

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ESTIMATES AND FINANCIAL OPERATIONS**

2022–23 BUDGET ESTIMATES



**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 22 JUNE 2022**

SESSION THREE

DEPARTMENT OF BIODIVERSITY, CONSERVATION AND ATTRACTIONS

Members

**Hon Peter Collier (Chair)
Hon Samantha Rowe (Deputy Chair)
Hon Jackie Jarvis
Hon Nick Goiran
Hon Dr Brad Pettitt**

Hearing commenced at 2.00 pm

HON STEPHEN DAWSON

Minister for Emergency Services, representing the Minister for Environment, examined:

Mr MARK WEBB

Director General, examined:

Dr FRAN STANLEY

Executive Director, Conservation and Ecosystem Management, examined:

Ms WENDY ATTENBOROUGH

Executive Director, Zoological Parks Authority, examined:

Mr PETER SHARP

Executive Director, Parks and Visitor Services, examined:

Mr JASON FOSTER

Executive Director, Regional Fire Management Services, examined:

Ms AMANDA KLENKE

Chief Finance Officer, examined:

Dr MARGARET BYRNE

Executive Director, Biodiversity and Conservation Science, examined:

Ms SANDRA THOMAS

Senior Ministerial Adviser, examined:

The CHAIR: Welcome to today's hearings, particularly the witnesses. The committee acknowledges and honours the traditional owners of the ancestral lands upon which we meet today, the Whadjuk Noongar people, and pays its respects to their elders both past and present.

Can you just indicate through a collective nodding of the head that you have read, understood and signed the document titled "Information for Witnesses"?

[Witnesses nodded.]

The CHAIR: That is duly done. The testimony before the committee must be complete and truthful to the best of your knowledge. This hearing is being recorded by Hansard and broadcast live on the Parliament's website. The committee will place the uncorrected transcript of your evidence on the internet a few days after the hearing. When the transcript is finalised, the uncorrected version will be replaced by the finalised version. This is a public hearing, but the committee can elect to hear evidence in private. If for some reason you wish to make a confidential statement, you should request that the evidence be taken in closed session before answering the question. Members, before asking a question, I ask that you provide the relevant page and paragraph number where possible.

Would the minister like to make an opening statement?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: No, thank you.

The CHAIR: I now move first of all to the committee. Hon Samantha Rowe.

Hon SAMANTHA ROWE: Minister, I am on budget paper No 2, page 719, and pretty much the second line in and around the Perth Zoo master plan. I know that there are some significant works planned as part of the master plan, but I was wanting to know specifically what conservation and infrastructure projects might be supported by those upgrades.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Thus far, I think \$51.8 million has been committed by the state government towards the delivery of the Perth Zoo master plan 2040, and that includes construction of a new cafe and function centre and \$30 million in support of other new animal and visitor experiences. The master plan defines cornerstone projects and provides a framework for the transformation of Perth Zoo over the next 20 years. Delivery of the master plan will position Perth Zoo as an even more attractive and engaging recreational and tourist destination, but it will also enable community recognition of the zoo's role in species conservation and animal awareness. A lot of that stuff at the moment happens behind closed doors and away from the community, so as part of this investment and part of the plan, the intention is to showcase the great work that is happening in species conservation. In addition to the funds committed to construct the new cafe and function centre, as I said, \$30 million has been contributed towards the planning and delivery of five key major projects that have been identified in that plan that we mentioned earlier on. That is a primate run and main lawn precinct, which includes a new playground and visitor amenities; the African Savannah redevelopment; a new orang-utan precinct; and, a new conservation precinct that includes an animal and wildlife hospital, native species breeding facilities and immersive education habitats. It also includes a high-voltage power upgrade for the Zoo. Work has commenced on developing business cases and project definition plans for all five major projects and the reports are due to be completed late this year and early next year. They will identify project costs and delivery time frames. Following the completion of the cafe and function centre, the primate run and main lawn precinct will be the next major project to be delivered, with construction planned to commence in early 2024. That project will certainly modernise the Zoo and bring it into the twenty-first century. We believe it will provide excellent visitor facilities and enable us to showcase the wonderful work that goes on at the Zoo. Hopefully, that answered your question.

Hon SAMANTHA ROWE: Thank you, minister.

