

Mr John Hyde; Dr Judy Edwards; Mr Paul Omodei; Mrs Cheryl Edwards; Mr Jeremy Edwards; Mr Martin Whitely; Dr Janet Woollard; Mr Tony McRae; Chairman

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**Division 39: Conservation and Land Management, \$109 793 000 -**

Mr Dean, Chairman.

Dr Edwards, Minister for the Environment and Heritage.

Dr J.C. Byrne, Director, Corporate Services.

Mr K.J. McNamara, Acting Executive Director.

Mr J.R. Sharp, Director, Parks and Visitor Services.

Mr A. Walker, Director, Regional Services.

Mr HYDE: It became apparent during the election campaign that saving old-growth forests was important to the people of Western Australia. Part of the Government's policy commits this Government to the creation, establishment and management of 30 new national parks and two new conservation parks. In reference to the parks and visitor services output on page 640, what measures and funding are in place to ensure that the creation of these areas meets the community's conservation and recreation demands?

Dr EDWARDS: That is a complex question. The policy was designed in response to sentiments that the community wanted old-growth forests to be saved. The 30 national parks will be created by looking at the areas that would be protected and putting them together on a geographical basis. The national park that is receiving the most attention at this stage is generally referred to as the Walpole wilderness area, which covers a number of proposed national parks and other areas. We have set up a stakeholder reference group to help determine the boundaries of that park, which has representation from conservation groups, the relevant local government and people from industry with interests in that area.

We are also in the process of setting up a community management committee. That has been advertised and we are waiting for the responses. We will use the information that comes from those two groups to guide us in the establishment of the other 29 national parks. We are working with the Department of Conservation and Land Management to determine the indicative boundaries of those areas. They will then be discussed with all the stakeholders and released to the community for comment. This budget provides new money to implement this policy, for both capital works for the proposed new national parks and recurrent services.

Mr OMODEI: Is one of the two groups the minister mentioned the round table, or is that another body?

Dr EDWARDS: The round table is run through the Conservation Commission of Western Australia as part of the process feeding into the forest management plan.

Mr HYDE: You mentioned the mechanisms regarding the establishment of those parks. What mechanisms are in place to provide for the community's aspiration to manage the new national and conservation parks once they are established?

Dr EDWARDS: As we go through the process of determining the exact boundaries, we will seek input from the community. Once the parks are established, the community will, to varying degrees, be involved in their ongoing management. We have committed to joint management with indigenous people in areas where that is relevant. Obviously, joint management will mean different things to different people, depending on the area involved, particular needs and the historical land use. A number of processes by which national and regional parks are managed already provide channels for community involvement. On top of that, we also have the layer to which the member for Warren-Blackwood referred; the forest management planning process. That process has allowed for things like forest forums and the round table. A further round of forest forums will be held when the forest management plan is out for discussion.

The executive director will make further comments.

Mr McNAMARA: The Government has committed an extra \$16 million in recurrent expenditure over the next four years for the establishment of 30 new national and conservation parks under its "protecting our old-growth forests" policy, and an additional \$9 million over four years for capital works in those parks, which is a total of \$25 million. Another key component of community consultation, over and above the forest management plan process, is that our Act requires the preparation of a management plan for national parks and other reserves and prescribes statutory processes for public consultation during the preparation of those management plans. It is commonplace for that process to involve community-based advisory committees or consultative committees that assist in the preparation of those management plans.

[2.50 pm]

Mr HYDE: Are those committees created by ministerial appointment?

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Mr McNAMARA: Yes.

Mrs EDWARDES: Mr McNamara referred to the amounts of money. The item is on page 640 under total cost of output. I wonder whether we could have a complete breakdown of the estimates for the funding for the projects in those parks that have been referred to. Again, I am happy to take that by way of supplementary information.

Mr SHARP: The recurrent funding for this year is \$2.504 million. Primarily, the starting point for the allocation of that is in planning - certainly for management planning and some of the site design work. The capital funds have not been allocated, because they are being worked through in areas in which management plans are in place or in which an advertised process is needed. Therefore, there is not a detailed breakdown at this stage, but it will be developed by some of the consultations we have mentioned.

Mrs EDWARDES: In respect of existing national parks, is that referred to in that total cost of output of \$48 million?

Mr SHARP: Yes.

Mrs EDWARDES: Could I have an estimate of the cost of the projects in those parks?

Mr SHARP: Yes.

Dr EDWARDS: We are happy to provide that by way of supplementary information.

Mr EDWARDS: I refer to page 633. Why are there large reductions in capital expenditure from the current budget year onwards when compared with the last two years of the previous Government? In what areas of capital expenditure will the cutbacks occur?

Dr EDWARDS: That is partly because of external contributions through agencies like the Commonwealth Government and other state departments that contribute to certain aspects of the capital works. However, I will ask the executive director to comment on that matter.

Mr McNAMARA: The figure on page 633 of \$7.365 million is the state government contribution to the capital budget. The total capital budget, including amounts carried forward and expected amounts from the Commonwealth Government and other sources, such as Main Roads Western Australia, is more in the order of \$15 million or \$16 million. That appears later in the papers. The change from last year to this year is, therefore, not as great as appears from those figures, because they are based on the state government figures. Also, there is a significant loan repayments item, as detailed on page 645, within that \$16.4 million figure on page 633.

Dr BYRNE: There is a problem with comparing previous years with current and future years. The previous years included the Forest Products Commission's large expenditures on maritime pine projects and other similar forestry projects.

Mr OMODEI: Dr Byrne is certainly right. Talk about a smoke and mirrors budget. Ayres Rock could be hidden in this budget. However, I refer the minister to the creation of the 30 new national parks and the 12 national parks set aside under the Regional Forest Agreement. Does the Regional Forest Agreement still exist; and, if so, how does it exist, on the basis that the current Government has virtually gutted it? Secondly, the minister referred to the reference groups that meet and advise through the consultation process. How will their advice be taken? I attended one of the consultation processes for the community. One of the first questions asked by the Department of Conservation and Land Management was, "What do you regard as high conservation forest?" If it is to be a definition agreed to by meetings that are loaded with greens and conservationists, it will be totally different from a scientific definition. Has the minister considered a scientific definition for high conservation forests? Therefore, there are two questions. One is about the Regional Forest Agreement. I understand that a further 12 000 hectares of state forest or regenerated forest will go into some kind of secure tenure. On what basis was that decision made?

