. A subdivision is not a licensed landfill, so it cannot have a levy charged on it. The levy is only charged on waste that goes into a licensed landfill. If it is not a licensed landfill, you do not charge the levy. If you put something other than waste into licensed landfill, it pays the levy.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: What about waste that is actually going through a recycling process?

Mr Atkins: If it goes through a recycling process and is sold as a product or used as a product away from a landfill, then, no, it does not pay it. In fact, that is how you reduce your waste to landfill—by recycling it. So when you take material to many of these inert sites, they usually have a reprocessing facility on site and they crush and screen and separate out things like timber, plastic, cardboard and so forth. The clean, crushed and screened material usually gets sold as a product or used off-site in road building, and what we call the residual waste then goes into the landfill and that residual pays the levy. The levy is there to encourage minimisation of waste to landfill and maximise the recycling or reuse.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: So is the EMRC facility at Red Hill, for example, not paying the levy?

Mr Atkins: Anything that goes into the landfill hole pays the levy; anything that is kept off to one side, reprocessed and then taken off and used somewhere else does not attract a levy.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: One more if you need it.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I have a final question on this subject, if I may. How many companies are now refusing to pay the levy?

Mr Atkins: I cannot answer that off the cuff. There are two, to my knowledge.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Could you take that as additional information, please?

[Supplementary Information No B2.]

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Could I have their names, please?

The DEPUTY CHAIR: And their names. Thank you.

Hon ALISON XAMON: I have quite a few questions, actually, but the ninth dot point on page 819 refers to the active fire management program. How much burning is planned for the urban bushland areas on the Swan coastal plain, and which bushland areas on the Swan coastal plain are slated for burning in 2011-12?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Director general.

Mr McNamara: The prescribed burning program is of course the cornerstone of our efforts to protect both the community and the environment against the effects of wildfire.

Hon ALISON XAMON: I am referring to urban bushland in this instance.

Mr McNamara: I appreciate that. The program across the south west aims to achieve about 200 000 hectares annually. There is increased focus in current and recent circumstances along the Darling scarp in particular in respect of that. We have been concerned in recent years that some of the urban bushland areas, some of the Bush Forever areas and some of the regional parks on the Swan coastal plain, which are obviously significantly surrounded by housing, do pose a threat in terms of fire, and indeed some of the areas in Rockingham Lakes Regional Park and the Beeliar Regional Park, for example, are suffering extensive wildfire damage very regularly and sometimes annually—places like Anstey Swamp and Paganoni and some of the others. So rather than have those burnt out 100 per cent in wildfires and doing a lot of damage, we are starting to introduce prescribed fire into those areas more actively to break them up so that they are not burnt entirely in one go. We publish a six-season, three-year forward master burn plan every six months, and the areas that are proposed are published in that plan.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Are you able to provide which sites are slated for burning in 2011-12?

Mr McNamara: I cannot name those sites now but we can, by reference to the plan, list the candidate sites, and then we have to make judgements on a daily basis as to suitable weather conditions and so on as to which ones we do burn.

Hon ALISON XAMON: I will put that on notice to get those.

Hon HELEN MORTON: Can I just be clear? Are you looking for the candidate sites?

Hon ALISON XAMON: Sorry?

The DEPUTY CHAIR: For the candidate sites.

Hon ALISON XAMON: I am specifically looking for the sites that are down to be burnt for 2011-12 on the Swan coastal plain, the urban bushland sites; it is very narrow.

[Supplementary Information No B3.]

Hon ALISON XAMON: In relation to that same issue, because you have rightly identified that a lot of these sites are already subject to quite regular, effectively, arson attacks, what considerations are being given to sites that have already been subject to unplanned burns in that fire regime?

Mr McNamara: Fire history, be it past prescribed burn or past wildfire or bushfire, is taken into account every time we update, and that is every six months—the forward master burn plan for

prescribed burns—so we always take that into account. Clearly, we try to protect areas against fire that have suffered extensive or very hot bushfire in recent times. But the issue on the Swan coastal plain is often, because of arson, that the entire reserves have been burnt out, and what we are seriously doing, or thinking about and doing, is trying to break up those areas so that, unfortunately, in the inevitable instance of arson or accidental fire, the whole reserve is not burnt. We really want parts of them burnt in a mosaic so that if we do get a fire, we do not lose the whole lot in one go.

Hon ALISON XAMON: I understand the thinking behind that, but even if you are undertaking mosaic burns, what is considered to be the best practice time frame in terms of an interim burn between planned burns and the burns that actually occur between? For example, would it be five years or seven years? Would it be three months? What sort of time frame? What are you looking at as a best practice time frame between burns, whether it be planned or mosaic or other?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Peter Dans might like to pick up on this one.

Mr Dans: Going back to the first part of your question, certainly the fuel age, be it from a prescribed burn or a bushfire, is the primary determinant that goes into our master burn planning process. The fuel age that we aim for in the south west forest, where we are generally looking to burn about eight per cent of that a year, is roughly a fuel age of about 12 years in the south west forest vegetation units.

Hon ALISON XAMON: And for the Swan coastal plain?

Mr Dans: It is quite variable because of the prevalence of some annual weeds and the like on the Swan coastal plain. I could not be precise because it varies quite significantly from vegetation type to vegetation type there.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Do you have a minimum level that you would consider to be best practice even across all vegetation types?

[5.00 pm]

Mr Dans: For some of the small reserves that we do manage within the urban area we have not historically had an active fire management program because of the prevalence of arson and fuel loads have been at such low levels. We have not got to a stage where we have had to determine a burn interval, if you like, because of the frequency of arson events and bushfires from other causes.

Hon ALISON XAMON: That is disappointing. Mr Deputy Chair, I have more questions.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: One more go; yes, that is okay.

Hon ALISON XAMON: One more? Okay, I will try to come back. In that case, I refer to page 817. Under “Delivery of Services”, in the absence of being able to identify a specified line item, can I just confirm whether DEC is still taking primary responsibility for water quality monitoring of, in particular, DOW bores across the Gngangara and Jandakot mounds?

Hon HELEN MORTON: The answer is no, and we are trying to work out why you would have anticipated that to be the case.