Hon JACKIE JARVIS: Minister, I am looking at page 710 of budget paper No 2, "Fire Management", dot point 15. It notes there the importance of prescribed burning programs to mitigate bushfire risk. Obviously, last summer we had a large number of level 3 bushfire incidents, particularly in my region in the south west, and you and I visited a number of those sites. I am interested to know, in reviewing that 2021–22 summer bushfire period, does DBCA know if the bushfire mitigation strategies put in place assisted in the response to those level 3 bushfires across the state?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Obviously, as you would be aware, those four level 3 bushfires that we had in February this year were unprecedented. We had the fires in Denmark, Bridgetown and the wheatbelt, alongside a number of other bushfires down in your electorate, including around Margaret River and Eagle Bay—and others. So while DBCA provided significant resources to support the four level 3 bushfires, the majority of those bushfires actually took place off DBCA conservation reserves and were managed essentially by DFES as opposed to DBCA. It is fair to say that climate change is increasing the number of fires and the severity of fires that we are experiencing in Western Australia and, to be honest, there is no end in sight. Around the state, DBCA manages about 2.9 million hectares of land—in fact, it is a lot more; it is 26.9 million hectares of land. They are the responsible agency for preventing, managing and controlling fires on those lands. DBCA is also responsible for fire preparedness across another 90 or so million hectares of unallocated crown land and managed reserves outside the Perth metro area and town sites. DBCA’s fire management program has the dual aim of managing risk to people, assets and also the environment from the damaging impacts of bushfires. It aims to maintain at least 45 per cent of department–managed land in the south west at less than six years since the last burn to manage bushfire risk to an acceptable level. That is a key performance indicator for DBCA and is reported on annually. Operationally, it equates to achieving approximately 200 000 hectares of prescribed burning across DBCA’s three south west forest regions. It was probably before your time, honourable member, but this government—and the last, in fact—provided about \$22 million over the forward estimates for an enhanced prescribed burning program. What that has enabled the agency to do is to particularly focus on those difficult to burn areas. In your electorate, a number of communities have forests right up to the doorstep so that enhanced burning program has allowed the agency to focus on ensuring that the burn-offs around those communities can be done safely and done, essentially, because of them have not happened for a long time just because of how difficult it is to burn around them.

Hon JACKIE JARVIS: This is just a quick follow-up, and I think you have kind of already answered it. On page 717, there are two key efficiency indicators. There is dot point 9, “Prescribed Burning and Fire Management”, and I think you might have just covered off on that. Then there is the key efficiency indicator of “Bushfire Suppression”. I think you have covered off on the prescribed burning and fire management. Is bushfire suppression a different set of activities?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Yes. In terms of bushfire suppression, the latest figures I have are from the end of April this year. DBCA personnel have been instrumental in fighting and/or monitoring about 400 bushfires that burnt just over two million hectares. The application of prescribed burning is the state’s principal risk-mitigation strategy for protecting the community from the devastating impacts of large bushfires. As I indicated, that has been assisted by the additional \$5.5 million a year of that \$22 million figure that I mentioned earlier. From 1 July 2021 to 9 May this year, 17 prescribed burns took place in three south west forest regions, and another 74 burns were partially completed. At that stage, 160 000 hectares had been burnt. That is only that south west corner because what is not captured in those figures is any burning that takes place in the Kimberley, for example, or in the goldfields or in the Pilbara.

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: I refer to page 708 of budget paper No 2, volume 2. Under “Spending Changes” is “New Initiatives” and “Climate Action—Carbon Farming on Lands Managed by the Department”. Can you please provide details for how the budget allocation for 2022–23 and the subsequent three out years will be used?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Sure. I might start off and then I might hand over to Mr Foster.

DBCA has been allocated an additional recurrent appropriation of about \$6 million over the forward estimates as part of that whole-of-government climate action initiative. That is overseen by the ministerial task force on climate action, which we touched on in the previous session, and that is to undertake carbon farming on lands that are managed by DBCA. These funds are to expand the savanna-burning program—that is a \$1.3 million investment—and to establish a team of six FTEs to deliver carbon farming projects on DBCA-managed lands. That includes areas identified for addition to the conservation estate as part of Plan for Our Parks.

I will ask Mr Foster if he can elaborate further.

Mr FOSTER: In addition to the minister's comments, the six FTEs that have been allocated to this new program will go towards supporting the initiatives on department-managed lands, and that is in partnership with our joint management partners—in particular, traditional owner and native title holder groups. Those activities will relate to spatial support, GIS analysis and remote sensing to determine the feasibility of projects, particularly in our rangeland areas. Also, we will support engagement and working-on-country opportunities with our traditional owner joint management partners.

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: To follow up on that, I think the minister touched on savanna burning. The methods of carbon farming that are being used?

Mr FOSTER: A range of different methods are recognised through the commonwealth government's carbon accounting scheme. That includes savanna burning as an option; another option is human-induced regeneration. Current activities that the department is involved in include savanna-burning opportunities, where we are undertaking early dry season burning in the Kimberley to reduce the threat of large-scale bushfires. In the rangelands, we are looking at opportunities to increase regeneration in some of those more semi-arid areas, which can include opportunities for the removal of feral animals and grazing pressures to actually help regenerate the vegetation in those areas.

