

**ECONOMICS AND INDUSTRY
STANDING COMMITTEE**

**INQUIRY INTO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND
CONSERVATION'S MANAGEMENT OF FORMER PASTORAL LEASES**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE TAKEN
AT PERTH
FRIDAY, 7 MAY 2010**

Members

**Dr M.D. Nahan (Chairman)
Mr W.J. Johnston (Deputy Chairman)
Mr M.P. Murray
Mrs L.M. Harvey
Mr J.E. McGrath**

Hearing commenced at 9.54 am

McNAMARA, MR KEIRAN JAMES

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

GILLEN, MR KELLY JOHN

**Regional Manager Mid West, Department of Environment and Conservation,
examined:**

WYRE, MR GORDON JOHN

**Director of Nature Conservation, Department of Environment and Conservation,
examined:**

The CHAIRMAN: Thanks for coming back. I will read an opening statement. On behalf of the Economics and Industry Standing Committee, I would like to thank you for your interest and for your appearance before us today. The purpose of this hearing is to assist the committee in gathering evidence for its inquiry into the Department of Environment and Conservation's management of former pastoral leases. You have been provided with a copy of the committee's specific terms of reference. The Economics and Industry Standing Committee is a committee of the Legislative Assembly of the Parliament of Western Australia. This hearing is a formal procedure of the Parliament and therefore commands the same respect given to proceedings in the house itself. Even though the committee is not asking witnesses to provide evidence on oath or affirmation, it is important that you understand that any deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as a contempt of Parliament. This is a public hearing and Hansard is here making a transcript of the proceedings for the public record. If you refer to any documents during your evidence, it would assist Hansard if you would provide the full title for the record.

Before proceeding to questions, I have to ask you a few questions myself. Have you completed the "Details of Witness" form?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you understand the notes at the bottom of that form about giving evidence to a parliamentary inquiry?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Did you receive and read the information for witnesses briefing sheet provided with the "Details of Witness" form today?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you have any questions in relation to being a witness?

The Witnesses: No.

The CHAIRMAN: Thanks for your submission to this inquiry. It is quite extensive. Together with the information you provide today, your submission will form part of the evidence to this inquiry and may be made public. Are there any amendments that you would like to make to your submissions?

Mr McNamara: Yes, chairman. I have this morning just as we arrived provided a letter to the secretariat, which is addressed to you. Attachment 13 to our submission is a detailed table listing all the former pastoral leases managed by DEC and providing various statistical and management information in relation to each of those properties. We have made some additions to that table in respect of the feral animals that are present on three Kimberley former pastoral leases, and I have provided that revised attachment 13 to the secretariat this morning.

The CHAIRMAN: We have a series of questions to ask you today, but before we do that, do you wish to provide the committee with any additional information beyond appendix 13 or make an opening statement on the hearing?

Mr McNamara: Mr Chairman, I will make only a very, very brief opening statement. We welcome the inquiry, and thank you for the opportunity to appear before you. We have provided an extensive written submission. We have already had the opportunity for a preliminary briefing to the committee, which was very helpful. I am aware that the committee has had the opportunity to visit pastoral areas and has met during those visits with the caretaker on Muggon, which is one of the properties that we manage, and that you have also been to Lorna Glen, where our regional manager, Ian Kealley, was able to assist you with advice on what we —

The CHAIRMAN: And Earraheedy.

Mr McNamara: And Earraheedy, yes. Ian Kealley would have been here for this hearing other than for the fact that he has had a longstanding commitment to some meetings and discussions in the Gibson Desert that he is at at the moment. Both in our written submission and in the preliminary briefing that we were able to provide, I think we gave extensive background on the objectives of the pastoral lease acquisition program and the objective of building a comprehensive, adequate, representative conservation reserve system in Western Australia and restoring the ecological function and flora and fauna of those areas, and building recreation and tourism opportunities as well. That is being carried out in accordance with government policies and government decisions going back to round about the mid-1990s, as detailed in our submission. Given that we have had the opportunity to provide such extensive information before, I do not wish to go over that any more now, but, obviously, to maximise the time that you have for the questions that I am sure you have of us.

The CHAIRMAN: First, I would like to thank the department for its input for our activities in visiting the various stations and Ian Kealley's efforts. He spent most of the day with us, and he did inform us that he was not going to be here today, and understandably so. We have already had a briefing about the basic policy structures and the contribution of DEC, so I may as well get down to some detailed issues. From our visits with the pastoralists, I do not think many people disagree with the overall thrust of the policy. The issue is how it is carried out on the ground and how it is implemented. It appears to us that their views vary from place to place. You have a couple of policies that on paper look very good—good neighbour policy, how you work with each other. One of the issues is that you have purchased these properties with a conservation focus; that is why you purchased them. The adjacent properties have a commercial, pastoralist focus. When you have different objectives, you might have a different view if problems arise. We ask people particularly about pests. What is the adjacent leaseholder—that is, DEC—doing with pests? When we talk with Ian, he tells us one thing; when we talk to pastoralists, they do not know. In terms of pest management on new leases, I would like an example of hard data, if you can provide it. If you are dogging or aerial baiting or you are putting effort into pest management of your pastoral leases, what did you actually do on some of them, because the adjacent pastoral lease holders are telling us that they think nothing is happening; okay? I am not going to mention names, but that is the general impression. They either do not know, or when you ask, "Do you think they are doing something?" the answer is, "Very little." I wonder whether you could provide us with some data on that. For

instance, Ian told us that when DEC purchased Earraheedy, they removed many thousands of roos and other —

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Twenty thousand.

The CHAIRMAN: Yes, 20 000 roos from the area. That was not the impression we got in talking with the adjacent pastoral lease holders. Their impression was generally, “Don’t know if anything happened” or, “Very little.” Could you comment on that?

Mr McNamara: That is a fairly general opening question. Clearly, engagement with pastoral neighbours and the pastoral community in the broad sense is something that we seek to do and we would like to do more of, but it is essentially, to a large degree, a question of being able to be present, being able to talk to neighbours, being able to go to the structures, be they zone control authorities, or becoming declared species groups, I think, under the agricultural structures, where discussions are held about things like ferals and about land management more broadly. I will begin by saying that in terms of policy intent and practical intent, I think our objectives in terms of pests, weeds and so on are aligned very much in most respects with those of neighbouring pastoralists, and the question that arises, and I am sure will arise, as a theme here is the capacity to deliver on what the good intent is. But the answer to the question really varies according to the circumstance and to the types of animals one is talking about. Attachment 13 to our submission does detail quite extensively the figures, for example, for the removal of feral goats from properties. Certainly, some of the Mid West properties have had multiple thousands of goats removed, and the figure is over 10 500 for Muggon, for example. There are other figures in the thousands for various properties in respect of feral goats.

In terms of wild dogs, we have listed the stations where baiting has been carried out. We really do not need to bait former pastoral leases for conservation purposes in respect of wild dogs, but we do it essentially for good neighbour purposes in respect of neighbours who are carrying, in particular, small stock units, mainly sheep. Some of the cattle pastoralists are less inclined, though variably, to baiting programs than the sheep pastoralists for whom it is an absolute necessity. But you can see once again in attachment 13 that a significant number of the stations list, under wild dogs, participation in baiting programs since the properties have been acquired. Animals like donkeys, camels, horses and feral cattle are also controlled where that is necessary. In terms of kangaroos, of course kangaroos are native fauna and animals we seek to conserve, but our wish is to conserve them at what would much more closely resemble natural levels than the artificially high levels that have been sustained by pastoral use of the rangelands over the past 100-plus years. That is where the question of closure of artificial water supplies comes into play, and we also carry out improved fencing with our neighbours, once again on a good neighbour basis, and I think once again attachment 13 to our submission does give details of fencing that we have conducted jointly with neighbours, and it gives that in number of kilometres by various stations. The weed situation is a little different in that the focus there is really more on quite localised needs rather than broad landscape needs. So that is, if you like, a broad answer to the question that you have put.

The CHAIRMAN: One of the areas of, let us say, difference of objectives perhaps is in the dogging area. My impression is that DEC knows that dogging is important where there are sheep. First, dogging is not as important for conservation as it is for pastoralists. That is what you said and that is the feedback we are getting. Second, it is recognised as vital where you have sheep but maybe not cattle. We did get some feedback from some pastoralists that dogs do attack cattle—the calves—even if they are healthy, so that is an issue. But particularly from a good neighbour policy, even if it is not as important to you, as good neighbours, if you have a difference of objectives, you try to address the issues and priorities of your neighbour. They also said that in dogging you have to do not just aerial baiting, but you have to do rack baiting and shooting. Do you carry out all three in your dog eradication programs?

