

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES AND
FINANCIAL OPERATIONS**

2014–15 ANNUAL REPORT HEARINGS

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
THURSDAY, 10 DECEMBER 2015**

**SESSION THREE
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND WILDLIFE**

Members

**Hon Ken Travers (Chair)
Hon Peter Katsambanis (Deputy Chair)
Hon Liz Behjat
Hon Alanna Clohesy
Hon Rick Mazza**

Hearing commenced at 2.02 pm

Mr JAMES SHARP

Director General, examined:

Mr PETER SHARP

Director, Parks and Visitors Services, examined:

Mr PETER DANS

Director, Regional and Fire Management Services, examined:

Dr GEOFF STONEMAN

Director, Forest and Ecosystem Management, examined:

Dr MARGARET BYRNE

Director, Science and Conservation, examined:

Dr JOHN BYRNE

Director, Corporate Services, examined:

The CHAIR: On behalf of the Legislative Council Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations, I would like to welcome you to today's hearing. Can the witnesses confirm that you have read, understood and signed a document headed "Information for Witnesses"?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIR: Witnesses need to be aware of the severe penalties that apply to persons providing false or misleading testimony to a parliamentary committee. It is essential that all your testimony before the committee is complete and truthful to the best of your knowledge. This hearing is being recorded by Hansard, and a transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. The hearing is being held in public, although there is discretion available to the committee to hear the evidence in private either of its own motion or at the witnesses' request. If for some reason you wish to make a confidential statement during today's proceeding, 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 review agency outcomes on behalf of the people of Western Australia. The committee values your assistance with this.

Do any witnesses wish to make an opening statement or shall we go straight to questions?

Mr J. Sharp: Straight to questions, Chair.

Hon RICK MAZZA: In reference to page 23 of the annual report, you have the average cost per hectare of managing parks. I take it that the actual for 2014-15 is \$4 000 a hectare; would that be right?

Mr J. Sharp: Yes.

Hon RICK MAZZA: That is an increase from the actual target of around about \$800 a hectare.

Mr J. Sharp: Sorry; it is \$4 per hectare.

Hon RICK MAZZA: It is \$4?

Mr J. Sharp: Yes.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Because it has “\$’000” at the top, so that has thrown me a little bit.

Mr J. Sharp: The “Actual \$’000” relates to the expense by service.

Hon RICK MAZZA: To the other one above it? Yes, okay. What has been the reason for the increase in the management costs?

Mr J. Sharp: It reflects the way funds are allocated. It is the funds that have been made available, relative to the land and water area that is managed. Peter Sharp could give some direct answers in terms of the variations.

Mr P. Sharp: The increase in expenditure is related directly to the costs of the fires that were incurred earlier this year. In the previous year, in fire suppression our expenses under parks and visitor services or park management were \$3 million; in this financial year just passed it was \$18 million. There has been a significant increase there. That is the fire suppression. In addition, we had a modification of our accounting procedures for depreciation that added another \$4.5 million. So it is a book variation.

Hon RICK MAZZA: With the new national parks that are proposed in the Kimberley, has there been any costing done on what that might cost the state to manage?

Mr J. Sharp: There are several proposals in relation to the Kimberley under the Kimberley science and conservation strategy; there are some marine reserves as well as terrestrial reserves. A proportion of that has already been funded in relation to the creation of—if you are talking about the terrestrial parks, they have been costed in terms of funds being made available to develop Indigenous land use agreements which result in a management cost and the engagement of Aboriginal people in delivery. The final annual budget has not been costed but the costs of establishment and some of the management costs have been incorporated into the Kimberley science and conservation strategy.

Hon RICK MAZZA: I refer to page 24, which is headed “Report on operations”. The fourth bullet on the left-hand side talks about Parks and Wildlife’s continuing negotiation for joint management. Can you tell me a little about that?

Mr J. Sharp: There is a commitment to the creation under the Kimberley science and conservation strategy. A component of that is the creation of several marine parks and the creation of a large national park that will have a mix of tenures across that landscape. Indigenous land use agreements need to be negotiated to achieve the creation of those reserves, meet the requirements of native title, meet the objective of traditional owners being engaged in those conservation activities, and meet the requirements of our act in terms of joint management and, more recently, joint vesting. For instance, in relation to the creation of Eighty Mile Beach Marine Park three ILUAs have been negotiated with the traditional owner groups. Other Indigenous land use agreements are being negotiated to enable the creation of the reserves to take place. Peter Sharp may be able to outline the detail of the ILUAs underway.

Mr P. Sharp: In the northern Kimberley we still have negotiations on foot with the Miriwung Gajerrong, Wunambal Gaambera, Balangarra and Wilinggin groups, and further towards the southern area we have been negotiating with Dambimangari around Camden Sound and a couple of other groups in that space.

[2.10 pm]

These things are required under the commonwealth Native Title Act to give validity to the reserves. In the case of the large terrestrial reserve, those negotiations are being progressed as we speak and we are hopeful that we can come to a resolution during this financial year.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Do you want to make any comment on the slight decrease in your annual visitor satisfaction?

Mr J. Sharp: Peter may be able to give some detail. There is variation in business satisfaction. I do not know whether that would rate as statistically significant. We do target ourselves around a benchmark of 85, which we have continued to meet. I do not think I could give an explanation, apart from it just being a natural variation. Do we have any further information?

Mr P. Sharp: I think some of the variation that has occurred in that satisfaction stems from some of the capital works that are currently underway in some of our parks under the Parks for People initiative because there is currently quite a lot of capital works, which are impacting on visitor satisfaction, and also just a bit of natural variation arising out of loss of facilities from bushfires and other events like that. We have lost some amenity values there and that may be reflected. I cannot be completely accurate about the figures. It is a slight variation within the realms of normal variability but still well above our benchmark.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Talking about Parks for People, on page 28, you have got “Making WA camping more enjoyable”, which is a good program, and you talk about “Upgrading the favourites”. What is taking place there?

Mr J. Sharp: The program is not just the creation of new facilities; it is actually renewal and refreshing of existing facilities and bringing them to a higher standard. There are two elements to the program. A lot of people thought that the program was simply about adding new stock, if you like, or new opportunities. This is also about improving the opportunities that are there, so there has been expenditure on both of those, and that is both increasing capacity and also increasing the standard of facilities. Peter, do you want to add anything?

Mr P. Sharp: In terms of some of the favourites, Mr Mazza, you would be aware of Contos in Leeuwin Naturaliste National Park, a very popular destination. We have had an opening of the extension and improved camping opportunities there. Lane Poole Reserve near Dwellingup has also had a significant amount of upgrade and improvement of facilities. We are doing similar works in Shannon and D’Entrecasteaux and, tomorrow, I will be down in Esperance where we are currently upgrading the Lucky Bay caravan park there, and expanding the services. So it is a refurbishment and expansion where we can possibly do them.

Hon RICK MAZZA: I note with the Nanga Brook and Lane Poole upgrade you have 29 purpose-built caravan sites or campervan sites. Is the caravan and camping discussion paper that is up at the moment going to affect Parks and Wildlife with its Parks for People programs—anything you will have to do—if they happen to bring some of that in?

Mr J. Sharp: We are fully engaged with the discussions around the act and its application and how it might impact. We would think that it would not impact in terms of what is provided.

Mr P. Sharp: In the current paper, the existing recommendation is that it does not bind the Crown, so we would not be impacted.

Hon RICK MAZZA: What is the actual maximum stay limit for someone who has got a caravan who wants to stay at Lane Poole?

Mr P. Sharp: It is 28 days.

Hon RICK MAZZA: So they can stay for 28 days. How much a night is that for someone in a caravan?