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: Will this produce carbon credits for the government; and, if so, do we have an estimation of what that might produce?

Mr FOSTER: Correct. Each carbon farming project does have the potential to generate carbon credits, but the amount of carbon credits will depend on the feasibility of projects. At this stage, across the state, we are in the feasibility stage, apart from our savanna-burning program in the Kimberley, which we have been undertaking for a number of years, and carbon credits are being generated from that savanna burning at the moment.

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: There are carbon credits being produced from that savanna-burning program. Do you know how many credits have been produced?

Mr FOSTER: At the moment, with the savanna burning in the north, we are looking at around 22 000 carbon credits or ACCUs being generated from our current activities.

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: On a different tack, this is actually one I could not find, so I do not really have a page for it, but it broadly refers to "Appropriation, Expenses and Cash Assets" on page 708. What I could not find—maybe because it sits with somebody else—is a budget line for the penguin discovery centre that was announced earlier this year. Is that not here for a reason?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I will ask Mr Foster.

Mr FOSTER: Yes, it is covered under the peri-urban parks expansion, if I understand your question correctly about the centre. We are still currently working through that initiative—working on

concepts and designs—with key stakeholders and looking at our process moving forward for implementation.

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: Am I to take from the fact that it is not listed as a discrete \$3.3 million budget line that that project is under review, might proceed this year or will proceed as announced?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: No. The intention is to proceed. You should not surmise that because it is not listed as a line that the money is not in the budget.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Minister, if I can get you to turn to page 726 under “Details of Administered Transactions”, you will see that the second-last item indicates that there was a \$36 million loss in the value of native forest and sandalwood biological assets in the previous financial year. You will see that there is a little note there, (a), which indicates that those “assets were transferred to the Department on 1 July 2019”. Which entity held those assets prior to that time?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: That was the Forest Products Commission.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Is the department currently administering these assets on behalf of anybody?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: No.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Can you just provide some explanation as to why the assets have been devalued by \$56 million?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I will ask Ms Klenke to respond.

Ms KLENKE: When we took the assets over from the Forest Products Commission, there is an annual valuation that needs to occur, and it looks at future income-earning potential. It can only be based on the current FMP. Obviously, we are getting towards the tail end of the current FMP. We are actually going through the revaluation process now for the financial accounts this year. Again, they have to look at the future potential of the asset’s earning capabilities. Because we do not have a new FMP at this time, it is highly likely that it will go down again. We do engage an external consultant to do that valuation for us.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: This is an annual process, this revaluation?

Ms KLENKE. Yes, it is—for financial accounting.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: The valuation that is currently underway is due when? Is it 30 June or is there a deadline for that?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I think it feeds into the annual report every year.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: So by 30 September?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Yes. Correct.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Minister, the most recent data here indicates a \$56 million loss. Is it expected that we are going to see further losses in this revaluation process?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I think Ms Klenke actually said that in the answer—yes.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: So we are expecting it to get worse.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: For the value to drop.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Is this primarily because of the government’s recent decision in this respect?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: In relation to stopping logging in forests? Some of it may well be that. Some of it may well be climate change, but I will ask Ms Klenke to respond.

Ms KLENKE: Thank you. So, it is actually to do with the potential yields and the like, so the contracts and the commercial viability of it, so it does actually look at the operational costs of the FPC. The

reason it is an administered transaction is because we do not control, I guess, the operational expenditure for that asset. It is a state asset, the forest, so that is why it is deemed an administered transaction. The actual cost to feed into the valuation process does come through from the FPC.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: What happened in that financial year to result in such an extraordinary loss—\$56 million? What was the event?

Ms KLENKE: So, they obviously —

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Was the evaluation the previous year of no value?

Ms KLENKE: As I say, there is a detailed report that is produced by the external consultants, and they do look at future cash flows, and because they can only work on the current FMP, there was the unknown as to what the new FMP would look like. So, in what FPC has put forward, even in their own strategic plans, they were not projecting significant logging or commercial operations. That is what feeds into the model.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: It was the new information that was provided in that financial year that led to the reduced valuations; it is not because the previous valuation was incompetent? From one financial year to the next, to lose an asset with a valuation of \$56 million is no small amount, so something significant has happened in that financial year.

Ms KLENKE: It is significant. Obviously, the FPC transferred it through to us. Obviously, the way they were undertaking that valuation—so, no, it is nothing to do with incompetent valuation methodologies—however, when it was in their accounts, it was looked at in a different manner. We would have to go back to their valuation company compared to our own.