[10.10 am]

Mr McNamara: I might ask my colleagues to add to the answer. Most of our activities have probably been related to baiting rather than shooting. We do support the programs that are put together by declared species groups and zone control authorities across multiple pastoral leases, as dealing with the dogs on only one property is pretty much a waste of time. I clearly recall in one area north of Meekatharra, where some of the stations were acquired, when I visited there in about 2003 great concern was expressed that our acquisition of a couple of those properties would lead to the cessation of dog control. However, on further discussion with the pastoralists, I ascertained that of the 19 or so properties in the dogging group about half of them had already stopped anyway because they were into cattle rather than sheep. Opinion does vary. I accept that wild dogs do cause problems for cattle—less so than for sheep, but they still cause problems. I accept that. There is a variety of opinion about the efficacy of baiting versus shooting versus trapping. My expectation would be that you would need an appropriate mix of all three, but you will get people who will vehemently argue that only on-ground stuff works and others who will vehemently argue that aerial baiting is the most efficient broad-scale means of control. Even scientists will argue about that. The position that we take though is that we will participate in broader landscape multi-property dog control on a good neighbour basis. That is the fundamental position we take.

Mr Gillen: I can comment particularly on the Mid West, if you like, Mr Chairman. We have two major zone control authorities—the Meekatharra group and the Carnarvon group, and we participate in those groups at all their meetings. Those meetings basically look at the planned program for each year. At those meetings, the budget requirements and whatever are discussed and determined. We support those programs. Our staff are involved, particularly in the Meekatharra group. We attend all baiting sessions where the baits are actually cut up and dried on the racks, and we also participate in the distribution of those baits, following the treatment of the baits. We have had less opportunity to do that in the Carnarvon area in the past couple of years, but intend to pick that up again in the near future. Further to Keiran's comments about the efficacy of baiting versus other treatments, we certainly believe that it needs to be a multiple approach, particularly where there are troubles with dogs, we need to follow the leads, rather than doing broad buffers. The work needs to be strategic and the best approach is a combination of active dogging as well as strategic ground and aerial baiting.

The CHAIRMAN: Is there a disagreement between you and the pastoralists on the priority; that is, aerial baiting versus rack and shooting?

Mr Gillen: Not that I am aware, Mr Chairman. We have basically gone with the group's approach to that. We have certainly promoted the concept of being more strategic with the baiting—aerial baiting in particular—rather than broad-scale baiting, but we have worked with the groups to do that.

The CHAIRMAN: To clarify this, you participate in all this; one is that they prepare the racks?

Mr Gillen: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: We did not investigate that. We thought we would skip that part of the investigation. Do DEC people participate in all that in relation to adjacent pastoral leases?

Mr Gillen: Yes. We have baited racks on Thundelarra as well, and the local group comes into those racks and participates there.

Mr McNamara: If I could just say that I am not certain we would participate on each and every occasion. That is a capacity issue. These are extensive lands, and I would not sit here and say that we have necessarily participated in every single operation for the past five years, but we certainly do to the extent that we can. We pay a lot of attention to it, as Mr Gillen has said.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: On this topic, I want to follow up two issues that have been raised with us. The first is that because you are not paying rates on the areas you are managing, the amount that is levied for the ZCAs—or whatever their proper title is—you are not making a contribution to those

groups and therefore they have fewer resources. The second thing I would like you to comment on is that DEC comes to the ZCAs, the RBGs, and whatever the other names are, but that the DEC participants do not make a contribution to the discussions and activities of the group. Whilst they are attending, they are not making a contribution. Can I get some comments on those two issues?

Mr Gillen: In respect to the contribution at the meeting, I cannot see how that comment has been made. The people attend that meeting to contribute and to discuss the planning for the group and the budgetary requirements, so we are definitely involved in those discussions. What was your other question?

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: The fact that you do not pay rates to the organisation.

Mr Gillen: Are you talking about local government rates?

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: As I understand it, you get your council rates and there is another rate on top of that for pest control.

Mr Gillen: We do not pay that levy, but we do contribute our staff time and we do support the efforts of the ZCAs through other means. For instance, in the Carnarvon group, we provide fuel for the dogger, particularly when he is operating across lands that we manage. In the Carnarvon ZCA we have provided fuel and accommodation, which is readily available at our Waldburg homestead. We have made that available over the past 10 years to the dogger who has operated through that area. We have supported them in other ways.

The CHAIRMAN: But you did not help pay the doggers' wages?

Mr Gillen: No.

Mr McNamara: But there have been examples where we have engaged doggers ourselves in the north eastern Wheatbelt when there was a particular problem beyond Southern Cross and on the border of the unallocated crown land in the north eastern Wheatbelt. We have directly engaged doggers ourselves there. I know that we make a cash contribution, for example, to declared species groups in the Ravensthorpe–Esperance part of the state, and perhaps to others. We make a combination of contributions, both cash and in kind, according to the circumstances and capacity.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: With respect to that, when your employees or your caretakers attend those zone meetings, do they send through some summary or some proof of their attendance at the meetings, because there is a bit of dispute as to the DEC employees and DEC property caretakers attending those meetings? We are hearing from other people that they do not attend them and they do not contribute.

Mr Gillen: We have never had any of our caretakers or tenants attend those meetings. They are attended by our staff who are across the issues and are dealing with budgets and planning.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Do they provide some kind of report back to the department as to what occurs at those meetings? Is there any paper trail, or something like that, we could view to verify that, because we are getting conflicting reports about attendance at those meetings and contribution to them?

Mr Gillen: The minutes of the ZCA meeting would record our attendance and contribution.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: One other thing on the issue of ZCAs: the Kalgoorlie ZCA spent \$472 000, which is 91 per cent of its budget for 2009–10, on dog control, and half of that comes from the pastoralists. We have a figure of \$110 000 that DEC spends in the Goldfields and Mid West regions for 2.5 million hectares. In your view, is that an adequate contribution towards feral pest control? We hear all the time about resourcing and issues to do with resourcing. What figure do you need? Do you think that is adequate or do you think you need more? What should that figure be?

Mr McNamara: If I can make a couple of comments in respect of that. Firstly, while dollars per hectare may be a useful guide, it can be somewhat misleading. The two and a half million hectares

that you quote in the Goldfields region would include some areas that are very remote from pastoral activity and there might not be a need to control dogs. It is really in the areas that provide dogs into sheep areas and to a lesser extent in cattle areas that one needs to concentrate on. The straight area comparison is not necessarily the best measure. Secondly, the Department of Agriculture and Food is actually the government agency with the lead responsibility for dog control. Going back to the earlier questions about methodology and so on, we do take guidance from the views of the Department of Agriculture and Food and the state's wild dog management strategy. Indeed, Minister Redman announced only a few weeks ago some significant extra funding from the royalties for regions program for wild dog control, including fencing but also on-ground control. Therefore, that is recognised by the government, primarily through the agency that is primarily responsible for biosecurity and pest management. On the other question about resources, we have described in our submission at page 7 the budget that was allocated to the department under the Gascoyne–Murchison strategy for the ongoing management of the acquired lands. We have also described the fact that, through reallocation of our own pre-existing budget and ongoing budgets, we have expended more than that allocation on the management of these lands. One frequently gets asked in front of parliamentary committees about resources and whether we would like more. I always sit here and say we have a large job; it is a large state. We have an extensive job to do. Of course, it would be nice to have more resources to do the things that we do and would like to do, but it is the role of government to weigh that up across a whole range of portfolios and needs that the community has.

[10.20 am]

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I just want to go back to your comments about the government contribution to pest control. Effectively what you are saying is that DEC's job is to manage the DEC lands, and although DEC makes a limited contribution to the pest control process, pest control is the responsibility of the Department of Agriculture and Food, and it is putting in a large amount of money. Therefore, the government as a whole is making a significant contribution. I do not want to put words in your mouth, but is that effectively what you are saying?

Mr McNamara: In large part, yes. The government is making a larger contribution than what you see just through DEC. If one goes back quite a number of years—I have been in Western Australia for 25 years—there was an Agriculture Protection Board. That was quite a large organisation. It had a significant research capacity and also a significant on-ground capacity across the state doing on-ground pest and weed control. There has been—it is enshrined, I think, in the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007—a policy and a practical transition over an extensive period of time to a situation where the expectation is placed on landowners and land managers to meet responsibilities in terms of feral animal and weed control, or pest animal and weed control. So we have that responsibility as a land manager, and others who hold and own land also have that responsibility. Notwithstanding that, the Department of Agriculture and Food is still a provider of putting policy and resources into those controls. For example, as I understand it—this is a matter for the Department of Agriculture and Food, not DEC—essentially the Department of Agriculture and Food either matches, or seeks to match, the levy that is put on pastoralists for their dog programs. A certain amount is raised through the levy, and the government—through another avenue; not through my department—matches that.

The CHAIRMAN: But the problem is that that existed before you purchased the lease, and the people you purchased the lease from were making their own contribution. I think it is a matching arrangement, so if the pastoralists are paying another dollar in addition to what they paid yesterday, the department matches that per dollar. The withdrawal of a pastoral lease by your purchase of that pastoral lease means that there is less money not only from the Department of Agriculture but also from the former pastoralist, and you are not matching that. What one arm of government does is one thing, but if you, as the manager of that property, do not make contributions, you are withdrawing not only from the government pool but also from the pool of the pastoral landowners.

Mr McNamara: I am not aware of the straight dollar-for-dollar comparison that sits behind —

The CHAIRMAN: I understand it is a matching.

Mr McNamara: Sorry. I am not aware of the average, if you like, of what a pastoralist pays in terms of that type of levy. But what we have said is that we do make contributions, which range from cash, to staff time, to in kind, to those dogging programs within the resources that we do have.

