

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ESTIMATES AND FINANCIAL OPERATIONS**

2018–19 BUDGET ESTIMATES



**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 20 JUNE 2018**

**SESSION TWO
DEPARTMENT OF BIODIVERSITY, CONSERVATION AND ATTRACTIONS**

Members

**Hon Alanna Clohesy (Chair)
Hon Tjorn Sibma (Deputy Chair)
Hon Diane Evers
Hon Aaron Stonehouse
Hon Colin Tincknell**

Hearing commenced at 10.14 am

HON STEPHEN DAWSON

Minister for Environment, examined:

Mr MARK WEBB

Director General, examined:

Dr FRANCES STANLEY

Acting Executive Director, Conservation and Ecosystem Management, examined:

Mr JASON FOSTER

Acting Executive Director, Regional and Fire Management Services, examined:

Dr MARGARET BYRNE

Executive Director, Biodiversity and Conservation Science, examined:

Mr MARK NEILSON

Manager, Strategy and Reform, examined:

Ms MORGAN MARSH

Acting Executive Director, Corporate and Business Services, examined:

Mr PETER SHARP

Executive Director, Parks and Visitor Services, examined:

Ms WENDY ATTENBOROUGH

Executive Director, Zoological Parks Authority, examined:

Mr DARREN FORSTER

Principal Policy Adviser, Minister for Environment, examined:

The CHAIR: We are reconvening with the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions. On behalf of the Legislative Council Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations, I welcome you to today's hearing. Can the witnesses confirm that they have read, understood and signed a document headed "Information for Witnesses"?

The WITNESSES: Yes.

The CHAIR: It is essential that all your testimony before the committee is complete and truthful to the best of your knowledge. This hearing is being recorded by Hansard and a transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. It is also being broadcast live on the Parliament's website. The hearing is being held in public, although there is discretion available to the committee to hear evidence in private. If for some reason you wish to make a confidential statement during today's proceedings, you should request that the evidence be taken in closed session before answering the question. Agencies have an important role and duty in assisting the committee to scrutinise the budget papers. The committee values your assistance with this.

Minister, have you a brief opening statement to make?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I do not.

The CHAIR: We will go straight into questions then, starting with Hon Diane Evers.

Hon DIANE EVERS: My first question is in regard to the Preston River to Ocean Regional Park and the Leschenault Regional Park. It shows on page 579 that there is \$1.374 million per annum until 2021–22. On page 569, this is listed at the bottom under “Spending Changes”, which shows the amount of \$1 240 000. I am just wondering why there is a difference between those two amounts.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: That is a good question. Member, given that you have raised the issue of the Preston River to Ocean Regional Park, I am going to provide a bit of background in relation to it while we find the figures. Protection of this area in the greater Bunbury region scheme has been on the cards for a very long time. It has been on the cards for over 20 years. In fact, when I went down to make an announcement some months ago now, I was told that it has been on the cards since 1983. The community have been left hanging all that time while governments of all persuasions have talked about protecting these areas, but not made the move and jumped into actually doing it. The funding will enable the creation of those two parks—the Preston River to Ocean Regional Park and the Leschenault Regional Park. The Preston River to Ocean Regional Park will create a continuous reserve of almost 900 hectares from the south of Bunbury west of the Preston River to the coast. The Leschenault Regional Park will be 2 297 hectares—almost 3 000 hectares—and extend along the Collie and Brunswick Rivers westwards across the Swan coastal plain. The new regional parks will finally provide protection of these areas for future generations. I am particularly proud of the fact that in tandem with the creation of the parks, there will also be some jobs created for Aboriginal rangers. Three Aboriginal ranger positions will be created to care for and undertake maintenance for the parks. It is a good outcome and that, on top of our Aboriginal ranger program, I am very pleased with how they have both rolled out because finally we are actually creating real positive jobs for Aboriginal people that connect them with custom and culture on country, so that is very good.

The \$10.5 million in funding will pay for the construction of walk trails, lookouts and other public accessways and facilities. We will work with the City of Bunbury but also with the local community. It is my plan to establish a community advisory committee in the south west to guide us with the planning and the future works associated with the parks. Expressions of interest for that committee will be called probably in late July or early August. That is a plug for that process because I know you and Hon Dr Steve Thomas have a particular interest in this area and may wish to ensure that community reps in that area who have an interest put their hands up for it.

Saying that, and thank you for your indulgence, in terms of the difference in those two figures, I am going to ask Mr Neilson if he can provide a response to that part, please.

Mr NEILSON: The difference in the two figures relates to the category of expenditure. The figure on page 569 is recurrent expenditure. There are two components to the \$10.5 million allocation. There is a recurrent allocation that is shown in the table on page 569 and there is also a capital component. It is the format of the budget statements. That capital component is shown at the bottom of page 579.