Dr EDWARDS: I will answer those questions sequentially. First of all, dealing with the Regional Forest Agreement, perhaps I need to put the question back to the member. What happened to the RFA when the previous Government did the backflip in July 1999? From my point of view, the RFA still exists. However, there is no doubt that Labor's policy was a response to what the community wanted. We listened to the community, and we went forward with the policy that the community wanted, not with what was in the RFA.

Mr OMODEI: Therefore, the RFA does not exist.

Dr EDWARDS: With regard to the RFA, it is a great disappointment to me that the federal Government is doing its own thing, disregarding the State. My preference is that we work together. For example, under the RFA, moneys were jointly agreed to by the State and Commonwealth Governments, and they would help the people in the member's electorate, who are very much geared to on-the-ground projects. I look forward to hearing the

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announcement of the \$5 million. If the federal Government does not pick up viable and valuable projects, I hope that the State will look at those with great interest. The Government wants things to happen in the member's electorate, and it wants some of those worthy projects to go ahead.

Mr OMODEI: That will all change.

Dr EDWARDS: It will all change if there is a federal Labor Government. I look forward to that very much. The federal Government has now advertised the \$15 million and called for proposals. Our preference is that the State and Commonwealth work together. That again flows from the RFA. The proposals regarding the \$15 million will not be bankable unless people have a timber allocation. At the end of the day, timber allocations are a state responsibility. I look forward to things settling a bit. No matter which Government is in power federally, this Government will work with it cooperatively. To answer the member's question, the RFA was a milestone on the way, but we have all moved beyond that. However, we will seek to use the positive parts of the RFA that are still in existence, and hopefully work in a constructive manner.

Mr OMODEI: Therefore, the RFA no longer exists.

Dr EDWARDS: The RFA still exists to the extent that there are programs.

Mrs EDWARDES: The State and federal Governments have not withdrawn from it.

Dr EDWARDS: That is right.

Mrs EDWARDES: Therefore, all the wonderful scientific works, the databases and everything else in the annexures are still being worked through by both Governments. Some wonderful things have been identified.

Dr EDWARDS: Some excellent work has come from the RFA. I hope everyone agrees with that. A number of valuable documents will not be lost. Some good work was done in industry development, with very good signposts for the way ahead. The Walpole wilderness stakeholder reference group is in the process of being set up. We have nominations back from the stakeholders. They are being pulled together. That group will help determine the boundaries. To answer the member's question about regrowth, the reference group will look at the proposal that we put forward during the election campaign, at the interests of all the key stakeholders in how that is finally composed, at how much regrowth exists, at the needs of the different players in that region, and at how all those tensions can be balanced. Government will make the ultimate decision. However, we need information from people on the ground, and we need that local feedback to make sure we make the very best decision. It must be said, as the Opposition is probably finding out, that Oppositions make policy with the very best of intentions. However, when a party is in government, it has access to further detail and information. The Government intends to make the best possible decisions.

I refer to the member's comment on high conservation value. As I have explained in the Parliament, we are working through a definition of high conservation value. We are seeking feedback from the community as part of the forest forums. We have a draft definition based on scientific terms. However, we are looking at the other aspects of how people regard high conservation value. That matter will shortly go to the Conservation Commission for final advice for government. We will then release that definition.

Mr WHITELY: It is widely accepted that changes in policy regarding logging in native forests will cause social and economic change in the south west, and in my electorate as well. Page 644 of the budget papers refers to the capital works program and includes items for national parks infrastructure and tourism roads. Could the minister please identify the details of investment in tourism infrastructure, and how that will provide alternative employment opportunities while enhancing tourism potential for Western Australia?

[3.00 pm]

Mr SHARP: As indicated, there is an additional budget allocation for the new national parks that will be created under the old-growth forest policy. A program of works is being identified. The prerequisite is that a planning process is entered into before that works program is commenced to ensure that any proposed works comply with the management plan or the requirements of the Act with regard to compatible operations. The benefits that will be derived will be in the construction and development process as well as in the end result, which is that improved facilities will be put in place in national parks. The output figures indicate that there are more than nine million visits to national parks annually. Those improved facilities will improve local levels of visitation and amenity, and generate opportunities for small businesses that service those parks.

Mr WHITELY: What other strategies are proposed, apart from the national parks infrastructure and the tourism road improvement program, to further develop and enhance nature-based tourism in Western Australia?

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Dr EDWARDS: There are a range of strategies across a number of portfolios, particularly the CALM portfolio, the tourism portfolio, and the portfolios for the South West Development Commission and the other regional development commissions, in which money has been allocated for projects to enhance tourism. For example, the package that we announced to assist the timber industry includes money for the Warren-Blackwood action plan. That money will go to local governments in the area, and part of that money will assist with tourism.

Mr SHARP: A range of nature-based tourism initiatives are being generated, not only within this portfolio but also, as the minister has mentioned, through the Western Australian Tourism Commission, which has been allocated funds to develop an environmental tourism strategy and approach for the State, to which this agency will make a significant contribution through the development of facilities and services that are compatible with that program.

Dr WOOLLARD: I, like the member for Perth, have also talked to people who have asked when the 30 new national parks will be created. What is the role of the Minister for the Environment and Heritage and the Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries in the forest management plan? I refer also to the second dot point on page 633 of the *Budget Statements*, which states, "Public interest about protection of biodiversity and the environment", and to page 635, which outlines the budget for certain species. How close is the Government to expediting the replacement of the Wildlife Conservation Act?