Hon ALISON XAMON: That is fine; you have answered my question.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: My question goes back to page 819 and the ninth dot point regarding the active fire management program. As the officers would be aware, I am very supportive of the prescribed burning program that is undertaken by the department. I know that last financial year we exceeded the target of over 200 000 hectares. I am keen to hear what progress has been made by DEC with respect to that program this year, bearing in mind obviously there are issues with respect to weather and the like, which can impact on the level of burns that are undertaken, but I am keen to see what progress you have made so far this year.

Hon HELEN MORTON: I ask the director general to respond.

Mr McNamara: Last winter was the driest on record, I think, in the south west and the spring last year was not any better. We had to suspend our normal prescribed burning in about late September because by then it was already too dry and therefore too dangerous to do much prescribed burning, certainly in the northern forests. We were not able to start our autumn burning program in the Perth hills until May. I think it was about a week or so before Easter before we got that first 20 millimetres or so of rain that allows us to start. So our achievements were much lower in that period than last year; we managed only about 3 000 hectares last spring compared to 35 000 hectares in spring the previous year. But we have gone very, very hard under suitable conditions over the past four to six weeks or so and made some very good progress. As of 10 June, we have either completed or commenced 134 prescribed burns on 133 500 hectares in the south west of the state for this financial year to date. That does compare with 165 burns and 211 000 hectares the previous year, but that is still an outstanding achievement in an extremely dry and challenging weather period.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: Thank you for that, Mr McNamara. I suppose that is a focus with respect to the south west, but also up in the Kimberley. Can you tell me how you are going with the prescribed burns up there?

Mr McNamara: The objective of the prescribed burning program is quite different in the Kimberley. Clearly, the density of human communities and so on is far less and the objective of the program is very much one of achieving landscape-scale mosaics to protect against the late dry season extremely intense bushfires that can burn for a couple of months and burn across hundreds and hundreds of thousands of hectares in one go and do so on an annual basis and are very destructive in terms of the environmental and vegetation heterogeneity that sustains wildlife conservation. We have in the financial year to date carried out about 14 burns in the Kimberley. We had a fairly heavy wet season that has only allowed us to get active in the latter part of the financial year, but we have carried out prescribed burns on about 2.15 million hectares of the Kimberley this financial year. That is a very positive environmental and conservation program. Under the Kimberley science and conservation strategy, that will be a major focus on conservation lands, pastoral lands and Indigenous-owned lands.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: Can I presume that that also relates to those partnership approaches that are very much part of the Kimberley science and conservation strategy with the local pastoralists, Indigenous groups and the like?

Mr McNamara: Absolutely; it is a cornerstone of those partnerships and the work that we will do with those groups—Indigenous communities, Australian wildlife conservancy and the like.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: I go to “Threatened Species: 15 Saved by 2015” under “Major Spending Changes” on page 817. Perhaps this is a question, without being presumptuous, to Mr Sharp. Can I presume that this is part of the work of the threatened species council that I announced last year? That is the first part of my question.

Mr Sharp: Yes, this is an extension of that program that was using existing funds from the agencies involved and so this adds to that program.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: I may have missed it and you might not have a full list of the 15, but could I have that on notice? Perhaps now Mr Sharp could advise me of some of the flora and fauna that might be included in that 15 and, I suppose given my personal interests in the woylie, whether or not the woylie is in there. On that basis, also could you tell me how they are going with the Perup Nature Reserve place and the work being done on the woylie conservation?

Hon HELEN MORTON: I ask the director general to speak to it.

Mr McNamara: The funding initiative is an extra \$1 million over four years and that is on top of a very substantial existing threatened species program that ranges across many of the 600 species that are listed as threatened in this state, including the woylie, which we have built an enclosure for at

Perup and where there are some very recent monitoring results that the population there is breeding and breeding very well. In terms of the extra \$1 million across four years in this budget, the funding will in particular go to conservation efforts in the field for numbats. We have unfortunately had a serious decline in numbers in Dryandra, which is a stronghold of the species, and we are very concerned about that. Funds will also go to western ground parrots of which there are probably less than 100 on our south coast and there is some intensive captive breeding and work to try to recover their numbers. We will support the Perth Zoo's work in the captive breeding of the western swamp tortoise, the rarest tortoise in the world. Then there is a list of 20 flora species—I will not read out their common and Latin names—that are the ones that we will target with that money to translocate from places like dieback-affected sites or very small threatened roadside populations to establish extra secure populations of those.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: Could I ask, perhaps on notice, that we have a list of the species and the others that Mr McNamara has alluded to. Also, perhaps I did miss it: I would like to just have a very quick update with respect to the woylies at the nature reserve at Perup. I understand that there have been some positive outcomes in terms of breeding and I am very keen to hear what, if any, progress has been made in that area.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Can I just get the supplementary question?

Hon HELEN MORTON: The list of 15.

[Supplementary Information No B4.]

Hon KEN TRAVERS: It is the same if they read it out.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: No, I said the list of 15 could be taken on notice, but then I have a quick question with respect to Perup and the woylies.

[5.10 pm]

Mr McNamara: The enclosure at Perup east of Manjimup that was constructed and, I think, completed last year is a significant component of our efforts to conserve the woylie. We are obviously maintaining our fox baiting and research efforts broadly across its range, but it has declined significantly in many forest areas. That has been of great concern to us over the last few years after the population had recovered from near extinction to being quite abundant—indeed the most commonly trapped animal in many areas of the forest—and then somewhat mysteriously declining again. So, the Perup population is an insurance population; a captive population with a feral predator-proof fence around it, funded through existing funds from the department, from the Zoo and also from the government's natural resource management program last year. That enclosure was completed. I do not have the figures at hand on how many woylies were introduced into it, but some monitoring results that were brought to my attention only a couple of days ago clearly show that many of the animals have bred. Indeed animals that were dependent young when they were introduced to the sanctuary are now independent and breeding themselves; so, there is a very healthy growth in that protected population.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: That is good news indeed, Mr McNamara. I will leave it to others to ask some questions.

Hon BRIAN ELLIS: I have a couple of questions on page 819 of the budget papers under "Significant Issues Impacting the Agency". My question relates to vegetation clearing permits and I refer to the fourth dot point from the bottom of the page where, among other things, it states —

Increased demands on the Department for regulation and development approvals are expected ...

What is the current situation with approving native vegetation clearing permits?