Hon DIANE EVERS: Thank you for that. Is it expected that the project will be completed at the end of 2021–22?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I might ask Mr Webb if he can provide a response to that.

Mr WEBB: That is the current intention—correct. That is the timeframe we are working to.

Hon DIANE EVERS: Thank you. My next question is in regard to page 571 and all the comments made about the Rottneest Island developments. We are talking about another 200 rooms plus other

facilities. I am wondering what work has been done with regard to ensuring the preservation of the environment and cultural heritage as well as the current amenity value.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Member, unfortunately, you will have to place the question through the question system because I am not the minister for Rottnest Island; the Minister for Tourism is. While it is part of this agency, it does not form part of my budget items. Apologies for that.

The CHAIR: You might have to —

Hon DIANE EVERS: Put it in writing, I think.

The CHAIR: Do it after the hearings.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Member, I will make sure that I raise it.

The CHAIR: Or we can take it as B1 and direct it ourselves to the minister. Do you want to do that?

Hon DIANE EVERS: Yes, that is fine. Thank you.

[Supplementary Information No B1.]

Hon DIANE EVERS: My final question for now is on page 570—the sixth dot point about Wellington National Park. I am interested to know if there is community input into the planning for the extension into Wellington National Park and when the planning is expected to be completed and when will those plans be made public?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: In relation to Wellington National Park, this, again, was an election commitment by the government last year. We are committed to working with local industry and the local community to extend the park near Collie. At the moment, the park and the adjacent reserves currently comprise around 19 770 hectares. Promote Preston, who are a local group—I am not sure if you are aware of them—are a very dedicated and passionate group of people. I can see Hon Dr Steve Thomas also agreeing with me. They have been running the campaign for the last few years. It is called the “Imagine Greater Wellington National Park Campaign”. They have proposed a significant expansion to the national park down there.

In terms of implementing the proposal, it will involve changes to tenure in accordance with the CALM act. It could be impacted by the South West Native Title Settlement process, which has, essentially, slowed down our progress. While we continue to have conversations and I have been involved in conversations with Promote Preston as, indeed, my department have, we have also been in conversations with the Forest Products Commission and other groups. The member for Collie—Preston, Mick Murray, has led some conversations. We have also been in conversation with the Forest Industry Federation of Western Australia. All those conversations continue to happen; there is no formal boundary of a consultation process other than we continue to have those dialogues, but we are cognisant of the South West Native Title Settlement process. Hopefully, a decision is made there sooner rather than later. If we do not wait for that process, we will have to progress and get an Indigenous land use agreement. If the South West Native Title Settlement process is finalised, we then will not need to go through an ILUA. An ILUA, essentially, costs roughly in the order of \$500 000. It is a process that we should not need to undertake if the South West Native Title Process happens and comes to a final resting point.

Consultation occurs, but we are waiting on the South West Native Title Settlement. Saying that, if for some reason that looks like being dragged out, we are hopeful there may well be a decision later this year. There are some stories floating around that there are potential national implications for national title as a result of this decision, so there may well be appeals following a final decision. If that is the case, my view is then that we embark on the ILUA. We are committed to delivering this. I am not willing to put it on the never-never. We will give it this year to see if that south west process

is finalised. If not, we will have to commence on the ILUA process. Essentially, the commitment is there and is very pleasing. There is a range of views about it. Promote Preston is passionate and it has to be congratulated and appreciated. We will work with them and the industry to get to final boundaries.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Minister, I draw your attention to pages 570, 571 and 572 of the budget papers outlining significant issues impacting the agency. You might now be familiar with this question. Could we get a sense, please, of whether or not there is an order of priority implied in the way that these significant issues are listed, because you have listed an extensive range of significant issues. Which of these exercise most of your attention, minister?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Member, the short answer to the first question is there is no perceived or real order of priority in relation to these. These are the priorities for me, my agencies and department. I alluded to this last night, but I believe that we should tell this committee and, in fact, the people of Western Australia in the budget papers what we are doing and be transparent in that. We have put all those issues that are of significance in this document.

In terms of what has been keeping me busiest, I have to say that it is our election commitments. They include the Buccaneer Archipelago marine park, the Fitzroy River national park, the Wellington National Park expansion, and the Aboriginal ranger program, which initially took up some time. Again, I am very pleased to say that that was a program that was created with Aboriginal people at the table from the ground up, so it was worth that extra effort. We are already seeing significant positive benefits in that case. I think the first round of funding was \$8.5 million. We had around \$60 million worth of applicants. We funded across the state 85 Aboriginal ranger programs in that first round and 80 training positions in that first round too. I am particularly pleased to say that over half of the full-time ranger positions were female rangers. Historically, the commonwealth has funded ranger programs in this state and across the country. The men's ranger groups have done pretty well out of that. There has been a feeling that the women have missed out, so I wanted to make sure that female rangers benefited from this round as well. We had a nice spread from right across the state—eight rangers in the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council area, some in Esperance, some in the goldfields—the Murchison and northern goldfields, some in the Pilbara, and the Kimberley. I think that is probably the spread. I am happy to give you a list if you want. Essentially, that ranger program has been a priority. We have done lots of work on that and, obviously, those other election commitments that I mentioned earlier on too.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Of those, I am presuming, also exercising your attention, I should draw my attention to those government initiatives. They are principally your election commitments. With respect to the fifth one that is listed—the Community Rivercare Program—it refers to 17 community volunteer groups.

