

Chairman; Mr Bernie Masters; Dr Judy Edwards; Mr Colin Barnett; Mr John D'Orazio; Mr Jeremy Edwards; Mr Paul Omodei; Mr Brendon Grylls; Mr Norm Marlborough

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**Division 37: Conservation and Land Management, \$138 868 000 -**

Mrs D.J. Guise, Chairman.

Dr J.M. Edwards, Minister for the Environment.

Mr K.J. McNamara, Executive Director.

Mr A.W. Walker, Director, Regional Services.

Mr J.R. Sharp, Director, National Parks.

Mr R. Kawalilak, Acting Director, Corporate Services.

Dr R. Field, Chief of Staff, Office of the Minister for the Environment.

The CHAIRMAN (Mrs D.J. Guise): This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard staff. The daily proof *Hansard* will be published at 9.00 am tomorrow. The estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated fund. This is the prime focus of this committee. Although there is scope for members to examine many matters, questions need to be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount within the volumes in preface to their question. For example, members are free to pursue performance indicators that are included in the budget statements while there remains a clear link between the questions and the estimates. It is my intention to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee rather than ask that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. For the purpose of following up the provision of this information, I ask the minister to clearly indicate to the committee which supplementary information she agrees to provide. I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the Clerk by 11 June 2004 so that members may read it before the report and third reading stages. If the supplementary information cannot be provided within that time, written advice is required of the day by which the information will be made available. Details in relation to supplementary information have been provided to both members and advisers. Accordingly, I ask the minister to cooperate with those requirements.

I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice with the Clerk's office. Only supplementary information that the minister agrees to provide will be sought by 11 June 2004.

Also, if members seek to pursue a line of inquiry, can members refer to further questions rather than supplementary questions? There is a distinct difference between the two.

Mr B.K. MASTERS: I start by congratulating the minister for somehow getting out of the Treasurer a significant increase in funding for the coming financial year. My estimate is in the order of five or six per cent. Well done. However, I see that most initiatives or highlights in division 37 for 2004-05 are continuations of programs that have been under way for some time. Can the minister summarise the genuinely new initiatives that her Government will undertake in this aspect of the environment portfolio over the coming year?

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: This is the biggest increase in a budget that the Department of Conservation and Land Management has received since it was established in the mid 1980s. CALM is worthy of receiving that money because of the excellent work it does throughout the community in the entire State. The major initiative in this budget of which the Government is extremely proud is its policy of stopping logging in old-growth forests.

Mr B.K. MASTERS: That is three years old, minister.

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: The Government has stopped logging in old-growth forests.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: No, it has not.

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: An excellent new forest management plan has been released that sets out the direction for the next 10 years. The budget contains new money to implement that forest management plan. Also, new money is in the budget for the capital works associated with the 30 new national parks to be rolled out as part of that policy. New money is also allocated for the biodiversity conservation initiatives that are being worked on within government. A discussion paper was put out on a proposed new biodiversity conservation Act. The summaries that came in from that process are being collated, and that will be all put together by the end of the year. Money is also in the budget for that initiative. In addition, the World Heritage listing of Purnululu is continuing, for which money is provided, particularly for the joint management initiatives with Aboriginal

Chairman; Mr Bernie Masters; Dr Judy Edwards; Mr Colin Barnett; Mr John D'Orazio; Mr Jeremy Edwards; Mr Paul Omodei; Mr Brendon Grylls; Mr Norm Marlborough

---

people of the cultural aspects of Purnululu that are required from the international bodies as part of the further World Heritage listing.

The budget has many initiatives involving national parks, including capital works in national parks, and marine parks. The Government has created the first new marine park in 13 years - the Jurien Bay Marine Park. New money is included in the budget to keep rolling out marine parks.

[9.10 am]

Mr B.K. MASTERS: I do not believe the minister has answered my question. Is there anything genuinely new rather than just a continuation of previously commenced programs?

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: It is clear that the member has never been in government. It would be fantastic to have an absolutely genuine new budget for CALM. The reality of day-to-day management is that many tasks are ongoing. Let us start with biodiversity conservation. Yes, there are new initiatives in the budget, particularly with the biodiversity conservation Bill, which will underpin the changes that the Government will be driving in that area. In addition, the Government has allocated a lot of money for the marine parks initiative. We have had the courage to tackle the hard issues. When the member was in government, he and his colleagues sat on their hands on these issues; they refused to tackle them. They did not pick them up and run with them. We have allocated money to do those things and to move on.

Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO: I refer to the first dot point at page 601 of the *Budget Statements*. I would like the minister to comment on the old-growth forest policy. More importantly, I would like her to comment on the creation of 30 new national parks and two new conservation areas. Will she comment on the impact it will have on the protection of flora and fauna and the community?

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: The first impact is that we have stopped logging old-growth forest. To manage that we have had to introduce a new forest management plan. We have cut the sustained yield so that we will have a sustained yield that will take us into the future. The forest management plan went through an extensive consultation process. More than 5 000 people commented and lodged submissions. We have done that in a lot of detail; we have listened to the community. We are now implementing the outcomes from that. We have new ways of managing the forest. We are making sure we have sustainable forestry management. The member for Vasse will be pleased that new money is in the budget to establish things such as fauna habitat zones. Additional money is allocated to the Conservation Commission of Western Australia so it can move on and conduct its task of auditing the forest management plan. In relation to the 30 new national parks, the Government has been putting out indicative boundaries. Groups of local people have given us advice on the boundaries and how we need to manage the parks. We are now in the process of finalising many of those. Later this session a Bill will come before the Parliament creating the first batch of new national parks connected with that policy. On top of that, the very good news in this budget is the large amount of capital works to build infrastructure in the new national parks and to upgrade infrastructure in the established national parks to ensure that the increased number of visitors have a really good experience.