Mr McNamara: The native vegetation clearing controls were brought under the Environmental Protection Act in 2004. A major focus of the department for a number of years now has been on working with proponents, landowners and others to fully explain the legislation and to improve both the timeliness and the quality of decision making to the point at which the average time to process a native vegetation clearing permit application has dropped from about 200 days in 2008 to 41 days in the first quarter of this year. We have a target of 80 per cent of applications to be decided within 60 calendar days and the remaining 20 per cent within 90 calendar days; and we have met or exceeded those targets in the past 12 months. They are being achieved through a risk-based approach. We are not, if you like, resting on our laurels in the sense of having improved the timeliness of these things. We are now working on some amendments to the Environmental Protection Act, off the back of some review material or reviews that have been done previously, to improve the processes and clarify some of the categories that might need permits and so on. We are also preparing a native vegetation policy for the state that will provide a policy context for the application of the legislation. In this financial year to date, we have granted about 340 permits through the department. We are also engaged in efforts more broadly around the Dandaragan area with Hon Philip Gardiner and working with farmers and so on on vegetation management programs for their properties. We recognise that there is still some angst out there in the farming community and we are working, with the assistance of Hon Philip Gardiner's office and others, to try to get some more cooperative relationships with some of the farmers who feel aggrieved by the land-clearing controls.

Hon BRIAN ELLIS: I have another question on page 819. The last dot point states —

The amount of waste deposited in landfill is expected to reduce as a result of the significant increase in the landfill levy that occurred from 1 January ...

I was wondering whether you could explain how the landfill levy is having an impact on the quantity of waste going into the landfill.

Mr Atkins: I turn your attention to page 820 and the key effectiveness indicator second from the bottom on the page, which is "Percentage of waste in the metropolitan area diverted from landfill through recycling". It is an inverse indicator of reduced waste to landfill. You will see in the actuals for 2009–10 that 34 per cent of waste was diverted and recycled, and that the estimated actual for the current financial year of 2010–11 is 40.6 per cent. There has, therefore, been an increase in diversion of waste from landfill, and the reverse calculation means that there has been more recycling and less going to landfill. That is the measure.

Hon BRIAN ELLIS: I have one other question on page 818. I am curious about the line item there, "Coordinate the Response to Climate Change" under "Service Summary". The cost of service to coordinate the response to climate change shows an allocation of \$19.215 million in 2011–12, but this drops off quite remarkably to \$1 million in 2014–15. Can you explain why the expense will fall by such a large amount?

Mr McNamara: The budget estimate figure of \$19.215 million in 2011–12 is significantly up on the 2010–11 figure because of carryovers and the timing of milestones for budgeted grants from the government's low-emissions energy development fund, which is a fund that supports innovative new technologies to seek to reduce emissions. The reason that the forward estimates beyond 2011–12 have lower figures is that finite funding for climate change that has been approved in previous budgets, back in 2006–07 in particular, is coming to an end. As the LEED fund—the low-emissions energy development fund—is disbursed and as the funding under the May 2007 Premier's climate change action statement comes to its conclusion, those are the reasons for declining figures in the forward years. The government does have an election commitment to a climate change adaptation and mitigation strategy. That strategy has been drafted and is undergoing consultation among government agencies currently, with a view to its consideration by the government in the coming months and a subsequent public comment process. And future commitments to funding in the area

of climate change will be considered in the light of the government's consideration of that strategy, which is the cornerstone of the government's climate change policy.

The DEPUTY Chair: We will halt for a minute while the Hansard staff change.

Hon HELEN MORTON: We might just keep going, otherwise we might take up a bit more time. There is some changeover taking place there that looks like it is difficult.

The DEPUTY Chair: I am quite happy if Dr Byrne is happy to keep going. On the list for questions are Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich, Hon Giz Watson, Hon Col Holt, Hon Sally Talbot and then Hon Alison Xamon.

[5.20 pm]

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I refer to page 819, significant issues impacting the agency. It is not really a case of what is here; it is more a case of what is not here. When we compare the significant issues in this year's budget with last year's budget, we in fact find that there is some missing information. Last year in the same section of the budget papers it stated that the emerging skills shortage would present a challenge in retaining a skilled workforce. I want to ask a series of questions in relation to DEC's workforce, the first one being, is this still an issue for DEC?

Hon HELEN MORTON: The fourth last dot point is the dot point that relates to that item.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Fine. Let me ask you the questions in any event. This is an ongoing issue for the department. What measures does DEC have in place address the problem? It must be doing something.

Mr Sharp: It remains an issue across the agency. Staff are being attracted to other positions, but we are working on a workforce plan at the moment through Dr Byrne's division. There is a specific plan underway looking at how that might be dealt with.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: What is in that plan?

Mr Sharp: The plan is not completed yet but it takes on board dealing with staff who are currently working, assessing and determining from then the issues that need to be dealt with in terms of retention and what other attraction measures need to be put in place to supplement the loss of staff or the failure of retention. It is looking at a whole range of issues.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: That is really what I am interested in—the whole range of issues. Can you give us an indication of the sorts of issues that you will be contemplating?

Mr Sharp: What has to be contemplated is what you deal with in terms of retention. Obviously we have limitations on what we can do with salaries but we can do a lot of work on workplace and workforce issues in terms of opportunities to work in other areas and to be rewarded in whatever ways can be made available to staff. We have program in which we recognise achievement in terms of scholarships and opportunities to study and improve your skill base. A wide range of those are being looked at. We also need to look particularly in regional areas and at policies which take on board family-friendly issues. The government itself has looked at encouraging people to stay in regional areas by way of some incentives around remuneration. There are a whole range of those measures that need to be packaged up.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I am mindful of the time. I wonder whether you could take on notice that you will provide the committee with the full suite of measures that are being considered as incentives to be able to encourage and retain DEC staff. Can you take that on notice?

Mr Sharp: Through the Chair, when the report is made available, it will be made public.

Hon HELEN MORTON: It sounds to me like it is a timing issue. Under normal circumstances, you would expect to get that answer back in 10 days. Mr Sharp is saying that that will not be possible.

Mr Sharp: The agency is working through that with the consultant who has been engaged to assist in that process, and that report is still being prepared.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I am not asking for the report; I am asking for those things that are being considered. What ends up in the final report is an entirely different thing.