[10.30 am]

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Member, excuse me for a second—what page?

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Page 570.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am on the wrong page.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: My question is regarding the fifth dot point, which is the Community Rivercare Program. Could you give me a sense please of the size of that grant program and how much money these recipient community groups are receiving?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Absolutely. So that program is a \$900 000 program over three years, so \$300 000 per annum and, again, it is an election commitment that we made. In the first round of funding, 17 community volunteer groups were the recipients of grants. The grants ranged from

\$8 662 to \$117 370, and 14 of those projects actually span the full three years so they are not one-off grants. The projects have been distributed throughout the Swan and Canning catchments, so it was a Swan and Canning Rivers-focused funding program. The funds were provided to support community groups to improve habitat for fauna protection, to work on foreshore condition and water quality and prevent erosion along the waterways in the Swan and Canning Rivers catchment. The grant round opened last year—we made the announcement early this year—and the funding starts to roll out as of next month. The next grant round will be opening at the beginning of September and it will be the same process as the first round.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: I presume that round two is still within the three-year time frame so how much funding is available through stage 2? More to the point, what is the process for applying for this grant and what metrics are used to determine who gets what?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: In terms of how much is going to be expended each year, it is \$300 000, so it is \$300 000 for the next round. Even though some of those projects are over three years, the first round is \$300 000 so the next round that we advertise in September will also be for an amount of \$300 000. That does not stop us from providing funding to groups for over a year or two. It is a constant frustration, member, and as you would be aware as a local member, from groups that they get money for one-off purposes and then the government says, “Oh, well, barleese, we have no money.”

Hon TJORN SIBMA: In the very least though, it is a competitive grant, which is good for this government to run a competitive grants funding round.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: It is a competitive round, absolutely. I was obviously involved in the advertising of it and the announcement at the other end, but in terms of the probity and the process we went through, I will ask Dr Fran Stanley if she can explain the process to you.

Dr STANLEY: Yes, it is a competitive grants process. There is a series of criteria that apply for particular types of projects that groups can apply for and the applications are assessed against those criteria.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Is that criteria listed online or could it be tabled if it is not, minister?

Dr STANLEY: The criteria would be available when the applications open.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: So you open a round—okay, I follow you.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Certainly in terms of the criteria that was used last time, that can certainly be provided to you.

[Supplementary Information No B2.]

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Can I get a sense of where the source of the funding is?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: In what sense?

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Is it within a department appropriation, have you had to —

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: It was an appropriation.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: An internal reallocation?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: No, it was an extra appropriation from consolidated revenue.

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: Just looking at page 582 and the expenses, the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions will spend close to \$8 million next financial year on various concessions to entry fees, among other things. I was wondering, do those concessions appear under “Other expenses” or under another line item?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I will ask Mr Neilson if he can reply to that one, please.

Mr NEILSON: The concessions do not show directly in the budget statements. They are, in essence, a reduction to income so the income is lower.

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: Okay. Looking at the various concessions and excluding the obvious ones to seniors and children, are any of these other concessions—say, the national park entrance fee reduction and the treetop walk entry—means tested in anyway? Is there any eligibility criteria? Are they available to seniors? Are they available to everybody?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Certainly in relation to seniors, obviously seniors have to have the Seniors Card for them to get seniors access.

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: There are a few that are self-explanatory that say seniors in the concession. If you look at page 234 in budget paper No 3, it has a list of the various concessions for biodiversity.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Member, are you on budget paper No 3 now?

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: Yes, it has a breakdown of the concessions issued by the department.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Sorry, the page again? I am on a different page.

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: Page 234. There are a few here that are, like I said, self-explanatory—children under four concession, obviously—but then there are few with a name that does not explain who may eligible for those concessions.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I will ask Mr Neilson or Mr Webb to answer. On page 234 of budget paper No 3, there is a list that includes things such as fee reductions, treetop walk concessions, Geikie Gorge boat trip concession. Are we in a position to explain what they are?

Mr WEBB: Just seeking clarification, there are two major elements that relate to Perth Zoo and national parks. Would you like the national parks?