Mr P. Sharp: It is \$10 a night per head.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Is it the same whether you are in a tent or a caravan?

Mr P. Sharp: Yes.

The CHAIR: Got your Christmas break sorted, Rick?

Hon RICK MAZZA: Yes.

Mr P. Sharp: We can do a special price for you—\$15!

The CHAIR: Are you allowed to go shooting?

Hon PETER KATSAMBANIS: That is the next question!

The CHAIR: Sorry; it has been a long week.

Hon RICK MAZZA: You have thrown me off now, Chair!

To go to a different subject, has Parks and Wildlife been involved at all with any of the Cockburn Sound fish-kill situation?

Mr J. Sharp: Not specifically. Peter Dans might know. We have assisted where we can in collecting information and data.

Mr P. Dans: I think there were a couple of animals—a pelican and a penguin—that were found dead on shore. Obviously, our wildlife officers were involved in the retrieval of those birds and some testing of them. It is not uncommon to have sea birds found dead on the beach. It happens most weeks.

Hon RICK MAZZA: None of the testing revealed anything, as far as you are aware?

Dr M. Byrne: Not in terms of the animals but the fish kill was believed to be due to an algal bloom.

Hon RICK MAZZA: An algal bloom, yes. Fisheries put that out.

The CHAIR: If you want to dob in Fisheries, they are in later on today!

Hon RICK MAZZA: I am happy to defer to someone else.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: I want to go to the third dot point on page 31 about taking a lead role in conserving WA's significant wetlands. Specifically, is there something called a Wetlands Coordinating Committee established in the 90s to provide advice to the minister?

Mr J. Sharp: There is a group that bears that name, yes.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: When was the last time it met?

Mr J. Sharp: I cannot recall. I think it was last year that we entered that question in.

Dr M. Byrne: September 2014.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: That was the last time it met?

Dr M. Byrne: Yes.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Its role is to provide advice to the minister?

Dr M. Byrne: Its role is to provide advice in relation to the state wetlands policy, which was, I think, in 1996—around then it started—and the raft of activities under that policy. A lot of the activities under that policy have been implemented, so it met much more frequently in the early days but there is a lot less requirement for that advice given that the policy is, essentially, well implemented by now.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Is there an implementation report on that policy or do we have to glean bits and pieces from annual reports over the years?

Mr J. Sharp: It is not reported on annually. This role refers also to a broader role where significant wetlands, reserved under the Ramsar Convention, are specifically required to have management plans and be reported to the commonwealth under the convention. That was in that case. In the case of wetlands generally, they are separate categories of wetlands.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Did you say there has been a report on the implementation of the policy or do we have to glean that from —

Mr J. Sharp: We need to glean that from there or specifically questions in relation to that.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: It is Christmas; I am not going to ask questions!

Dr M. Byrne: The policy is not just Parks and Wildlife policy; it is a state policy and a range of government agencies are involved in implementing that policy.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: It is your department's responsibility to coordinate that?

Dr M. Byrne: We provide executive support to the committee.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: I understand that part of the role of that committee was to look at the wetlands buffer guidelines. Is that true, or is there another committee that looks at the wetlands buffer guidelines?

Mr J. Sharp: The committee had taken on the responsibility of there being buffer guidelines. They do fit, though, into a continuum of responsibilities, including those of the Department of Planning, and there have been some consultations underway about where those roles fit in terms of implementation. That is currently something we have been discussing and will continue to discuss with the office of the EPA and the Department of Planning and the agency as well.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: It is because of the new world order around parks and wildlife?

Mr J. Sharp: It is part of that, but it is also working through responsibilities in legislation and making it clear who has what responsibility.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: In that, did you say that the guidelines have been published or when will they be published?

Mr J. Sharp: They are still in a draft form. They have not been published. I do not think a date has been set for their publishing.

[2.20 pm]

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: How long have the guidelines been in development?

Mr J. Sharp: I cannot answer specifically but I would say possibly 10 years or longer.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Seriously?

Mr J. Sharp: Yes.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Why?

Mr J. Sharp: I cannot answer why it has been in development for so long but I think the directions around wetlands and buffers and those issues have been dealt with iteratively for some time.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: And you cannot give me an idea of when the guidelines will be complete?

Mr J. Sharp: No, I cannot give you that.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Okay. I will ask the same question again next year and hopefully get a different answer.

The CHAIR: What is the problem? Why has it not been brought to a conclusion?

Mr J. Sharp: I do not think it reflects a problem. The guidelines do not have a status as such under legislation; they are guidelines. From my understanding, there is a review of how it would fit in legislation, how it would work in the legislation and what responsibility there is under the planning act, the Environment Protection Act and the Wildlife Conservation Act. Our act is relatively silent around that. It was a coordinating role. It is a matter of seeing what the approaches are to managing wetlands and setting protection measures under other legislation. It is around that complexity.

The CHAIR: I assume thousands of hours of resources have been applied to developing those buffers for a decade.

Mr J. Sharp: Yes, and the work and the information that underpins it, as I understand it, and the information and the science is both getting to a higher level of understanding and improvement and there is information that is used. It is just that there is not a specific guideline published as such that says, “This is a guideline”, because there is an issue around where the guideline fits in legislation.

The CHAIR: Do we then get a consistency in terms of how we prepare buffers under all that other legislation across the state?

Mr J. Sharp: There is in that there is cross-referencing between agencies in the development and planning approval process.

The CHAIR: Ultimately, though, in terms of your agency, and I assume one of the reasons you are the lead agency is that you often end up—I know there are a lot of wetlands on private property but an awful lot of wetlands are on estate controlled and managed by yourselves.

Mr J. Sharp: We would manage those to a standard that is separate from guidelines.

The CHAIR: Yes, you manage the estate but I would have thought that the buffer would often extend beyond the land that you manage to help you manage your estate. With the wetland, someone taking an action could be many kilometres away. Someone is taking an action and the buffer guidelines would be about controlling impacts in that buffer zone and it would then ultimately lead to an impact on what you then have to manage. I do not doubt that, to the best of your ability, you manage the land under your control but surely the whole point is about going back upstream, for want of a better term, and providing some protection so that you do not end up trying to deal with the consequences downstream.

Mr J. Sharp: The highest value wetlands would be Ramsar listed. They have a management plan as such, so they are managed to a very stringent plan.

The CHAIR: Including in their buffers?

Mr J. Sharp: Well, it talks about managing them as a whole. The buffers would be part of that. Having a guideline would be somewhat meaningless in relation to their management because they are managed to that value. The same would apply to other wetlands. All our land is subject to a management plan that guides their management development. The guidelines themselves are used off reserve, off areas where they are protected in relation to where there may be some impact of development or changing land uses. Setting a guideline as itself is about a guideline. There is an element in which that has moved beyond that towards looking at the specifics of that situation and how it can be managed in that setting.

The CHAIR: We even see development in Ramsar wetlands, do we not?

Mr J. Sharp: Not that I am aware of.

The CHAIR: Roe 8 will go through parts of Ramsar wetlands.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Beeliar.

The CHAIR: Sorry; that was not one for you. If you want to make comment about the impacts on the Ramsar wetlands in Beeliar, you are welcome to.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Is there a coordinating committee around the Ramsar convention and your responsibilities under the federal legislation?

Mr J. Sharp: There is not a coordinating committee. We have a responsibility to meet the standards met by the commonwealth. We have to produce a management plan that looks at protecting their values to the commonwealth’s satisfaction.

Dr M. Byrne: It is called an ecological character description. It is a description of the values of the Ramsar wetland. Then we have to report to the commonwealth on how those values change over time to meet their reporting under the international treaty.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Is that report available on your website? Is it made public?