Hon HELEN MORTON: If you are happy to take something that is fairly general and not specific in terms of the range of things that may or may not be considered, that is the sort of information you will get at this stage.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I am always willing to take the best that you can offer.

Hon HELEN MORTON: You will get very, very good information from me.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: If you can make it the absolute best, I will appreciate it very much.

[Supplementary Information No B5.]

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Is the member also seeking the report when it is released?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Yes. I have a few questions to follow on. How many vacant positions are there currently in DEC?

Hon HELEN MORTON: The director general can answer that.

Mr McNamara: I am not able to give an answer as at today, of course, but the department has about 1 965 FTEs. That is the figure in the budget papers for the 2011–12 financial year. That is an increase of maybe 25 or so on the current figure of 1 940. Our headcount across the whole financial year will turn out to be in the vicinity of 1 880 or thereabouts. That obviously remains to be seen. We always have some vacancies, of course. To go back to the earlier question, the attractions that are being offered to skilled and valued people to move to industry, given the rate of growth in this state, are extraordinary at the moment. There is some churn, obviously, in our staffing. We are running at about 1 880 headcount. That includes part-time people equalised back to FTEs, if you like, against an FTE ceiling of about 1 940 for the current year.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: If you could give us the total number of FTEs et cetera and the headcount, and then provide us with a list of all the vacancies that currently exist and the areas that they exist in.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: That will be supplementary information B6.

Hon HELEN MORTON: I have not accepted this question yet.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Why? What is hard about that?

Mr McNamara: In a department like ours, we obviously run a wide range of programs and there are elements of our work that are quite fluid. For example, there is a very strong seasonal element in our fire workforce and there is a lot of short-term work in areas where we get external grants and so on. I have got contract people working on all sorts of research projects and the like. These things are not fixed across an agency of our size and shape; they are quite fluid. Dr Byrne might be able to elaborate on the degree to which we can specify the list of positions, because it is not that straightforward.

Dr Byrne: I am sorry to say this, but the question about the number of vacancies is not a meaningful one because a lot of positions are seasonal and provide employment for only part of the year. What is meaningful is that we are basically funded for 1 965 FTEs, as shown in the *Budget Statements*. Currently there are 1 880 FTEs. That is a low point in the seasonal workforce. About 85 positions could potentially be filled for the full year, in which case the number of FTEs would increase to 1 965. In terms of vacant positions, it is not really a meaningful question.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I would assume that if a position is not vacant for a certain length of time, there is a saving to the agency, irrespective of the way that you look at it, because if you are

not actually paying a salary to that FTE, it must mean there is some saving to the agency. It may not be a perfect way of looking at it, but I would assume that you have a pretty sophisticated HR system in place and you should be able to pull this data of vacancies on any single day of the year. I will let this stand. If you can do your absolute best in terms of providing me with the information that I sought, and perhaps you could put some clarifiers on the answers that you give.

Hon HELEN MORTON: I want to make it clear that it will be done to the extent that it is possible.

[5.30 pm]

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Can I also get that same information for the previous year, and also how many of the vacancies in each year there are at each level?

Dr Byrne: We will do our best efforts.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Okay—on a best efforts basis, I think.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Best efforts; absolutely.

[*Supplementary Information No B6.*]

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I have only got one more question, which is on page 821. It is under the subheading “Nature Conservation”, and it is note 2, halfway down the page, under “Explanation of Significant Movements”.

Hon HELEN MORTON: So your question is?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: My question is: it says —

The calculation methodology used for the 2010–11 Budget has been refined, in addition new funding initiatives increases FTEs for 2011–12 Budget Target.

Can I ask: how has the calculation methodology for FTEs been refined? That might put a bit of light on our previous discussion.

Hon HELEN MORTON: This will be directed to Dr Byrne.

Dr Byrne: That is another fairly complicated question, but these figures are calculated by taking an allocated proportion of people’s salaries in six services. We allocated against that, and we refined proportions of the allocations, so it resulted in some changes. It does not mean it is a significant change. It is not; it is just a change in the allocation formula.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Okay. Is there anything else you would like to add to that?

Dr Byrne: Not really.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Is the refining of the calculation methodology a good thing in your view or a not so good thing?

Dr Byrne: It is a good thing on an ongoing basis, because we refine and improve our systems. We are allocating people’s salaries against the various services and refining that over time.

Hon HELEN MORTON: Could I ask the director general to make an additional comment, please?

Mr McNamara: It is in the nature of our department that, for example, the half of the department’s staff who are in our regional services division, scattered right across this state, go to work every day and contribute across multiple services. So they will do nature conservation work; they will fight fires; they will do parks and recreation work; they will deal with park visitors; they will do some environmental assessment work and assist in environmental regulation work and the like. There is always refinement that can be done in the accuracy of those sorts of figures. But we are not a department where all of our people sit neatly in one box. They spread their work across multiple outcomes, and that is one of the strengths of the department in providing an efficient service in the bush, without having one person doing one job all the time.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Mr Deputy Chair, I was interested to explore this point a little bit further. Do I have to wait?

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Okay. I will let you take this point a little bit further then.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Okay. I just want to pick up on this calculation methodology, because I notice that it is actually between effectively, I am assuming, the 2009–10 actual and the 2010–11 budget, because if you look at that, the FTE number has gone down. What I am trying to get to the bottom of, and I think it is trying to get to the bottom of what Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich was trying to ascertain, is that with this recalculation, what was the actual effect in terms of individual humans? It is one thing to look at FTEs, and that is a really useful exercise, but I am wanting to know if there were any actual extra jobs or positions that were created as a result of this; or, when you recalculated it, did it impact on the number of people performing the work?

Hon HELEN MORTON: I will ask Dr Byrne to speak.

Dr Byrne: The recalculation did not impact on what people were actually doing; it was just a better allocation of their time to the services. It is actually about a four per cent reallocation or a four per cent shift in the time of the staff on average. Some would be more; some would be less. It is just a reallocation of their time from refining the allocations.