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: A lot of the Perth Zoo ones seem pretty self-explanatory—a children's discount obviously applies to children. But it is the ones that are not self-explanatory. Perhaps working our way down the list, national park entrance fee reduction, treetop walk entry concession, camping concession et cetera. Is there any means testing around those or are they available to anybody who is paying the entry fee or are they exclusively available to seniors or pensioners or what have you?

Mr WEBB: No means testing applies, but for the detail around other concessions, I might pass it on to Mr Sharp.

Mr SHARP: With regard to the concessions, we have arrangements where we provide a subsidised entry for those people who hold veterans cards, pensioners cards, the usual concessions that flow to people on some sort of commonwealth or state support program. In and of itself, that is a sort of means tested arrangement, but we do not actually put a means testing system in place.

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: There is at least an eligibility criteria, I suppose.

Mr SHARP: Yes, you have to have a card that shows that you are on a disability support pension or a pensioners card or a DVA card.

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: Moving on, while we are looking at page 582 of the income statement, looking at the breakdown of income, can you explain to me—maybe there is a simple explanation—why the budgeted 2017–18 and the estimated actual 2017–18 for income is exactly aligned? There is a budgeted total income of \$140 895 000 and the estimated actual is \$140 895 000.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Member, I can provide an answer to that. We estimate that we will get that \$140 895 000 and we are going to spend the same amount. In terms of the breakdown of the budgeted income for 2017–18, we had \$26.725 million from state government and private grants, so things like NRM grants, Main Roads WA grants, various mining companies et cetera. We had recreation income of approximately \$19 612 000 for things such as national park entrance fees, payments for attractions et cetera. We had about \$17 012 000 from recoupable project work provided to external parties. We had \$5.5 million for mining compensation. We had \$4.4 million which came in for fees collected for things like apiary sites, forest leases, communication sites, wildlife fees and other miscellaneous fees. We had \$2.2 million from employee housing rents and \$1.988 million from bank account interest. We had \$1.157 million from commonwealth grants from groups like the Australian Biological Resources Study. We had \$400 000 from the sale of goods for things such as publications. We have a fantastic magazine and did some great books on Western Australia's biodiversity, plants, animals et cetera that are for sale either through our website or in the Kieran McNamara centre over in Kensington. We had \$16.173 million that came in through Perth Zoo for entry fees and other revenue. We had \$9.136 million from Kings Park, and they were for lessee payments and other revenue. As part of this, too, \$36.52 million is included for Rottneest Island visitor fees and other revenue. That is the \$140 895 000 estimated actual and budget. In terms of why they are the same, are they always the same, Mark Neilson?

Mr NEILSON: The figures are not always identical. In this case we did a reforecasting exercise and the overall total seemed to us to be about the right figure. There will be minor variations within components but in terms of making a formal revision for budget statement purposes, we came to the view that the income forecast was going to come in on budget.

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: Entry fees to parks and attractions et cetera that are collected by the department, do they show up in the sale of goods and services or in regulatory fees and fines? That would be under the sale of goods and services, I imagine.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Again, I will ask Mr Neilson to reply.

Mr NEILSON: They will come under the sale of goods and services.

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: I am wondering, minister, if the department has some kind of time machine, I suppose, in that they were able to budget for \$70 772 000 worth of sales, goods and services, including ticket sales or entry fees to parks, and actually achieve that exact same number. That is remarkable forecasting. I do not know whether anyone else can forecast their projected sales that accurately. Looking at other departments, they are pretty accurate and maybe they budget sales of \$197 million but then they get \$202 million —

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Member, if I can stop you there; there is no time machine so that is the answer to that part of the question. These are the figures that the agency has come up with. Both have projected income in relation to the sale of goods and services, fines, fees and grants, subsidies and other revenue. If for some reason there is a difference throughout the year, then obviously we will either make comment in the midyear financial review or indeed in next year's budget. Essentially, this is what we have estimated to be —

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: I know that there are a few days left in the financial year yet, but it is convenient that the estimate is exactly what you budgeted for this time last year, I suppose. If it proves to be, hats off to you, minister, I suppose; that is fantastic forecasting.

[10.45 am]

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Believe me, member, I will not be taking the credit, but I will be thanking people like Mr Neilson, who is an expert in this area, and indeed his staff. We will both watch this

with interest, but certainly there is no time machine, and in these hard financial times we certainly cannot afford one.

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: Thank you for clearing that up for me.

Hon COLIN TINCKNELL: I have got a few specific budget questions in a minute, but the first one is a bit of a general one for the minister, if I could please ask. We are introducing an improved cost-recovery model for environmental regulation services undertaken by the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation —

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Member, I will have to stop you there. This is the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions. We did not call DWEAR this time and because these are not DWEAR staff, if you have questions about it, by all means, put them in; lodge them through the after process, and we will get your questions.