Dr M. Byrne: I am not sure but I can check on that.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Okay. If you check on that, and could we also get a copy of that?

Mr J. Sharp: My understanding is that it is but we will check and confirm.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: If it is not available, could we have a copy?

[Supplementary Information No C1.]

Hon RICK MAZZA: On page 39 is the heading “New bait in fight to save wildlife” and you talk about the trials of Eradicat. In what areas are you using Eradicat?

Mr J. Sharp: Eradicat, as indicated here, is being trialled in a number of areas. I will get Dr Stoneman to outline how the program is being implemented.

Dr G. Stoneman: The development of that bait, Eradicat, has been ongoing for about a decade. There have been a range of trials in its development to get it to the stage at which it was then authorised for use on an operational scale by the commonwealth authority. There have been trials at Cape Arid and Fitzgerald River. It has been applied at Matuwa—the former Lorna Glen pastoral station—and it has been used out at Dirk Hartog Island for part of the restoration project out there. There are a couple of others—Fortescue Marsh in the Pilbara and Nambung National Park as well.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Anything in the south west as well?

Dr G. Stoneman: Cape Arid is in the south; not in the south west forests. We are in the process of commencing a project in which the Upper Warren area will be part of a trial to work out the interactions between fox and cat control so that we can integrate the baiting against both of those feral animals.

Hon RICK MAZZA: What has research shown as far as the effectiveness of it? Is there some sort of rate of destruction that you get?

Dr G. Stoneman: The research has shown it to be effective. It certainly kills feral cats and it does not kill the native fauna in the areas in which it has been trialled.

Hon RICK MAZZA: That is good. Has there ever been stocklicks laid around the Lake Muir area to control large herbivores?

Dr G. Stoneman: I am not aware.

Mr J. Sharp: No.

Dr M. Byrne: It has not been used to control herbivores at all; 1080 poison has not been used to control herbivores.

Mr J. Sharp: The only application has been on foxes and cats.

Hon RICK MAZZA: What do you use for herbivores—anything?

Mr J. Sharp: As far as I can recall, there has been no use of any form of poisoning for the management of large herbivores.

Dr G. Stoneman: It would mainly be aerial shooting programs that are applied to things like goats, camels and cattle in the Kimberley.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Just moving on to report 41 by the environment and public affairs committee to do with ESAs, has there been any work around keeping people better informed as to whether they have an ESA on their land or not?

Mr J. Sharp: That is not a responsibility that we specifically have. Environmentally sensitive areas are managed under the Environment Protection Act.

[2.30 pm]

The CHAIR: You talk in your annual report, I think it is on page 34, about the biodiversity audit 2. I noted that on the weekend the minister made some announcement about changes to the category of endangered species. Are those announcements a result of the biodiversity audit 2?

Mr J. Sharp: It is not related to the biodiversity audit, which is a broadscale analysis of the status of biodiversity. Dr Byrne can explain how the specifics of the listing of species is handled.

Dr M. Byrne: The Threatened Species Scientific Committee meets every year to consider changes to the listing of species and threatened ecological communities. It is a standard process that occurs every year.

The CHAIR: Separate to the audit?

Dr M. Byrne: Yes; nominations are made and then they are reviewed and then it goes through to the minister for approval and that is what he released on the weekend.

The CHAIR: Your report said you had completed the report, I think, and that you are now using that data in relation to the threatened and priority ecological communities. When can we expect the biodiversity audit final report to be publicly released and in what form will that occur?

Dr M. Byrne: We are not anticipating doing a formal report, as was done in the previous audit. What we have done is capture all of the data into a database that is now readily searchable. It is much more efficient in terms of usage. Rather than having it statically in a book, which is only applicable to one point in time, we have got a searchable database that now can be used and can be updated.

The CHAIR: When you say “we”, is that publicly available?

Dr M. Byrne: No, that is for internal use in Parks and Wildlife.

The CHAIR: When are we going to get public access to the outcomes of the biodiversity audit 2?

Dr M. Byrne: We are not anticipating releasing that publicly at this point in time.

The CHAIR: Why not?

Dr M. Byrne: Because of the format it is in, which makes it readily usable for staff, but it is fairly difficult for other people who are not familiar with that to be able to get that information out of a database that is fairly large.

The CHAIR: How do people get the information that was available in the original biodiversity audit that was publicly released, as I understand it?

Dr M. Byrne: That information is still available in the very thick booklet that was done and the summary statement. All of that background information is all still readily available and used by lots of people in terms of planning.

The CHAIR: But is that related to audit 1, or is there a further work that you have released since the original biodiversity audit?

Dr M. Byrne: No, because most of the information documented in that report is static information. It is information about what are the natural assets in all the particular IBRA regions and subregions. A lot of that has not changed. When we looked at that, we said, “Well, there is not a lot of value in actually just reprinting that information, so that is all still readily available and people can have access in either hard copy or electronic.”

The CHAIR: But the fact that you have now created a database says to me that there is more newer information as a result of the work that was done on the biodiversity audit 2.

Dr M. Byrne: What the database does a lot is actually take the information that is there and actually put it into an electronic format, into a database that you can search.

The CHAIR: Is there nothing new on that database that is not in that original document, then?

Dr M. Byrne: The status of the plants and animals and ecological communities has been updated based on expert information, mainly, in that. So, yes, there is.

The CHAIR: So how do people get access to that?

Dr M. Byrne: A lot of that status of particularly threatened species and ecological communities is already available as published on the gazetted lists that we have; that is readily available to people anyway.

The CHAIR: I would have thought it is an area where there is an awful lot of public interest in these things. Whilst it is great, you have got it, and I understand there may be some complexities in the database, but trying to put it into a format that is publicly available for people who have an interest in these matters to be able to look at it themselves, just see that constant updating—my understanding is you used a whole range of scientific experts. I assume unless they work for the department they now cannot get access to the benefits of the work that they put in, do they? How do they get access if they are at a university or at a —

Dr M. Byrne: They can request it. We have had requests and we have been able to provide some information, but it takes a bit of time to get the information out of the database for what specific people are interested in. The majority of the experts that we use to get information for the audit were internal Parks and Wildlife expertise.

The CHAIR: Right. I still encourage you to look at whether you can make some of that information available in a public form.

Mr J. Sharp: We have a number of databases that are publicly available and a high degree of them have technical and scientific information, which we think is much more useable, in a useable form; both from a floristic point of view and from a view of fauna, for that information there are specific databases that are used and publically available, and people come and use on site.

The CHAIR: Does the audit cover Ramsar wetlands and nationally significant wetlands?

Dr M. Byrne: It did cover Ramsar wetlands, yes and nationally significant wetlands; it did not cover the regionally significant wetlands.

The CHAIR: How will people get access to that information?

Dr M. Byrne: The majority of that information is readily available anyway, through information that we have on all of the 12 Ramsar wetlands. The majority of those have an ecological character description and a management plan, so the information for those is already readily available.

The CHAIR: Is there any information that is not, though, that would be included in the internal database?

Dr M. Byrne: I cannot tell you that.

The CHAIR: Is it something you could give us some idea about if you took it on notice?

Mr J. Sharp: We will take that on notice and give you some feedback about what the differentiation might be.

[Supplementary Information No C2.]

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: There were 66 threatened ecological communities listed by the department as threatened, as at June 2015. Sorry, this is page 36. How often is that list updated?

Dr M. Byrne: It is updated once a year. It is the same as the threatened species and threatened ecological communities. Two committees that look at nominations. Nominations are received each year. The Threatened Species Scientific Committee for ecological communities meets once a year and evaluates those nominations and makes recommendations to the minister.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Okay. Then the minister endorses or approves that?