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Was it a different company that did the valuation?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Yes.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: Can I turn to page 709 under “Visitor Services”, and specifically in relation to the establishment and upgrade of visitor facilities and infrastructure across the state? I have a specific question with regards to upgrades that are planned for John Forrest National Park. I understand that a survey is currently out seeking public comment. My first question is: when does that survey period close?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I will ask Mr Peter Sharp if he can respond.

Mr SHARP: Thank you, minister. Thank you for the question. The survey conducted by the department has closed. There is a community-based survey that is underway. With regard to the John Forrest development, the licence for occupancy by the lessee for the tavern expires today. The assets will be vacated tomorrow. We will have services being disconnected in the tavern come Friday, and Monday there will be asbestos removal processes commencing. The intention is in the long term to upgrade the whole of John Forrest National Park as an outstanding example of our national parks around Western Australia so that visitors to the eastern parts of Perth can see representations of the various parks around Western Australia and to elevate the standard of the visitor services available to visitors there.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: I appreciate that, but my question actually perhaps more particularly relates to the general upgrades. I think you mentioned that there is a community survey out now. My query is when that community survey, with regards to the more general upgrades—I appreciate your information with regard to the tavern as well—closes?

Mr SHARP: As I said earlier, the community surveys that were undertaken by the department closed.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: It is on your website, though, still.

Mr SHARP: There is comment available on the design for the new facilities that are proposed. So, we have a design that is being prepared by external consultants for us, and there is a process underway for community consultation in that regard.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: When does that close?

Mr SHARP: I cannot tell you the answer on that. I think it is two months.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: Perhaps if I could maybe take on notice a couple of points with regard to this. First, if we could find out when that community consultation on the design closes; whether or not the local council, which would be the Shire of Mundaring, is being formally consulted on those designs; and what other stakeholder groups are specifically being consulted with regard to those designs?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am not taking that on notice. I am trying to get answers now so we will come back to you later in the hearing.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: You are going to see if you can get back to that one.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: People have started chasing down the answers, so I want to provide them today.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: I suppose I am keen to understand with regard to the designs, how the department and/or the organisation that is doing it—is it only the survey that is being done in terms of more general consultation with the community? So if you can come back to me on that.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am not sure I understand that question. Can you please ask it again?

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: I understand that there is a community survey, but are there going to be any workshops or anything else or is that pretty much it, if I can put that way?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: We will come back to that.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: One more, and I am happy for it to be taken on notice. On page 712, under “Service Summary: Research and Conservation Partnerships”, can I just confirm that Perup sanctuary is still part of the recovery effort for woylies?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Yes, that is correct.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: Can I just take on notice, then, to speed things up, could you please provide for me an update on the outcomes in terms of the sanctuary in terms of its conservation of the woylie. Some of your officers will know I have a personal interest.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am sure there is an officer here who might provide an answer now. Dr Byrne.

Dr BYRNE: Thank you. Yes. The woylies, as you know, have been in the Perup sanctuary and there was a lot of effort went into providing effective conservation of the species and the numbers at the sanctuary, and the woylies have bred up well in the sanctuary there and are doing very well in the sanctuary itself.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: I am pleased to hear that.

Hon STEVE MARTIN: Minister, I refer to page 712, “Outcomes and Key Effectiveness Indicators”. The removal of jarrah and karri sawlogs figure is well under budget and it refers in the notes to an explanation about significant movements about market conditions being responsible for that under-performance. Can someone outline what those market conditions were, please?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I will ask Dr Stanley if she can provide an answer to that.

Dr STANLEY: The markets are managed through the Forest Products Commission. The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions does not get involved in the markets, so the question is probably best directed to the Forest Products Commission.

Hon STEVE MARTIN: I will refer to an answer that I received for a question submitted prior to the hearing, which was question 1. It talked about the preparation for the upcoming FMP and it talked about some focus groups—74 people participated in focus groups. Would I be able to get a list of the people who took part in the focus group process, please?

Dr STANLEY: Are you asking for a list of the specific people or the groups?

Hon STEVE MARTIN: I assume that is on notice.

The CHAIR: Do you mean the groups or the individuals?

Hon STEVE MARTIN: Both.

Dr STANLEY: I can provide some information on that. We held focus groups with seven different sectors. That included conservation and a separate group for ecologists and scientists; an industry focus group; land managers—for example, natural resource management groups; local government authorities; a mining focus group; and a tourism and recreation group. Largely, those were made up of representatives from peak bodies or organisations or local government authorities, rather than it being individuals representing themselves; they were representing groups within those sectors.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: In terms of some of those groups, I can let you know, for example, that the Bee Industry Council of Western Australia were involved; the Forest Industries Federation of WA was —

Hon STEVE MARTIN: By interjection, minister, rather than going through a few now, would I be able to get the list?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I have got them; I could tell you who was there. I do not have the individual names, but we probably will not disclose them.