Hon ALISON XAMON: The reason is that we are aware that in the notes you are talking about a reallocation, but we are trying to also get to the bottom of exactly how much of an increase in the delivery of services has been accomplished by these additional FTEs. You have got 847 for the 2010–11 budget, and then you have got the estimated actual at 879, and of course you have got an increased budget target. I am aware that you have referred to new funding initiatives, and that is something I was going to ask about later. But I am still trying to get an idea as to how much of this is simply just the recalculation and how much of it is actually going to result in an increase in services because you have got increased numbers of people performing the roles.

Hon HELEN MORTON: I will get the director general to speak first.

Mr McNamara: There certainly are some quite discrete increases in numbers of people embedded in some of those figures. For example, during the 2010–11 year, under the Barrow Island agreement act, there are six staff employed by the department on a fly in, fly out basis to work on Barrow Island, and they are paid for through Gorgon funds. There are the Gorgon offset projects, such as the threatened species program, where extra people have been employed with those external funds.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Can I just clarify: have they now been taken out of your FTEs, or are they now included in your FTEs? How have you recalculated those sorts of arrangements?

Mr McNamara: They are certainly in the figures, but that aspect is probably more appropriate for Dr Byrne to address.

Dr Byrne: I would like to explain shifts of more than about three or four per cent in the figure, for example, between the 2010–11 budget and the 2010–11 estimated actual. You can see a significant shift of about four per cent in the employee numbers there. That is simply due to a change in calculation methodology. That part of the figures does not reflect a change in service. But in the 2011–12 budget target, there is another increase there. That reflects the increase in funding for the service.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Okay. What I am trying to determine, though, is: using the example that you just gave, you have now taken out those six FTEs from the calculation in your budget; is that correct? They are performing work for DEC, but they are not being funded by DEC, so for the purposes of calculating within this budget, are you calculating that as part of your overall FTEs or not?

Dr Byrne: Yes; the increase in nature conservation is reflected by a reduction in the other services—a reduction in the calculation for the other services. In the other services, the shift was not significant enough to warrant a note.

Hon ALISON XAMON: That is fine. That answers the question. Thank you.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: I think Hon Col Holt has a question on this same area.

Hon COL HOLT: I have. I have actually got two questions. I am happy to wait for my turn on the other one, but this is along the same lines. If you look at page 821, down at the bottom, this is about sustainable forest management, where there has been a fair adjustment in the FTEs based on that recalculation. I understand the recalculation as it has been explained, and I also accept that it is only three or four per cent in the nature conservation in terms of the change in FTEs. However, in sustainable forest management, there is a budgeted FTE of 329, going down to 250, and I suspect that that will potentially impact on those services. I guess I would like some explanation about that, really. I can understand an adjustment with what people are doing in terms of their daily job and how it might change, but there seems to be a lot of change in FTE in that particular role.

[5.40 pm]

Hon HELEN MORTON: I will ask Dr Byrne to speak.

Dr Byrne: We will have to take that question on notice.

Mr McNamara: I will just make a comment first. The 2009–10 actual is 244 and the 2010–11 actual is 250, so it is the budget figure for 2010–11 that is significantly higher. While Dr Byrne is probably right—we will have to take it on notice—there are two comments I would make. One is that the outcomes can vary considerably because the workforce spends a lot of its time on prescribed burning and bushfire response in the forest areas. Where the fires occur—which is not something that we get to decide a lot of the time!—whether it is in a national park, a nature reserve or a state forest, significantly influences the service against which the efforts are booked. The other thing is that sustainable forest management is about caring for the forest in a broad sense, but I think we have been going through a process of refining where the work is being done in terms of recreation on state forests or in terms of wildlife conservation on state forests, and those efforts have been increasingly allocated against the nature conservation and parks and visitor services, rather than sustainable forest management. That is as far as I can elaborate now, but if the question still stands, we will have to take it on notice.

Hon COL HOLT: I can see that there is only, from 2009–10 actuals, 244, to 2010–11 actuals, 250. However, somewhere along the line there was budgeting for 329, so am happy to get the answer on notice.

Hon HELEN MORTON: We will take that one on notice: the explanation of the 329 in the 2010–11 budget.

[*Supplementary Information No B7.*]

Hon GIZ WATSON: I might just follow up on the issue of burning and the line items on page 819 in terms of continuing to undertake active fire management programs et cetera, which is down on that page. What is expected to be spent by DEC on fire fighting wildfires in each of the same years? This line item says that the department will continue to undertake an active fire management program in an increasingly complex operating environment exacerbated by drying conditions and will place a priority on achieving its annual target for prescribed burning in the south west of the state. What is expected to be spent by DEC on prescribed burns in 2010–11, 2011–12, and each of the out years?

Mr McNamara: To set the high level figure first, the department probably spends in the order of \$50 million, in current terms, in a year, on fire management, spread across the three services—nature conservation, sustainable management, and parks and visitor services—because those are the

reasons we hold and manage land. That \$50 million is inclusive of the prescribed burning, bushfire response and preparedness, but to talk about the break up, Mr Dans would be better placed.

Hon GIZ WATSON: I am interested in how they break up; what is prescribed, what is fighting wildfires.

Mr Dans: I can give you the absolute figures for the 2009–10 season, and give you a bit of an indicative figure of where we are at for the current season. In the 2009–10 financial year, which is how we account for our fires, our total expenditure on fire management was \$51 million. Of that, \$9 million was spent on prescribed burning and \$26.5 million, including normal time salary, was spent on bushfire suppression.

Hon GIZ WATSON: So how does that break up when you have a prescribed burn that becomes a wildfire? Is that included as being a prescribed burn, or is that fighting a wildfire?

Mr Dans: The point of inflection is a delicate balance. When we declare that we have actually lost control of the burn, we then cost the suppression effort to bushfire suppression rather than the burn.

Hon GIZ WATSON: So there is not necessarily a clear line there? That is what I guess I am trying to say here.

Mr Dans: When the person in charge of the burn declares, through our fire management hierarchy, that they have in fact lost control of the burn, we will declare that we are in a bushfire suppression situation and we will account for the costs incurred accordingly.

Hon GIZ WATSON: What level of detail can you provide in terms of that division? You have just given some figures about how much was for prescribed burns and how much was for fighting wildfires. Of that component that is for wildfires, have you got the breakdown as to how much of that is prescribed burns that become uncontrolled fires?