Dr M. Byrne: Yes.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Is the list as at 30 June the most recent one?

Dr M. Byrne: Yes.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: And the minister approved that?

Dr M. Byrne: That will be what was current at 30 June. I do not think we have released any change to threatened ecological communities since then. We have released the update for the threatened species list, which is what came out just last week.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: I will come back to that. Can we just stay on ecological communities? Did the minister endorse or approve that ecological communities list, the last time was updated?

Dr M. Byrne: Yes.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Okay. So the minister endorses and approves it every time it is updated?

Dr M. Byrne: Yes. Every time.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: When were the last few times that it was updated?

Dr M. Byrne: I cannot tell you for this year, but it certainly would have been last year but I cannot give you a date.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Can we take that on notice? And then each time the minister has endorsed them and just a clarification on that on notice question that the minister has endorsed them over that time.

[Supplementary Information No C3.]

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: You may not be able to answer this then: how many changes in the conservation status of the threatened ecological communities list occurred in the last financial year, 2014–15.

Dr M. Byrne: That is listed on page 105.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: I need glasses on my glasses, I cannot really see that!

Dr M. Byrne: On page 105 there is the total number of listed taxa and ecological communities and it shows the difference between 2013–14 and 2014–15.

[2.40 pm]

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: I seriously actually cannot see that. How many of those changes in the conservation status occurred due to conservation activities rather than new information acquired that showed it was not really threatened?

Dr M. Byrne: I cannot give you an answer to that in relation to threatened ecological communities.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Could you take that on notice?

Dr M. Byrne: Yes.

[Supplementary Information No C4.]

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: For those threatened ecological communities, those ones that are critically endangered, endangered and vulnerable, how many of those have recovery plans?

Dr M. Byrne: The information I have does not distinguish between threatened ecological communities and species.

Mr J. Sharp: We would have to take that on notice.

[Supplementary Information No C5.]

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Of the 339 ecological communities on the priority list, how many of those have been assessed by the Scientific Advisory Committee and considered threatened and should be added to the list?

Dr M. Byrne: They will not have been assessed and considered threatened and added to the list, because, if they had, they would have been recommended to the minister

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: For adding to the list?

Dr M. Byrne: Yes. So they are on the priority list, either because we do not have enough information or because they do not meet the criteria but we consider that they may have some conservation concern.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Okay. I just need to check something else on that, so, if you do not mind, I will come back to it. I do not want to hold you up, so I will come back if someone else wants to ask a question.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Just as a matter of interest, do you still use 1080 poison on rabbits?

Mr J. Sharp: The 1080 is best used with carnivores.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Is it?

Mr J. Sharp: With herbivores it is not used.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Interesting.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Where did that come from?

Hon RICK MAZZA: Are rabbits a herbivore? I used to use it.

The CHAIR: Foxes, is it not?

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: You used to use it—is that what you are saying?

Hon RICK MAZZA: No; not me. Just on the bushfire mitigation strategy this year, as a matter of interest, how many hectares are you up to?

Mr J. Sharp: Mr Dans can answer that.

Mr P. Dans: In terms of the last financial year, are you asking this question in relation to what has changed since the annual report of last year to now?

Hon RICK MAZZA: Yes.

Mr P. Dans: The 2014–15 achievement was 147 000. For the year to date from 1 July 2015, we are at 130 760 as of this morning.

Hon RICK MAZZA: In less than six months?

Mr P. Dans: Correct, yes,

Hon RICK MAZZA: Fantastic. What were the main areas that you had for the prescribed burning?

Mr P. Dans: In our Swan region, which is pretty much Wanneroo through Mundaring, down to Dwellingup and down to about Yarloop, about 41 000 hectares. In our south west region, which is essentially around Waroona down to about Nannup–Bridgetown, we have done about 36 500 hectares. In our Warren region, which is south of Bridgetown, Manjimup, Walpole, Pemberton, they have done 52 500. The Warren region in the lower south is still burning, and the south west and the Swan region have ceased and will not start again until we get some first sort of autumn rains in April–May.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Very good. So it is close to 300 000 for the calendar year?

Mr P. Dans: Well, the 147 000 was for the financial year. It is always on a financial year.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Sure.

The CHAIR: Your annual refers to the new Bunbury headquarters. Has construction started on those headquarters yet?

Mr J. Sharp: No; construction has not started on the headquarters, and it was not intended that it would be started at this time. The work is still underway in relation to the planning and development.

The CHAIR: Right. So no site works—nothing; it is still literally at the planning stage?

Mr J. Sharp: yes, it is.

The CHAIR: Where are we up to with that?

Mr J. Sharp: There is a considerable amount of site work being undertaken in relation to the site itself, and a number of environmental studies. They relate to both the fact that it had been used for mining and there are some mining tailings in relation to the site that need to be dealt with, and there are some heritage issues in the environment relating to shipwrecks. There is also, as part of the commitment, work to upgrade the management of the mangrove areas and the estuarine area itself, particularly in relation to improving public access but also improving the conservation status of the mangroves in that area. That work is well advanced. A number of environmental studies are underway and have been informing the land assembly, and discussions have been taking place with the City of Bunbury about assembling the land. But also there has been some preliminary work undertaken in relation to the site and dealing with those factors.

The CHAIR: Right. So we are not at the point of even doing the detailed design of the buildings then?

Mr J. Sharp: We have not got towards detailed design yet. That is being handled through Building Management and Works, and I think the other information is being assembled to inform the design, particularly the specific siting, which relates to the design.

The CHAIR: What is the current time frame for commencing construction and completing the project?

Mr J. Sharp: The completion is early to mid-2018 as the target to have that open and functioning.

The CHAIR: In order to do that, when will you need to start the ground and site works?

Mr J. Sharp: I would think—it is not my expertise—in the next six months some works would be undertaken.

The CHAIR: So when will you be out with the gold or silver shovels for throwing the first bit of dirt—sometime just before March 2017, maybe?

Mr J. Sharp: I am not particularly skilled in the use of shovels!

The CHAIR: You would have a few in your storeroom, would you not, or do you have to borrow them from Main Roads?

Mr J. Sharp: We have quite a few from a firefighting point of view, but none of them —

The CHAIR: They would not be the nice silver, shiny ones, no—yours would be working shovels!

Mr J. Sharp: Very dark and dirty!

The CHAIR: The business case for the development, has that been completed yet?

Mr J. Sharp: The information has been gathered in terms of the environmental studies that have been undertaken and the land assembly will inform that business case.

The CHAIR: I think when you last came to see us you talked about it being potentially two months away. We are now six months after that. So why has that taken longer than expected?

Mr J. Sharp: It has been about conducting a range of—there have been a number of consultancies doing the environmental work and the environmental assessment that will inform the business case.

The CHAIR: Are the Treasurer and the minister unhappy that you are taking a bit longer than you had planned, because of the budget circumstances?

Mr J. Sharp: No. We are not comfortable at all; I do think anyone is. We would much prefer to be progressing. But we do have to do due diligence in relation to the site.

The CHAIR: So what has happened since June? Surely with all of that study work, you would have known that in June, when you said it might be available in August?

Mr J. Sharp: No. Some of that work was underway, and some of the environmental studies actually indicated that further work needed to be undertaken.

The CHAIR: What sort of problems were encountered that required further work?

Mr J. Sharp: It is soil testing and looking at where you could site in relation to—the tailings do contain some level of contamination, so it is a matter of dealing with those levels of contamination where it exists, at what depth and what level, and then what mitigation would be undertaken in relation to that.