Mr J.P.D. EDWARDS: I will come to the line item in a moment. I have made it very clear that I have some concerns about the way CALM is dealing with the environment. I understand that we have to have management of the environment and I am sure that the officers are doing a very good job. I make the plea that CALM needs to work more closely and in partnership with some of its clientele in the farming community. There are some real issues in my part of the world. CALM is seen as a fairly voracious animal that appears to be gobbling up everything in the agricultural community. That is of some concern. I ask the minister to duly note that.

The CHAIRMAN: I have allowed a fair bit of latitude and I appreciate the point the member is trying to get across. However, this is not an opportunity to make a speech; it is an opportunity for the member to ask a question.

Mr J.P.D. EDWARDS: I will take that as a slap on the wrist. I refer to the fourth dot point at page 601. The department has a clear role to play in the finalisation of areas to be excluded from pastoral leases for conservation and lease renewals in 2015. What progress has the department made towards this and what remains to be done?

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: The department is working very closely with the Department for Planning and Infrastructure, which is in charge of the entire process. The department has had discussions with local people, particularly pastoralists, who will be affected by the changes. I will ask Mr McNamara to comment further. I will also pick up the member's point about interaction with the farming community.

Mr McNAMARA: Concerning the pastoral lease exclusions in 2015, the department is the designated acquiring authority for 57 of the proposed exclusions, as I recall. We are working with each of those pastoralists to reach

Chairman; Mr Bernie Masters; Dr Judy Edwards; Mr Colin Barnett; Mr John D'Orazio; Mr Jeremy Edwards; Mr Paul Omodei; Mr Brendon Grylls; Mr Norm Marlborough

---

agreement on the boundaries and the other associated conditions with each of those exclusions. That process is due to be completed by the end of this year. It is being performed under the Land Administration Act. I have signed a number of final reports and agreed boundaries with pastoral lessees, and many more are expected to come to fruition in the next few months. We expect to reach agreement with the pastoralists on those exclusions in the vast majority of cases within the time frame. Many of those exclusions are ones that have been identified for up to 25 years or so by Environmental Protection Authority reports and various other planning documents.

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: I will comment on the links with the farming community. The matters raised by the member for Greenough have been recognised by CALM. Since late last year it has been working with the Western Australian Farmers Federation on a new good neighbour policy and improving relations with people in regional areas. I met with the Farmers Federation last week, and it described to me its pleasure with the process. It described to me in some detail how, in high-level discussions, it brought together regional managers and zone people to talk about the issues. The federation feels more confident that better dialogue is being established, particularly between landowners who border CALM areas and the department. We are getting a clearer way forward on rights and responsibilities in each case and what the nature of the dialogue should be. We are also engaging in discussions on the broader issues for the community in those areas, particularly fire management, access to certain areas and control of feral animals and weeds. It is a good point; it is one to which we are paying attention and on which a policy is being worked up. Once more work is completed, we will be ready to receive more feedback. We are keen to improve the relationships.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: I refer to the appropriation and forward estimates at page 601. The increase in the budget is certainly welcome. However, I observe that with the advent of the split within the old CALM to create the Forest Products Commission, there was always going to be a need for an increase in the budget, particularly given that the department is now responsible for a large increase in unallocated crown land. The first dot point of significant issues and trends refers to implementation of the Government's policy of protecting old-growth forests. I know that the Premier and the minister make great capital of that. It is obviously one of the successes of the Government. Having protected old-growth forests, will the minister explain why CALM allowed trees to be felled in Challar block that were obviously old-growth forest? They were in a unique gene pool area adjacent to the Mindanup tree, which is one of the biggest karri trees in the world.

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: The member knows full well that the area is not old-growth forest. The department has been through an extensive program of mapping old-growth forest. People have also raised concerns in the community about areas they thought might be excluded, particularly on the basis of dieback infestation. A list of those has been drawn up and further work is being done. The area did not register on that antenna. This is two-tiered karri forest, which is not old growth. I find it a strange question coming from the member. I would like to ask him a question: what will the sustained yield be if his side comes to Government? Does he still back the Leader of the Opposition, who is talking of a figure of 180 000 cubic metres?

Mr P.D. OMODEI: We will definitely manage the forest on a sustainable yield basis.

[9.20 am]

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: It has a great record!

Mr P.D. OMODEI: The minister had better tell that to the people around her as well.

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: I refer to the third dot point on page 601, which relates to the State's salinity strategy. Can the minister please direct me to the line item in the Department of Conservation and Land Management budget that allocates the salinity money? Is there money in the CALM budget to match the funds from the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality?

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: I thank the member for the question. The bulk of the money to match the funds from the national action plan is in the agriculture budget. Nearly \$80 million, which is literally in the glass jar, will be put on the table and will be spent according to regional priorities. The major part of that is in the agriculture budget. The AlintaGas money is in the nature conservation part of this budget.

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: There is \$80 million in the agriculture budget. Where will the rest of it come from?

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: The full \$158 million is spread throughout the agriculture budget, the Forest Products Commission budget, and the Department of Environmental Protection, Water and Rivers Commission and CALM budgets.

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: It can be found. As we go through the estimates process, I will be able to draw out that \$158 million.

Chairman; Mr Bernie Masters; Dr Judy Edwards; Mr Colin Barnett; Mr John D'Orazio; Mr Jeremy Edwards; Mr Paul Omodei; Mr Brendon Grylls; Mr Norm Marlborough

---

Mr McNAMARA: In addition to the money to match the national action plan funds, the department is maintaining its pre-existing expenditure on salinity programs to the tune of \$8.05 million in the coming financial year.

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: Can I ask for supplementary information to document the different areas to which the \$158 million is allocated?

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: Yes, I am happy to provide that information.

*[Supplementary Information No B11.]*

Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO: I refer to the seventh dot point on page 602. The Perth Observatory is supporting efforts for major investment of \$1 billion for the world's largest telescope. Can the minister tell us a bit more about what is involved and what will be the spin-offs for our economy?