Dr EDWARDS: We wanted to put the new forest management plan in place quickly in order to bring some certainty to the communities in the south west, and also to implement the national parks part of our policy. Therefore, it has been initiated by the Forest Products Commission and the Department of Conservation and Land Management, acting jointly, as required under the Conservation and Land Management Act. It will then be put out for public discussion and evaluation. Part of that process will be an assessment by the Environmental Protection Authority, as also required by law. We intend to introduce an amendment to the CALM Act to give the Minister for the Environment and Heritage the final say in the signing off of that forest management plan, and we anticipate that will be in the Parliament shortly. With regard to biodiversity and the Wildlife Conservation Act, we have made an election commitment to put in place new biodiversity legislation. I am awaiting a paper from CALM. Quite a lot of work has been done to move us towards that new biodiversity legislation, and I intend to release a draft Bill for comment from stakeholders, and to then have a Green Bill or discussion paper to get further input from the community. The process of amending the Wildlife Conservation Act commenced in 1992, and a fair wealth of information has been built up. I am keen to move away from looking at just flora and fauna and to look also at habitats. Again, there is a lot of interest in the community. The Environmental Defenders Office held a seminar on this matter about a year ago. I have been talking to a range of interest groups to get their input, and I intend to release a draft Bill and get the Bill through the Parliament some time next year.

Mrs EDWARDES: I refer to output 1 on page 635, which deals with nature conservation. This is where we were at last year, but it is not found in this year's budget. Given the minister's question to me last year when I was the minister responsible for this portfolio, when does the minister intend to present to the Parliament the new biodiversity conservation legislation and to finalise the biodiversity conservation strategy?

Dr EDWARDS: I have just answered that question for the member for Alfred Cove. We are waiting for information from CALM. CALM has been doing a lot of work in this area. We will be releasing it as a discussion paper or green paper.

Mrs EDWARDES: The draft biodiversity conservation strategy or the Bill?

Dr EDWARDS: The Bill.

Mrs EDWARDES: Will they be separate documents?

Dr EDWARDS: I think they will. We will do the Bill first, to get the framework in place, and we will then follow it with a strategy, because I am finding in government that despite the fact that a lot of people have had input into this matter, there is still a huge amount of interest in the findings that will be made once we take those comments into account. We will need to get moving with that and put the framework in place.

Mrs EDWARDES: Is that expected to be put out as a green paper this year?

Dr EDWARDS: It is more likely to be early next year.

Mr McRAE: The fourth dot point on page 636, under major initiatives for 2001-02, states that the Government intends to -

Continue to expand the terrestrial conservation reserve system, with an emphasis on the Gascoyne-Murchison rangelands, Kimberley, Wheatbelt and Swan coastal plain.

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What is the background to that initiative, and what activities of the program relate to that initiative?

Dr EDWARDS: This is an important area, because although our old-growth forest policy has placed a great deal of concentration on protecting the south west of the State, we need to keep in mind also the other huge areas of the State, particularly with regard to biodiversity and conservation.

Mr McRAE: I reflect on the conversation we had earlier about the Millennium Seed Bank and the concentration on the semi-arid zones throughout the world. Is this in some ways related to that?

Dr EDWARDS: It probably is. People may be a bit slow to recognise that there is a lot of biodiversity in the dry areas of the State. Recently, I was pleased, along with Senator Robert Hill, to announce that the federal and State Governments, in conjunction and over a time - I think in the program commenced by the former minister, the member for Kingsley - have now reserved 2.7 million hectares of land in the Gascoyne-Murchison region. Although that may appear a huge figure, it is quite a small area when we look at a map of the Gascoyne-Murchison area. That indicates that the State is so big that in order to have proper representative areas, we need to choose areas that are fairly large.

Mr McRAE: Would it be true to say that that 2.7 million hectares is in a small patchwork arrangement rather than in a large, consolidated area?

Dr EDWARDS: No, not on this occasion. It was a very good, ecologically sustainable development-type strategy that looked at not only conservation but also the economic and social aspects, because they are more difficult to deal with in such an area of the State. To give an example, one station that I visited recently is now in CALM ownership, but the previous pastoral owner is the manager of that station, and he and his family live there and undertake a range of activities, including some conservation activities. This program has allowed us to get quite large chunks of high conservation value land that is being actively managed.

The other part of that program has involved talking to the owners of adjoining land - the other pastoral leaseholders - about management of the range lands and protecting conservation areas. I commend the previous Government on its work because people are very enthusiastic. One particularly impressive initiative is the bore-capping program. That program involves investigating how we can conserve and make the best use of water in the area.

[3.10 pm]

Mrs EDWARDES: I cannot see how that provides any extra money or even the same amount as was available last year. I note from page 633 that capital contributions will decrease by more than 50 per cent. Is that federal funding? It probably includes money for land purchases. Details at page 644 indicate that the value of land acquisitions falls from \$1.34 million to just over \$134 000 for works in progress, and new works amount to only \$700 000. There appears to be a shortfall in funding available to expand that conservation reserve system.

Mr McNAMARA: Page 644 contains several entries that relate to land acquisition. It includes a \$2 million entry under the Gascoyne-Murchison strategy. The \$700 000 allocated for land acquisition is the general, statewide allocation. Below that is an allocation of \$2.5 million for the Gascoyne-Murchison. The State Government has continued the allocation of \$1 million this financial year for acquisitions as part of the Gascoyne-Murchison strategy. As a general rule, we have attracted \$2 from the Commonwealth Government for each \$1 provided by the State Government. The anticipated commonwealth contributions are reflected in these figures. Because the program has been substantial and we have been able to make purchases and receive commonwealth reimbursement, we have a substantial amount carried forward into the program. The total figure that might be available for the Gascoyne-Murchison strategy acquisitions in the current financial year, inclusive of carryovers and anticipated commonwealth contributions at the same rate, is about \$4.6 million. The commitment of resources to manage the acquired areas has been continued. The overall figures for the department include a \$750 000 item for the management of the acquired lands in the Gascoyne-Murchison strategy region.

Dr EDWARDS: That is an increase of \$350 000.

Mr McRAE: I refer to the incorporation of pastoral lease lands in the conservation estate. Is any assessment made of the previous owners' relationship with native title claimants involved in that process? Does part of the assessment of a viable transfer involve investigation of the relationship between the previous leaseholder and native title claimants and their knowledge of the land?