The CHAIRMAN: But giving cash, and in kind, such as giving petrol to a dogger, is one thing. Sitting down and making a commitment for an ongoing and costly planning exercise as a current landowner is different. There is a difference between giving a guy some petrol, and saying we will match the contribution that was made to the eradication of pests by the people we purchased this lease from. It is a planning issue.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: In other words, you will not continue to pay the rates that were previously paid when the pastoral lease was held by a private person, because once it is taken over by DEC, there is no requirement, we are told, for you to pay those rates that were previously paid by the private pastoral leaseholder. That means there is some money coming out of the system that is normally matched, and that is where there is a bit of a shortfall.

Mr McNamara: I understand, obviously, the point that is being made. I do not know what the actual financial effect of that has been and the degree to which the other inputs that we make either fall short of offsetting that, or offset it, or perhaps even exceed offsetting it. There is no doubt that with this shift over quite a number of years from the previous practices of the Agriculture Protection Board to the current arrangements that there has been, in the broad sense, a transfer of onus and expectation towards our agency to fund feral animal control on not only the conservation reserves we manage but also these former pastoral leases, and, in particular, unallocated crown land where we have feral animal and weed control responsibilities as well.

The CHAIRMAN: Can you quantify in monetary terms your contribution to the joint management of pests? Also, can you provide us with what you would be contributing if you did have a policy of matching the contribution that the previous owners of your properties had made to these various pest control collective decision-making bodies?

Mr McNamara: We can certainly answer the first question in terms of what we can draw out of our chart of accounts as to what we spend on this. That is something we can do and we will do, obviously. I am quite happy to try and answer the second question. I do not know off the top of my head whether we have that data or whether we would need to get it from the Department of Agriculture and Food.

The CHAIRMAN: We can probably get it from another source, but I would like you to try, because there is huge diversity out there from one area to the next. Therefore, you might be best placed to try to reflect that diversity.

Mr McNamara: But then it does need to be remembered in that context that the government, as I said, is investing directly in wild dog control, because wild dogs are a particular issue, through that other portfolio.

The CHAIRMAN: Just to clarify my perspective on this, the Department of Agriculture has a task of assisting landowners of various types of tenure to eradicate pests, including dogs, through matching funds for pastoral leaseholders. If through various collective agencies you purchase what was formerly a pastoral lease and become the landowner, in my view you would have an obligation, in addition to what the government provides through the Department of Agriculture, to contribute to that collective decision making or collective eradication process.

Mr McNamara: I mean, that is a matter for government policy determination. The government decided to purchase the leases. We are the agent through which it was done.

The CHAIRMAN: I know. I fully understand that.

Mr Wyre: If I can just add, there is another important aspect that might have slipped by here. That is that over the years in terms of wild dog control, and certainly under the state wild dog management strategy, contributions to wild dog management are related in part to the benefit that the lessee or the landholder would receive from those control measures. So they have the idea there of a buffer, where if you are a pastoral lessee who is not running a small stock unit—sheep or something like that—but your neighbours are, then you would contribute to a buffer form of baiting around your property so that dogs on your property would not have a negative impact on your neighbour. So it is not a straight 100 per cent of the hectares that you have got would be a measure of your contribution. It is looking at a buffer—if you like a good neighbour policy—as to how you would contribute to your neighbour being able to make a return on their investment in the pastoral lease. That is a complicating factor there. As has already been mentioned, DEC as the manager of these former pastoral leases for conservation really is not achieving any significant nature conservation benefit from wild dog control.

[10.30 am]

Mr McNamara: Can I make a further remark about wild dogs, please? The wild dog problem is a landscape-wide problem. It is one that has grown significantly over the past 10 or 15 years. There was not a wild dog problem in the north eastern Wheatbelt 15 years ago. There was not a wild dog problem on pastoral leases as far west as Wooleen, Muggon, Mt Narryer and so on 10 or 15 years ago. When I talk to pastoralists, for example, at Hamelin Station at Shark Bay and the former lessee of Muggon, Bill Mitchell, and ask them about dogs, they had not seen them, sometimes in their lifetime or a fair part thereof, until the past five or 10 years. Certainly, when I spoke to the pastoralist on Hamelin Station a year or so ago, he had never seen dogs there until the past couple of years. This is a problem that is moving westwards and south westwards across the landscape. Many of the former pastoral leases that we now manage did not have any dog problem whatsoever when we purchased them. We have a combination of things going on here. We have fewer doggers and a lot more pastoralists in cattle rather than sheep; therefore, while still requiring some dog control they vary in their attitude to that and a lot do not bother. We have got a reduction in the human population across the rangelands and where pastoral leases used to have on them not only families but also significant workforces, everybody who saw a dog would shoot it. I remember being out with my wildlife officer who was based in Carnarvon in the mid-1980s and he would, while he was on wildlife patrols, if he saw a wild dog shoot it as a favour to pastoralists. There are fewer and fewer people doing that general control. The problem is one that is across the landscape and it has multiple causes. It is not caused by the acquisition of these leases for conservation. We want to play our role in helping to deal with it on a good neighbour basis.

The CHAIRMAN: That is the feedback we are getting. The problem is growing west. It also highlights the importance of the people who remain in resources in the pastoral area contributing to the collective eradication process.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I will take a step back. How does a person become a dogger? Is there any registration process required or any criteria? Does one just need to have a rifle and a ute? From what we saw, it appeared to be like that—maybe not the ute. The other side of this is that for a kangaroo shooter the cost of a licence is, we were told, \$1 500. For some of those people it is very expensive.

My other question is that when a person purchases a property and that person's watering points have been taken away, filled in or whatever, there are some concerns about not being able to shoot kangaroos within a buffer along the boundary line. It does not apply so much to dogs, but to kangaroos, camels and those sorts of pests that want to push through a fence to go to the waterhole and then go back onto the adjoining property. Because the buffer is not shot out, the pastoral owner still has that problem. There tends to be a degree of animosity. When we mentioned the good neighbour policy it was met with laughter. They asked, "What good neighbour policy?" I believe

that some of that is about communication, not necessarily saying that it is not happening, but not knowing that it is happening. We had a lot of reports about crossing that boundary line.

My question is: how a person can become a dogger?

Mr Gillen: In the past couple of years when there has been a shortage of doggers around the north eastern Goldfields and elsewhere, some courses were established through DAFWA to train people. I understand that the latest cohort of doggers who have been involved in that program over the past couple of years have completed that program. It means that the people who actually go out on the ground do not necessarily have a lot of on-ground experience when they go out, but they would have been trained in how to set and use the traps, how to use the strychnine associated with those traps and the sort of program that they need to put in on the ground.

The CHAIRMAN: Just to supplement that—there are some questions that need to be answered—we heard that problem-wise the pastoralists were not able to go onto DEC land because they were not registered to shoot—they were registered to shoot on their land but they could not do that on DEC land, because DEC imposed a different regulatory structure that took into account not only costs, but also they had to undertake a week's course in pest removal. They were not able to do that.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: To clarify this; this is the question on the agriculture department providing one licence for farmers to dog on their property, whereas you require people to be a registered pest controller, which is a much higher standard. Therefore, the pastoralists cannot dog on your land.

Mr Gillen: Yes. That training is the training that is provided by the agriculture department that registers people.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: That is not right. You are requiring them to be a registered pest controller, which is a completely separate procedure to the procedure used by the agriculture department.

Mr Gillen: That is done because of the requirements attached to the handling of 1080 in this state through health. We are complying with those requirements.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Why is it that the agriculture department lets them do it on their land with the licensing that it provides, but you have a different regulatory framework?

Mr McNamara: If this question relates particularly to the use of 1080, it is lethal and there are very strict controls that we have to meet in handling 1080—locking it inside double safes and so on—and in the transport of it. We are accountable for that and accountable to the health department. People's pet dogs are killed from time to time by our baiting programs and we have to investigate into, account for and report to the health department on those instances. Our licence to use 1080 is not one that can be taken lightly. In many parts of the world the use of 1080 is not available. It is essential for feral animal control in this state. We need to meet the highest standards in our handling of it. Those standards are set under health legislation. We require that our staff and rangers comply with those requirements. It is a matter for the Department of Agriculture and Food and others to answer for what requirements they impose in the same respect on other people.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: The issue that was raised with us was that pastoralists—indeed, one dogger who we interviewed said that if he was chasing a dog and he got to the boundary he would stop. He said that doggers are not allowed on DEC land. I think that what we are asking is: under your good neighbour policy, what sort of policy do you have when it comes to one of your neighbours coming onto your property and doing some culling or following a dog? There is a belief out there that penalties could be imposed on them for doing that. Can you tell us what your policy is on that?

Mr Gillen: The issue that was raised by Mr Johnston actually relates to the doggers having that particular requirement under the pest requirements, because we do allow neighbours to bait on the boundary. All they need to do is submit the normal paperwork that is required for approval for laying 1080, which is a risk assessment, who is doing it and when. I can show you where that is being done.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Does that relate to shooting within a five kilometre buffer of that boundary?