Hon COLIN TINCKNELL: Okay, that is why I was directing it directly at you.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Yes, just because it is a different agency. We are here solely to talk about DBCA this morning.

Hon COLIN TINCKNELL: I will go back to the budget questions I have got here. I refer the spending changes table on page 569 of budget paper No 2 volume 2. With regard to the “Senior Executive Service Reduction” item. This is to do with the election commitments with the SES. My questions are: How many SES personnel were reduced? How many SES personnel came across from other agencies as a result of the MOG changes? And, what is your current complement of SES personnel?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I will ask the director general to provide a response to this, but essentially prior to 1 July last year, we were a number of agencies. We were then the Department of Parks and Wildlife, we were then Zoological Parks Authority and we were also BGPA, the Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority, and then of course the Rottneest Island Authority was separate; it is now in this agency but has a different minister. From 1 July last year those agencies started to merge and certainly the director general has been responsible for that. We have made the number of SES reductions, that were set first by Treasury, but in terms of the amounts, I will ask the director general to reply. In terms of if people came from other agencies, I am aware that Ms Wendy Attenborough, who has recently started as the executive director for the Zoo, came from another agency, but I will ask the director general to give as fulsome a response as he can, and if we have not got the level of detail that you require, perhaps we might look at providing further information.

Mr WEBB: The original SES number was 23, and we reduced that to 14. My position and appointment, also as the CEO of the Rottneest Island Authority, Zoological Parks Authority and the Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority—I have an SES position. At the Rottneest Island Authority and the Zoological Parks Authority there is one SES position each and the same for the BGPA. All the other SES positions are within the former Department of Parks and Wildlife, which was renamed Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions.

Hon COLIN TINCKNELL: If I can move to major spending changes. On budget paper No 3, the table on page 156 lists “Preston River to Ocean Regional Park and Leschenault Regional Park”, election commitment, \$14 million per annum, 2021–22. My question is: the annual \$1.4 million listed in budget paper No 3 does not match the \$1.24 million in spending changes. What explains the difference?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I have got “Major Spending Changes Since the 2017–18 Mid-year Review” on page 156. We have that section. Mr Neilson is now in a position to identify the difference between that \$1.24 million listed under “Election Commitments”, and “Spending Changes” on page 569 of the document. Mr Neilson, if you can provide a response to that one, please.

Mr NEILSON: Budget paper No 3, page 156 focuses on the capital and that shows that \$1.4 million per annum. The format of the budget papers requires a separation of recurrent and capital, so the spending changes table on page 569 shows \$1.24 million in recurrent. That is the difference.

Hon COLIN TINCKNELL: Thank you. When will the purchase and construction of facilities commence?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Essentially, we have the money from 1 July. As I kind of mentioned earlier, a community advisory committee will be established. That will call for expressions of interest for that later in July or early August. We will then use that committee to help guide the planning and the future works that we think, or the community thinks will be needed for both these parks. From that, essentially, the spending will commence. The money is there for now, but given this community have waited on this park since 1983, I want to make sure that the community has buy-in for the project—some positive engagement with it. When the money is there, we will get the committee started, we will get a bit of a plan from the committee. We have notional boundaries, but I know people like Hon Diane Evers have asked me about expanding the boundaries and putting different lots in. We will have the community consultation and then we will start the planning process from there. The money will be spent; I anticipate it being spent in the annual years as laid out in the budget papers, but it will be done in collaboration and consultation with the local community.

Hon COLIN TINCKNELL: Giving a target to the finish of that construction would be pretty hard for you at the moment, just within 2021–22?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: We will do it in that time. I have no doubt we will do it in that time, but there is about \$10.5 million in funding and that will pay for things like construction of walk trails, lookouts, public access ways facilities, fire breaks, rehab projects et cetera. There needs to be a proper plan for it. While we have known about the park and the need for it for a very long time, and some planning has been undertaken by the department and the department has a view on what is needed, I am very clear that we need to get community feedback on it. We will meet it in that year, most definitely, 2021–22, but the earlier, the better, from my perspective.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Minister, I direct you initially to page 569. The top of that page, says “Division 40: Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions”. Minister, will you please change the name back to either DPaW or something with a useable acronym?

The CHAIR: You now have seven minutes left, member, so if you have any other questions that are more pressing?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Madam Chair, I am happy to provide an answer, given the member took the time to ask that question.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: You can just say no.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Member, this has been a controversial name in some quarters, but can I say, it does really show the breadth of the agency. If you think of where we came from, we had the Zoo, BGPA, Parks and Wildlife Service and Rottnest—all four different agencies—and we could not get all their names in the title of a new agency. We believe that the words “biodiversity, conservation and attractions” really shows what this agency is about. I understand the name is not a favourite of yours. I know you are very passionate for the agency itself and you do not like the name, but there is no plan to change it.