Dr EDWARDS: We do not look simply at acquisition; we look at other methods of managing it. We do not put them all in national parks - the conservation values can be managed in a range of ways. I was recently lucky enough to visit Lake Gregory for the first proclamation of a Western Australian indigenous protected area. The

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native title leaseholders of that land now want to manage part of their land for conservation purposes. CALM works with a range of different Aboriginal communities and groups.

Mr SHARP: The pastoral leases have been purchased for conservation reasons. That involves a negotiation process with the owners of the land.

Mr McRAE: Is that the leaseholders?

Mr SHARP: Yes.

Mr McRAE: They are not the owners.

Mr SHARP: No. We negotiate with native title claimants. We have reached agreements in some instances with land councils. A memorandum of understanding has been signed by the minister and the Goldfields Land Council. Other negotiation involves the Yamatji Land and Sea Council and the Pilbara native title service. The agreement puts in place a protocol for discussing issues with the representative body for the native title claimants. When the lease moves into a reserve, there will be a negotiation process to develop a form of appropriate joint management that is specific to that lease as it moves into reserve status.

Mr McRAE: That answer did not deal with the evaluation criteria for bringing particular ecosystems or subecosystems into the conservation estate - whether it is held by CALM or in the broader conservation estate and whether the knowledge and relationship between leaseholders and the native title claimants is part of that assessment.

Mr SHARP: The process for selection of land to be incorporated is based on biodiversity criteria, not cultural values. That is taken into account when pastoral leases could meet the criteria to come into the reserve system. In that case, the cultural and heritage values would advantage one lease over another. The memorandum of understanding we are working on with the land councils will allow us to understand the native title claimants' position about land coming into the conservation reserve system and the relative merits of doing that. It is not a competitive process.

Mr EDWARDS: I refer to page 633. I know we have referred to this page a couple of times already, but I have not heard the answer to my question. Under "Significant issues and trends", it states that 30 new national parks and two new conservation parks will be created. How many years will that take, and how long will it take for management plans to be developed for all 32 parks? If it takes more than a year or two to prepare a management plan for some parks, under what prescription will they be managed? Are there existing management plans or expired plans?

Dr EDWARDS: A process is followed when creating a national park and in implementing a management plan. The forest management planning process is under way. We need to complete that to get the best idea of exactly which bit of each proposed national park will be reserved and the exact boundaries. We must also take into account the native title process. Developing management plans is a long, detailed process that involves extensive community input. However, we can manage the parks as though they are national parks ahead of both processes.

Mr SHARP: Funds have been allocated this year. As indicated, \$2.504 million has been allocated as recurrent funding for management. In the absence of a management plan, the Act also provides for parks to be managed according to necessary operations. Apart from planning, a large amount of that funding will be spent on activities such as ameliorating visitor risk - which can be done as something that is necessary - and providing the necessary signage and directional information. In other words, safety requirements such as signage and basic infrastructure will protect the park environment. Those actions can take place ahead of management plans, using guidelines that are in place.

[3.20 pm]

Mr HYDE: A number of extremely important conservation initiatives that the Government is continuing to fund and support are listed on page 636 of the *Budget Statements*. These include Western Shield and Western Everlasting. I also note that the recovery of threatened species will be a major initiative for the coming financial year. What activities will be carried out in this financial year on these important nature conservation programs?

Dr EDWARDS: The Western Shield and the Western Everlasting programs will continue. Western Shield is a nationally recognised program that deals with fox baiting. We have also made some advances in getting rid of feral cats. A few days ago I launched a "miaow" device that, basically, attracts cats, which are trapped and then disposed of humanely. I will get the executive director to expand on that.

Mr McNAMARA: The announcement was that Westcare Industries will manufacture a sonic device that helps lure cats into traps. That is an important achievement for the department. Although fox control in the south west

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has produced remarkable results in threatened fauna recovery, CALM has not been able to achieve the same success outside the south west in the more arid areas because of predation by feral cats. We continue to have remarkable success in the south west, with 3.5 million hectares or thereabouts being routinely baited. As a result, three species have been taken off threatened fauna lists, and I am confident there will be more in the years ahead as that program continues. In more arid areas such as at Shark Bay we have recently released more mallee fowls, bilbies and banded hare-wallabies, which are extinct on the mainland, in an area in which we are intensively controlling not only cats but also foxes. We are looking forward to more success there.

Western Everlasting is an ambitious umbrella program for our threatened flora. Over 330 species of our flora are classified as threatened. The biological survey work that is nearing completion throughout the agricultural zone as part of the State's salinity strategy is identifying that that figure will probably increase markedly - probably by another 450 species over the years and decades ahead. We have a range of programs under the salinity strategy and elsewhere that will seek to address that over the years ahead - including the Millennium Seed Bank that was referred to in the earlier discussion.

Mr HYDE: Do you have a figure on fox numbers in Western Australia? Is there a service delivery output on the number of foxes you wish to eradicate in a year?

Mr McNAMARA: We have no estimate, nor is there any reasonable way of getting an estimate of fox populations. However, the measure is not of the fox populations, but of the threatened species that we are trying to recover. One of the significant advances in nature conservation in Western Australia - we have led the country in this in the past 10 years or so - is that the individual species recovery plans that we prepare for species like woylie, chuditch, the noisy scrub bird and so on, have explicit criteria on the numbers of populations, their densities, trap success rates and those types of things. Our measure of success relates to the species we are trying to look after rather than the problem.

Mr OMODEI: I refer the minister to output 2 on page 636, sustainable forest management, and also output 4 on page 641, parks and visitor services. I refer to the explanatory note about full-time equivalents. Firstly, how many FTEs in CALM have been given voluntary redundancy? The explanatory notes on page 637 show that in 2000-01 the number of FTEs was 485 and was estimated to be 334 for the 2001-02 budget. Output 4 says that the FTEs employed in parks and visitor services during 2000-01 was 318 and is estimated to be 328 in 2001-02. Given that the Government's statement on the creation of new national parks referred to 130 new FTEs working in national parks, where are those FTEs in this budget? When answering my first question on voluntary redundancy, the minister should bear in mind that Labor's pre-election promise was an extra 130 FTEs. Can the minister explain the obvious anomalies?