The CHAIR: We just want everyone that attended, in terms of the groups.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: It was the WA Bee Industry Council, the Forest Industries Federation of WA, Forestry Australia WA, and the Djarlma Plan ecological thinning working group. There were a range of government agencies represented, too, with the Forest Products Commission; Department of Fire and Emergency Services; Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation; Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries; Main Roads; Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety; Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage; Department of the Premier and Cabinet; Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development; Synergy; Department of Training and Workforce Development; Treasury; Water Corporation; and Department of Water and Environmental Regulation. There were also land managers involved from NRM groups, and there were some tourism and recreation members involved, too.

Hon STEVE MARTIN: Thank you, minister, for that level of detail. Also in response to my question submitted prior to the hearing, you mentioned a total of 2 277 individuals responded to the online survey. Is that the online survey that has had a fair bit of media in the last nine months? Can I check the number? It was referred to, I believe, if it is the same survey, this morning in *The West* where Jess Beckerling, the convener of the WA Forest Alliance, said 17 000.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I think you are talking about two different things, but I will ask Dr Stanley to answer that.

Dr STANLEY: Thank you. Yes, there are two separate surveys. There was one conducted last year in July–August 2021, and that was the one that received around 17 000 responses. We ran a survey to inform the draft forest management plan in April 2022, and that is the one that received 2 277 responses.

Hon STEVE MARTIN: Thank you. One more, chair. Also in response to a question submitted prior to the hearing—question 3 on WA-specific modelling. It refers to page 713. The answer talked about a recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report. Would I be able to get the details of which report that was, please?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: It is a publicly available document.

Hon STEVE MARTIN: There are a number of them; I just wanted the particular report.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I understand it was the 2019 IPCC *Special report on climate change and land*.

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: Minister, we can stay on the same page—in fact, at the top of page 712 under service summary, we have item 6, “Conserving Habitat Species and Ecological Communities”. I am interested in the quantum of that allocation provided to recognised biosecurity groups in order to undertake baiting programs on unallocated crown land that is under the management of the department?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Funny you might ask a question about that issue; I did guess that you would! Dr Stanley, can you provide an answer to that, please?

Dr STANLEY: Thank you. There is not a specific budget allocation to that activity. It is funded through that service and there are staff within our head office at Kensington and within relevant regions who are involved in liaising with recognised biosecurity groups around wild dog control.

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: Does the department make—or is there money paid to either DPIRD or directly to the groups in order to undertake that work or is it more that you provide the other services in terms of staffing and so on?

Dr STANLEY: There are some specific funds put towards or provided to recognised biosecurity groups in some areas. It is not across the board; it depends on the particular region or district and the arrangement they have with the recognised biosecurity group. There are some specific funds, but largely it is staff salaries.

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: Are you able to provide a breakdown of that funding at some point—perhaps on notice if that is possible?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am not sure we can. I will ask the director general to respond.

The CHAIR: Could you just repeat that question?

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: What I am asking is: you mentioned that some of that funding is provided to RBGs, but it varies by region and so on; are we able to get a breakdown of how that funding is provided to those groups?

Mr WEBB: Is it just the RBGs—and by region?

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: Yes.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: We can provide that.
[*Supplementary Information No C1.*]

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: Continuing on further down page 712, “Area of land baited for introduced predators”, is there an indication of what proportion of that target is baited by recognised biosecurity groups?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I will ask Dr Stanley to answer; I missed it because we were talking.

Dr STANLEY: I think you are asking was there a proportion of the area of land baited for introduced predators that is delivered by recognised biosecurity groups?

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: Correct. Yes.

Dr STANLEY: No. That effectiveness indicator is what the department delivers. It is the area of land that the department delivers baiting programs on.

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: When a recognised biosecurity group baits on department land that is not counted in that figure?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: We are not sure.

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: Is there a way to clarify that?

[*Supplementary Information No C2.*]

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: Just following on from that, then, obviously, we know that these groups play a pretty big role in managing pests on crown land and also on other land. Given that, why is it that the legal responsibility for baiting is being transferred to RBGs away from the department?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I will ask the director general to reply to that.

