

**Division 42: Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions — Services 1 and 3 to 10, Environment; Climate Action, \$427 261 000 —**

Mr D.A.E. Scaife, Chair.

Mr R.R. Whitby, Minister for Environment; Climate Action.

Mr M. Webb, Director General.

Mr P. Dans, Deputy Director General.

Dr M. Byrne, Executive Director, Biodiversity and Conservation Science.

Dr F. Stanley, Executive Director, Conservation and Ecosystem Management.

Ms A. Klenke, Chief Finance Officer.

Mr J. Foster, Executive Director, Regional and Fire Management Services.

Ms W. Attenborough, Executive Director, Zoological Parks Authority.

Ms S. Thomas, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

**The CHAIR:** The estimates committees will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point. Consideration is restricted to items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must relate to a page number, item or amount related to the current division, and members should preface their questions with these details. Some divisions are the responsibility of more than one minister. Ministers shall only be examined in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 3 June 2022. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system.

I give the call to the member for Moore.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to page 710 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and paragraph 13 under “Biodiversity Conservation and Ecosystem Management”, which states —

The Department has commenced preparation of the next Forest Management Plan ...

That is interesting because I was referred back to the Minister for Forestry when I asked a question about this the other day. What directions were given to the department for the preparation of the forest management plan 2024–2033? What are the guiding principles for the plan?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** As the member knows, the government made a policy decision about ending logging in native forests, which is, of course, an important government commitment. The new forest management plan will obviously take account of that policy requirement, and protection of the natural environment is always a concern. There are a range of issues that the plan has to account for each year, but I think that is a significant change and will have a significant impact on the new forest management plan.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Was the intention, at this stage of the government, to allow under the forest management plan for the use of karri thinnings for the laminated veneer that Wesbeam uses at the moment?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I will refer that query to Dr Fran Stanley.

**Dr F. Stanley:** I thank the member for the question. Given the change in forest policy direction, the focus of the forest management plan is changing to a forest health focus. One of the activities that we are looking at using to deliver forest health is the ecological thinning regime in both jarrah and karri forests. The matter of whether forest products are generated from that for those operations, commercially used, will be a matter for the Forests Products Commission because it deals with any contracts that may arise to allow for the use of those products.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I guess the issue though for the forest management plan is to know whether there will be available product to provide into the market. Whoever or wherever it might go after that, in terms of the Forest Product Commission, is not really the issue. The reason I am asking is that it is a part of a process that provides structural beams for Western Australian builders. I am just trying to keep an assurance that there will be some availability of that karri thinning product under this new plan, or if that is the intention.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I think Dr Fran Stanley might be able to elaborate again, but there will be product available through the thinning process. I think the intention is that if there is any commercial application—I am sure there will be—in terms of the new plan, the ecological thinning of forests and what that may produce, there is obviously

timber coming from mining operations that will still be available. There will still be timber available for commercial use, and I guess that is a matter for the commission to determine in the usual way. The plans are for 10 years and each time a new plan is put in place, there is an obligation or a market whereby the commission looks at what companies are out there and what resources they might want. That is a continuing process with each new plan.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The issue of mine clearing, is that it is mainly in jarrah country, with not much karri I would have thought, but I could be wrong. No doubt there are people over that side much more expert than me who would know. I take it then from the minister's answer that mine site clearing will still be included in the forest management plan as an available product?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Yes. Part of the decision that the government made was that that resource would be available commercially.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** In terms of the development of the plan, what is the consultation process? Who in industry will be consulted with? Who in the community is the department going to be working with to develop that plan?

[6.40 pm]

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** It will be all stakeholders, and there will be the ability for the public generally to submit their input into the process.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Specifically, I wanted to get an understanding if this would involve what we might call activists, rather than groups or community elected representatives or anything like that. I believe that one green activist has already been given a seat at the table for the consultation committee or process that the department is running, a Mr Swarts, I think his name is. Is that the case?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I do not know what the member is talking about. I think, in a broader sense, in terms of public comment and ability to take part, that is open. I do not determine "you cannot comment because you—you know, you are an activist", for instance. I will refer to Dr Fran Stanley. If she knows what you are talking about, then she can respond.