Dr EDWARDS: Forty-one people have taken voluntary redundancies. Of the 130 jobs that the member referred to, around 30 will be attached to the Forest Products Commission. They will go into forest thinnings and other activities that are related more to the Forest Products Commission.

Dr BYRNE: The member referred to the decline in numbers from 485 to 334 in sustainable forest management. The Forest Products Commission did not start until 16 November. The employment from July to 16 November equated to 151 FTEs over a full year. In effect, that is the reason for the drop. With regard to the 130 people displaced from the industry, currently our numbers are down to 1 180. They were raised to about 1 300 during the summer due to the recruitment of well over 100 people to fight fires during summer. We should be able to accommodate a significant number of displaced timber workers due to the seasonal nature of our work force.

Mr OMODEI: Dr Byrne, are you saying that there will be 130 more people employed in CALM in 2001-02 than in 2000-01?

Dr BYRNE: Not quite. I am saying that because of the seasonal nature of the work force we should be able to employ displaced timber workers during summer.

Dr EDWARDS: The extra figure we have referred to relates to both CALM and the Forest Products Commission.

Mr OMODEI: I understand that; but I do not think they are there.

Dr WOOLLARD: I refer the minister to the last dot point on page 633 and also to output 2, sustainable forest management, on page 637. What does the management of forests refer to? Does this refer to native forests or native and plantation forests? Can I have a breakdown of those forests? The next point relates to timber production on a sustained yield basis. We know from the timber industry that WA currently uses about 40 000 square metres of jarrah and karri log in total. However, the Government used figures derived from CALM, which stated that it would use 140 000 cubic metres of first and second-grade jarrah sawlogs and 40 000 cubic metres of first and second-grade karri sawlogs. What is difference being used for? The third point related to the

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protection of forests from disease and fire. Will the Government continue with the methods applied by the previous Government - that is, broadscale burning - or will it move to strategic prescribed burning?

[3.30 pm]

Dr EDWARDS: I will answer the points in the order in which they were asked. The final dot point on page 633 refers to forests vested in the Conservation Commission, because the committee is dealing with the division related to the Department of Conservation and Land Management. They are virtually all native forests, because plantations are transferred to the Forest Products Commission. Although the State has a big plantation estate, it is vested in the Forest Products Commission. The Department of Conservation and Land Management manages state forests and forests in national parks and other reserves for a range of values, as listed in the *Budget Statements*, from nature conservation through to timber production on a sustained yield basis. Included in that range are recreation, honey production, and wildflower picking in some areas. A whole range of uses are made of different parts of the forests referred to in that dot point, which are under the control of the Conservation Commission.

I turn now to the figures for indicative volumes. The indicative volume of 140 000 cubic metres is for first and second-grade jarrah. We have provided this figure on the basis of modelling and information, to give the industry our best estimate, at this stage, of what is likely to be available when the forest management plan now in process is completed. The figure for karri was 40 000 cubic metres. I did not quite catch the first part of the member's question.

Dr WOOLLARD: The minister has mentioned a sustainable yield basis. The furniture industry has indicated that it requires only 40 000 cubic metres of timber. There is a big difference between the 40 000 cubic metres that the industry states it needs and the 180 000 cubic metres that CALM has specified.

Dr EDWARDS: I have had some very good and frank discussions with the furniture industry. The Government is keen to see the highest possible value added to that timber, and manufacturing it into furniture is an excellent use of it. However, it is not possible for all the timber to end up as furniture-grade timber.

Mr OMODEI: I am not here to help the minister, but the industry may have been talking about 40 000 cubic metres in dried form, which is a much greater volume in the green form.

Dr EDWARDS: The industry representatives said they do not need first and second-grade logs, whereas CALM has stated that it wants first and second-grade jarrah and karri sawlogs.

Mr OMODEI: They used first and second-grade logs.

The CHAIRMAN: Has the minister finished the question?

Dr EDWARDS: No - there is a third part, which had to do with fire. Fire is an issue that should worry us all. Until the end of July, we had had the driest winter ever, and the three seasons before that were also very dry. Fuel loads are high, and the risk of fire is extremely high. Mr McNamara and I constantly discuss this issue, and the concern felt by both of us. Currently, CALM is carrying out an internal review of its practices on fire, but I do not envisage any radical shift at this stage. I do lie awake at night worrying about the risk of fire, both to communities and those involved in fighting fires. There will be a lot of discussion in the community about fire, because it is an issue in which people take a lot of interest. Having lived on a farm and watched a fire come across a paddock very quickly towards my house, I do know the devastation that can be caused to not only property, but also, more importantly, human life.

Mr OMODEI: In relation to the issue of the volumes of timber, I understand that the Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Hon Kim Chance, favours a volume of 180 000 cubic metres of first and second-grade jarrah, and 50 000 cubic metres of karri. When will the Government make a decision about those volumes? It is imperative that the industry know. As time goes on, more and more people are losing their grip on their businesses in the south west, and it is causing great uncertainty. If the minister could answer that question, I am sure a lot of people in Western Australia would be better informed.

I notice on page 634 that an amount of \$3 million has been allocated to wildfire suppression. I understand that a real cut has been made in the fire effort. Another page shows that vehicle replacement has been reduced, and \$1.3 million has been allocated to plant replacement. There is nothing in the out years for fire control. The minister has mentioned the great fear in the south west that if a fire starts with a strong south easterly wind it will burn from east of Walpole all the way to Augusta. That is a real fear related to me by experienced foresters who have been working in forests, and on fire management and fire science, for many years. It is one of the greatest threats facing the forests of Western Australia. People talk about salinity and a range of other things, but I do not think the allocation in this budget for fire control is enough. I would like an explanation for that. The question of fire is very much on the minds of people in the south west. The rainfall has been about half the normal rate,



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and it is shaping up to be a very dry season. The Government should look again at the whole issue of fire management in Western Australia, including funding for fire control and suppression, and hazard reduction burning. It is absolutely vital, and the Government has not put enough effort into it so far.