Mr Dans: Our annual report will generally declare that, of the fires that we suppress on DEC-managed lands, something in the order of two per cent to three per cent are escapes from DEC-managed prescribed burns. I do not have the actual cost information that is attributable to that percentage of burns that are escapes; however, I am aware that in the instance of one particular burn, of the total expenditure, which was in the order of \$600 000, approximately \$520 000 of that was costed to bushfire suppression and \$80 000 to prescribed burning, because it was a fairly sustained suppression effort in that case.

Hon GIZ WATSON: Is it possible to provide that level of detail on notice?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Sorry; I thought I could find an easier way of providing that information, but no, I cannot.

Hon GIZ WATSON: Is it possible to take that on notice? I am looking at the breakdown of the expenditure. Would you have the complete figures to the end of this financial year? Not yet, I assume. So let us take the last financial year; how that breaks down in terms of prescribed burns, then wildfires and what proportion of those are uncontrolled fires as a consequence of a prescribed burn that gets out of control. And perhaps, because it is sort of related and it was my next question, I would like a breakdown in terms of that expenditure on both prescribed burning and wildfire suppression, what percentage is salaries and what percentage is overtime and allowances.

[Supplementary Information No B8.]

Hon GIZ WATSON: I am interested in a figure that was mentioned in a previous question on page 823 under “Coordinate the Response to Climate Change”, where there is a note that the grant payment of \$7 million from the LEED fund was re-cashflowed. Does that mean, therefore, that that money had been allocated but was not spent within that financial year? If that is the case, why was it not spent? What I understand of “re-cashflows” is that they are put across to the next financial year, or rolled over, as the minister has indicated.

Hon HELEN MORTON: I have used another term before and I cannot remember what it is right now.

Hon GIZ WATSON: It used to be rolled over but now it is re-cashflowed; it has been given a new name. I guess the question is: is that understanding correct and, if it was not spent, why was it not spent in that financial year?

Mr McNamara: I am not an accountant, but it has been rolled over or re-cashflowed, whichever you wish! There are three projects that have been funded under the LEED fund, which have been fully signed up in terms of agreements. One is the oil mallee harvester with the Future Farm Industries Cooperative Research Centre; one is a wave power generator with Carnegie Corporation; and another is Aurora Biofuels with an algae biofuel plant in Karratha.

[5.50 pm]

In each case, one of the features of the LEED fund is that for each dollar of state money, the proponents have to bring an extra \$3 at least of money from their own or other sources. Another feature of the program is clearly that it is at the cutting edge of innovation. Once a decision is made by the government to fund a particular project, we obviously negotiate a contract and milestones. It is not unexpected, given the nature of the type of work that the fund seeks to support, that there can be technological and design and other issues that mean that original projections about time lines are not met. So, that is what has happened. The projects remain ones that the government is committed to. There are two further projects that have been approved in principle, and the contractual agreements are currently being negotiated. Indeed, I think the fourth round of the LEED fund is currently advertised, with up to \$8 million available for further projects. It is simply in the nature of the type of work that is being funded that the original aims in terms of the cashflowing have not been met. The funding is still there for those projects, but we are accommodating the technological issues and innovations that are inherent in those projects by re-cashflowing.

Hon GIZ WATSON: If I can just be clear on that, Mr McNamara, you are saying that any delays in spending that funding have been because this was not something that the department had control over. Is that what I am understanding?

Mr McNamara: Absolutely. These are projects where the proponents are running with them. I am personally fairly familiar with the oil mallee harvester, for example, which is seeking to get a cost-effective way of harvesting the oil mallees that have been planted in the Wheatbelt. I am aware of technological challenges and efforts to get an efficient oil mallee harvester for the last 15 or 20 years. I went to an event—I cannot remember whether it was last year or the year before—with the Minister for Energy and the then Minister for Environment, where a Queensland designer and engineer had developed the latest prototype. But there are always teething troubles with these sorts of things. They are not simple; otherwise the LEED fund would not be funding them. It is about the cutting edge of technologies.

Hon COL HOLT: This will be a question on notice. It is to do with the parks and visitor services income on page 822. I am wondering whether you can provide the park fee collection for the Porongurup National Park for 2009–10 and 2010–11; and, if it is budgeted, what sort of budget do you expect for 2011–12? It is basically the park income for that. An alternative to that is to do with park maintenance. I do not know whether it is in this section. The Friends of the Porongurup Range obviously do a lot of work voluntarily for the park. I am just wondering whether you have put any dollar value on what they contribute to Porongurup National Park; and, if so, it would be good to see some of those figures.

Hon HELEN MORTON: Jim.

Mr Sharp: I am not able to give you the figures for the Porongurups specifically, so we will need to take that on notice to provide you with the actual figure. I can say, though, that the voluntary contributions to park management and maintenance are incredibly valuable. We are talking about a

considerable figure of around 11 000 volunteers. We recalculate that number of volunteers by their hours, and we do attribute that back in terms of dollar values. Again, I do not have those values in front of me at the moment, but the contribution is considerable. We do use that as a calculation, not necessarily by park, but as an overall figure to indicate the value of volunteers to park management.

[*Supplementary Information No B9.*]

Hon COL HOLT: The Friends of the Porongurup Range is a fairly distinct group. If you can get those figures about the value of their contribution to the park, that would be great.

Mr Sharp: We may be able to do that calculation.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I have a couple of questions about things that I cannot find. I just ask you first of all whether you show income received from environmental offsets in the budget papers. I am not clear whether it comes under something like other receipts.

Dr Byrne: Receipts in the form of money are shown in the income against services; there is an estimated income for each service. But if it comes in a form other than money, like a land swap or some other form, it is not included in the *Budget Statements*; it is only financial statements and the financial offsets that are included in this.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Do I understand correctly that the projected figures for 2011–12 under each of the six services include what DEC expects to receive in offsets payments?

Dr Byrne: Yes. The income will include, for example, things like parks and visitor services and park fees, but can also include environmental offsets in a cash form.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: So do you actually publish anywhere the breakdown of income to tell us how much in offsets has been received or is expected to be received? The reason I am asking is that if offset receipts are not shown in the budget papers, I cannot see what accountability there is for their expenditure.

Dr Byrne: In both the *Budget Statements* and the annual report, you have too high a level of aggregation to show that detail. It is not published in either of those publications, but we can provide specific information.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Could you take that as a supplementary question?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Just before you ask for this to be a supplementary question, I will get the director general to make a few comments that might meet your requirements.