Mr Gillen: I am not aware of any particular requests to shoot within any of our properties by any neighbours.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you have penalties that apply if somebody who happens to be your neighbour comes onto your property and shoots feral animals?

Mr Gillen: No, but the first issue would be that they would certainly need to get our authorisation to be on the property to shoot, because we certainly try to maintain the highest standards in relation to the use of firearms on our properties, otherwise we have a significant issue to deal with. I suppose that goes to the heart of the question that Mr Murray asked about the cost of, perhaps, getting licences for kangaroo shooters and others. You need to have very high standards in relation to the capability and ability of a person to use firearms in the most humane and proper way.

[10.40 am]

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Can I just add some concerns to that? Some people would make very good shooters and doggers because they have lived in that sort of country all their lives. Without being disparaging to those people, their ability to read and write has not been that good. It frightens them away. They are terrified of having to sit an exam. Is there any room to have RPLs or prior learning? They have had a rifle under their arm since they were three years old yet when it comes to sitting an exam, they are frightened of the process. A couple of people that we spoke to would have loved to become shooters but if we say that all they have to do is get a licence, they are just terrified.

Mr McNamara: It might be useful for Mr Wyre to elaborate. We have a number of threads running here—kangaroo shooting, wild dog control and the like. We oversee the kangaroo industry in terms of the quotas that are set, the licensing of professional kangaroo shooters and the requirement to comply with the national code of practice for the humane shooting of kangaroos and then the move that has come in more recently towards testing of shooter competencies. I have spent not just 25 years in Western Australia but a number of years in Canberra beforehand dealing extensively with the politics and the practicalities of kangaroo management with significant threats from the US, Europe and elsewhere to markets for kangaroo products. Without those markets, there is no kangaroo industry and there will be no kangaroo control other than by cowboys. The commonwealth government has to authorise all exports. We have to go in and defend the state programs at that level, at the federal Administrative Appeals Tribunal and in the court of international opinion. The demand for a high degree of humaneness and testing for shooters has gradually grown over that period. One of the positive things that we do and support is enable the use of kangaroo meat for human consumption. Once again, that has imposed extra standards on the shooters so that what used to be a pet meat trade now has to meet the standards for human consumption. Mr Wyre chairs the state Kangaroo Advisory Committee and can elaborate briefly on the requirements of shooters.

Mr Wyre: Just on the shooter requirements, we have a couple of hundred licensed shooters in Western Australia. Several of those cannot read and write. It is a bit embarrassing for some of them to admit that. I am personally aware of a person coming in and doing the tests that are required verbally and someone else transcribing those answers for him and submitting that into the system. The person that I am aware of passed the course without any problems. He was told the details and was able to remember the details and those sorts of things. In that case, not being able to read or write was a problem and an issue but it was not a barrier to that person getting a licence. If anyone can admit to that situation, we are more than happy to set up the arrangements and help them out. You are aware, Mr Murray, that a person admitting that is a barrier in itself.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Going back a few steps, I think Mr Gillen said the pastoralists are able to do buffer baiting on DEC properties.

Mr Gillen: We certainly do that quite regularly on the longer boundaries.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: That is in direct conflict with what pastoralists say. Pastoralists across the state are saying to us unanimously that they are not even allowed to throw a dog bait over the fence on to DEC property and that obtaining approval from DEC to bait the buffer zone is virtually impossible. If you could provide some evidence of agreements with pastoralists who do the buffer zone baiting, that might assist this inquiry in getting to the bottom of that. Pastoralists have verbally told us that it is virtually impossible to buffer bait DEC properties.

Mr Gillen: I do not have the evidence in front of me but we can supply that. We have certainly provided that advice to the Department of Agriculture and Food when asked about that and advised of the process that people need to follow for us to be able to do that. It is a very simple process, the normal 1080 process of risk assessment.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Does this not go to the heart of the question I asked a moment ago? Mr McNamara, you outlined what are obviously very serious issues regarding the handling of 1080. You are only allowed to bait 1080 on your properties if you have a pest control licence but no pastoralist has that standard of qualification; they only have the certification provided by the ag department. That means they will never be able to throw the bait over the fence because they do not meet the requirement to be a licensed pest controller. Is that not therefore QED—they cannot do it?

Mr McNamara: We would need to check with our people and our records. I am far from certain that there is any requirement on our part that one be a licensed pest controller. I do not know the different registrations and legislation in that area intimately. We have talked about training courses and so on for doggers and accreditation in those areas. I am not sure how that does or does not equate to a category called a licensed pest controller. We will need to take that on notice and provide an answer.

The CHAIRMAN: Just to reiterate that we have heard repeatedly that pastoralists adjacent to you cannot pursue pests, either by baiting or shooting, on DEC property adjacent to their property. They say that the regulatory barrier inhibits them. Regulators allow them to shoot and bait on their property but the regulations on DEC property are much higher and prevent them from doing that.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: It is not a question of the obvious need to get approval for DEC to enter DEC lands to shoot, which I think everybody accepts but the question of the regulatory framework in which they pursue pests on your land.

Mr McNamara: I just draw attention again to attachment 13 to our submission. Under the column “wild dogs” it lists many stations as being baited.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: This is a separate issue. It is not the same question. I have no reason to doubt your submission but it is not the question that I was raising with you and I do not think it is the question raised by others either.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: The underlying thing that we are hearing is that while the pastoralists basically support the overall conservation reserve system policy that came in some years ago, they support the fact that there has been a lot of degradation of stations out there and they understand that you have a good neighbour policy, they believe that they can play a greater role in some sort of collaborative arrangement with DEC to help in the control of feral animals. They believe that they are restricted from doing that because they are told they cannot come on to DEC land. If they want to come on to DEC land, they have to get permission, and that might be fair enough, but they say that is sometimes a barrier against them winning this fight against the feral animals that might be on your property. You do not have the staff to maintain them at adequate numbers. They believe they can play some role but they believe they are being restricted from doing that because of certain policies within your department.

Mr McNamara: We will take that on notice and respond to the committee around that, with particular reference to wild dogs. There are cooperative arrangements around things such as goat mustering. In terms of kangaroo control, I would argue there would be little need to shoot across on

to DEC-managed lands. We provide very extensively for a commercial kangaroo industry to operate and that is available to provide reasonable control on pastoral leases.

The CHAIRMAN: We have not heard too many comments about roos; it is the other exotics.

Mr McNamara: We readily agree that wild dogs are a significant issue for the state, for our agriculture colleagues and for the livestock industry.

[10.50 am]

The CHAIRMAN: Do you want a go on this one?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: No.

The CHAIRMAN: Liza has to change tack.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Just rolling everything back a bit, in the beginning you were saying that DEC, or probably CALM as it was at the time, were the agency charged with this project, so government at the time decided it wanted to broaden our conservation base through the purchase of pastoral leases. DEC or CALM are the agency charged with the project. So you were given some funds to purchase properties. What I am interested in is when this was first established, what were the parameters, what was the oversight, what were your KPIs? Obviously, you had been told, “We want to purchase a conservation estate.” What was set up at the time? Was there a time frame or a maximum amount of land to be purchased? How much money in that allocation were you told to set aside for ongoing management of the properties? How do you know that your attempts at conservation are going to achieve their objectives? What is your benchmark for success?

Mr McNamara: That is a long question.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: It is a good one, is it not? It is a big question.

Mr McNamara: It is a long one. I will attempt to answer the various facets of that. The submission we have provided does include, both in the text and in various attachments, various documents that go back to the genesis of the Gascoyne–Murchison rangelands strategy that was adopted at cabinet level by the then government. I cannot search for the date, but it was around 1997. It had a gestation going back some period before that. It was formally adopted by the then government. Inside that document there is a statement. Once again, I have too much to leaf through to find it right at the moment, but there is a statement about a commitment to a comprehensive reserve system. Whether it used the words “comprehensive, adequate, representative”, which are the sort of scientific benchmark terms, I cannot quite recall. I think it had reference to one or other of the figures of around 10 or 15 per cent in the documents at that time. There was also a government policy statement, which I know is in our submission, about the rangelands, which was a broad policy across the rangelands in terms of everything from pastoral use to social outcomes to conservation outcomes. So those settings were formally in place as government policy drivers. There were also national drivers that helped, to some degree, to inform those matters. The specific decision that was made was to provide \$6.8 million to CALM at the time. That would have been in 1997 or 1998 or thereabouts. The specific decision was to provide \$6.8 million to CALM to purchase lands for addition to the reserve system and to assist in doing so with some structural adjustment in an industry that was facing challenges. It was well known, with the beginning of the Natural Heritage Trust I think in 1997 as the commonwealth funding initiative at the time that Telstra was sold or partly sold, that there was a national reserve system program within the Natural Heritage Trust. We had negotiated at government-to-government level essentially a two-for-one arrangement for land purchases for conservation, the two for one being based on the fact that the commonwealth acknowledged that they were there for purchase but not on an ongoing basis for management. So we had that \$6.8 million for acquisition, and coupled that with commonwealth money. The commonwealth rules changed a bit over time. In that Gascoyne–Murchison area, \$13.45 million has been spent on purchasing pastoral leases since 1998. A bit over half of that came from the federal government. The figure of \$6.8 million was reduced through some government efficiency

requirements in about 2001 to \$6.4 million. I think part of your question was whether there was any maximum level set on the lands that would be acquired. There was no such particular level set, but once again the general benchmark that conservation professionals regard as meeting the basic requirements of a comprehensive, adequate, representative conservation reserve system of around 15 per cent was in our minds. Certainly across the rangelands that figure is not reached. We have maps and so on in our submission that demonstrate that. The government also decided at the same time and in the same cabinet process to allocate money for management. That is also described in our submission. It was based on, I think, \$400 000 in the first year, \$750 000 in the second and \$1.05 million per annum ongoing as the extra allocation to CALM, now DEC, for the management of these acquired pastoral leases in the Gascoyne–Murchison area. That base figure has not changed other than by way of the standard cost escalation that the budget applies each year to salary and other costs.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Is that like a CPI-base increase?