Dr EDWARDS: In answer to the first part of the question, the member for Warren-Blackwood is speculating on what the Minister for Forestry might be thinking, so he should talk to the minister directly.

Mr OMODEI: Does the minister not talk to him?

Dr EDWARDS: Of course I do. It would be only natural, as we have seen in the past, for the Minister for Forestry to want the very best for the industry and to lobby very hard for it. Equally, the Minister for the Environment has a slightly different perspective, and will lobby very hard for that.

Mr OMODEI: It is vastly different from the Regional Forest Agreement figure of 286 000; it is 100 000 cubic metres less.

Dr EDWARDS: Yes, but a lot more forest is reserved, so there is a lot smaller area for the logs to be taken from. As the member for Warren-Blackwood knows, early in June the Government released the indicative yields, which are the best estimate to give industry some certainty. A couple of weeks ago the Minister for Forestry wrote to everybody who has a contract with the Forest Products Commission, calling for submissions and proposals. Already a number of small millers, larger entities and individuals are getting together and working on proposals, which we believe will be viable.

Mr OMODEI: How can they make submissions if they do not know what the volumes are?

Dr EDWARDS: As the member well knows, if the Government could release the volumes tomorrow, it would. No-one likes living with uncertainty, but the Conservation and Land Management Act spells out the process that has to be gone through for forest management plans before those contracts can be signed. The member knows, from his own experience, that the Government must go through that process.

The CHAIRMAN: Members, the question is being answered, I believe, but it is tending to move away from the budget issues.

Dr EDWARDS: No minister would make that decision, because if the process put in place by law were contravened, it would not be a responsible thing to do.

There is money in the budget for wildfire suppression. I welcome the member's comments about the need for a broader approach to fire issues. The roles of different agencies and entities need to be examined. In the member for Warren-Blackwood's electorate, CALM plays a much greater role than necessarily appears on paper.

[3.40 pm]

Mr McNAMARA: I refer to the figure of \$3 million for wildfire suppression shown in this year's budget on page 634. By way of comparison, the department's wildfire suppression cost for the previous financial year was \$6.5 million, met by an allocation of \$1.8 million from the department's appropriation, \$1.6 million payment from the Forest Products Commission, and an excess of \$3.1 million met by the Treasury. Members will note an amount for the forward years is not shown. The \$3 million is effectively the trial of a new approach of an up-front allocation in the budget based on an average-type approach to what wildfire suppression costs might be over and above the \$1 million or so we would meet elsewhere within our budget and the amount that would be charged to the Forest Products Commission in accordance with its interest in the lands that are protected from wildfire. Any amount over and above those allowances would be sought by way of excess, which has been a well-established practice.

Mr WALKER: On the operational side for the threat posed by wildfires, the department has been able, through the budget, to maintain what is known as the fire model, which is the number of firefighters located at various centres throughout the south west able to respond to wildfires. Another 20 personnel will be hired to bolster the seasonal firefighter force referred to earlier. It is hoped that some of those seasonal firefighters may also be displaced timber workers so that a double benefit is gained from that initiative. We have been able to maintain the water-bomber program - Operation Firebird - that has proved very successful in the past two fire seasons. The finances are there to enable the maintaining of that operational adjunct to ground suppression forces.

*Sitting suspended from 3.41 to 3.50 pm*

Mrs EDWARDES: The committee should consider finalising the Department of Conservation and Land Management's division by 4.15 pm. I have some parochial, but no less important, questions to ask. I refer the minister to page 644 of the *Budget Statements*, dealing with the Gngangara Park development. It has been allocated \$250 000. The amount is very small. There appears to be no extra allocation for this year; the money is for works in progress. Has the concept plan, which was expected by July 2001, been finalised?

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Dr EDWARDS: It might be cheeky to say, but it was suggested by some people - who are not present - that I should cut that program and do away with it totally. The Government has not done that. I ask Jim Sharp to outline exactly what will happen with the money.

Mr SHARP: This year's allocation is \$250 000. Over the past year there have been very successful programs regarding fencing and higher levels of patrols. A pollution control plan has also been put in place. That program will continue. There was a proposal to put in more capital works funding for facilities. A decision was made to move the funding under the old-growth forest policy to add to the capital funds that are available this year. However, it is premature to put new facilities in place while an effort is being made to reduce vandalism, which has resulted in other facilities being destroyed. There has been a high level of success, through the combined efforts of a number of agencies and local governments, in reducing the amount of vandalism through patrols. That will continue. The 400 submissions have been incorporated into a final concept plan, and that is yet to be given to the minister for release.

Mrs EDWARDES: It has left the City of Wanneroo and is back in the hands of the department?

Mr SHARP: Yes.

Mrs EDWARDES: I refer to page 640, output 4. I take it that money will be allocated to Yellagonga Regional Park and that the details will be supplied through supplementary information. In particular, I want to know how much money will be allocated to the algae problem. There is a suggestion that the problem has extended to Lake Goollelal. Has the management plan for that been finalised? Given the proposed development of the Luisini winery, which is still part of the Yellagonga Regional Park but has not been handed over - it is still with the Ministry for Planning - when will a request for transfer occur?

Dr EDWARDS: Which part is the member referring to?

Mrs EDWARDES: Luisini winery. There is a proposed development. The local community is concerned about the effects of any development on the environment. They would much rather see it in the hands of the Minister for the Environment and Heritage than the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure.

Dr EDWARDS: I understand that the Luisini winery will go to the National Trust.

Mrs EDWARDES: It has a contract from the Department for Planning and Infrastructure to proceed with the development.

Dr EDWARDS: I will look into that and the member can follow it up in the final session.

Mr SHARP: The funding level has been maintained in relation to midge control in this year's budget. In respect of the capital program, it will flow from the management plan as it is finalised. It is currently before the local authorities. When it is finalised, everything will be right.