The CHAIR: So is it still possible you may get to a point where the impact of that site is of a nature where you need to look for an alternative site?

Mr J. Sharp: No. The understanding is, as the information becomes available, that there is both mitigation that can be undertaken and avoidance that will result in that site —

The CHAIR: Still being suitable?

Mr J. Sharp: Yes, being suitable.

The CHAIR: Does that add to the cost of the project at all?

Mr J. Sharp: No, but what it does do is add to the time taken to get to a final design.

[2.50 pm]

The CHAIR: So you have got to find the spot where you can build it without the contamination.

Mr J. Sharp: Yes, that is right.

The CHAIR: Have the staff to be moved there been identified yet?

Mr J. Sharp: The staff have not been identified but we have been working through a process of looking at what are the best functional units to be located there. Staff have not been identified. We have also been looking at the transitioning arrangements that would occur to enable that to happen in a couple of years.

The CHAIR: I would have thought that that is a fairly important issue to give a fair bit of notice to staff if you are going to relocate their positions from Perth to Bunbury. When do you expect to be in a position to finally identify the staff that will be relocated to Bunbury and give them forewarning? We all go through processes of deciding whether to upgrade or renovate our house. If you think about it, it is early 2018 when you are hoping to move them to Bunbury in two years, so I would have thought you would want to be giving them notice fairly soon.

Mr J. Sharp: We need to meet a range of industrial obligations, and we will meet those, but in the next couple of months we are entering into negotiations informally and also seeking information from staff about their desire to move and relocate, plus further examining what work groups would be relocated. A range of different strategies can be used in the transitioning of replacement positions being advertised for that place and other restructuring that occurs. A range of strategies and approaches will be undertaken and it will be considered and applied over the period to get to the 100 people that will be there in the first instance.

The CHAIR: When are we going to have a definitive figure? When will people finally know whether their positions will be moved to Bunbury? Surely at this point we should be able to give

a precise date and say that by day X you will be in a position to notify staff. I am not asking you to tell me today which staff are going. If you have not notified them formally through the industrial relations process, I accept that you should tell them first, not the committee. But we must be at a point now where we should have a date by which we have selected the staff and advised them that those positions will be in Bunbury.

Mr J. Sharp: It will not be as simple as selecting staff and saying that they are going to be relocated in Bunbury.

The CHAIR: Some will be, though. Some positions will be like that.

Mr J. Sharp: Some positions may well be. Some of those positions will become available through vacancies in the meantime. A number of our positions are done on the basis of contract positions as well. You are talking about those who are full-time permanent positions. They will be notified. I cannot give you a date when that will occur but it will be well and truly in advance of the time they will be relocated.

The CHAIR: Do you have a freeze on employing new staff until you make a decision about the functions that will be relocated to Bunbury?

Mr J. Sharp: No, we do not. We do notify and make aware when we are advertising positions that there is a possibility it will be located in Bunbury. So we are at least saying —

The CHAIR: Which is nice, but how long do you leave people hanging? This was first flagged in 2013. It is now 2015. How long do we leave people just hanging, not knowing what their future is?

Mr J. Sharp: I do not think people have been left hanging and not knowing what their future is. The first phase of consultation we are about to enter into is with those who would like to move to Bunbury and would fit within those categories.

The CHAIR: But you are going to move functions, are you not? It is nice to ask who wants to go, but functions will be moved. My sense of your agency is that you would have people who work in their jobs because they have a passion for what they do. Some agencies have people who work there because that is their job and they can be shifted tomorrow to another job and that is not really going to make any difference to them, but many of your staff do their job because they love their job. You are fortunate that you are from one of those agencies where if you find a job that you love, you never work another day in your life. It is the nature of that agency and we get great service out of your staff because of that. It is not like some agencies where you can say, “We will redeploy you and you will still have a job in Perth”, because for that individual, if their job goes to Bunbury, they will follow the job to Bunbury because that is what they want to do. I am just amazed that we are not in a position to at least give a date for when we are likely to notify everyone.

Mr J. Sharp: The date will be well in advance of 2018. There have been ongoing discussions amongst directors and others. We do not have a finalised position on that but they will be given well and truly adequate time. We also want to what opportunities would be available so that it is a positive for people; that is, what attractions can be placed in relation to work groups that would be placed there. That will be part of the consultation process.

The CHAIR: Will assistance be given to people to relocate if their positions are identified for relocation?

Mr J. Sharp: We are currently in the process of working through those arrangements within government, yes.

The CHAIR: Is there an expectation that they will be given some assistance but we do not know what the level is?

Mr J. Sharp: We would expect there will be assistance, yes.

The CHAIR: When do you expect to give us an idea as a committee of what that would involve? Are we talking just relocation costs, or relocation and stamp duty costs?

Mr J. Sharp: After we have consulted with staff we will be looking at the full range of options, and we will also need to look at what options are available within the industrial framework in which we work.

The CHAIR: Will staff who do not want to move be given a forced redundancy if their position is moved, or what arrangements will be made?

Mr J. Sharp: That has not been determined, but we would think that if we use the strategies that we are currently contemplating, we will not arrive at that point.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: How many conservation reserves are there in Western Australia? Is there a list?

Mr J. Sharp: In the annual report we list reserves by the number and the area. There are many different categories such as national parks, conservation parks, nature reserves and state forest as well, which does not necessarily fit in as a conservation reserve. There are also marine parks, marine nature reserves and marine management areas and there is a miscellaneous category under the new arrangements with the act. They are listed on page 57, and listed by area as well. We do not enumerate the reserves. We give them by area rather than by number. We have indicated that there are 100 national parks.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Is there a definitive list by name?

Mr J. Sharp: Not all reserves would have a name. There is in the order of 10 million hectares of nature reserve and something like 10 000 nature reserves—can someone correct me on that?

Mr P. Sharp: It is in the thousands. We can provide more detail.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Do the national parks, conservation parks and state forests all have management plans?

Mr J. Sharp: Not all national and conservation parks currently have management plans. However, we have been moving quite vigorously to have the number of parks and reserves with the Conservation Commission, which has responsibility in the management planning area as well, to get as great a coverage as we can. We have been aggregating reserves into our plans. Peter Sharp might be able to outline that. We are moving to the widest coverage that we can in terms of management plans.

Mr P. Sharp: All of our marine parks have management plans because before you can create a marine park it is a requirement that you have to do it by way of a management plan. In the terrestrial area it is different. The forest management plan overlays a lot of our terrestrial reserves, so they are subject to the provisions of the forest management plan. In the wheatbelt region, for example, we are trying to have a regional management plan similar to that which applies in the goldfields and the south coast where we have regional management plans. We are delayed in that process currently because of the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council native title negotiations. We have commenced that process, but we have given an undertaking to them that we will not progress any further until such time as the ILUA has been resolved, and then we will get into negotiations further with them in terms of the applicability of a regional-based management plan.

[3.00 pm]

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Is there something like a template which gives the current status of plans—which reserves and parks have plans and which are in the process?

Mr P. Sharp: Yes; that information is on our website. We publish all the management plans that are either final or —

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: I was thinking more like a table that says what the current status of the development of management plans are. How do I know which have a management plan—a ready reckoner?

Mr P. Sharp: On our website we publish all our management plans. If you go to our website, you will see that it lists where there are final management plans; for example, the Yanchep National Park management plan is there. If you click on, it will give you the full list of where there is a draft management plan and a plan in preparation; and if you have a reserve that is not listed there, then obviously no management plan is applied.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: I was actually after an overview.