Mr McNamara: It might be fair for me to describe it as CPI minus, but I will leave it at that. There is a cost escalation factor in the budget each year. It does not necessarily reflect the increase in real cost.

The CHAIRMAN: Is that \$1.05 million how much you actually spend in the ex-pastoral leases, or does that include money spent on regional headquarters?

Mr McNamara: No, the regional infrastructure all existed. The \$1.05 million is what we spend on managing those pastoral leases, but it does include some staff positions that are dedicated to the management of those areas. In addition, we have estimated in the submission given to you that we have spent an estimated \$7.25 million on top of that through reallocated existing funding, because we recognise the importance of trying to do as good a job as we can in these areas. In terms of objectives and KPIs, our high-level KPIs are captured in the *Budget Statements* around our parks and visitor services and nature conservation programs, but fundamentally our objectives are ones of ecological restoration, with particular emphasis on some key areas like Lorna Glen, where we are trying to go down the path of full reconstruction of the original landscape, if we can, through fire management, feral animal control, and the reintroduction of animals that were formally abundant across this country and are now either extinct or in very low numbers on the mainland. That is what we are seeking to reconstruct. I might leave it at that in terms of the long question.

The CHAIRMAN: Not long ago we visited that and you did have an extensive program. I might add that it was a very successful pastoral lease before you purchased it. It was not clapped out. That is the information we have been given. In fact, the adjacent pastoralists perceived it as a benchmark as to where they wanted to go. Clearly, you have had some research and some volunteers and scientists go there—we saw the buildings they stay in. How much actual monitoring do you do on your pastoral leases? That is, you have this objective to purchase them and take them back to nature. Do you put in a de-stocking, de-watering exercise? How do you know you are achieving your aims? Do you monitor, not just Lorna Glen, but all of them?

Mr McNamara: We certainly do not have an extensive monitoring program across all of them. In terms of achieving aims, I mean it is apparent to the naked eye, for example, on the former Peron station, which was purchased 18 or more years ago, that the recovery of the vegetation and the native fauna has been extraordinary. I might ask Mr Gillen to just elaborate a little on the monitoring that we do, but it is by way of selective examples rather than broadscale across every property. Just as we do not monitor every species on our threatened species list, we do not monitor every national park and nature reserve in this state. Those things are done on a targeted and on a sampling basis.

[11.00 am]

Mr Gillen: You would have seen in the submission some detailed information regarding monitoring that was conducted in the Goldfields, particularly at Lorna Glen. Similar works were being conducted on Muggon and Waldburg in the Mid West region. It is basically a program that looks across a geographical spread in trying to look for trends and responses. That work includes monitoring and native vegetation recovery as well on those properties. In addition, we have established a significant series of exclusion plots on a number of the properties to monitor for goat impacts, which gives us a very good measure of recovery across another geographical transit through the lower Murchison and Yalgoo areas.

Mr McNamara: We have talked a bit about goats. You will remember I think from the maps we showed you at the preliminary briefing that there is a cluster of properties in the south western extremity of the pastoral zone above Mullewa and Morawa in the Karara sort of area. Only last week or the week before, a partnership with the Geraldton Iron Ore Alliance was announced by the alliance and by the minister in Geraldton, where they are assisting with feral goat research, monitoring and control and those sorts of things. When I answered questions about resources I should have mentioned that there are volunteer programs, and there are camp ground host programs for people who want to contribute to these properties. There are also partnerships with mining companies and Aboriginal communities that provide assistance and resources over and above the straight dollar amount.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Can you explain your system of maintaining some of the homesteads? Some have caretakers; others do not. Some people are paid with Coles vouchers. I did not know we were still in that age, to be quite honest. Maybe it used to be tea, damper and sugar. I am not quite sure what it is now—perhaps a bit of fuel. At Muggon the caretaker people were paid a wage, yet a caretaker of another property was on the voucher system. How do you work that out? Is there any possibility of saving some of those heritage buildings by putting caretakers in there and excising, say, 1 000 acres around the homestead—which out of 150 000 hectares is a very small amount—so that they can pursue hobbies with, say, horses or whatever within that parameter at a low caretaker rate? Then you would be getting a return through them looking after the property rather than it being left alone.

Mr McNamara: Once again, our submission does detail which pastoral leases have homesteads on them. Not all do. We purchased 32 full pastoral leases and 28 part ones—I think that is the right way around. A lot of the part ones we purchased do not have a homestead. There are some on which the homesteads are so dilapidated that they no longer exist. We do have caretakers or tenants in the majority of the remaining homesteads, and that is detailed in attachment 13. I know from personal experience that they have ranged from people on contracts to provide various services through to kangaroo shooters, for example, who use those places as a base but provide us a basic management service as well. We are certainly keen to contribute our part to the pastoral and historic heritage of Western Australia. But the question of conserving homesteads and pastoral infrastructure in a heritage sense is one not just for us; it is a challenge across the entire pastoral regions.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: The destruction of some of those places has already happened. We are losing them before we start.

Mr McNamara: We agree absolutely that the best way to protect heritage values and homestead values is to have them occupied. There is absolutely no doubt about that. Once again, Mr Gillen might be better placed to answer the particulars. I am not sure about the question on vouchers. I will leave that to Mr Gillen.

Mr Gillen: We have a mix of arrangements across the properties that reflect management requirements on individual properties and our capacity to pay for a range of services. In some instances, people are occupying properties as tenants and we support them with fuel for generators and basic resources. They do nothing more than occupy the accommodation for us so that it is not vandalised or damaged by anyone. There are a number of situations like that. In some of the more

remote locations where the infrastructure itself is not very salubrious, they use the place as a base for their own operation. We have a couple of kangaroo shooters who work that way. They shoot on the properties we manage.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Do you agree that they assist with fire control and illegal campers?

Mr Gillen: No. We do not charge them with any of those sorts of responsibilities.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: No. I am not saying officially.

Mr Gillen: They provide us with a set of eyes, indeed, and we certainly make use of the information they provide us. But in all cases, those people do not carry those responsibilities. In other situations—Muggon is a good example, as are Woolgarong, Karara and Doolgunna—we have people who work as caretakers, so they occupy. They also fulfil for us a range of specified services. That varies across properties depending on the skill set and capabilities of the people we have on site. You will have met the current occupants at Muggon, who are very capable, skilled and experienced people. They have quite a full range of duties. Other people are more limited because of their capacity. In some places we have a caretaker rate that is based on the standard rate that is paid for caretaking in the rangelands, with some additional fee for the services that we provide them. In some instances we have people on properties who have retired and would prefer not to be paid. In those cases we have had arrangements whereby we provide them with their food and other things through a voucher system. They get it through whatever local store they can. Initially they started working as volunteers. We have plenty of volunteers who want to do that sort of work. We are supporting them for a reasonable lifestyle, if you like, by providing that sort of support. We have a mix of options based on the circumstances and our requirements across those properties.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: You do not see it as a cheap option of providing caretaker services? The other thing I found very strange about the caretaker and the connection between the city and the regional areas of your department is that when we went there, Geraldton was not aware that we were coming, but Perth did know. To me, there is something wrong with communication. Is it because they do not have access to some of those things?

Mr Gillen: No, that might have been more to do with how the arrangements were made for the visit, I would think, because our caretakers have very regular contact with their head office, which would be Geraldton.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Volunteers or people who just want that solitude, I suppose, can perform a caretaker role at a very low cost to the department. If you do not have anyone there, surely someone must go out on a regular basis to see how your property is going.

Mr Gillen: All the properties are visited on a regular basis, whether it be every few months or whatever. Some are visited very regularly because of the level of activity on them.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I think you have a couple of jewels in the crown, looking at the number that is in front of us here. That is fine because you have to have role models, I suppose. Is that to the detriment of some of the others?