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: This is a very exciting project and I am delighted that the Perth Observatory has been able to be involved in it. I am not sure whether members have visited the observatory, but it is well worth a visit. The observatory has excellent staff - real night owls obviously - who are internationally renowned. This is a project that the State is trying to get for Western Australia. It is driven by the Office of Science and Innovation within the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, but if the member would like more detail, we can provide that for him.

Mr B.K. MASTERS: The third dot point under major initiatives for 2004-05 on page 610 refers to the Walpole wilderness area. Based on past advice from the minister, I understand there will be a core central area that will be true wilderness - that is, no tracks, no access and so on - surrounded by different categories of land. However, I think the core area will be up to 9 000 hectares. Can the minister again answer the question to which I have not received an answer; namely, if this proposal were to go through and if one fire started in that area, what would stop 9 000 hectares being destroyed?

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: Fire is a very big issue. It is a big worry to us. That is why there is an increased allocation in this budget for the management of fire. I am very pleased to report that, as of a few days ago, we are up to speed with our prescribed burns. We have undertaken 157 burns and have covered a total area of 188 000 hectares. It is an area to which we pay particular attention and in which look we look for opportunities so that we can undertake those burns in a safe manner. We have had a lot of discussions with the local community and local people about the boundaries of the Walpole wilderness area, the configuration of the area and the types of facilities that need to go in the area. I was very pleased to visit the area about a month ago and announce the facilities at Swarbrick, the Valley of the Giants and Mt Frankland. There will be facilities there and ways in which we can manage people according to the type of experience they want. I will ask Jim Sharp to expand further on the member's question about fire, given that he is on the committee that is looking at the management of the area.

Mr SHARP: The planning process so far for the Walpole wilderness, which is approximately 350 000 hectares of land and includes about seven national parks, has identified some core areas that meet the national wilderness inventory criteria at level 12 for wilderness. A draft policy for wilderness, which has guided the planning so far in the Walpole wilderness area, is being drafted at this time. Several areas of about 8 000 hectares that meet that criteria have been identified and are being considered in that planning process. The policy does not exclude the use of fire for prescribed burning to protect those wilderness nodes or core areas, so fire is one tool that is available to protect those core areas. More importantly, in the management planning process, an overall fire management plan will be devised that will take into account the values of those areas. That is being designed to protect those core areas.

Mr B.K. MASTERS: The definition of "wilderness" means generally no access tracks and therefore an almost impossibility of putting out fires once they start; for example, through lightning strikes. What is the largest area of true trackless wilderness that will be contained within the park and how would a fire be stopped once it started in whatever is the largest area of vegetation that is defined as wilderness in that area?

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: I thank the member for that question. Clearly, one of the issues I have in the back of my mind is if people were in the area and there was a fire, we would need to be able to get them out. These types of issues arise when we consider to what extent we should create such an isolated wilderness experience, which people think is really amazing and internationally unique, versus the safety issues and the management of fire. I will get both Jim Sharp and Alan Walker to comment briefly on the discussions.

Mr SHARP: The largest area that will be set aside will be 8 000 hectares to meet that nationally agreed criteria for wilderness. The criteria do not prohibit there being tracks; they prohibit the maintenance and development of tracks. There is a process of allowing them to be rehabilitated. There is not a total exclusion of tracks. Of

Chairman; Mr Bernie Masters; Dr Judy Edwards; Mr Colin Barnett; Mr John D'Orazio; Mr Jeremy Edwards; Mr Paul Omodei; Mr Brendon Grylls; Mr Norm Marlborough

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course, a range of strategies can be undertaken to protect the values in that core wilderness area. That core of the wider area also needs to be seen in context, and the fire management plan will be devised right across that landscape. From a fire management point of view, that will be taken into account in that overall planning.

Mr WALKER: With regard to the areas that are surrounded by roads and tracks, it is probably fair to say that the part of the Walpole wilderness area that is east of the Frankland River, by comparison with other areas of the south west forest, is an area that does have relatively few tracks. There are blocks in there of between 8 000 and 10 000 hectares and there are no tracks within those blocks. It is not uncommon to get fires from lightning strikes within those areas. The method of suppression is chosen depending on the circumstances, but it is not uncommon for fires to be fought through what is called indirect attack, whereby the fires are lit from the existing containment lines - the boundaries of roads and tracks that already exist - and the fire is contained through back-burning. That is probably the preferred method in those areas, although the alternative of committing large heavy equipment to fight fires is also available, depending on the circumstances. If there were a relatively high likelihood of containing the fire to a small size, that would probably be the preferred strategy.

[9.30 am]

Mr J.P.D. EDWARDS: One of the major policy decisions on page 602 relates to common fire service conditions, and has a budget of \$621 000. What does it involve and how does it alter the existing arrangements?

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: A number of people are employed seasonally to work with the Department of Conservation and Land Management to help fight fires. The common fire service agreement is to make sure that different groups of people who are working for CALM fighting fires have similar conditions. I had some concerns about the number of weekends that some people were asked to be on call to fight fires. Because the previous year was so dry and there were so many lightning strikes, there were many fires. As a result, those people were run pretty ragged. During 2003 we looked at the whole area again, in conjunction with the workers and their unions. We came to a common fire service agreement. We got extra money in December 2003. I took to Cabinet an initiative to get extra money for the agreement, to make sure that we had people out there on the ground and also to get extra money for prescribed burning.

Mr J.P.D. EDWARDS: The page also contains reference to allocations to fire management of \$3 million, forest management plan implementation of \$1.5 million and indigenous joint management of national parks of \$1 million. What does this involve and how does it alter the existing arrangements for those three specific items? To which national parks does it apply?