Mr WEBB: Thank you. I think it was back in 2019, we sought advice on the ability of the department to verify that the baiting done by regional biosecurity groups was our responsibility or theirs. The advice effectively was that we could not verify that in fact those groups had been trained and were undertaking those services. So, we had to review the code of conduct that applies. We have a MOU with each of those regional biosecurity groups. We had to review the code of conduct, but that code of conduct really sits with the Department of Health and DPIRD. DPIRD has been reviewing that code of conduct, and I am advised that we are getting a revised code of conduct later this year.

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: What happens if those groups then decide that since they are volunteer-based, they are not going to do the work anymore?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: That is a hypothetical question. We are involved in a process now and will answer that at the appropriate time.

The CHAIR: Hon Tjorn Sibma, as you are shadow, I will give you a couple of extra minutes, as long as they are good questions.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Thank you. Minister, my questioning pertains to paragraph 14 on page 710 and the issue being the Biodiversity Information Office. My first question is: in the spending table for your asset investment program at page 719, there is a figure of \$2.1 million assigned to this particular project in the most recent budget year. Could I capture the full investment in the establishment of this Biodiversity Information Office over preceding years?

[2.40 pm]

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Sure. I will ask Dr Byrne if she can provide an answer, please.

Dr BYRNE: The Biodiversity Information Office has been funded jointly, largely by state funding but also with co- investment from the commonwealth. Overall, over four out years from 2020–21, it was funded from the state at \$7.734 million, and from the commonwealth at \$1.5 million.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Thank you. So, roughly —

Dr BYRNE: It was \$2 827 000.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: There was a statement made in the course of the budget paper that the first iteration of the platform would come online in June this year. Has that been achieved or are you still on target to achieve that?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I have to say, honourable member, that there has been some slippage. It will be released on 1 July—24 hours late.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: In terms of slippages, that is not a bad one. I endorse your accountability; that is wonderful.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Sorry, I am incorrect. It will be launched on 1 July, but it will actually be released on 30 June; therefore, the commitment has been met.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: It will be active from 30 June, but the media program is from 1 July. That is when the media statement will come out. That is all right. What further iterations are planned for the platform? Actually, with this first iteration that will come out next week, what functionality will that provide?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Dr Byrne, please.

Dr BYRNE: The release that will come out next week has a large amount of data in it from a range of sources. That comes from the sources that the department holds itself plus a range of other sources that were provided into previous data repositories under what was known as NatureMap, and then, in addition, a large amount of industry proponent data, primarily coming from companies working in the Pilbara who have given us a large amount of their back data to come into this initial release. So a large amount of data will be available to government agencies, industry and researchers covering a large range of both plot and point-based data. That will be available to everybody through the platform.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Just further to that, in terms of “where to next?”, which I think was part of the question, the agency is taking a user-centric approach. We will work with the various stakeholders who will use it to identify, from their perspective, what the priorities should be for additional feature development. That is from 2022–23 onwards. Rather than us deciding what we think is best, we will work with them.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: The process of iteration rollouts is not, necessarily, the delivery, using Environment Online language, of minimum viable products—different components. This is more or less the full suite, which you will attempt to upgrade, like an app upgrades, over time. Would that be a fair summation?

Dr BYRNE: The platform has been designed to give core functionality now, at this point—the functionality that we expect people to be able to utilise in their surveys of data to inform environmental impact assessments. What we will then be looking at is getting feedback from stakeholders as they use it. We have resourcing to build enhancements according to what they are seeking to use over and above the core functionality that we already know about that they use regularly, and then we will enhance it according to the specific functionality that they would like to see within the database.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Sure. What access arrangements will apply to this platform from a non-government user’s perspective? For example, will there be a fee for service or a licence application that you can obtain?

Dr BYRNE: No; the intention is to make this data freely available, so all users will be able to sign on and use the data in the database, effectively, however they choose to use it.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Fabulous. Who has assumed responsibility for what I call “data hygiene”? This might be used in any number of applications. Obviously, there is a premium put on the accuracy of the information that it will contain. What checks or what QA has taken place up until, say, next week when it gets rolled out?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I will ask Dr Byrne to respond, but bear in mind again that lots of this data is government data—it is ours that we hold already—or stakeholders have provided it.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: That is what worries me, minister; it is government data. Forgive me my cynicism.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Having been a Minister for Environment, I am very confident that the agency manages its data very well. There will be data, though, as we have previously pointed out, from stakeholders, so from industry. Lots of that stuff is captured by virtue of ministerial statements under the EP act. It needs to meet a threshold. I will ask Dr Byrne if she can further elaborate.