Mr J. Sharp: I do not think there is an overview of the type that you are asking. We can attempt to provide you with that information. As Mr Sharp indicated, the forest management plan, in status, is a management plan for a number of reserves that are covered which do not have their own individual management plan. That is quite deliberately done, so the reserve is covered by a management plan. That would not necessarily show up individually in that process. I do not know how we could indicate where all those overarching coverages are, but we could give you a description.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: How do you know?

Mr J. Sharp: We know an area. An officer in the field who is responsible for managing an area would immediately go to the tenure of the land and look at its status.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: But how do you have a management overview of the plans?

Mr J. Sharp: We have a management planning branch that has an overview of the plans and there also is a subcommittee of the Conservation Commission which has full responsibility for management planning.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Surely they must have some sort of overview document.

Mr J. Sharp: Yes, absolutely.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Great! Could I have a copy of that?

Mr J. Sharp: Yes.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Thank you.

[Supplementary Information No C6.]

Mr J. Sharp: The status of management plans will answer that.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: What is it called?

Mr J. Sharp: If you are asking about the status of management plans and coverage, we can give you an indication of that.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: That is exactly what I am asking, thank you.

Have the Tuart Forest National Park and the Leeuwin–Naturaliste capes area parks and reserve plans been completed?

Mr J. Sharp: Yes.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: When were they completed?

Mr J. Sharp: I do not have the details. I can recall that it was in the last 18 months that I went to the release of the Leeuwin–Naturaliste plan, but I cannot recall the date. They would be published on the website, but we can make those available.

The CHAIR: Do you want that?

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: No, do not worry; it is on the website. I will go to the website.

The CHAIR: On page 105 are your KPIs. It shows that the number of threatened taxa and ecological communities increased from 763 to 772. You then say the number of threatened taxa and ecological communities with improved conservation status, you expected one to be improved in 2014–15, and you achieved that. You then say the number of threatened taxa and ecological communities with declining conservation status, you expected two to decline and that was the outcome. I am trying to work out whether that means we are going backwards. If we are only improving one and two are slipping backwards—taxa and ecological communities; their conservation status—overall, we are losing the battle of protecting them? Am I reading your KPIs right there?

Mr J. Sharp: That is, if you like, a somewhat subjective analysis of it.

The CHAIR: No; I am just saying that as a layperson when I look at those figures that is what they say to me. I am inviting you to tell me how I should read it.

Mr J. Sharp: Vis-a-vis the report, I would think that there is both improving and lessening status. There are management interventions where you improve conservation status. There are a whole range of factors outside of anything you can do in terms of management intervention that have an impact in terms of a drying climate—a whole range of things that we have no control over—but when you look then at the absolute quantum, the variation around that is very marginal, I would think, over the quantum of 750 or whatever.

Dr M. Byrne: It is 772. The two species that declined were *Banksia verticillata* on the south coast and the western ringtail possum, so they were upgraded to a higher threat category due to the pressures, the threats, that were facing them. The western ringtail possum is related to development pressures on the coastal plain and *Banksia verticillata* is due to an aerial canker that is affecting the populations.

The CHAIR: Is that your traditional banksia, the Swan coastal plain banksia?

Dr M. Byrne: No, it is on the stony granite outcrops along the south coast.

Mr J. Sharp: There are issues that deal with various species, whether they be plant or animal species. We would like to think that even though there are issues that they face, such as the banksia or the ringtail possum, by the listing, we actually think we are improving because it means we are going to take more definitive action to do something about it. Part of my response is: how do you make that judgement? We made the judgement that if there are issues and something is being challenged, if not threatened, then we have identified it and we are going to do something about it or do the best we can about it. That is what really that is trying to indicate: where there are issues, we will try and deal with them.

The CHAIR: Is there a system of getting ahead of the game then, so that they never get to the point of you putting them on the list of threatened taxa and ecological communities?

Mr J. Sharp: There are a range of strategies. One of the key strategies that, obviously, has been heavily invested in by the government is something like the Kimberley strategy, where we try to deal with things, not on an individual basis but across a landscape scale. We try to deal with all of, if you like, the broadbrush factors that impact upon the status of a given plant or animal and try to deal holistically with those impacts. It cannot always be done, but there are ways in which we can get ahead of it. Obviously, one of the key drivers that we have is trying to get information and science and understanding. As you indicated, sometimes it is that nothing out there in the world has changed except our knowledge and understanding of the plant or animal that moves us to a place where we need to do something about it. So, knowledge itself is incredibly important.

The CHAIR: So you are saying that it was already a problem and we now know it is a problem?

Mr J. Sharp: In some instances that is the case.

The CHAIR: Will the new biodiversity bill have any impact in this area?

Mr J. Sharp: We think it will be incredibly helpful. For instance, threatened ecological communities are not represented in our legislation at the moment, so the question is around that. It will, because it will identify threatened ecological communities specifically by way of legislation—our legislation that requires us to do something about it. So, it will assist.

The CHAIR: To implement that bill, will it require any additional FTEs?

Mr J. Sharp: We have not worked through what that finally means. The bill, as you are aware, has just been introduced to Parliament.

The CHAIR: But you have been working on that bill for a long time. You saved us a question today!

Mr J. Sharp: I was anticipating it. I am so disappointed!

The CHAIR: It is almost the end of an era that we do not get to ask about when it will be introduced! Now we can move on to: how many extra FTEs will you need to implement it?

Mr J. Sharp: Whether it is extra FTEs, and part of the way we are looking at it is we are evaluating how we will apply the legislation, how it will change the way in which we function and how we need to redirect existing resources. All of that is part of what will be considered.

The CHAIR: I find that interesting, because certainly when my side of politics was in government, we would not have put a bill into the Parliament without knowing what its FTE implications and, more broadly, its budget implications were. I do not think Eric Ripper ever allowed a bill through cabinet without knowing the staffing and overall financial implications. Are you telling me that the bill is in the Parliament and we still do not know what the staffing and financial implications are for that bill?

[3.10 pm]

Mr J. Sharp: No, we do not. We have an understanding of what will be required and we are working through that process. As the bill goes through Parliament, we have an understanding that there will be a requirement on us as an agency. A lot of what we will need to do will be the reorientation of resources to meet the requirements of the bill in terms of the identification of both habitat and threatened ecological communities. As we already indicated earlier on, much of the work on, for instance, threatened ecological communities has already been done. What I am saying is that they do not have a place in legislation at the moment. They are picked up indirectly through regulations under the EP act; that is where they are expressed. There will be a whole range of actions that really do not require expenditure, but we will be looking at a program. There may well be additional costs and they will be developed either by us doing a reallocation of resources or by identifying what new additional resources might be required.

The CHAIR: I might just suggest to Eric Ripper that he offer himself as a consultant to the current Treasurer at some point. When you say “reallocation”—a reallocation from where?

Mr J. Sharp: We are already doing work in a range of areas that relate to the elements of the biodiversity and conservation act—what will become the act—under the Wildlife Conservation Act. It is a modernising.

The CHAIR: I accept that then continues to do it.

Mr J. Sharp: It will not be continuing; this will do the same things under the Wildlife Conservation Act. There will be, if you like, improvements in the way we go about listing and using processes that will result through the modernising of the act.

The CHAIR: Can you give me one example of how that would work?

Mr J. Sharp: I cannot give a specific example.

The CHAIR: Would you be able to as supplementary?

Mr J. Sharp: Yes.

[Supplementary Information No C7.]

The CHAIR: Just a case study, for want of a better example, of what you currently do and how that will allow you to reallocate resources by what you will not do as you currently do it and what you can now do. Have we got any idea of a quantum of the resources that are going to be required for it?

Mr J. Sharp: No.

The CHAIR: Nothing at all?