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: I think I had best answer that in the general, and then talk about the money we got at the end of last year following the review done of the previous season. We got extra funding of nearly \$3 million at the end of last year to make sure that we were really keeping up to speed with the prescribed burning process. That allocation was broken down into the regions. I will get the executive director to outline that in a minute. We were able to put on 32 extra full-time equivalents. This has meant that we have been able to achieve a lot more burns in autumn because, basically, when the conditions have been right, we have been able to call people in to undertake burns in various parts of the State, depending on which parts of the State it has been safe to do it in. The money was also used to make sure that access tracks, bridges and infrastructure such as that were upgraded, so that we could get good access to fires in more isolated areas, because that had been identified as a concern. Money was also put into having heavy equipment available to us when we needed it, so that we could respond more quickly. I will ask the executive director to add to that by giving a breakdown for the regions.

Mr McNAMARA: In respect of fires, as the minister has indicated, we were allocated just on \$3 million in December for the current financial year, because it was outside the normal budget process. That money was distributed predominantly to CALM's three south west forest-based regions, but about \$180 000 was allocated to each of the south coast and mid west regions to enable some extra seasonal firefighters to be on call and do some of the fire preparedness work, prescribed burning and other associated works that the minister has outlined. The allocation of that money followed a very thorough analysis by the department of the 2002-03 fire season, which was a very serious one, and a comparison of that season right back over several decades. We did a very thorough analysis. That has led to this budget increase. The important growth in this area in the out years is that the funding will continue and grow somewhat in the south west regions, but there will also be an increased allocation on a statewide basis. We face very serious neighbour protection, asset protection and biodiversity conservation problems in respect of fire in the inland and northern areas of the State. As well as addressing fire needs in the south west, across the out years we will be able to grow the budget for regions, such as the mid west and the south coast, to over \$500 000 each through increased funds by way of this budget, as well as inject new funds into the wheatbelt, goldfields, Pilbara and Kimberley for fire management.

Chairman; Mr Bernie Masters; Dr Judy Edwards; Mr Colin Barnett; Mr John D'Orazio; Mr Jeremy Edwards; Mr Paul Omodei; Mr Brendon Grylls; Mr Norm Marlborough

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Mr J.P.D. EDWARDS: What do the Purnululu World Heritage property and the service agreement for the Forest Products Commission involve?

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: CALM is getting an extra \$250 000 per annum for the Purnululu World Heritage property, commencing in the financial year 2004-05 that we are about to enter into. It will be used in 2004-05 to ensure the employment of a World Heritage executive officer for the Purnululu Aboriginal Corporation and CALM. That is the body we are dealing with because it represents the local indigenous people of the region. We will be pursuing World Heritage listing for cultural values. Money will be used to support the park council that is set up as part of the arrangements for World Heritage listing.

Mr J.P.D. EDWARDS: What is involved in the service agreement for the Forest Products Commission, budgeted at \$400 000?

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: Basically, as the member for Warren-Blackwood alluded to, we have an agreement with the Forest Products Commission for work that is undertaken by CALM that assists the Forest Products Commission. This is the service agreement. The \$400 000 will come from extra consolidated funding to CALM to assist with some of the operations that help with forest products.

The CHAIRMAN: I have a couple of queries. One is about the number of divisions the committee is dealing with in this session. Members may wish to organise among themselves some sort of time allocation. The Chair will be guided by the committee on how the committee wishes to approach it. We are currently dealing with the question that the appropriation for division 37 be recommended. However, there are a range of divisions. All the Chair will do, unless members have some sort of agreement among themselves, is to remind members of the time remaining and the number of divisions left to deal with. That is something the committee members may wish to discuss.

The other question that has been asked of me is whether there will be a break for morning tea. Once again, the Chair will be guided by the committee, although usually it is my practice to recommend that, since the committee has a rather long stint ahead of it and is not due to break until 1.00 pm, it seek to take a break mid-session.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: On page 601 one of the significant issues and trends refers to the State's salinity strategy. To follow on from where the member for Merredin left off, will the minister explain how much of the \$31 million budgeted to be spent on salinity last year was actually spent and how it was spent? Which budget contains the \$158 million on which the minister gave a commitment to provide supplementary information? Has the amount of \$158 million been accredited by the Commonwealth as funds for projects that are allowed under the matching arrangements?

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: I am happy to answer the question now, but it would really be most relevant under the Water and Rivers Commission division.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: I will not be here then.

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: I will answer it.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: It really follows on from the question before.

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: Following the announcement on 4 April by the Premier that we would be matching the full \$158 million, he wrote to the Prime Minister laying that out and laying out the agreement that had already been reached for \$31 million, to which the member referred.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: That is for the previous year, is it?

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: Yes. He also laid out how the rest of that money would be allocated. To the best of my knowledge we have not yet received a response from the Prime Minister. Given that when we wrote in November 2002 outlining that we were putting \$88 million on the table it took until March 2003 to get a response from the Prime Minister, we are not holding our breath. Having said that, very senior people from here are in virtually daily contact with the Commonwealth and are urging it to move as quickly as possible.

[9.40 am]

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Minister, you have had three years, or at least two years, to match that \$158 million.

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: We have put a full \$158 million in the budget, which the Commonwealth Government asked us to do. As soon as that cabinet decision was made, we announced it and wrote to the Prime Minister seeking his help. The member needs to apportion blame where it is due.

Chairman; Mr Bernie Masters; Dr Judy Edwards; Mr Colin Barnett; Mr John D'Orazio; Mr Jeremy Edwards; Mr Paul Omodei; Mr Brendon Grylls; Mr Norm Marlborough

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Mr P.D. OMODEI: Minister, if you keep on putting up projects that are not approved by the Commonwealth, it is an exercise in futility.