**Dr F. Stanley:** Thank you, minister. Yes, the consultation process that we are undertaking is fairly broad. We have undertaken some targeted meetings with key stakeholders that includes industry groups but also groups that have a focus on different sectors. We have run a series of focus groups and through those focus groups some organisations and individuals were provided an opportunity to have their input through that. Ray Swarts is involved with an organisation called Nannas for Native Forests and that group was part of one of the focus groups. We have also run a publicly available online survey that anyone could undertake. That could have been any member of the public, someone representing an organisation or an individual. There will also be another opportunity for people to have their input through the statutory public consultation phase, which is a two-month period when the plan is open for public comment. That is anticipated to occur later this year.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 709, the fifth paragraph "Joint Management", under "Significant Issues Impacting the Agency". This refers to the department progressing the plan for our parks and mentions the proposed south coast marine park. What stage is the development of this new marine park at, has public consultation completed and has planning concluded?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I know the member has an interest in that part of the world. This is a significant body of work and it is a very aspirational—well, not aspirational; it is very ambitious and a very broad marine park. As the member would know, it is a very special part of the world that is incredibly beautiful and diverse in its environment values. The process is ongoing. It has started, but there is ongoing consultation and that will continue. In terms of the time line, I might seek some advice. Certainly, there has been extensive consultation and there continues to be, and I know there are various stakeholders with commercial interests. We, as a government, want to make sure that all concerns are listened to. We are setting up national parks all around the state and it is always the way that we need to accommodate all interested parties, whether they are recreational or commercial fishers, or traditional owners or the local community. This is a big marine park, in scale, and there is a lot of valuable marine environment down there. Peter Dans might be able to elaborate on the process and timing.

**Mr P. Dans:** Thank you, minister. During 2021, the department, with its partners in the project the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, developed a community engagement strategy. That was done with stakeholders. That led to the establishment of a 12-member community reference committee. That reference committee first met in December 2021. It met again earlier this year and will meet for a third time in June. It is expected that that committee will meet between probably six and eight times during the development of an indicative joint management plan for the marine park. There is a statutory requirement for that indicative joint management plan to go out for a minimum of two months' public consultation, similar to the forest management plan that Dr Stanley referred to. We are not at that stage yet. There is a lot more consultation to go through that community reference committee structure. Sector reference groups have also been established. They represent various sectors: tourism, commercial fishing, recreational fishing, environment, science, youth, snorkelling, diving and the like. The

chairs of those sector reference committees sit in on community reference committee meetings and provide input from a sector point of view into the process. It is very early days so far. We are anticipating, at this stage, that probably early in 2023, perhaps the first quarter of 2023, we will be at the stage whereby we will be releasing an indicative joint management plan. We will take public submissions on that. It will come back. The planning team, including the department, DPIRD and joint management partners will consider those submissions and a final management plan, which precedes the establishment of the park, will hopefully be considered by government. The Minister for Environment will refer it to the Minister for Fisheries and the Minister for Mines and Petroleum, which is a statutory requirement. It needs their concurrence to formally establish the park. We are hoping to do that late in 2023.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Thank you for that comprehensive response. The minister said that the department was working with DPIRD and the like. Is it working with fisheries to determine the value of the fishing licences in that area?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Member, that is outside my area of responsibility. That comes under Minister Punch in terms of fisheries. I think he addressed this issue in the estimates earlier today.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I would have thought by that answer that the member gave about working with DPIRD—is there an ability to determine the value of the fishing licences in the area and will the economic value of the fishery be included in the considerations of the marine park boundaries?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Again, it is a matter that comes under fisheries. It is not part of the planning for the national park, but it is certainly an issue that Fisheries is responsible for and it would have its own methodology. The only thing I would say, and it is certainly outside my ability, or appropriateness, to answer, is that all stakeholders are very much involved in the planning and the discussions of this and their concerns about access are part of these negotiations and consultations. As a starting point, we would hope that we can have a national park that allows access for commercial activities and allows recreational fishers to have their enjoyment, but does so in a way that we can have a sustainable long-term resource there. These are actually good things for the commercial sector as well. I was recently in Exmouth and I spoke to a charter operator. He welcomed the new marine park in the Exmouth Gulf because he is keen on seeing the fish stocks protected and having a sustainable catch. That is the long-term prosperity for these operators. This is not a bad thing; this is a good thing and commercial operators appreciate this and know it to be so. I would hope that we come out of this process with a successful marine park plan that has a sustainable fishery in there that allows those commercial operations to continue, and that is why we consult them. It is a very broad and detailed process, as Mr Dans has explained. I do not see this as a negative. If there is an impact on commercial operations, there is an ability, under the Minister for Fisheries, to deal with that. I would hope that the consultations are good and productive, and allow everyone's interests to be served.