Dr BYRNE: We have staff within the Biodiversity Information Office whose job it is to curate the data, as well as the curation functions that are built into the database automatically. The data will get scanned for obvious outliers, obvious inaccuracies—things that will get flagged. When it is first brought into the database, it will be manually checked and balanced and checked back against the original data suppliers if there is anything that we need to follow up. We do not change any of the data within the database without checking back with the original suppliers of the data and the custodian check that they have on that data. This is all under our data-sharing agreements. The intent, though, is to maintain the data as accurately as it can be. One of the main ways in which data becomes inaccurate over time is any name changes in terms of species, so we have built in functions that will look for that and then will track those name changes over time so that you can always go back and find out how a point of data has changed over time.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Fabulous.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: The director general was just going to make a comment.

Mr WEBB: Can I just add to that that the data is curated in the way that Dr Byrne described and then it is uploaded to the portal. So, it is not actually uploaded until such time as that data has been properly curated.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Thank you. Minister, I think this is a very sensible innovation—absolutely—and I think it is obviously to everybody’s benefit that there is access to current reliable information which informs better decision-making. But what broader application does government envision in terms of utilising this platform or this capability across other policy vectors or, indeed, your own operation? I am not going to presume or hypothesise something, but for example, if I wanted to reconstitute what used to be called the strategic assessment of the Perth and Peel region, would the datasets embedded in the Biodiversity Information Office facilitate that process?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: First of all, I concur with you that it is a good initiative. I may or may not have been involved in it when I was the Minister for Environment, so thank you for that feedback. Secondly, in relation to SAPPR, obviously SAPPR is outside of—I will ask the director general to reply to that.

Mr WEBB: Sorry; I was actually going to refer it to Dr Byrne to speak about what might be some other use, particularly in the commonwealth context.

Dr BYRNE: Whether you could actually reconstruct the SAPPR database directly would depend on whether that data has been brought into the Biodiversity Information Office data platform. I know that the data from SAPPR came from a broad range of information. Reconstructing all of that would

depend on where the data sources are, how they have been curated and whether they are available and have been brought in.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Sorry; I did not hear the end of that.

Dr BYRNE: In terms of broad use, the intention is that the data will be available for a broad range of stakeholders. Obviously, industry proponents will use the data in terms of their impact assessments and we are intending for it to be an integrated data environment with Environment Online. It is also an integrated data environment with the commonwealth data repository and the system that the commonwealth is doing, which mirrors the BIO and Environment Online here in WA. We will be the first jurisdiction to feed data into that national system that the commonwealth is setting up. It is also researchers, community groups, NRN groups—anybody who has an interest in understanding where species are can use the data for whatever purposes they want to use it for.

[2.50 pm]

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Very quickly, presumably, there is also a value in the application to the department's own operations, particularly its biodiversity function. I will just reflect on questions to answers provided prior to the hearing. I am interested in the sum total of threatened species and ecological communities in the state of Western Australia. My colleague has mentioned the woylies. I am particularly fascinated and enamoured by numbats. I have an exceedingly unbounded love of that faunal emblem of this state. For example —

The CHAIR: We are going to have to hurry.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Yes, I will be quick, chair. Will this be able to determine population sizes of these species and potentially improve their management plans and measure the performance of those management plans?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Potentially, because the success of BIO rests on the data that goes into it in the first place. If data is put on the system that identifies numbat populations, certainly it may well be used in a way that you have suggested, but it just depends what goes on in the first place.

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: I want to follow up on a couple of issues that I was speaking about earlier. Returning to page 708, climate action —

The CHAIR: I apologise. I thought you did not put your hand up when you wanted to ask a question.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Perhaps you did not see me sitting back here.

The CHAIR: No; I thought when I asked that you did not put your hand up. Can you just ask one, Hon Dr Brad Pettitt?

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: I have two really quick ones. A quick one is just in terms of clarification. Did the removal of feral animal and grazing pressures include kangaroos or is it just ferals? There was a comment around grazing pressures and feral animals. Are kangaroos included in those grazing pressures?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Are we talking carbon farming?

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: It was in response to an earlier question in relation to carbon farming, and the quote was around removing feral animals and grazing pressures was one of the ways of managing that. I was just wondering is it just feral.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I will ask Mr Foster to explain.

Mr FOSTER: It typically relates to feral herbivores—goats, feral cattle, large animals. Kangaroos do place grazing pressure, but it is typically around the feral herbivores.

The CHAIR: I am just going to need to go to Hon Dr Steve Thomas; he has not had a go at all yet.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I will try to make this quick. Page 710 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, has a heading called “Biodiversity Conservation and Ecosystem Management”. Point 12 includes “protect the State’s unique biodiversity, manage threats”. I was a little disappointed. I ran a search engine for the words “biosecurity”, “invasive species” and “feral” and got nothing, and I got “weed”, but only under Main Roads. I am sure that would not happen if you were still the minister, so I miss you in that position. What is the budget specifically for the management of feral animal species and weed species; and, if necessary by supplementary information, can you break it down by national park, state forest and unallocated crown land?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am told that we cannot do it. It is not readily available and it would be an excessive amount of work.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Can I just confirm that the government has no measure of how much money it spends on invasive species on state-managed lands? Is that what you are telling us?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am not sure that is what the question was. If that is what the question is now, I will ask Dr Stanley to reply to that.

