

Division 35: Fisheries, \$54 340 000 —

Mr P. Abetz, Chairman.

Mr T.R. Buswell, Minister for Fisheries.

Mr S.J. Smith, Director General.

Ms H.G. Brayford, Deputy Director General.

Mr B. Mezzatesta, Executive Director, Regional Services.

Mr P. Robinson, Chief Financial Officer.

Dr R. Fletcher, Executive Director, Research.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIRMAN: Member for Bassendean.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Is the minister still committed to completing the third party sustainability certification to the state's commercial fisheries; and, if so, when does the government hope to have that completed?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: What is the page number?

Mr D.J. KELLY: It is the third dot point on page 421 under "Significant Issues Impacting the Agency".

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Is this the Marine Stewardship Council?

Mr D.J. KELLY: That is right.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I will ask Mr Smith to make some further comments. We have certainly been doing a lot of work with the rock lobster industry around the implementation of the MSC accreditation. We are still committed to the MSC processes. We have to work with industry in and around these issues because it is ultimately a decision that industry will have to fund or partly fund. The government will play a role there as required. The short answer is that it is happening. Another issue needs to be teased out of this; that is, some of these outcomes will not only be shaped by what the government or industry thinks is appropriate, but also what the people to whom they are selling their product think is appropriate. I think we will see pressure from consumers or people who sell to consumers—that is, retailers—in and around some of these independent assessments about the sustainability of that fishery. I will ask Mr Smith to make a couple of other comments.

[2.50 pm]

Mr S.J. Smith: The MSC project is funded for four years. It is \$14.5 million in total. A total of \$6.5 million of that covers three aspects. The first one is pre-assessment for all 48 commercial fisheries in Western Australia. The MSC has agreed that we can adopt a bioregional approach in Western Australia, which is the first time it has ever been used in the world. The Gascoyne bioregion has already been through the pre-assessment. We are awaiting that report. We are preparing the information for the northern bioregion to be assessed and we expect that to happen later this year or early next year. We are also looking at some individual fisheries going through the pre-assessment stage. Peel–Harvey Crabs is interested in going through that separately from the bioregion approach, which we are happy for it to do. Once the fishery is through the bioregional approach, where the government is actually the applicant, to proceed to full assessment, the fishery is the applicant, so the commercial fishery has to decide when it wants to go through the process. The government has said it would fund the cost of that application fee and the initial audit, so the timing will be up to the commercial sector rather than the government. But it will be funded by the government, and the department is being funded to cover those costs.

Mr D.J. KELLY: If a fishery does not wish to proceed, is it up to the fishery or will the government require people to do it?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: At the moment our policy position is that we will get through the pre-assessment phase. The decision to proceed will ultimately be that of the fishery. We do not have a position yet, I suppose, on whether we will then require that of the particular fishery.

Mr S.J. Smith: We have indicated to the fishery that it is voluntary whether it chooses to go through or not. It is a commercial decision for them to make because the industry ultimately will have to fund the reassessment. That reassessment will occur after five years, when its certification is up for renewal. There is a cost to them ultimately, but the benefits to the industry are substantial and that is why the industry requested this program from the government. The government has implemented what the industry wanted.

Mr D.J. KELLY: I am conscious of the time. As the new shadow for this area, in June I requested from the minister that I be provided with a briefing from the department. I got a letter back recently from one of the minister's advisers saying that the minister was not willing to give me a briefing. Has he cut funding to the

department to such an extent that it is unable to show the shadow of this area the common courtesy of a briefing? If that is not the case, can the minister organise for me to have a briefing with the department?

The CHAIRMAN: I am not sure what line item that is, but I will allow it.

Mr D.J. KELLY: It is page 419, “Total Cost of Services.” Is the department so hard up that it cannot meet with me? Other ministers have asked their departments to show me that courtesy. I think it is appropriate that in this place those sorts of common courtesies be applied and I get a briefing.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: In answer to the question, I do not think the department’s funds are that parlous, notwithstanding the fact that everyone is so busy that someone would not be made available. I am unaware of the member’s approach to my office and I will investigate that further.

Mr D.J. KELLY: I have the letter from Michael Buba, the minister’s principal policy officer, saying that my request was received in June; the minister asked him to respond that a briefing would not be provided. I know the department is busy. My understanding is that it is a common courtesy to provide these briefings, and I ask the minister to organise it.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: It is not a piece of correspondence that immediately leaps to my mind. However, I will undertake to investigate that matter for the member.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Thank you, minister

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: On page 422 reference is made to the number of recreational fishing persons in Western Australia as 740 000. Given it refers to the number of recreational fishers, can the minister point to line items in the budget that demonstrate the establishment of a fishing hub at Wellington Dam, and can he show where the \$2.4 million commitment to restocking the state estuaries with black bream and mulloway are in the budget papers?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: At the moment, the restocking efforts are being funded through the recreational fishing initiatives fund that flows to Recfishwest. Indeed, I have recently signed off on the initiatives they will be funding for the next financial year, and that includes another artificial reef to supplement the two in Geographe Bay and includes some additional funding for restocking. We are working with them to develop plans around restocking. I anticipate that work will be ongoing. I have personally been involved in some restocking of mulloway in the Swan River and some restocking of barramundi at Willie Creek to the north of Broome. We have also been restocking mulloway in other places on the coast and in the midwest in conjunction with Challenger TAFE and, I understand, restocking prawns in the Swan River. That is very much a work in progress.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Does the government have any say over how initiatives are funded through Recfishwest or is that left to Recfishwest to determine? The second part of the question was about whether the establishment of Wellington Dam as a fishing hub is going ahead.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: In relation to the first part, my understanding is that, technically, the money in the recreational fund is state money. Recfishwest manages that process by, I think, calling for expressions of interest to fund different initiatives. It then assesses them and makes recommendations to me. While I probably have a technical right to veto that if I want to as the minister, I am not of a mind to do that. I think I have enough confidence in Recfishwest to deal with that funding appropriately. I think it is doing a fantastic job with investing this money back into fishing. When the fishing from a boat licence was introduced, there was some angst, it would be fair to say, and I think a lot of that has evaporated. One of the initiatives with this year’s funding—I will get onto the second part of the question—I am particularly supportive of is the introduction of some new technologies around fish aggregation devices, which attract a range of pelagic fish.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Given the question was quite succinct about whether the government has the right to determine it, the minister is now wandering off. The second part of the question was: will the government go ahead with establishing Wellington Dam as a fishing hub?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: That is a matter we are currently working through with Recfishwest.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Will it be funded through the same fund?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Once we get a bit more of a solid idea around what that will entail, we will look at the fundamental mechanisms available.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Is there no funding currently in the budget?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: We have not yet developed the final proposal. As we work to develop a final proposal, we will understand how that can be funded. It may well be that it is Recfishwest’s view that some of that should be funded through that program. If that is the case, Recfishwest will make that recommendation to me. It may well be that it requires supplementary funding from alternative sources. If that is the case, we will certainly have a

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Chairman; Mr Dave Kelly; Mr Troy Buswell; Mr Chris Tallentire

look at that. I do not think anyone could doubt our commitment to reinvesting in recreational fishing. It is really important for governments —

Mr D.J. KELLY: I was just asking about specific commitments. You have done a great job as fishing minister in your short term.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: The one thing I have not had to do is answer any of the member's questions, so it is obviously going very well! However, I stand waiting with pen poised. I think it is a really important industry commercially and recreationally. There are areas we need to do some more work in, especially around aquaculture and, in due course, will move into those spaces.

The appropriation was recommended.

[3.00 pm]