Mr J. Sharp: No.

The CHAIR: It was not part of the development of the act—identifying the potential resources that would be required as a result?

Mr J. Sharp: What we have identified is the sort of work that would need to be undertaken and if the legislation passes in the form that it is in now, what would be required. There will be work required in identifying, for instance, threatened ecological communities and mapping them, as opposed to identifying what a threatened ecological community is. So, there will be some mapping work required. In terms of our GIS work, we might reallocate some priorities, so there is an example of where that might be done. Rather than the way commonwealth does threatened ecological communities by describing it by type and it is up to the landowner to find it, we are going to say through our identification that we will publish where we see the ecological community existing, and in that case it will require some mapping work. We will have to set some priorities in mapping which might say that some of the other mapping we are doing might be —

The CHAIR: I guess the problem I have is that kind of suggests the current GIS mapping that you are doing is not really that important, because —

Mr J. Sharp: No. It does not mean it is not important —

The CHAIR: If you can reallocate to it, there is something that, clearly, already an important task is no longer going to be fulfilled.

Mr J. Sharp: I suggest that all the work that has been done is important. It is a matter around the urgency as opposed to the importance, so it is a matter therefore of priority. That is the challenge that most elements in the public service face. It is what I face. All of the work that is undertaken is important, otherwise it should not be there.

The CHAIR: You have been under some pretty tight financial pressures over the last five years, so I would have thought that you would not be doing too much that you did not think was absolutely high priority and urgent to date.

Mr J. Sharp: The variable that we can work on is the urgency and that becomes an important part of this process—what gets done first.

The CHAIR: So, it will have budget implications. Does the act bind the Crown?

Mr J. Sharp: Yes.

The CHAIR: It does bind the Crown. Will there be financial implications for other government agencies then?

Mr J. Sharp: Potentially, yes.

The CHAIR: I guess we will need to find out from those agencies.

Mr J. Sharp: And that will be part of the bill, but the bill also —

The CHAIR: Will that be LandCorp, Department of Housing? It is a shame, we had them in earlier; it would have been a good question to ask them whether they had done their assessment.

Mr J. Sharp: There has been extensive consultation with all government agencies and I guess that the details of the bill will be discussed and debated. An important part of the legislation is, though, that if there was a pre-existing environmental approval, that then exempts it, and that is one of the savings that will occur. There is not double or triple jeopardy that you would get approval under one form of environmental legislation and then have this piece, which is currently the case where the Wildlife Conservation Act will then come into play after. So, there will be improvements in the approval process, which will make it much more streamlined in that sense.

The CHAIR: I am just trying to think of the big ones—it is probably Main Roads, Housing, LandCorp. Those are the sorts of agencies it would have to have some dramatic impact on.

Mr J. Sharp: If they have gone through a full environmental approval first.

The CHAIR: They have got projects. I mean, they do not stop. Housing and all those agencies would regularly have new projects. They are not going to do Keralup east—apparently they said today it still an option—but they will need to be given some alternative land to replace Keralup east. That is going to be a different cost now. Main Roads clearly are having problems with identifying land, otherwise they would not have put into their bill the capacity to compulsorily acquire offsets.

Hon RICK MAZZA: On page 69 there are financial statements on income revenue. “User charges and fees” seem to have jumped by about \$10 million and I just wondered what the story was around that.

Mr J. Sharp: An increase in user charges and fees: we would anticipate that we do an annual review of our camping fees and entrance fees. There seems to be a much higher take-up of passes. We have entered into an arrangement with the RAC, for instance, where they are selling our passes. There has been improvement in revenue. We anticipate that there will be an improvement in revenue.

Hon RICK MAZZA: I mean \$45 million is a lot of camp stays at \$10 each!

Mr J. Sharp: Peter might correct me, but we have something like 16.5 million visits to the lands and waters that are managed; not all of those are subject to fees and charges, but a large proportion are, so significant revenue comes from that, as well as leases and licences. We expect those will increase as well.

Hon RICK MAZZA: A couple of line items down there is “Other grants and contributions”, which has fallen by about \$16 million. What was that in relation to?

Mr J. Sharp: Other grants: they would be grants from other organisations. There is a decline in external revenue coming from a range of grants and other sources. Dr John Byrne might be able to help with that figure, but there is a whole range. From the commonwealth, we have certainly seen a decline, but funds from other sources are declining.

Dr J. Byrne: The increase in user charges and fees is shown as note 12 on page 82. In regard to “Other grants and contributions”, it is mainly capital contributions that have increased. That would be increased capital works.

[3.20 pm]

Mr J. Sharp: John, we are referring to the decrease in other grants and contributions in revenue over 2014–15, which is the decline in funds from other sources.

Dr J. Byrne: I will require more information and take that on notice. I do not have that detail at the moment.

[*Supplementary Information No C8.*]

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: I think it is Mr Dans’ turn—he will be starting to feel left out! I was speaking to some Noongar women not long ago who were very concerned about the burns in the Armadale reserve at the end of November. They were concerned because it was, for them, the

wrong time of the year and they were concerned because of the impact on biodiversity in particular—that by burning at the wrong time of the year it was having a negative impact on certain plants and whatever else lives in the forest. How do we know that what burns are taking place are the best to ensure biodiversity?

Mr P. Dans: When we prepare a prescribed fire plan for a burn, we state the objectives of the burn and they are generally bushfire risk management to reduce the threat to life or property, or for biodiversity conservation purposes, silvicultural purposes, or for research. I suppose the prescription by which they undertake the burn addresses the primary purpose of the burn. Some will have two; some will have bushfire risk management as well as biodiversity conservation. That is the most common combination of purposes of each burn, and the biodiversity impacts and potential impacts are addressed during that prescription process. It is quite a methodical and detailed process where the risks to life and property, and the risks to biodiversity values, are all addressed during that planning process. Mitigation strategies are devised, contingency strategies are written for various scenarios that might unfold during the burn, but each and every burn has a detailed prescription that goes with it.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Which includes burning at the right time?

Mr P. Dans: Correct; to achieve the primary objectives of the burn.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Which may be bushfire risk management, and how is that balance given to—the top end of the scale might be bushfire risk management, but what about biodiversity and the impact on biodiversity by burning at the wrong time of the year?

Mr P. Dans: It is obviously taken into account—some burns are gridded up or broken up into small cells, and one cell might be burnt in spring, one cell might be burnt in autumn, so there is a range of strategies. It would be rare in a small urban interface burn such as—I am pretty sure I am aware of the one you are referring to —

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: It also caused an asthma attack for me!

Mr P. Dans: I apologise for that. There was a particularly good result that reduced the risk to adjacent landowners substantially, so the burns that are embedded within the metropolitan area are particularly complex to tick all the boxes.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Yes, I can imagine, but is there a statewide plan about the burns that includes the list of everything that has been taken into account?

Mr P. Dans: There is a fire management strategy for the department which is under development and it will certainly, by the end of the current financial year, be released and published because the environment we are operating in is shifting and moving, so it is timely to reassess and redefine our objectives and strategies.

Mr J. Sharp: We have an overall plan—I think it is a three-year rolling plan—of where the burns occur. When they get down to a specific plan, those outlined prescriptions are dealt with at a local level, but consultation also occurs and information is provided to the public that is impacted. The public are informed the burn is occurring, but Peter has indicated the complexity; you cannot just burn for one purpose at one time or not have an impact on other values. It is virtually impossible to do that, so what you do is maximise the benefits according to what the priority of the prescription is.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Okay. I guess my concern is that biodiversity seems to be increasingly losing out in the balance of that to bushfire management.