Mr McNamara: Dr Byrne has clearly answered the question as to the revenue figures being in the *Budget Statements* and the annual report at a level above that which identifies individual offsets. I know that we have provided answers to some questions in Parliament in recent times about offset income. The government is committed to the development of a whole-of-government offsets policy, and that work is progressing under the chairmanship of the Director General of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and the DG approvals working group that I am a member of, and under the auspices of the ministerial task force chaired by the Premier that oversees that DG working group. We are developing a whole-of-government policy on offsets. That, indeed, has been the subject of consultation with peak industry groups and peak conservation groups in recent months. We are also committed underneath that to put in place a transparent register of offset income and receipts. That is not in place yet, but it is a commitment that the government has and it is one that we are working towards.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I have another question to which I cannot attribute a specific line item, but I suspect it comes under service 5 on page 823. I have a question about the enforcement of the NEPM regulations. Does DEC administer a funding program as part of the implementation of the National Packaging Covenant? I suspect the answer is yes; in which case, what does the program consist of, how much does it cost and how is it funded?

Hon HELEN MORTON: I will ask Mr Atkins.

Mr Atkins: It is now called the Australian Packaging Covenant. The National Packaging Covenant was resigned last July and is now called the Australian Packaging Covenant. That covenant is funded on an annual basis by \$3 million from industry and \$3 million from jurisdictions. It is a calculation that apportions the jurisdiction contribution across the different jurisdictions. I cannot give you an accurate figure for Western Australia's contribution, so I would have to take that on notice, but it is in the order of \$20 000 to support the secretariat, and then there is a figure in the order of \$400 000 that goes towards packaging covenant projects that are jointly funded by industry and the state for projects that are within Western Australia. For instance, the Colmax Glass project, which I am sure you are all familiar with, was a project that was funded through what was then the national packaging covenant.

[6.00 pm]

Hon SALLY TALBOT: So does that money come out of DEC's consolidated revenue?

Mr Atkins: No, the contribution to the Australian packaging covenant comes from the Waste Authority, from the waste avoidance and resource recovery account. It is part of the approved Waste Authority program.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Do you need any further information on that?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Are you going to take that as a supplementary question?

Mr Atkins: We can do, if you like.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: That will be supplementary information.

Hon HELEN MORTON: What precise additional information was being sought?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I think the additional information was being offered.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: It was to do with the breakdown between the \$20 000 and the \$400 000; did you want a more accurate breakdown?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Yes, please.

Mr Atkins: To my understanding, Mr Chairman, the question is: what are the contributions from Western Australia to the Australian packaging covenant?

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Yes; how much does it cost, where is it funded from, and what does it fund?

[*Supplementary Information No B10.*]

Hon SALLY TALBOT: My next question is about page 822 of the *Budget Statements* and the subheading "Park and Visitor Services"—at least I think this is where it sits. My question is: how many Bush Forever sites does DEC currently have responsibility for managing?

Mr McNamara: There are, of course, a vast number of Bush Forever sites, and I do know that we did an analysis, once again for an answer in Parliament, and provided, sometime not that many months ago, a full breakdown of Bush Forever sites and those that we manage. Clearly, Bush Forever is a description that has been applied across land that was already managed by the department in some cases, to land that is destined to become managed by the department in other cases, and land that is not destined to become managed by the department. There are probably hundreds of sites and probably many, many hundreds of individual parcels, or lots of land in a land title sense, and we have done that analysis but I cannot answer that in detail here.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I do know the total number of Bush Forever sites, but my specific question is: how many of those does DEC have responsibility for? Will you take that on notice?

[*Supplementary Information No B11.*]

Hon SALLY TALBOT: We could probably add this into that particular question. I would like to know how many of those areas that DEC has responsibility for have a management plan.

Hon HELEN MORTON: Yes, that is fine. The two aspects will be incorporated into the same answer.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Is it the case that DEC is taking over responsibility for a number of additional Bush Forever sites from WAPC?

Mr McNamara: Yes, that is the case. It has always been the case that WAPC carries out most of the acquisition of land in the metropolitan area, and it does so under the metropolitan region improvement fund. WAPC is not, and does not see itself as, an end manager of land as a general rule; it is acquiring that land. Where it is destined to be government-run conservation land, we are, almost without exception, the end land manager. WAPC goes through the process of acquiring and accumulating appropriate parcels of land and then effects the transfers and signs agreements with us, often in the meantime, to manage that land while it remains WAPC owned but before reservation has been effected.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: This is the last one, if I can, Hon Sally Talbot, because I have two people to come.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I have only got a couple more questions on this topic.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: I think we might have to have one, because I only have 10 minutes.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Can I ask just one more?

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Yes.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Have I understood you correctly that DEC is the manager of some of the sites that are actually owned by WAPC? What I was talking about was the formal transfer of responsibility from WAPC to DEC.

Mr McNamara: DEC can have management responsibility by one of two ways. As I said, WAPC acquires land as a general rule, and under agreements we have with them—under signed agreements pursuant to the CALM act—we manage that land on their behalf. Then when reservation is effected through the Land Administration Act and the land is vested in the Conservation Commission of Western Australia as a nature reserve or whatever other category of land, then we, by virtue of the functions under the CALM act, assume full management responsibility.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I do not know whether we have the capacity to modify a question we have already asked, but can you indicate which sites you manage on behalf of WAPC, and which sites you specifically plan to take over in the foreseeable future—where there is planning for DEC to take over? My final question is —

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Sorry, can we have that one in writing, because otherwise it is totally unfair on the other people.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Is that an extra question?

The DEPUTY CHAIR: You can submit that question and get a response back afterwards.

Hon HELEN MORTON: Can I just make a comment that this is an answer that we have already provided, and we are happy to provide it again. It was provided on notice to Hon Alison Xamon within the past three months at least.

Hon ALISON XAMON: It is very recent.

Hon HELEN MORTON: Much more recent than that?

Hon ALISON XAMON: No, it is about that; it is a recent response, and it is many pages.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I do not mind if you duplicate some of that information.

Hon HELEN MORTON: We can provide that information again, basically.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I specifically want the breakdown about what is actually in DEC's control now; what DEC manages for WAPC; and what DEC is planning to take over.