Dr STANLEY: The management of weeds and invasive and pest animals is included within budget service 6, the conserving habitats, species and ecological communities budget. I do not have a specific dollar figure for that. It is incorporated in a number of programs that are delivered across the state in all of our regions on all the lands that we manage. It is part of that service.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Can you provide it by supplementary information?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am not sure we can, honourable member. It would be a lot of work to do. If you can be more specific in your question —

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: What I want to know is how much money the state government is spending for the control of invasive species on state-managed lands. If that is not available, I think that is an absolute shame and I will put it on notice if needs be, because I think it is a pretty reasonable question. I know because I got this information out of you when you were the minister previously.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am told we can take that on notice and we will provide you with what we can, noting —

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: If I give you the ideal, you provide me what you can. The ideal question is: what is the breakdown of the expenditure of the state on feral animal control and weed control on three areas: state forest, national parks and unallocated crown land? If you are unable to provide that, provide what you can and we will follow up with questions on notice afterwards.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: We will endeavour to answer that question.

[*Supplementary Information No C3.*]

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: I just go back to budget paper No 2, volume 2, and page 712 and the service summary around prescribed burning and fire management. Can you give us a sense of how much the increase in operating costs for DBCA and DFES can be attributed to climate change and more bushfires?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I am not sure we can give you what you are asking for. I will ask Mr Foster to respond.

Mr FOSTER: The budget relating to our prescribed burning and bushfire suppression efforts remains fairly consistent each year. The total cost of service for our bushfire suppression and prescribed burning is around \$51 million, and that includes all of our corporate overheads relating to prescribed

burning or mitigation, training, planning, roading and other activities. It also supports funding relating to our water bombing, air support, contracting of services, heavy fleet, light fleet, machinery, overtime, accommodation et cetera. In terms of breaking that down, the total cost of our prescribed burning program is a direct cost of around \$22 million per annum and, as the minister mentioned earlier in one of his responses, that includes the \$5.5 million each year through the enhanced prescribed burning program, which has gone a long way to supporting our operations and allowing us to use every opportunity, including on weekends and evenings, to maximise those windows of opportunities for burning.

Hon STEVE MARTIN: On page 710, item 13 is about the preparation for the next FMP. I just want a bit of clarification. Is approved mine site clearing involved or included in the FMP?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Dr Stanley.

Dr STANLEY: If I understand your question correctly, the approvals for the clearing are not under the FMP. They occur under the Environmental Protection Act.

Hon STEVE MARTIN: And the timber that is harvested?

Dr STANLEY: Under the current FMP? Yes.

Hon STEVE MARTIN: Current and future.

Dr STANLEY: If there is timber that is harvested ahead of those mining operations, then that is an operation that is conducted through the Forest Products Commission.

The CHAIR: Just before I conclude, minister, there is an issue with Hon Donna Faragher.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Yes, thank you. What we have been able to ascertain is that feedback will be received until mid-August. In terms of the Shire of Mundaring, I do not know. I will have to take that on notice.

The CHAIR: The Shire of Mundaring, is it?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Yes.

[Supplementary Information No C4.]

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: And my other question was: is there any other community consultations that would be undertaken outside of the survey?

The CHAIR: Did we get an answer to that?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: No. I will have to add that to it. The intention is no. I do have a clarification: \$21.7 million is spent on bushfire suppression. That was to an earlier comment. In terms of what we are taking on notice, we will find out if Mundaring has been engaged.

The CHAIR: There are no additional community —

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: No further rounds of community consultations.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: Because it was difficult to hear, did you indicate that the community survey was closing in a couple of months?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: We will take feedback until mid-August, the director general has advised me.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much for your attendance today, particularly the witnesses. Members, you may submit any remaining questions through the electronic lodgement system, which will close at 5.00 pm on 1 July 2022.

Witnesses, the committee will forward the uncorrected transcript of evidence, with questions taken on notice highlighted, as soon as possible after the hearing. Responses to questions on notice are due by 5.00 pm on 20 July 2022. Should you be unable to meet the due date, please advise the committee in writing as soon as possible before the due date. The advice is to include specific reasons why the due date cannot be met. Thank you once again for your attendance. It is appreciated.

Hearing concluded at 3.01 pm