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: Let us go through the projects that have already been matched. The catchment demonstration initiative with funding of \$6 million, the engineering evaluation initiative with funding of \$4 million, and the land care coordinators funding of \$1.2 million have all been matched by the Commonwealth Government. We are in intense negotiation with the Commonwealth on the Collie catchment recovery initiatives, which require \$15 million. However, I understand that the South West Catchments Council, which is the regional group for that area, is sympathetic to those projects. The rider from the Commonwealth is that such projects must come up through the regional groups and must be a regional priority to get that matching. In addition, there are intense negotiations about the \$32 million on the table for plantation forestry. That all adds up to \$58 million. Around \$80 million of the remaining money is in the agriculture budget. It is literally in the glass jar ready to be spent by the regional groups as they put together their strategies, get them accredited and put out their investment plans. With the remainder of the money, catchment demonstration initiatives come under the agriculture budget, engineering evaluation comes under the Water and Rivers Commission budget, and the AlintaGas funds come under the Department of Conservation and Land Management budget. We can provide the breakdown of exactly what is what. As I have said, I will give that to the member for Merredin.

The CHAIRMAN: I want to clarify that. Is the minister saying that she is prepared to provide that by way of supplementary information?

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: It is already covered by the previous request for supplementary information.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: No, it is not, because engineering evaluation funds have not been spent. Given that the Commonwealth rejected the proposals for the Forest Products Commission forestry project and the Wellington Dam project, how can the minister guarantee that the projects being put up for the rest of the \$158 million will be agreed to by the Commonwealth? Will we just put up those projects and then go on for another year without significant money being spent on salinity?

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: First, the member's assertions are false. The Wellington Dam-Collie catchment issue is not dead. Good discussions are under way with the Commonwealth on that. Commonwealth officials have been down -

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: They were previously rejected. In the last round -

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: The Commonwealth did not reject it; it said that it needed more information and further discussion. It ticked off on the first \$31 million.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: It probably thought you were trying to con it, minister.

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: I think the member needs to look at the expenditure of the Commonwealth Government. It made a big thing of it in its own budget, in which the environment totally missed out. The environment totally missed the boat in the federal budget last week. The Commonwealth made a big thing about extra money for the Natural Heritage Trust, but when we look at what has been allocated and spent under the NHT, we see that the Commonwealth has not been spending what it has been allocating. Of course there is extra money four years out, because the Commonwealth is just rolling it over.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: You are doing the same thing. Is that what you are saying?

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: No. We would like the Commonwealth Government to work with us in sensibly rolling out the money. If you look at the way the joint steering committee has worked through how money will be allocated to the groups, some groups are now worried that they will have so much money that they will need more time in which to spend it. The money that will flow through to the regions will be significant.

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: There is still no guarantee that the \$75 million for the two projects - forestry and Wellington Dam - will be matched until you hear back from the Commonwealth.

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: We are having many discussions with the Commonwealth. Discussions have been fruitful on the Collie recovery options. I am fairly optimistic about that. Discussions are also reasonably fruitful about the farm forestry initiatives, but again we need to hear back from the Commonwealth. The request from the Commonwealth to us was that the full \$158 million be put on the table. It is on the table. It is there. We urge the Commonwealth to match it. Anything the member can do to work with them and to hurry that up would be really good for the State.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: That is good, but the point is this: you may be putting up proposals that you know are unlikely to be matched. The way to do it would be for officers to get agreement before a proposal is put up to

Chairman; Mr Bernie Masters; Dr Judy Edwards; Mr Colin Barnett; Mr John D'Orazio; Mr Jeremy Edwards; Mr Paul Omodei; Mr Brendon Grylls; Mr Norm Marlborough

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the Commonwealth, to make sure that it will be approved. I do not blame the Commonwealth in a way. If the minister is trying to subsidise her budgets with projects that would normally be funded within the state departmental budgets, it is no wonder that the Commonwealth rejected them.

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: First, the Commonwealth has not rejected them. Further discussion is going on. The member misses the fundamental point about the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality, which is that projects must come from the regions. The regions must identify the projects as their priorities. Money is in glass jars, so to speak - that is the term the Commonwealth uses - and is delivered to the regions to undertake those projects. It is a massive turnaround of how government operates. If the member were in government, he would have some difficulties with that notion as well. That is one of the reasons we are working with the natural resource management groups to make sure that we have proper accountabilities and structures in place for the large sums that will flow directly to those groups to undertake projects that have been ticked off under their investment strategies.

Mr N.R. MARLBOROUGH: I take the minister back to the third dot point on page 601, which relates to the salinity strategy. First, is the review panel that has been put in place by the Government looking at the role of the private sector in tackling the issue of salinity? I think the minister is aware that there is a view around Australia that this issue is so big that Governments will simply not be able to pay for it and that we have to come up with private sector involvement in it. Secondly, it seems that the States are being stymied by the lack of legislation at a federal level, which particularly impacts on this issue - that is, the whole issue of carbon credits. There have been significant attempts both in this State and particularly in New South Wales to overcome the lack of federal legislation. I understand that New South Wales recently introduced a trading Bill in carbon credits - I do not know the name of the Bill. Will the minister advise what point such a Bill might be at in the mind of the minister and/or her committee? It seems to me to be an attempt by New South Wales to overcome the lack of federal legislation. Those two questions cover the bulk of what I am trying to get at. To assist the minister with her answer, I will say that I think we all agree that salinity is increasingly becoming our greatest environmental blight. It is occurring predominantly on farmland. We must find crops that farmers can grow and make money out of. To make money, they must be able to sell those crops. There is a big opportunity for this State to meet, particularly with overseas companies that want to put in place carbon credit rights. I would like the minister to provide an overview of present legislation and where she might be looking for some direction, such as the Government of New South Wales. I ask the minister to tell me where she believes the federal Government is at with its lack of legislation, and whether there are any signs that it may be changing its mind on carbon credit legislation.