The CHAIR: Six and a half minutes left.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Thank you, minister. Let us go into the details of DBCA, then. At the top of page 572, minister, there is a great line at the beginning of that page that states, “Invasive pests, weeds and diseases will continue to be managed”. My first question is: how well are they likely to

be managed? And I have some more detail. In particular, I am interested in some changes that were gazetted by the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development at the end of last year which changed the controlled regulations for a number of invasive species around the state. I am not going to ask you specifically about the regulations, apart from, can you tell me what consultation and input DBCA had in the changed regulations?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I will provide an initial response and then I will hand over to someone who will give you a more in-depth answer. But can I say, member, that certainly managing the effects of pest animals, plant diseases and weeds, as you would know, is essential to protect Western Australia's natural environment and biodiversity. This department, the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, manages more than 29 million hectares of land across Western Australia and on those lands is responsible for the control of pest animals, plant diseases and weeds. Control program areas are prepared in response to regional priorities and the objectives of DBCA's good-neighbour policy. Member, you would remember from the last time that you were in Parliament, there has not always been a fantastic relationship between what was parks and wildlife, environment and conservation, or indeed conservation and land management with local neighbours. Since that time and to the credit of the leadership of this department, they have worked very closely on their good-neighbour policy, so that we do truly share work in tandem with other landowners around the state. We have had a flagship program for a number of years, the Western Shield program, which involves deploying around one million baits each year across more than three million hectares of department managed land. That is from the Pilbara, through the south west forest and to the east of Esperance. The program also includes controlling introduced predators like foxes and feral cats to recover native animal populations and the mix of animals to get close to pre-European levels in selected areas. That Western Shield program continues to deliver, and very well. We have also had the feral cat bait, Eradicat, which was developed by this department and was approved for operational use in December 2014. We are also working towards integrated baiting for feral cats and foxes. They are some of the things we are doing. Could we do with more money? Absolutely. We are given the funding that we are. In an ideal world, if they gave us another \$20 million, could we use it? I am sure I could find ways to use more money, but certainly we have been focusing on those areas. I have to say, in terms of Western Shield, that is and has been delivering positive outcomes. In terms of the change of status given to certain things by the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, certainly one that has been controversial has been the change to the declared pest status of cane toads. Some of your colleagues, including Hon Ken Baston, have asked me about that. In October last year that status was changed to remove its status above the twentieth parallel. We have, as an agency, written to the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development to propose to re-list cane toads as a prohibited organism, and I have certainly had conversations with the Minister for Agriculture and Food on this. I think there is a lot more work that can and needs to be done in this area. In terms of some of those other species or pests that were taken off the list, I am not sure what consultation or conversation was had within my agencies. Perhaps I will ask Dr Stanley if she can provide more of an answer to that one, please.

Dr STANLEY: Yes, the then Department of Agriculture and Food did consult with the then Department of Parks and Wildlife regarding the proposed changes to the declared species list. We provided a number of comments on a range of species. But the final decision rests with the Minister for Agriculture and Food, so we have provided advice and input into that process and a number of other agencies were asked for input as well.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Minister, I do not suppose that advice is available?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Member, I am not sure it is. I am not going to provide it by way of supplementary, but let me investigate and if it can be provided I will certainly provide something to you.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I would be very interested, if you could.

[*Supplementary Information No B3.*]

The CHAIR: If the minister is unable to provide it, he will provide the committee with information as to why.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Minister, on the same line. I am interested in the spread of a number of those, particularly reclassified invasive weed species—I appreciate your comments on cane toads—but if I gave you three or four species, would it be possible to provide a measure of the current distribution of those species on the land managed by DBCA and whether that spread is increasing or decreasing?

[11.00 am]

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Member, we could certainly try to do that. Depending on the species, it might depend on —

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Some of these—I am happy to put them out there.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Tell me what the species are and let us have a look.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I am interested particularly in arum lily, blackberry, blue lupins and narrow leaf cotton bush and the distribution of those on DBCA-managed lands.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Without putting someone full-time on it to traverse around the state looking at lands, and I am not going to do that —

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: No; if you do not have the information already, that is fine.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Let us see what is easily accessible and we can provide that information by way of supplementary.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: There may need to be a briefing afterwards, but if you could provide that, that is fine.

The CHAIR: So, either the information or a briefing?

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Information or a briefing—whichever you are able to provide—would be good.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Member, as you aware, I am always very happy to provide a briefing, but let us see what we can provide the committee and otherwise, member, we will talk behind the Chair about a briefing ,if you require one.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: If it is not available in an easy briefing note, let us do that.