Mr J. Sharp: There is a considerable amount of work being done and that comes out of both Geoff's area and certainly Margaret's area of science and forest ecology that Geoff is responsible for, to make sure that we maintain those biodiversity values within that context. There is a lot of

work being done. As Peter has indicated, things such as mosaic burns as well as timely burning are all part of the considerations as to how you maximise those outcomes.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Is there an evaluation from your work around that? Is there something that is publicly available around your work that goes into the development of those plans? Is there a published evaluation?

Dr M. Byrne: Not as such, but where we know that particular species are impacted by burns in different ways, particularly, say, orchids, because if you burn orchids at the wrong time of the year, you destroy their underground tuber and you do not get any regeneration. So, frequently under the burn plans, say that particular species had particular requirements, then, as we said, they will burn different cells or they will delay a burn and not do it in spring and do it in autumn instead so it is outside its flowering time so that you do not have that negative impact, where we are aware there is potentially likely to be an impact on a particular species in a particular burn area.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: So that informs the plan in an ongoing way. Is there anything published?

Mr J. Sharp: I am reticent to say but on our website we do make available our strategy in relation to fire and we outline our approach and how we go about making those sorts of decisions. That is outlined both in video form, I think, as well as in written form, so we have tried to inform the community about those issues, how it is done and why it is done and what outcomes we are trying to get, so that is publicly available.

Hon ALANNA CLOHESY: Finally, the fire management program budget—how is that this financial year compared to last financial year and the previous year?

Mr P. Dans: We have maintained our numbers, our staff numbers involved in fire management, through the budget challenges of the last couple of years. We continue to have about 100 dedicated fire management officers statewide and 320-odd frontline firefighters around the state who man the trucks and the hoses. The budget has held firm. As you are probably aware, we are the recipient of royalties for regions funding for an enhanced prescribed burning program in the south west of the state, which contributed to that year-to-date achievement that I spoke of earlier on, so the budget is in a solid position.

Mr J. Sharp: Coming back to the point I raised earlier about setting priorities, where we have had budget constraints and restrictions, we have kept a priority of keeping those people who are available to be on the ground and meet that responsibility a head of priority, so that has been part of the strategy we have followed through in our employment strategy.

The CHAIR: Note (J) on page 93 of your annual report identifies—I think it refers back to page 82—about a \$1 million increase in your revenue from beach shack lease revenue. On page 82 it refers to forest and beach shack leases and then note (J) says an increase of \$1 million is mainly due to an increase in beach shack lease revenue. Can you give us a bit of an understanding of where does that extra million dollars come from? It seems like a big jump.

[3.30 pm]

Mr J. Sharp: I will ask Mr Sharp to give the detail of it, but it does relate to the fact that there was a decision-making process that took some time to arrive at, where they were offered licences as opposed to formal leases to allow continuing occupation while planning processes were undertaken. So there was actually a backlog. There was some delay in time in which people had paid. Some of that was a catch-up for not having paid in previous years because of some uncertainty.

Mr P. Sharp: There were quite a number of shack owners who had avoided paying licence fees over a particular number of years and, although we were invoicing them, they were not paying. We came to a position where we said, “If you have a debt which exceeds \$5 000, we will forcibly acquire your shack”, and the money came flooding in.

The CHAIR: Would you need to forcibly acquire it or would you just be able to cancel their lease?

Mr P. Sharp: Cancel the licence really.

The CHAIR: Acquire suggests that you would have made a payment to them, whereas I would have thought that if they are in breach of their lease, they are in breach of their lease.

Mr P. Sharp: It was poor terminology, Mr Chairman. Essentially, we were saying, “You need to pay your outstanding dues to ensure you have got some security into the future”, because we were issuing new licences, and they paid those outstanding moneys. We are still in a process of sending out invoices and we have also increased the amount of licence charges, so it is approximately \$1 250 a year for a shack owner to have a licence at Wedge or Grey.

The CHAIR: What was it previously?

Mr P. Sharp: Several years ago, it was running around the \$800 mark.

The CHAIR: In terms of on an ongoing basis, how much of that is one-off back payments and how much of it is —

Mr J. Sharp: How much of it is catch-up as opposed to ongoing?

The CHAIR: Yes. How much of it is a one-off payment as catch-up and how much of it is ongoing revenue?

Mr P. Sharp: Probably 50 per cent of that is a catch-up, because we have got about 400 licence holders there. So an annual fee of \$1 250 —

The CHAIR: Was that previously listed in your outstanding liabilities? Was that amount previously listed in your debts?

Mr P. Sharp: No, I do not think so.

The CHAIR: So even though they were in default, you were not listing them.

Mr J. Sharp: Dr Byrne should be able to answer that.

Dr J. Byrne: First, on an accrual basis for the financial statements, it would be shown as a debt, yes. We include debts not yet received as part of the assets and liabilities, but what we do not include is revenue until it is received.

The CHAIR: Yes, that is right. So it was showing in your outstanding liabilities. It is not a lease as such, is it? It is a licence.

Mr P. Sharp: It is a licence.

The CHAIR: Is that allowed for under the CALM act? What provision of the CALM act allows you to charge a licence for those shacks?

Mr P. Sharp: The licensing of the shacks is undertaken under the arrangement that we have with the Minister for Lands. Those reserves are set aside as reserves for recreation and holiday shacks. We administer the shacks on behalf of the Minister for Lands technically and we have the power to issue a licence with a fee attached to it as opposed to a lease in those areas.

The CHAIR: Do they comply with the state treatment of sewage and disposal of effluent regulations?

Mr P. Sharp: I think the short answer is no.

The CHAIR: Whose liability is that—yours or theirs—that they are not compliant?

Mr P. Sharp: We are working through a process because there was a committee of inquiry, as you know, in terms of the shacks and the government has given an undertaking to commence a process to look at a level of shack retention that will comply with all health building code requirements. So we are going through a process currently with the shack associations to identify what level of

retention may be accommodated, whilst meeting those statutory obligations. The shacks originally were illegal structures that were put in place without authorisation and it has been a longstanding issue for governments of both political persuasions.

The CHAIR: I understand the history of it. But now you are licensing them, who takes the obligation in terms of meeting government regulations? Whose obligation is it? Is it the licensee of the shack or is it your agency as the licensor of those people to ensure that they are compliant?

Mr P. Sharp: We carry a liability; there is no doubt about that. We are the state agency with responsibility for the lands and, as the state owns the land, the state will carry a liability, but also the shack owners will carry a liability. The details and the extent of the liability have not been identified at this point in time, but there is no doubt about it that there is a liability that extends to the state in regard to those shacks.

The CHAIR: Noting the time, I might bring it to a conclusion. I was going to ask you if you wanted to endorse your minister for Deputy Premier, because it seems to be the thing of CEOs today, but we have run out of time so you are saved!

The committee will email the transcript of evidence, which includes the questions you have taken on notice highlighted on the transcript, to you in the next couple of days. The corrected transcript will be requested to be returned within five working days of receipt. The answers to questions taken on notice will be requested by 11 January 2016. Any additional questions the committee has for you will be forwarded via the minister next week and will also be requested by 11 January. That is slightly different from what we normally do. We are asking you to get the corrections to the transcript in a bit quicker, but we have deferred because of the new year break. But if your minister is going away, you still might want to get them to him depending on when he is going to be away, so that gives you a bit of flexibility. Should you 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 cannot be met. In the event that you are unable to meet the due date, the committee expects that as many answers as possible are provided by the due date. If members have any unasked questions, I ask them to email them to the committee staff by midday on Monday, 14 December. On behalf of the committee, thank you for your attendance.

Hearing concluded at 3.37 pm