[9.50 am]

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: I will start by saying that the really good news in this budget is the extra allocation for salinity. It is no accident that it sits in the agriculture portfolio. We have made sure that within government we have a cabinet committee of the Minister for Agriculture and me to look at this issue and broader NRM issues. We meet regularly with the chair of the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council and with the chair of the regional NRM groups. We have been working through all the issues that arise from this problem. It is the number one environmental problem that we face. As I said, and picking up on the member's first point, agriculture will be a large part of the solution. However, we need to provide leadership to get many of the current farming practices to continue to change. Massive change has been made that has already had great environmental benefits, but we need to build on that, and projects are going on that will help with that. Research is going on that assists with that, such as the cooperative research centres looking into dry land salinity and the new types of plant varieties. Carbon rights have real potential for us, which has not yet been tapped. This State has put carbon rights legislation through the Parliament, which was recently proclaimed. However, we are hampered because we have no carbon trading ability. The federal Government, despite talking a lot about greenhouse issues and having a lot of international discussions about them, has not adopted the fact that there needs to be a carbon-trading mechanism. As a State we would not go down that track alone. New South Wales has gone down that track, but its greenhouse issues are very different from ours, and its system probably would not suit our needs. It has put big penalties on its electricity generators, but the way that State generates electricity is very different from that in this State. Its reliance on coal, for example, is much greater than our reliance. In our discussions with the Australian Greenhouse Office and at ministerial council meetings, we have urged the federal Government to take the whole greenhouse issue more seriously and to look at carbon trading and the advantages and the incentives that we give farmers to plant trees to get more carbon. We now know that there are many different varieties of trees that we could plant for carbon rights. There are claims that carbon is trading at increasingly higher prices. That might make the real difference in a slightly marginal area by making the planting of trees a cost-effective proposal for farmers, which might add encouragement. The Forest Products Commission, through its areas, is looking at the potential to do this. It is exploring what can be done, but it is hard to trade unless there is a market into which the State can trade.



Chairman; Mr Bernie Masters; Dr Judy Edwards; Mr Colin Barnett; Mr John D'Orazio; Mr Jeremy Edwards; Mr Paul Omodei; Mr Brendon Grylls; Mr Norm Marlborough

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The CHAIRMAN: Members, your proposed time line is up. I have four questions left on my list, and I presume you want to ask them. If you each ask one question, you might get them over with by 10.00 am. There is a proposition to have a break from 10.45 to 11.00 am, so members can take that up with the incoming Chairman.

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: I refer to page 601 of the *Budget Statements* and the third dot point about the state salinity strategy. The allocation for the national action plan is \$158 million, of which half is for two projects: the plantation forestry initiative and the Wellington Dam proposal. It is a key requirement by the federal Government to have regional natural resource management group support for those two projects. Can the minister outline where we are at in getting those two major projects up and running, which would have to be a number one priority on the list of the regional NRM groups? If the federal Government decides to not match the funding for those projects because it does not believe they meet the NAP criteria, will the Gallop Labor Government still put in its half of the commitment to those two projects?

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: The Collie catchment initiative is worth \$15 million and the plantation forestry initiative is worth \$32 million, which combined is not half of \$158 million.

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: But it forms a substantial percentage of \$158 million.

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: That is right. My understanding is that the South West Catchment Council places a high priority on recovery options in the Collie catchment. A Collie catchment salinity statement was released late in 2001. That went through a number of options that could be undertaken in that catchment to quite dramatically improve water quality. Workshops have been held, particularly with local people, since that time to explore all the options in that catchment and to work out what would be most viable. There are interesting engineering options, and already we have a ground water pumping trial going on in the farming area to see what impact ground water pumping has on the salinity flow. The east Collie part of that catchment contributes a much greater load of salt than the other parts of the catchment, so that particular area is receiving focus. All that work is going on and will continue to occur in that catchment regardless of whether the federal Government matches those funds. However, like anyone else, our preference would be for the Commonwealth Government to match funding for worthwhile projects like that and many others coming up in the regions so that the State gets the greatest benefit. My understanding from commonwealth officials is that they are favourably inclined to that. They are waiting to see the South West Catchment Council regional strategy, which is due for release early in June. Once that strategy is out, they then have to work, according to the whole agreement that the previous Government signed us up to, towards getting their investment plan together, which is expected at the end of July, so work is starting on that already. From the feedback I have received from having met with the groups, I am fairly optimistic that that project will come up as a regional priority in that south west region.

With regard to plantation forestry, again discussions are going on with commonwealth officials. Our money is already there. We want that money to flow into salinity. I believe that the money that is already sitting there, both now and in the forward estimates, will continue to flow through to salinity.

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: So it will be spent regardless of matching commonwealth funding.

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: That is right. We have really waited longer than I have been comfortable with. We are sitting on some of the moneys waiting for the federal Government to match it so that we can roll it out. We sent the federal Government a very strong signal that if it did not reply early on, we would start rolling out that money. However, I also need to point out that regardless of that money sitting in the glass jar, a lot of other money continues to be spent every day on salinity projects, many of which were started when the previous Government was in office. That needs to keep rolling on. As we know from the Denmark catchment, it takes about 30 years to see some of the results; it takes a concerted and consolidated effort over a generation to see a turnaround, and we want that to happen.

With regard to the various regional NRM strategies, currently the Avon Catchment Council strategy is out for comment. Its investment plan is due to be presented in June. The Swan Catchment Council strategy is also out for comment, with its investment plan due at the end of June. The South West Catchment Council strategy is expected in June and its investment strategy later in July. We expect to see the document from the south coast in late June. At this stage, the northern agricultural document is expected in mid July. The rangelands are behind, but we anticipate that by the middle of next year they will have caught up.

Mr B.K. MASTERS: I refer to the third dot point on page 611, which deals with the focus on increasing the area of conservation reserves covered by management plans. I have a specific question about the last few words under that dot point, which state -

... "road test" the next generation of outcome-based management plans.