[*Supplementary Information No B4.*]

Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT: A couple of my questions have very generously been covered by committee members. Nevertheless, that leaves me with a few. Can I start with page 570 and the item on the Aboriginal ranger program. It is noted on the significant issues list. Can the minister explain to the committee the progress of the \$20 million five-year program and, in particular, how that funding is being used?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I can. Member, I have said quite a lot on this issue, but let me just supplement what I said previously.

Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT: That is what I was hoping.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: As you and members in this place are aware, we have had established ranger groups in this state for a number of years. They have been funded by the federal government. We made a commitment last year to fund a \$20 million program over five years and we have done a range of things in relation to that work. That funding will start to roll out from 1 July this year. As I mentioned earlier on, the program is led by Aboriginal people. It is creating jobs and skills to deliver positive economic outlooks for Aboriginal people in remote areas in particular. What we decided early on was that the funding could be used on land that was tenure blind. It did not need to be spent on land that was necessarily managed by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions.

The first round of funding—I did not have this information earlier on. I mentioned that we have invested \$8.5 million across 13 Aboriginal groups. I had mentioned the 85 new jobs and the 80 training positions. Forty-seven of those rangers will be female. I mentioned earlier that there is a spread from across the state, so the Kimberley, the midwest and the south west areas were funded, as were the goldfields. Aboriginal people are being employed to carry out works such as biodiversity monitoring and research, management of tourism and cultural sites and weeds and feral animals. To refer to Hon Dr Steve Thomas's earlier question, we have rangers on the case in managing some of these weeds and feral animals around the state. They are also involved in prescribed burning, bushfire suppression and environmental protection works. This program will provide a pathway for Aboriginal people to develop a career in land and sea management, and also create long-term cultural, conservation and tourism opportunities. So, it is a nice program. I have had the pleasure of meeting some of these groups, but I was also at the table having conversations with these groups about what the scheme should look like, what the program should look like and how it should be rolled out.

An amount of \$8.5 million was spent in the first round. A number of groups have been funded for a number of years. Some have been funded one-off, but it is certainly our intention to make sure that this scheme continues, because there is a great deal of benefit to not only the environment, but also Aboriginal communities around the state. Hopefully, member, that gives you all the points. I do not think I missed anything earlier on. Member, I can give you some detail about the groups that were funded, if that is of interest.

Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT: Yes, that would be good.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: The ones particularly of interest I am sure to you—not saying you do not have an interest outside the South West Region—are the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council Aboriginal Corporation. Their project was the Noongar Boodja Mentored Employment and Training Partnership. They have 12 rangers. I might have said eight earlier on; it is 12 rangers, including six females. There were two groups in the Central Desert, the Tarlka Matuwa Piarku Aboriginal Corporation and the Pila Nguru Aboriginal Corporation. One of those was the Seed Women group; I think you may well have met some of those women when they were at Parliament. I will zoom through this list. The Goldfields Land and Sea Council were successful, so they got \$825 000. The Esperance Tjaltjraak Native Title Aboriginal Corporation got \$440 000 for 12 rangers. The Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation on behalf of the Malgana Shark Bay People's native title group was funded for seven rangers, including three female rangers, based out of Geraldton essentially. The Kalyuku Ninti-Puntuku Ngurra Aboriginal Corporation, or KJ, had six rangers, including three female rangers, and they are in the Pilbara. The Yinhawangka Aboriginal Corporation, they again are in the Pilbara; they had seven rangers, including one female. The Aboriginal Prospecting Company trading as Yandeyarra Pastoral—again, outside Hedland—had

seven rangers, including four female. KLC, on behalf of the Yanunijarra Aboriginal Corporation, had four rangers. Nyamba Buru Yawuru Ltd in Broome, their Yawuru women's ranger project had three rangers. The Nyul Nyul and Bardi Jawi Women Rangers on the Dampier Peninsula, they got two 0.8 FTEs and five casual rangers. The Bunuba Dawangarri Aboriginal Corporation had three women rangers. All up, it was \$8.447 million. I am happy to provide this list to Hansard so they get the spellings right.

Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT: Staying on the same page, the third dot point refers to the new Fitzroy River National Park. What community consultation has been done in the planning for the reservation of this area?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am conscious of the time so I will do this as quickly as possible. Thank you for the question. We have commenced our community consultation across the East Kimberley as part of our election commitment to delivering on the ambitious and visionary plan for the Fitzroy River. Myself, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the Minister for Water and Minister MacTiernan as Minister for Agriculture and Regional Development hosted a community conversation—a community meeting—a few months ago now in Fitzroy where we had a range of people. We had the state government. In fact, we had federal government, we had local government, we had pastoralists, we had industry—mines and petroleum industry—and we had TOs, Aboriginal organisations—that is probably the extent of it—from right across the region in the room for our first conversation. There were about 80 people there on the day. Environmental organisations, too, have a keen interest. The workshop was the start, the first stage, of what we propose to be wide community consultation. It is focused not only on the creation of the jointly managed Fitzroy River National Park, but also land use and economic framework for the Fitzroy River and a water allocation plan for the entire river system.