Mrs EDWARDES: Is the management plan still with the two local authorities?

Mr SHARP: Yes.

Mr WHITELY: The second last dot point on page 633 of the *Budget Statements* acknowledges that there is a growing expectation by Aboriginal communities that the Department of Conservation and Land Management will accommodate their aspirations for joint management and employment in land management. What initiatives are in place to meet these aspirations?

Dr EDWARDS: A policy commitment exists to look at joint management of our conservation estate with indigenous people. Discussions have occurred with key land councils to try to define joint management. Depending on which part of the State is being discussed, and the nature of particular conservation reserves, it will mean different things. Different activities are permitted in different nature reserves and national parks. Apart from meeting with some of the land councils and other Aboriginal groups, I was lucky enough to sign a memorandum of understanding with the Goldfields Land Council to establish how we will work together in the future. As mentioned previously, I was also present when the Tjurabalan people declared an indigenous protected area around Lake Gregory, south of Kununurra. The Department of Conservation and Land Management is working through a number of initiatives to develop the commitment.

Mr SHARP: A number of activities are being undertaken with respect to joint management. Some models are in place. Further memorandums of understanding are being developed with a number of land councils, which are the representative bodies of native title claimants. We are also continuing a process of cross-cultural training within the agency to improve liaison skills with indigenous owners. Some additional funds have been set aside from the old-growth policy for the liaison process to be improved and continued with Aboriginal communities. The joint management policy has been reviewed, and we are preparing a paper for the minister's consideration on how the proposals may be implemented.

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Mr EDWARDS: I refer to page 635. I am aware that \$20 million from the AlintaGas sale has been set aside for salinity measures. Prior to the election, the Government promised \$10 million over four years to combat salinity. What money is available from the Commonwealth Government? Will the minister explain the salinity funding in detail?

[4.00 pm]

Dr EDWARDS: I have a table to which I will refer. Essentially, the main departments involved are the Department of Agriculture, the Water and Rivers Commission, the Department of Conservation and Land Management and the Forest Products Commission. The new Department of Environment, Water and Catchment Protection comprises both the Department of Environmental Protection and the Water and Rivers Commission. This Government is continuing many programs started by the previous Government. AlintaGas money has been parked and is waiting until the Government has evaluated the recommendations of the salinity task force.

Mr EDWARDS: Did you say parked?

Dr EDWARDS: Yes. The Government has allocated \$10 million of new money, which we will discuss in the budget estimates when we get to the Water and Rivers Commission. That new money is for the evaluation of engineering pilot projects and also for demonstration sub-catchments. In 2000-01 the Department of Environment, Water and Catchment Protection spent roughly \$4 million. I will table that information later. In 2000-01, the total expenditure of the four agencies to which I have referred was \$32.36 million. In this year's budget, the total expenditure across the four agencies, plus part of the AlintaGas money, which is allocated for this year, is \$41 million. In supplementary information I will provide a table of the break-down of departments in previous years and in this current financial year.

Mr EDWARDS: Will the minister table that information?

Dr EDWARDS: I will table that by way of supplementary information.

Mr McNAMARA: As both a land manager and an agency responsible for biodiversity conservation, the Department of Conservation and Land Management is involved with other agencies and the community in the delivery of the salinity strategy. In 2001-02, the department plans to spend \$8.05 million in direct expenditure on: the management of crown reserves; recovery catchments for which there is a priority focus on biodiversity conservation, but for which other needs are also taken into account; the continuation of the biological survey; the search for new commercial revegetation options among our native species; and a range of ancillary programs.

Mr HYDE: I know we said we would discuss this issue until 4.15 pm, but I am conscious that a quarter of this session is supposed to be used to discuss heritage issues. I am afraid that some of the important environmental issues will be lost to us. We should consider heritage by five o'clock.

The CHAIRMAN (Ms Guise): The management of time is entirely up to those present. Although I have just come into the Chair, I understand that the agreement reached loosely or officially was that members would try to finish division 39 by 4.15 pm. Is that correct?

Mrs EDWARDES: We are being flexible on the matter. Although we want to cover the issues of heritage, a number of other departments and divisions remain to be discussed. I have only another couple of questions on this issue, and I would rather not be locked into a time frame. I would not agree to spend a whole hour discussing the issues of heritage.

The CHAIRMAN: At this stage, three speakers are on the list for this section. I will proceed with those speakers and at the end of that time we can reassess the situation.

Mr OMODEI: I notice in the budget papers there is reference to conservation and consultation with the community about the protection of forests, etc. Some of the major achievements and initiatives refer to weed control, particularly in the Gascoyne-Murchison area, and they also refer to conservation partnerships.

Mr EDWARDS: What page is that on?

Mr OMODEI: A number of references to them are made in the *Budget Statements*, and I refer to them generally. Weed control is very important in the native forest estate, whether it be in the national parks or state forests. The rapid spread of watsonia, arum lily and blackberry in state forests is getting out of control. Will the minister indicate where in the budget is the allocation of funds for these issues? Successive State Governments have let go of this issue for a while. At one stage, the Agriculture Protection Board compelled people on private property to control their weeds; however, it appears that the State is not controlling the weeds on its property. The spread of watsonia between Manjimup and Pemberton is choking the native vegetation. The spread of weeds is having an impact on tourism and the State's biodiversity. The weeds are choking native vegetation. Where in the budget is the allocation for weed control? Has the allocation increased since last year?

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Dr EDWARDS: The Minister for Agriculture and I have discussed the issue of weeds, which relates to the responsibilities of CALM and the Department of Agriculture. Historically, one of the cultural issues - I do not think that this will change - has been that people tended to focus on weeds that have an impact on the economy rather than weeds that have an impact on biodiversity.

Mr McNAMARA: Weeds have been a challenging issue for the State for a long time. I expect that weeds will remain a challenge for biodiversity and for managers of land conservation in this State and throughout Australia for the rest of my career, and everyone else's. It would always be desirable to do more about the problem. The department tries to focus its available resources on the highest priority weeds in the highest priority sites. When deciding its priorities, the department considers threatened species and ecosystems, recreation sites and neighbouring issues, as well as Forest Products Commission reimbursement and timber production issues.