Chairman; Mr Bernie Masters; Dr Judy Edwards; Mr Colin Barnett; Mr John D'Orazio; Mr Jeremy Edwards; Mr Paul Omodei; Mr Brendon Grylls; Mr Norm Marlborough

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I would have thought that the previous generation of management plans were outcome based. Can the minister explain what that last sentence means?

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: We are having some trouble hearing the member. Perhaps he needs to be closer to the microphone.

Mr B.K. MASTERS: I did not realise I had a quiet voice. I refer to the third dot point on page 611. The last line of that dot point refers to the need to road test the next generation of outcome-based management plans. I would have thought that all management plans produced to date are outcome based. Can the minister explain what is meant by "the next generation of outcome-based management plans" and why there is a need to road-test them?

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: It is a good question and I appreciate the member asking it. I will get Jim Sharp and Keiran McNamara to expand on that. Management plans tend to be quite general. When reading a management plan it is sometimes hard to drill right down to what the outcomes will be. We have been looking at a desire to have a greater number of management plans to provide guidance to people about what they can do in particular areas, what can happen in those areas over time and how we can measure what happens there.

[10.00 am]

Mr SHARP: It relates in particular to the changed functions of the Conservation Commission. In 2000 it was given an auditing role in management plans. That extra role has recently been given to the commission. It also reflects the fact that the earlier generation of management plans were very much directed towards what was to be done rather than what they were intended to achieve. That made it very difficult to set performance measures that could be easily recorded. The move taking place across protected area management agencies in their management plans is to focus more directly on the outcomes that will be achieved, rather than the means used to achieve them. This is being progressively implemented. As each new management plan is developed, an attempt is made to move it more towards that outcome-based focus.

[Ms J.A. Radisich took the Chair. ]

Mr J.P.D. EDWARDS: I refer to the output performance measures on page 605 of the *Budget Statements*. I note that the area managed for nature conservation shows an increase of 500 000 hectares, and there seems to have been a funding increase of around three per cent for this item. I note that the number of threatened species is expected to increase by 12 in 2004-05, to 560. Do species change every year, and are the same funds allocated for the increase? What recovery efforts are being undertaken to reverse this trend? Is there any idea of when that trend may be reversed?

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: A lot of work goes on every year, particularly in the regions, to determine which species are present, which are under threat, the threats they face and how those threats are to be managed. For example, in recent times work has been done in the Pilbara. As the member can imagine, in a State like Western Australia there are large areas for which we do not know what is there, what used to be there and what faces a threat. I will ask Kieran McNamara to outline why that number is going up. It is a positive rather than a negative trend, although I know people have read it as a negative trend in the past. Mr McNamara will then detail what recovery actions are in place.

Mr McNAMARA: The department places a lot of focus on keeping the threatened species lists under the Wildlife Conservation Act 1950 in good repair. The lists have meaning in terms of what people can and cannot do, and it is very important that they are kept up to date. A scientific committee meets annually and recommends changes, which then go to the minister for gazettal. The department expends considerable amounts of funds and effort on scientific and taxonomic research, survey work and so on, to understand the status of species throughout the State. The lists change on an annual basis largely as a result of improved knowledge of taxonomy, distribution and abundance. They change not only by having more species added, but also in the other direction, as we learn more about some species. More than 170 recovery plans are in place, mostly at an individual species or subspecies level for endangered and threatened species. A number of plans, particularly in the case of flora, are for entire CALM administrative districts, so that we deal with all the threatened flora in one go. There has been an improvement in the status of some species, particularly under the Western Shield program. Three native species have been taken off the threatened species list as a result of recovery through fox control, and a number of other species are well on the way towards the same outcome. On the flora side, a number of translocation and habitat management programs are holding the line on a range of species and gradually improving their status.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: I refer the minister to the new works listed on page 613, in particular the tourism road improvement program and the park improvement program. Can the minister outline which roads will be improved as a result of that budget item, and where the park improvements will occur? Many very good tourist

Chairman; Mr Bernie Masters; Dr Judy Edwards; Mr Colin Barnett; Mr John D'Orazio; Mr Jeremy Edwards; Mr Paul Omodei; Mr Brendon Grylls; Mr Norm Marlborough

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attractions are located in my neck of the woods, and have come about as a result of a lot of good work by CALM over a number of years. I was in the area last Saturday, and saw that the majority of those tourist attractions, such as the Warren National Park, the Big Brook Dam and the whole forest discovery trail, have gravel roads. There is a difficulty for tourists in accessing them under the policies of the various car hire companies. Where will the money be spent, and how will it be spent on both of those programs? As an aside, has the minister or the Government approached the car hire companies with a view to lifting the restrictions? Obviously, some of these roads need bituminising. The Treetop Walk is a good example of where an access road has been bituminised, but the roads to Big Brook Dam, the Warren National Park and Old Vasse Road all need to be bituminised.

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: The sum of \$4 million has been allocated in 2004-05 as part of a major new program to improve tourism roads throughout the State. This money consists of \$2.6 million in new funding to supplement a prior allocation from Main Roads of \$1.4 million for 2004-05. The program will continue, and a total of \$10.4 million of new funding will be allocated -

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Is that just for the roads or for the parks as well?

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: That is for the roads, and is allocated in this budget and in the forward estimates. I have a huge list of places where the money will be spent, but I think I will narrow it down to the area about which the member has asked.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: The minister can provide the information by way of supplementary information if she wishes.

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: I will just ask the executive director to give the member some highlights.