[11.10 am]

Mr McNamara: In a broader context, we have an extensive camp ground host program in national parks and so on. This is an extension and variation on that. As Mr Gillen has said, the wishes of people who want to live that lifestyle vary from people who are retirees and really just want to have that solitude and enjoyment of living in that location, to others who want to do, and are capable of doing, a broader range of work. We, I think, deliberately need to have a horses for courses attitude to that. We welcome the fact that there are people, including retirees, as well as some of our own staff, who have gone out and lived on those places as part of their lifestyle. They provide us with a wonderful service, firstly, by being on site; secondly, by looking after the homesteads and the

immediate surrounds; and, thirdly, by doing a variety of things beyond that according to the circumstances.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Having lived in these areas and having visited them, I think there is very little option other than to adopt a range of very flexible arrangements with people. I think it is important to have people living on and managing the properties and observing what is going on. We need to do everything we can to try to get a handle on what is happening on those properties. That brings me to the next question. Obviously, when properties have been purchased, some decisions were made to have caretakers in certain areas because the structures there were in better condition than the structures in other areas. I am interested to know how strategic DEC has been with the placement of caretakers with respect to neighbouring pastoralists who might be able to assist with some of the management as perhaps a centralised property, if you like. The homestead at Lorna Glen, for instance, is very distant from the edges of Earraheedy, so that makes management of that big patch of land somewhat difficult. I am interested to know if that was a strategic allocation or if it was a matter of just, “This building is good, we’ll keep that; and that one’s shocking, we’ll get rid of it.”

Mr McNamara: A range of factors come into play. But the figure on page 24 of our submission is that on the properties we are talking about in this inquiry, there are 23 homesteads in one range of stations, and, of those, 18 are occupied. There is a reasonably high rate of occupancy in that sense. A number of considerations come into play. You visited Muggon, where I stayed as a guest when it was still a pastoral lease. It is a lovely homestead, well kept and so on. Without naming some others, there are some that are extraordinarily dilapidated and full of asbestos and, indeed, dangerous in terms of the electricals and other things. As a CEO of a government agency I have a range of responsibilities. One of those is occupational health and safety. I cannot put people in some of those buildings without regard for those responsibilities and the need for improvements. We have, indeed, spent a lot of money on electricals, plumbing and roofing and so on for those reasons. As to the strategic selection, if you like, of which ones are occupied and which ones are not, certainly, once you get in the Karara–Lochader area of the south west of the rangelands, strategic choices have been made about which homestead to occupy to serve multiple properties. Mr Gillen is better placed to elaborate on that.

Mr Gillen: When you look at the spread of the properties in the Gascoyne, we identified what we thought were strategic locations where we should have a presence. That happily coincided with homesteads that were adequate for purpose—in other words, they were suitable for habitation—that is, Doolgunna, which became a focus for Doolgunna–Mooloogool, the Karara homestead in the Karara block, if you like, and Muggon to the west, where we had Muggon as an ex-pastoral lease and a very large nature reserve next to it and some other coastal country that could be serviced in that area. From our point of view they represented three strategic locations that gave us access to major groupings of some of the properties. Some of the distances are still significant, but that is one of the things you have to deal with in that sort of landscape. You do have to travel a fair distance.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: In 2015 a lot of those pastoral leases will be rolling over into new lease arrangements. Mention was made that there is some conjecture as to whether there might be expansion of some of the DEC-owned properties—some land exchanges and that sort of thing with the 2015 rollover of leases. Do you have any information or plans for expansion at the time these leases roll over?

Mr McNamara: The Land Administration Act 1997 put arrangements in place for pastoral lease tenure and for the way that expirees in 2015 would be handled. Governments over many years have had proposals for land that is in pastoral lease to be acquired or excised out of pastoral lease for a range of purposes; they have included town site expansions, public works of one sort or another, and conservation reserve proposals. Some of the conservation reserve proposal ones go back to the 1970s. For example, Dirk Hartog Island, which was purchased by the government and announced

by the minister as a national park in, I think, October last year has long been identified as such a pastoral lease. The Minister for Lands in about 1991 wrote to many pastoral lessees around the state and outlined proposals as they stood at that time and listed pastoral leases that are required for public purposes, including conservation. That exercise was repeated some years later in, I think, 1997 by the Minister for Lands of the then coalition government. There has been bipartisan advice by Ministers for Lands about public interest in acquiring certain pastoral leases. This is not a matter of conjecture. Under the process there was, I think, a two-year negotiation period. I sat on a committee chaired by the chairman of the Pastoral Lands Board at the time, Alan Robson—now the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Western Australia and the head of the Department for Planning and Infrastructure—which had the Land Administration Act responsibilities. The three of us were a sort of steering committee for a process whereby all those individual pastoral lessees who were notified that their land was required for public purpose were negotiated with over that two-year period. The overwhelming majority across the state with whom there were such negotiations signed agreements that are binding.

When 2015 comes, there will be areas of pastoral leases across the state that have been identified that will not be included in the renewed pastoral leases and will be transferred to management for conservation and, indeed, in some cases, for some other purposes. The area of land that is due to be not renewed as pastoral lease at that time, and is due for management conservation purposes, is, if I remember rightly, in the order of two million hectares. I will ask Mr Wyre if he has a better memory than me on that one.

Mr Wyre: I think it is actually less than that. Negotiations started at about that level and various agreements were made. The final area signed up by the state cabinet through the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure at the time was a bit less than that. That is in law. All the lessees have been notified in writing of the situation with the expiry of their pastoral lease on 30 June 2015. There is no discussion at the moment about what will happen; the law has been applied and a decision has been taken.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Do you actually have those areas now mapped as part of your planning process for the future of the management of those additional nearly two million hectares?

Mr McNamara: Sorry; I think two million could be as high as double the real figure. I just do not have that in my head.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Whatever that figure is. The second thing is: obviously there have been significant changes to the viability of some of the leases in the last 10-year period, with drought and various other factors such as the drop in the wool price et cetera. Are any negotiations still in train or is there any opportunity for pastoralists to negotiate with DEC over the extension of some of those areas or the reduction of some of those areas or leases that have picked up, or is that signed, sealed and delivered and negotiations ended?

Mr McNamara: The situation across the vast majority of the pastoral leases where those arrangements have been entered into and signed and, if you like, legally locked in exists, and I am not aware of any push or request by any of those pastoral lessees—with one exception; I will come to in just a moment—to renegotiate or change the agreements that they have entered into with the administrators of the Land Administration Act. They are not in direct agreement with us; they are with the government via the lands portfolio. This is a matter of public knowledge in terms of some of the coverage it gets: clearly, on the Ningaloo coast, there is a group of pastoralists who have been urging the government to revisit the arrangements that were set back at that time. A number of pastoral lessees along the Ningaloo coast did sign—or all but one—such agreements; one did not. The Minister for Regional Development and Lands, the Minister for Environment, and the Minister for Planning also have an interest by virtue of the Gascoyne to Exmouth coastal regional strategy. Those portfolios are examining that matter currently. I had discussions with my director general colleagues of those agencies as recently as the last couple of weeks, and the government is

examining options along that Ningaloo coast, but for the rest the situation has not changed since the agreements were entered into.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Has your department settled on the areas that you would like to acquire for the purpose of having a complete conservation estate?

Mr McNamara: On a statewide basis or a pastoral basis, not absolutely.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I am talking more with respect to the pastoral region, so not the entire state.

Mr McNamara: We have settled via that 2015 process on the areas that should be added to the conservation estate by virtue of that process. We took a very strong stand in that we would not see it as a land grab back but we would, by and large, honour previous decisions of governments and previous EPA systems reports that had standing and we did not just make up a new wish list for the sake of that exercise. Beyond that, the reserve system in the state is still being built. It does not yet reach the benchmark standards of comprehensiveness, adequacy and representativeness. There is no absolute hard and fast figure of what that represents. We keep finding new things, we keep finding new species, we keep finding a threatened species in areas where we did not know they were and those sorts of things. We have a modest budget for land acquisition. There are still pastoralists, amongst others, who come to us regularly offering their properties for sale, but I think it is fair to say that we are not terribly active in the land acquisition process currently. Certainly, the pastoral acquisition program that we have undertaken has slowed right down. I think there might have been only one last year. That might be over and above Dirck Hartog, which has got a different history. But we are not adding substantial areas through pastoral acquisitions currently.

The CHAIRMAN: Are you planning to change the tenure of the ex-pastoral leases that have currently got pastoral lease to unallocated crown land? Are you planning to take that into a higher level conservation?

Mr McNamara: Yes, and our submission in its conclusion goes to that point. These lands were purchased for addition to the conservation reserve system. They were purchased with commonwealth government assistance as well, which was on the condition that they were being purchased for that purpose. The department cannot hold pastoral leases, so the step that was taken was that on acquisition, the pastoral leases were surrendered. Legally, the land sits as unallocated crown land, and we manage it via an agreement that we have with what is now the Department of Regional Development and Lands. We have the view that that is unsatisfactory and inappropriate in the long term, and that the land, to honour its original intent, should be a category of conservation reserve under the Conservation and Land Management Act. It is necessary from our point of view that the CALM act and regulations are able to apply to those lands so that we can manage them for their conservation values. Governments have always had a due process for transferring land into the conservation reserve system, and that is a due process that involves considering a range of interests. There is a fairly standard process of consultation with the Department of Mines and Petroleum, with the Department of State Development in terms of any agreement act arrangements that might apply, with the Department of Water and with local government authorities and with native titleholders and with utilities. The decision ends up being made by government, not all those departments of themselves. They can say yes or no ultimately to the outcome. There have been contested ones before and they go to cabinet and cabinet makes a decision on what it will do. But there is a due process that has to assess all those things. We advocated that the vast majority of the pastoral leases, with some exceptions such as the areas immediately around the Kennedy Range Regional Park, should become conservation park. So in the hierarchy of the CALM act, you have got national park, nature reserve and conservation park as the three primary conservation reserve tenures. Conservation park was advocated by us deliberately because it is, if you like, the most open to exploration and mining. We understand the reality and importance of appropriate access by that industry in the rangelands. The previous Labor government did get to the point where it made a formal decision on the first batch of these properties to proceed with conservation park reservation

for them and was proposing to deal with the second half in a subsequent and second batch. That was the policy decision at the time. That policy decision could only be enacted fully by us once native title issues had also been dealt with, so it was not finalised. The matter sits—I do not know if “in abeyance” are the right words at the moment—but it sits there as unfinished business currently, and we are involved in a broader range of discussions with the government, particularly with our colleagues at the Department of Mines and Petroleum, about access issues, about exploration and about mining. We are still aiming towards having an appropriate reservation as one of the categories of land under the CALM act, but under precisely what provision of the act—as I said, there is national park, there is nature reserve and there is conservation park, and there is also a sort of miscellaneous category that could be used as well. We still want to work towards that.