Hon HELEN MORTON: It is done.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: My final question was —

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Hon Sally Talbot, it must be an additional question; I am sorry. Hon Alison Xamon.

Hon ALISON XAMON: In relation to this same issue I just want to confirm whether there has been any increase in the allowance for DEC to be able to manage any of these Bush Forever sites. These are the Bush Forever sites that are actually vested with you in terms of the management. Is there any increase between last year and this year?

Hon HELEN MORTON: In funding?

Hon ALISON XAMON: In the funding for management purposes of the sites that are actually meant to be managed by DEC. I am not talking about WAPC sites that may be nominally managed by DEC, although I think that is a grave concern. I am talking about sites that have been vested with DEC for management.

Mr McNamara: There has not been a specific budget increase aligned to the transfer of Bush Forever sites. There has historically been a significant budget increase when the department took on board the management of regional parks, there was a budget increase when the department took carriage of the management of Araluen Botanic Park, and there have been general increases for things like fire management, for nature conservation, for threatened species, and indeed the government's environmental community grants program, which has a specific component to assist community groups doing voluntary work and restoration work and so on in regional parks. It is our function as the department with the nature conservation and the parks and visitor services budgets that we have and the revenues we have, to spread those capacities across all the land, including the Bush Forever sites that come to us.

Hon ALISON XAMON: Of course, one of the major problems for the existing Bush Forever sites is the lack of appropriate fencing to particularly stop the incursion of vehicles, and in some instances horses. Have no additional moneys been identified for a specific increase in fencing beyond what would just be the normal amount a year, which is very little?

[6.10 pm]

Mr McNamara: There has been an explicit component in the government's \$1.5 million a year environmental and community grants program. Beyond that, as I have indicated, there has been only the capacity of the department through general increases in things like fire management and so on over the years.

Hon ALISON XAMON: All right, so it is still a long way to go there. Can I just —

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Hon Alison Xamon, I need to give five minutes to the last question. I am sorry to cut you off.

Hon ALISON XAMON: That is all right, I just want one more question on this.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: I think it has got to be an additional question to be submitted afterwards.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: I turn to the asset investment program on page 824. Perhaps these questions might need to be taken on notice. For the 2011–12 program for the park improvement program, could I ask for a list of the proposed improvements, specifically whether any fall within the East Metropolitan Region? I can perhaps ask that on notice, unless you can provide that to me now.

Hon HELEN MORTON: I think that we might be able to. Director general.

Mr McNamara: I do have the full answer for the honourable member but the list is very long. There is a very wide range of capital works programs across a great many of the parks in forest areas we manage. Given the length of the list and the time, I think if we provide that as a supplementary answer that would be best.

[Supplementary Information No B12.]

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: In the same vein, the first paragraph under “Asset Investment Program” refers to \$0.5 million over two years for pathways in regional parks. I understand that that is a new initiative. Could I just get some further detail with respect to that and, again, whether or not any improvements or additions to pathways in regional parks fall within the East Metropolitan Region? I am happy again to have that taken notice.

Hon HELEN MORTON: I ask the director general.

Mr McNamara: The allocation is \$1 million across two financial years. For the 2011–12 financial year, the work that will be done under that initiative, which is to improve access for people, including people with disabilities, to parks in the metropolitan area and Bush Forever sites as well, will include a 1.5 kilometre walk from Woodvale Drive to Perry’s Paddock and a 1.7 kilometre walk along the east side of Walluburnup Swamp in Yellagonga Regional Park in the northern suburbs. Also, a two kilometre walk from the top of Lesmurdie Falls to its base will be upgraded in Mundy Regional Park and work will begin on a walk path from Palm Terrace to the foot of the falls. In the second financial year—I do not have the full details with me—there will be further works including some improvements in access at Matilda Bay Reserve.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: That is very positive for the East Metropolitan Region, which is excellent. Finally, on the rediscovering our national parks initiative, which was announced last year, could I just seek confirmation that that is continuing this year and whether or not there will be free entry to certain parks on occasion to encourage people to visit our national parks?

Mr McNamara: That wonderful initiative has continued. There have been further free days at a range of parks; indeed, they have been promoted locally quite successfully. Along with smartphone technology in terms of information about parks, with our website, with online campground booking in some of our more highly pressured parks and, indeed, with both normal recurrent funding and royalties for regions funding around access to and facilities in parks, there is a huge amount of effort going into making our parks more accessible to people but in a way that is appropriate for their conservation values.

Hon ALISON XAMON: I refer to “Employees (Full Time Equivalents)” under “Nature Conservation” on page 821. Have any additional staff been assigned to the urban nature section; and, if so, how many; and, if not, what is the existing FTE of the urban nature section, please?

Mr McNamara: No additional staff have been applied to the urban nature section. The urban nature section is deliberately quite a small group that works with others to facilitate and promote their involvement in conservation in the urban area. They work alongside our regional staff, our Land for Wildlife staff and others, but that particular group is not one in which there will be an increase in the number of FTEs in the 2011–12 budget.

Hon ALISON XAMON: So is the existing FTE still about three? How much is the existing FTE?

Mr McNamara: It is about two or three people. It is meant to be a very discrete little group that assists other people in terms of how to manage their bushland.

Hon ALISON XAMON: I know what the group does, but I would have thought that with the increasing need for friends groups that it would have been useful to at least look at an expansion of that group to assist those people with the management of sites. I suppose that I hear you saying you think it is deliberately small and I understand that if you are wanting to facilitate grassroots

development, but I would have thought that you actually need to have a reasonable number of people to do that to at least get that process kicked off in a meaningful way. Just take that as a comment.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Okay, that brings us to the end. I am sorry to close off for those who still have questions to ask. I am aware that members do have additional questions. For those who do have unasked questions, I ask them to submit these to the committee clerk at the close of the hearing, which is as soon as we finish. The committee will forward any of their additional questions it has to you via the minister in writing in the next couple of days together with the transcript of evidence, which includes the questions you have taken on notice. Responses to these questions will be requested within 10 working days of receipt of the questions—apart from the exception we have with that report. Should the agency be unable to meet this due date, please advise the committee in writing as soon as possible before the due date. The advice is to include specific reasons as to why the due date could not be met.

On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your time and attendance today.

Hearing concluded at 6.16 pm