Mr McNAMARA: Some of the highlights of the rollout of the totality of the roads money and the park facilities money are that \$1 million extra in the coming financial year will be spent in Purnululu National Park for access, airstrip, camping and water facilities and the like. About \$320 000 will be spent in the Karijini National Park for roads. Over \$400 000 extra will be spent on a range of roads, coastal camp sites, moorings and a boat ramp at the Cape Range-Ningaloo site. Another \$1.5 million will be spent on a new tourist road in the Mt Lesueur National Park behind Jurien Bay, in accordance with the management plan, and \$1 million will go towards the first stage of the visitor centre for the Pinnacles at Nambung National Park, which is one of our most heavily visited parks. That will give some indication of the statewide spread of these funds, including the south west. Importantly, about \$2 million of the parks facilities funds will be put into the maintenance of existing infrastructure. The department manages an enormous number of recreation sites, assets and roads across the entire State, and there has been a specific recognition of the need to keep those in good repair.

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: I will ask Mr Sharp to comment on the car hire company question.

Mr SHARP: Firstly, the extra expenditure on the roads represents more than a doubling of existing funds for roads and road maintenance, although the member will recognise that moving towards sealing roads is a much higher order of cost again. Some of these funds will go towards sealing in specific sections of parks. For instance, at Karijini, the final stretch to the visitor centre will be sealed. Hire cars having a penalty and not being covered by insurance if used on gravel roads is a disincentive to tourism. We are aware of that issue, and I understand it has been raised by the Tourism Commission with car hire companies and their insurers. A concerted effort will be needed to bring about some change in that regard.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Can I receive a list of where those road funds will be spent?

[10.10 am]

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: Yes. That will be provided by way of supplementary information.

[*Supplementary Information No B12.*]

Mr B.K. MASTERS: I would like to move to the next division; otherwise, we will not finish the divisions in the time allocated.

The CHAIRMAN: Does the member for Greenough have another question on this division?

Mr J.P.D. EDWARDS: Yes. I again refer the minister to page 605 of the *Budget Statements*. The bottom dot point refers to the Jurien Bay Marine Park and Montebello and Barrow Islands, which may also come under the reserves under the Gascoyne-Murchison strategy. Are these included in the area managed by CALM? What funding is allocated for the creation of the reserves?

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: The Jurien Bay Marine Park was declared, and new funding has been provided for CALM to work in that marine park. Obviously, we work very closely with fisheries. We launched an indicative management plan for proposed marine conservation reserves at the Montebello and Barrow Islands earlier this

Chairman; Mr Bernie Masters; Dr Judy Edwards; Mr Colin Barnett; Mr John D'Orazio; Mr Jeremy Edwards; Mr Paul Omodei; Mr Brendon Grylls; Mr Norm Marlborough

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year, which is currently out for public comment. A process set out by the CALM Act must be travelled through when the information comes in, and we are abiding by that procedure. There has been quite a bit of interest in the matter and we look forward to the feedback. Similarly, a draft management plan was released late last year or earlier this year for the Rowley Shoals Marine Park, and feedback is being received on that as well. Groups have been set up around the coast to look at further marine parks. I refer to the cape-to-cape area and Walpole. People are also looking at the science in the Jurien Bay area and considering what we need to do better to protect the area. That is all within CALM's responsibility, but we are working closely with fisheries particularly.

With the Jurien Bay Marine Park, \$180 000 was provided in 2003-04, and that will rise to \$360 000 in 2004-05. The allocation will be \$470 000 in 2005-06 and \$480 000 in 2006-07. The Government recognises that with increased management, increased money is needed. Money is also in the budget for the Gascoyne-Murchison strategy. I will get the executive director to comment further.

Mr McNAMARA: If talking about the day-to-day management of the properties acquired under the Gascoyne-Murchison strategy, the budget provided several years ago for that area continues. It is in the order of \$1 million for its management. In addition, the department has redirected quite a bit of its own effort from the goldfields and mid west regions, and the Pilbara region to some extent, into the day-to-day management of those areas. Officers are spending a lot of their time on the acquired properties and allocating a significant proportion of our existing resources prior to the allocation of the \$1 million to that management.

Mr J.P.D. EDWARDS: Can the minister point out the new CALM policy on fighting phytophthora dieback as announced in the press release of 6 March? Also, can the minister point to the funding for the urban nature program as also announced in a press release?

The CHAIRMAN: Could the member for Greenough refer the committee to the page in the appropriation papers?

Mr J.P.D. EDWARDS: I am asking where the funding is. The minister has announced the plans.

The CHAIRMAN: Questions need to relate to the appropriations.

Mr J.P.D. EDWARDS: It relates to funding for CALM in general.

The CHAIRMAN: Which page?

Mr J.P.D. EDWARDS: Page 601, I suppose.

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: It is covered under the nature conservation output on page 605 of the *Budget Statements*. Money for dieback and the urban bushland service is covered by the nature conservation outcome. The Dieback Consultative Council is a high-level body that meets regularly. It has been providing advice in our term in government on the Environmental Protection Authority's report on dieback and its management that the previous Government commissioned. Following that, the council put forward more proposals recently that we are looking at in conjunction with that earlier advice. Dieback is a very serious issue. A dilemma is knowing how to manage it, and particularly how to manage it into the future. Within the nature conservation budget, we continue the work already being done with dieback and its management, and we service the consultative committee. In addition, money is allocated for the treatment of dieback infested trees. I will get Mr McNamara to comment on the urban bushland service.

Mr McNAMARA: A couple of months ago, the minister formally launched at the Brixton Street wetlands the urban bushland service and its combination with the eco-plan program that was run by the Department of Environmental Protection. These are combined under the banner of urban nature. Three people and a budget of \$250 000 per annum have been provided to deliver day-to-day advice to community groups and the wider group of people involved in managing bushland and other reserves throughout the metropolitan area with the intent to provide the same services to regional centres over time.

Mr J.B. D'ORAZIO: I point out to my colleagues that we agreed that this session would finish at 9.50 am; it is now 10.15 am and we are still going. Members will not have much time on other divisions.

The CHAIRMAN: There appears to be no further questions on the division.

**The appropriation was recommended.**