The CHAIRMAN: You have a large volume of unallocated crown land. You could actually keep these ex-pastoral leases as part of that stock in perpetuity, could you not?

[11.30 am]

The CHAIRMAN: One of the issues that we have feedback on in the Gascoyne–Murchison strategy is that you have a pastoral lease that has areas of conservation value that CALM has identified, but it has a lot of land that might be tangentially or not at all of high-conservation value. One of the aspects of that strategy was that CALM at the time would come in and negotiate to take what it needed—not the whole lease necessarily, but what it needed—and then maybe sell or transfer the adjacent land, or come to some agreement with adjacent pastoralists, if CALM wanted to have that land, that it would allow it to be used perhaps for pastoral purposes. We heard that when it came to the purchase of the lease, there was not a great deal of flexibility in the ultimate final negotiations on use, and CALM generally took the whole lease, rather than the parts that were the priority for conservation purposes. Can you comment on that?

Mr McNamara: I can. I might then ask Mr Gillen to elaborate. I think I said in one of my earlier remarks in terms of the Gascoyne–Murchison strategy that it had multiple objectives, and they included pastoral and social objectives. Structural adjustment in a wool industry that was facing challenges was part of that. Certainly with the lands that were purchased, some of it is good grazing country and some of it is not. Many pastoral leases are like that. But in the arid zone, you generally need broad and extensive areas to achieve conservation outcomes, not just small reserves. Even after what we are doing, still over 85 per cent of the land is available for pastoral activity. There was a GMS board, chaired by Mr Ian Laurance, and there was also a subcommittee of that board that was called the regional environmental management program, I think. Mr Gillen will confirm in a moment for me, but I think he was not only on REMP, but also on the board. We had to justify what we were doing through those processes, and they were certainly looked at from those perspectives. If we did have in front of us the map that we tabled at the preliminary briefing, I could show you very clearly what happened at Bulga Downs and Cashmere Downs and how the purchase there of the ends of the properties, if you like, allowed the pastoralist, David McQuie, to consolidate the best country from his point of view of Bulga Downs, with the purchase of Cashmere Downs, or the bulk of that. By selling to us and then consolidating his assets and buying, I think, part of next door, he came out with a much better pastoral lease. There were not a lot of examples of that, because there were very few cases, I think, where mutual objectives could readily be met.

The other comment I would make is that certainly a number of the part pastoral leases that we purchased were often of the less valuable grazing land and allowed those pastoralists to acquire a payment from us that they could reinvest in their businesses as they saw fit, so they were able to strengthen their financial positions. While I probably should not name them, I can certainly point to pastoral leases where they had no chance whatsoever of ever being viable, and neighbours in fact begged us to help those people out by buying those pastoral leases, and we did, and those people were able to exit with some dignity. So we assisted with the adjustment of social outcomes in some

of those respects. But on a straight sort of trading of land, if I can put it that crudely, Kelly Gillen might be able to add a comment.

Mr Gillen: The adjustment issue was one around which there was a lot of discussion during the process of the GMS. Certainly in the early stages of our acquisition program, because there was virtually no conservation reserve system in place, and because we were choosing from the properties that were offered to us the best examples that we could, a lot of those initial purchases included a range of land systems and representative ecosystems that were just not in the reserve system. So from our point of view the whole purchase warranted being kept by us until such time as we developed redundancy in the areas that we were purchasing. From an adjustment point of view, the GMS struggled, because there were a number of factors that influenced the adjustment process. They were the cost of purchasing part of an adjoining lease by existing leaseholders. In most cases, few people could afford the prices that were being requested, even though they were roughly equivalent to the Valuer-General's valuation of that land. In many cases, pastoralists in fact did not want to sell to their neighbours. Most often, one of the key issues was that the actual condition of the land did not warrant purchase because it would add nothing to the adjoining lease. If you were to look at the final report of the GMS, you will find those points identified in that document as to why the lease adjustment process did struggle. You will also note there that in terms of the lands purchased by DEC there was a significant bias in the totality of that purchase towards lands that were clearly unviable as pastoral leases. So whilst we were doing our best to choose the best representative samples that we could across the landscape, we were still purchasing areas that had primarily very low pastoral value. However, I think the point Keiran made about the contribution of the part purchases is a critical one. I think it was accepted by the GMS board at the end of the process that because we had purchased such a large number of part leases, we had contributed significantly to structural adjustments. If you look at the Kennedy Range, for instance, we purchased seven part properties from around the range. Those seven parts basically consisted of the eastern and western escarpments of the range, which really provided nothing to the pastoralists in that case but provided a significant public asset from our perspective. We also made some large part purchases. If you look at the area around Mt Augustus, part of Mt Phillips and part of Dalgety are substantial areas, but both pastoralists could not manage those areas of land from a stock management point of view because of the very difficult nature of the country. So they were happy to reduce their properties by those areas because it gave them a more manageable area to work with, particularly if it was fenced.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: We visited Wooleen, where you purchased a relatively small section of the property. The leaseholder there, who is a very progressive person, was very pleased to dispose of that area, because he did not find it valuable for his pastoral activity. But we also heard in discussion with your representatives about how DEC had purchased a lease and had not been prepared to sell part of that lease to a neighbour on the basis that once the lease had been purchased it was no longer able to be included in the adjustment process.

Mr Gillen: That is because once the lease has been purchased and surrendered, it becomes unallocated crown land and then becomes open to the native title process. So there was a significant constraint there. In some cases in negotiations with people we advised them about making early decisions before the purchase process occurred. But in a number of instances that I can recall, that action was not taken. So once the purchase had actually occurred and surrender had occurred, we then had a major constraint to actually being able to do anything with that land.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: What was the time between the purchase of the lease? I understood that most of the outgoing leaseholders stayed on the property for a number of years while they moved their stock off, and that was part of the management strategy that DEC—I think properly—adopted, which meant that for two or three years there was still the leaseholder running stock.

Mr McNamara: It is difficult to answer sometimes without knowing the specific circumstances. I have on my desk right now a sale of part of one of our properties to a neighbouring pastoralist, and we will sign that and do it. So it is difficult to answer perhaps without the specifics. But, as Mr Gillen said, there was a window in which time that could have happened, and perhaps some people have come along later than would have been desirable with that request. But certainly for some of the ones I am most familiar with out there, Earraheedy was one example. The request being made by the neighbouring pastoralist for the ability to acquire or for us to give or sell a part of that lease was refused because of our analysis of the vegetation systems and so on. We needed the entire area to meet the aspirations and the targets of the program that we were conducting.

[11.40 am]

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: You said that DEC is responsible for bushfire management over unallocated crown land.

Mr McNamara: Bushfire preparedness on unallocated crown land outside the metropolitan area and townsites, not bushfire response.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I take that to mean maintaining road access, fire breaks and that type of activity. Would that be correct?

Mr McNamara: The range of preparedness activity can include physical access, water access and so on, and fuel modification by virtue of slashing, prescribed burning or whatever.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Obviously there are DEC areas that are purchased for the conservation estate, sometimes adjacent to unallocated crown land. Who would have responsibility for feral pest management on the unallocated crown land that is adjacent to the DEC properties, and would you be looking to fencing the conservation estate to try to protect it? Obviously, under the Dividing Fences Act government is exempt. I wonder in those areas where you have quite long borders with unallocated crown land what is going to happen with pest management, fire management and all that sort of thing?

Mr McNamara: On the land that we manage under the CALM act and under these former pastoral leases that we manage under a formal agreement with the Department of Regional Development and Lands, because it is unallocated crown land, we have full management responsibility, including feral animals, weeds and fire. On our lands, we do bushfire preparedness and bushfire response. On unallocated crown land, and by virtue of a government administrative decision in 2003, we were asked to take on the responsibility for bushfire preparedness and feral animal and weed control on that unallocated crown land. From a point of view of feral animals our responsibility is seamless between unallocated crown land and the former pastoral leases that we manage, and I cannot really envisage that we would be contemplating fencing ourselves off from unallocated crown land. We would be fencing ourselves off from livestock but not from unallocated crown land, I would not image—unless there was a particular management need in a particular circumstance.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Was that allocation of responsibility in 2003 accompanied by a boost in resources for management to pay for that?