Weeds present a major challenge for the department. There is no specific appropriation for weeds in the budget. When the department's managers decide general land management and nature conservation expenditures, they must weigh up a range of issues including feral animals and weeds, and they must apply the available resources on a priority basis.

Mr OMODEI: I suggest that not only CALM and the Department of Agriculture but also the Department of Land Administration look after private property and pastoral leases. The river and stream reserves in this State are not protected to the extent that they should be. As I have said, successive Governments have failed in this area, which should be given a high priority. Maybe corporate sponsorship arrangements could be put in place to protect certain areas. We talk about the Western Shield and the Western Everlasting programs and so on; however, it is getting to the stage at which the issue of weeds is a matter of state importance.

Dr EDWARDS: I agree that it is a matter of importance to the State. My office is considering the issue of weeds. I will take on board what the member said about corporate sponsorship; I had not thought of that. Manufacturers of various products may be open to that suggestion.

Mr OMODEI: I know the Labor Party is sometimes reluctant to reach agreements with the private sector; however, it could be a good idea.

Dr EDWARDS: If someone could sort out the issue of weeds, I would come to an agreement immediately.

Mr HYDE: We do not want to replace weeds with signage. It is one and the same.

Dr WOOLLARD: My question relates to outputs 2 and 3 on page 634 of the *Budget Statements*. Why has there been a massive decrease of \$50 000 in this budget for sustainable forest management in comparison with the figure last year? I believe that the Conservation Commission of Western Australia is currently partly responsible for the management of some 20 million hectares of land. With the 30 new national parks and the two new conservation parks, will the funds provided for in this budget be sufficient?

[4.10 pm]

Dr EDWARDS: The drop in the budget for sustainable forest management is explained in the footnote. Essentially, money was in the previous budget for the Forest Products Commission, which was created in November 2000, and was therefore transferred then. That explains the reason for such a significant drop. Money is allocated this year for the Conservation Commission in addition to some carryover money. The figure is therefore higher than appears in these budget papers. However, it is important to point out that the Conservation Commission is a small body that has land vested in it and is responsible for the overarching policy of the whole State. It does not carry out operational duties and therefore needs a much smaller budget than the Department of Conservation and Land Management's budget.

Mrs EDWARDES: In agreement with my colleagues to my left, I am happy to ask a couple of questions together and for the minister to provide the information by way of supplementary. These questions relate to page 634. What services and programs will be cut to comply with the amounts identified under the priority and assurance dividend? What specifically do the amounts under the parity and wages policy refer to? Again, they are obviously in keeping with enterprise bargaining agreements. What is the breakdown of the respective figures for outputs 1, 2 and 3 of the 2001-02 budget?

Dr EDWARDS: We are happy to provide that to the member as supplementary information.

The CHAIRMAN: I ask the minister to clarify what will be provided as supplementary information.

Dr EDWARDS: Supplementary information will be provided about the parity and wages policy, the breakdown of the priority and assurance dividend and the breakdowns of outputs 1, 2 and 3.

Mrs EDWARDES: Can I add outputs 4 and 5 to that?

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Dr EDWARDS: Yes. Therefore, a breakdown will be provided with respect to outputs 1 through to 5 of the 2001-02 budget estimates figures.

Mr McRAE: I refer to the item in output measures on page 636 relating to a change in threatened species. Under the column giving the reason for significant variations between the 2000-01 estimated and 2001-02 target figures is a note that uncontrollable external factors prevented gazettal of any changes to threatened species status in 2000-01. What were those uncontrollable external factors? Do they relate to printing?

Mr McNAMARA: I am not absolutely certain. However, there are two potential explanations. One is the difficulty we had convening the scientific committee that advises on these matters. We are then required to go through a drafting process using the parliamentary draftsmen. I will check the precise reasons and advise, if necessary, by way of supplementary information.

Mr McRAE: I appreciate that. Can I ask a supplementary question? We had agreed that supplementary information would be provided about the particular uncontrollable external factors.

Dr EDWARDS: Should I read it?

The CHAIRMAN: The minister needs to be specific about what will be provided.

Dr EDWARDS: We are happy to provide supplementary information on the output measure on page 636 relating to quality and the change in the number of threatened species.

Mr McRAE: My supplementary question relates to regional parks. I have searched for but cannot find a specific reference to metropolitan regional parks. Can the minister guide me?

Dr EDWARDS: Obviously regional parks are covered in the budget. I ask Mr Sharp to further comment on that. Does the member have a specific question?

Mr McRAE: Is there an agreement on priorities for the conservation values of regional parks across the metropolitan area?

Mr SHARP: The preparation of management plans is being undertaken. Some management plans have been completed. When they are completed, they will indicate priorities for both capital works and budget allocations. Each regional park has its own recurrent budget allocation, which is embedded in the outputs on nature conservation. Some costs and the way in which funds are expended are associated with nature conservation in output 1 and some with parks and visitor services in output 4. Also, a capital program flows out of the completion of those management plans. Those funds are derived from the Western Australian Planning Commission on the basis of a plan put forward to it for funding.

Mr McRAE: When each of the regional parks management plans are established, or reviewed and renewed - because some have been in place for a little while, particularly the one in my electorate, the Canning River Regional Park - will those plans appear in subsequent budgets as specific line items or will they always appear as a composite?

Dr EDWARDS: Given the size of the conservation estate, and budget and the detail we must go into, we would not generally include it in a budget. However, I am happy to provide that information to the member for Riverton because we have that information and the plans. I have had briefings on those plans, which are mapped out. However, we would have to bring in the budget documents in a wheelbarrow if we added the plans for regional parks to them.

Mr McRAE: It would be worthwhile if the budget included the Canning River Regional Park.

The CHAIRMAN: Once again I would like clarification. Is supplementary information sought by the member for Riverton?

Mr McRAE: No, Madam Chair.

[4.20 pm]