It is very unusual, as you would know, for four ministers to be on the same page, but the message from us is that we have these great commitments to this region and we are keen to turn around some of the social issues there. We are keen to protect the natural environment there and we are going to do it in tandem. The four of us are working in close collaboration to make sure we do it for the whole catchment. There are significant cultural, on behalf of the Aboriginal people, but also environmental and economic values associated with that river. So the collaborative approach across government will ensure that we not only deliver our commitment for the river, but it will also provide a long-term secure future for the region. We are keen to make sure that we are creating jobs and essentially changing lives and providing opportunities for communities.

In terms of the boundary of the park, we have started on the consultation for that. There are disparate views, as you would imagine. Some people want a big, expansive park. Some people want a limited park. There are some pastoralists there who have land on the banks of the river who have keen views. We are meeting with all of those groups. Initially, we started to have a dialogue with some of the traditional owners of the land in the Fitzroy for them to bring us out onto country to show us the important cultural areas from their perspective. We are doing that first before we talk or put lines on maps. The conversation started in March. We anticipate it will take probably the best part of 18 months in terms of consultation before we actually can move to the next stage with lines on maps and think about legislation or regulation.

Hon PIERRE YANG: My first question is in relation to the fifth dot point on page 570 and also the third point from the top on page 571 in relation to the Community Rivercare grants program and also the Swan—Canning River protection strategy. On page 571, it says that the strategy —

... continues to improve coordination across Government to protect and enhance the ecological and community benefits of the Swan Canning Riverpark.

Minister, can you please explain and elaborate on how the strategy and the grants program will improve coordination?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Sure. I will just do this quickly. The first part of your question—not being rude, but you referred to that fifth dot point on page 570, the funding to 17 groups. I have previously this morning mentioned those groups, just so you are aware of that.

Hon PIERRE YANG: That is right—mentioned by Hon Tjorn Sibma.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: In relation to the Swan–Canning River protection strategy, that continues to improve coordination across government to protect and enhance the ecological and community benefits of the Swan–Canning River Park. That document was developed in consultation with the 20 local government authorities and 17 state government agencies that have a statutory role to manage specific aspects of the river park. A number of councils—20 around the metropolitan area—have a link to the Swan–Canning Rivers. It is obviously not the easiest process but can I say that we have a good relationship with those councils and land managers of those councils that have boundaries along the river.

One of the major initiatives under that river protection strategy has been the artificial oxygenation. This continues to be an important component of the department’s catchment-to-coast approach to improving water quality. About \$1.15 million will be invested in the ongoing operation of oxygenation plants throughout the Swan–Canning River Park. Members will be aware that a few years ago prior to this, we had a number of algal blooms in the river. Thankfully, since that time, and mainly as a result of the fine work of the staff, but also these oxygenation plants on the river, we have been able to not have as many algal blooms on the river. Obviously, algal blooms are dependent on the weather, so at various times of the year you have got inclement weather that is not expected that puts the health of the river at risk. That probably gives you enough information, noting the time.

The CHAIR: We need to come back to a committee member for one last question.

Hon DIANE EVERS: My question is on page 582 on the income statement. I notice that supplies and services, which peaked at \$116 million last year, have dropped down below \$100 million and continue to drop down to \$90 million. I am wondering what cuts are being made to accommodate this decline in funding?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I would not necessarily say they are cuts, but what changes have been made; I will use that terminology. I might ask Mr Neilson if he is in a position to answer that one, please.

Mr NEILSON: The major reduction was in 2017–18 when there was a one-off \$8 million payment to Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation, and so that was included in the figure of \$116.644 million. That was a one-off payment. Having regard to that payment alone, there is an \$8 million reduction going forward into 2018–19. The remainder of the reduction will relate to a very wide variety of changes to expenditure across the whole range of the department’s programs, reflecting the overall budget parameters for the department. There is no one single factor, other than the \$8 million payment to Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation, that I could point to at the moment.

The CHAIR: Thank you, members. That concludes our hearing with DBCA. On behalf of the committee, I thank you for your attendance today. The committee will forward the transcript of evidence, which includes the questions you have taken on notice highlighted on the transcript, within seven days of the hearing. If members have any unasked questions, I ask you to submit these via the electronic lodgement system on the POWAnet site by 5.00 pm on 27 June. Responses to these questions and any questions taken on notice are due by 12 noon, 13 July. Should you be

unable to meet this due date, please advise the committee in writing as soon as possible before the due date. Your advice is to include specific reasons as to why the due date cannot be met. Once again, I thank you for your attendance today.

Hearing concluded at 11.17 am