Mr McNamara: Yes, it was. The figure was in the order of \$1 million across the state. The area of unallocated crown land is very large—you only have to look at the map—but a lot of it is also very distant and does not require much in terms of bushfire preparedness, or feral animal and weed control. It would be nice to do more, obviously. The government decided in 2003 that it would be more efficient to deliver those responsibilities through CALM, as it was, rather than through the former lands department, because we are regionally present and we have capacities in those subject areas and we are doing it on lands next door anyway. It was a view that we were both, if you like, better at it and better placed to do it than a department of land administration. That is a decision I agreed with at the time, and we took the resources that were available to do it at the time, knowing that it would be a challenge but that we were better placed to do it.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: On the issue of fencing, we understand that many leases have been there for a long time and the fencing is not always in great condition, but when you purchase next door, as you say, you want a fence to keep stock out—we understand that—but some of these properties are marginal and some of the fence lines are incredibly long. I mean 170 kilometres at about \$5 000 a throw is about \$850 000 for a fence, which is beyond the capacity of some of your neighbours. I do understand that a good neighbour policy means that you are meeting 50 per cent. How would you view a recommendation that says where you are purchasing next to operating leases that you need to bear the cost of fencing yourself?

Mr McNamara: That would be an interesting recommendation to the government. We are not bound by the Dividing Fences Act. The crown is not bound by the Dividing Fences Act—it is not just us. That is an issue that applies across a range of agencies, so you can imagine the linear length of Main Roads' responsibilities, for example. We, by agreement, contribute to boundary fencing on a 50–50 basis, so we went beyond the requirements of the law as part of a goodwill exercise in the Gascoyne-Murchison strategy. We have I think continued to honour that. I accept your point that sometimes pastoral lessees next door to us cannot afford to join us where we want to do some of that fencing, and they have some different motivations. Some of them do not mind their stock being able to sneak across the fence line, I suspect.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: And eat your grass!

Mr McNamara: They eat our grass, yes. That might occur once or twice. A recommendation that if we acquire land and we want to fence it, we should fence it at 100 per cent would be financially onerous. There is a two-way benefit in fences and I think the current arrangement is appropriate. If we want to fence an area and our neighbour does not want to or simply cannot, if it is a particularly valuable location—a wetland value or a vulnerable location for some particular reason—then we can make a decision to go way beyond 50–50, but I would rather do that on a needs basis. Fencing is not the only way to manage stock. Stock is also managed by the distance they radiate out from water sources. It is not only a matter of fencing.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: That leads me to a follow-on issue on water—it is probably more of a statement than a question. We have mentioned this before, and we see more photos of some of the most horrific visions of animal cruelty that in real terms rest with the government. Those photos were sickening. I hope that has been taken into real account and we do not see any of those horrors again. We saw that dams had been blocked off so that the water would not run into them—camels could not survive and actually fell over and kangaroos had been kicking for days trying to get out. I hope that we get an absolute commitment from your department that we do not see anything like that again and that as you withdraw the water sources, there is strong monitoring. I think it is one of the biggest blots on any government department.

Mr McNamara: I will respond to that, even though it was perhaps a statement. My minister, Hon Donna Faragher, also feels very strongly about that and we have had a number of discussions about that over the last number of months, given the photos that were published of the Warriendar station goats.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: They were tame!

[11.50 am]

Mr McNamara: I do not want to get into a detailed discussion of individual cases, but what is seen in the newspapers and so on is not necessarily the entire truth of the circumstances that applied in some of those cases. If people have cases like that that they want to bring to our attention, we will address them. Apart from the Warriendar case last Christmas, I can think of only one particular case that has been drawn to my attention as being particularly serious, and that goes back some years in the Goldfields and relates to horses and so on. We try very hard in terms of the management role that we undertake, particularly in respect of closing artificial waters, which is a valid management

approach. We have coupled that with timing it in the right seasons when there is free water around and when there are cooler conditions. We have coupled it with mustering. We have coupled it with engaging shooters to shoot in those areas. We are attentive to that. It is a challenging area, but we are certainly conscious of our animal welfare responsibilities and we seek to avoid any cruelty to native or feral animals.

The CHAIRMAN: Just in summarising, to your knowledge, you have had only one instance in recent times in which you had a problem, and you are satisfied with the existing systems.

Mr McNamara: I am at a disadvantage in the sense that photographs and incidents appear to have been drawn to your attention, which is fine, but I am not privy to those. There might be circumstances and explanations that need to be given about them, but I am not privy to them so I do not know the substance.

The CHAIRMAN: We have an example of a dam at Earraheedy, if I remember correctly. There was a large dam and you drained water. I understand that policy. Livestock went in there and got caught in the mud. The solution was to build a fence around it, if I remember correctly. The kangaroos could jump over the fence and just could not get out. It was not that long ago. The pictures dig it up. We have had submissions and evidence both in the media and otherwise. It is particularly shocking. I readily admit that when you have a policy of cutting out water, there will be deaths. The issue is how you go about it. Instances have been brought to our attention and you would not think that an organisation like DEC, which is focused a great deal on wildlife preservation, would overlook some of the processes that have taken place.

Mr McNamara: When I said that I am aware of a couple of cases, Earraheedy is the other one that I am particularly conscious of. I must say that that was some years ago now. It certainly helped us put in place the sorts of processes that I have talked about. But I am not able to answer on the particulars of it. Mr Kealley would have been able to if he was here; he might have been able to give some explanations that may, at least to some extent, explain or even rebut some of what has been said.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: A lot of the properties that DEC has purchased as part of the conservation estate can have natural water sources. If there are heavy rains, the water might lay on the land for up to eight months. Obviously, with that comes the breeding of both native and feral animals that need to be managed. When those natural water sources dry up, those animals will migrate to try to find water elsewhere. What is DEC's policy on the management of that situation? My understanding of that situation is that when those animals migrate from the DEC properties where the natural water has dried up, they hit a fence. The neighbours of those properties are saying that they are not authorised to even shoot through the fence at those animals. Do you have a management regime in place? Who monitors the water sources? What is your management regime for that? Obviously, what we do not want to see is those animals moving away from the natural water sources on the DEC properties, hitting a fence and dying there of thirst. Do you have a policy in place for that? Do you have a management system in place for your caretakers, rangers and people like that?

Mr Gillen: When you get good winter rains or episodic rains that provide water across the landscape, animals will move and they will move preferentially to where either water exists or there is a combination of food and water. We are monitoring the feral animal populations on our properties. In the Murchison and southern Yalgoo areas, we are particularly interested in goats. We have a handle on how many goats we might have moving around the landscape. That means that goats are not moving just out of our property; they are also moving onto our property. Goats move across the landscape quite readily. Fences are no barrier to goats.

Mr McNamara: Or kangaroos or emus.

Mr Gillen: The fences are really just to try to keep authorised stock in. The fences in my view do not really provide a barrier to that sort of movement, until you start talking about the state barrier

fence particularly. That is a barrier. It causes an accumulation of animals in some places, particularly emus, which have to be dealt with by other processes.

In terms of the question about shooting, we have no issues with doing cooperative arrangements with neighbours. What it really comes down to is the neighbour making contact and saying, "We want to do this" or "Can we do this together?" or whatever. We have plenty of examples whereby we have made arrangements with neighbours who are mustering to enable them to run their aircraft over the adjoining DEC property because they know that there are animals in there. We are quite happy with those sorts of arrangements; in fact, we are very supportive of those sorts of arrangements. As I said before, there are no barriers to shooting, other than being authorised to do so.

Mr McNamara: I will just add one quick remark on that. The natural cycle of pastoral rangelands and the interior of Australia is one of plenty and drought. When we get severe drought and baked earth, there are substantial livestock and feral animal and native animal deaths right across this continent, as unfortunate as that might be. For example, we monitor the red kangaroo population because we have to manage the kangaroo harvesting industry. Mr Wyre can once again correct me if I do not get it quite right, but we do aerial survey work and the red kangaroo population ebbs and flows with the seasonal conditions. It ranges between fewer than one million to more than three million. It goes in that cycle—it always has and always will—in response to seasonal conditions. Animals stop reproducing and animals die when the conditions go bad, and they do that across the landscape.

The CHAIRMAN: I think we will need to talk to you again at a time to be organised. We can provide you with a copy of those submissions. We will give you time to look at them and discuss them.

Thank you for your evidence before the committee today. A transcript of this hearing will be forwarded to you for the correction of minor errors. Any such corrections must be made and the transcript returned within 10 days from the date of the letter attached to the transcript. If the transcript is not returned within this period, it will be deemed to be correct. New material cannot be added via these corrections and the sense of your evidence cannot be altered. Should you wish to provide additional information or elaborate on particular points, please include a supplementary submission for the committee's consideration when you return your corrected transcript of evidence. Thanks very much for the evidence given today and the time you have spent with us today. Given the nature of the folks on the committee, you can understand why we are spending a good deal of time in discussion directly with you. I particularly thank the director general for his presence today.

Hearing concluded at 12 noon