[6.50 pm]

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Who is the chair of the reference group?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** The chair is Mr Fran Logan. I think we are very fortunate to have a former minister in that role. Fran, as the member would know, is someone who has abilities and certainly knows his way around government. I think he is doing a very good job in the role.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Has Mr Logan got any fisheries experience, minister?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I think former minister Murray might have had some fisheries experience! Look, I do not know if he is a keen fisher, but he has experience in dealing with issues and people. I think he makes a very good appointment.

**The CHAIR:** He likes to surf.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I look forward to improved consultation.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I am hoping I can ask this. I refer to page 712, under “Service Summary” and the line item “Visitor Services and Public Programs Provided in National Parks and Other Lands and Waters”. My question relates to one of the most visited national parks in the state, the Boranup forest as part of the Leeuwin–Naturaliste National Park. What progress has the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions made in relation to the six-point plan, which has been put together by the Shire of Augusta–Margaret River and the Margaret River Busselton Tourism Association, around the sustainability of this park, appreciating that there has been significant need for renewal? I look forward to the minister's response.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I am very happy to respond, and I know that it is obviously very dear to the member's heart. The Leeuwin–Naturaliste National Park is one of the most popular national parks because of its location and its shape; it is long and thin, because it hugs the coast down along the capes. It is very visited. It is a different national park in terms of the public access. People can come at it from all sides and from the east. It is heavily visited. We obviously had some issues with fire over summer, which impacted it as well. When I went down to look at the fires, I also had the opportunity to get under the spell of Mr Stuart Hicks, who the member knows very well, who is very, very passionate about his Karri Bowl plan. I was taken to the location—I was very familiar with it already—and the caves

in the area. A lot of work is going on at the moment with the rebuild after the fire impacted those cave entrances run by DBCA, and I think there is enormous potential down there.

What we have done with national parks—I think of the Kalbarri Skywalk—these wonderful places to visit, is if there is an investment in a major attractor, it escalates visitation and the value we get out of these national parks. I am very happy to look at this Karri Bowl proposal. I have been taken through it step by step, and it is something I am really keen to pursue in the future. Obviously, we look at where the best spend is and we are spending millions and millions of dollars on facilities and upgrades in our national parks right across the state. The member will notice a lot of work done in Collie on mountain biking and the work on the mural at Wellington Dam. It has an amazing return to the state. Visitation is huge, and a lot of that is linked to COVID, but I think it is beyond that—people are discovering their state. Now that they have discovered it, I think they are going to keep going back for more. Leeuwin–Naturaliste is a special place, and there is extra pressure on it because of visitation and because it is so accessible, and we want to protect that. But in the longer term, I think there is an opportunity and it is one that I want to look at, when we have completed our program of investment, which was many tens of millions of dollars in other national parks. We have the six-point plan—already made—proposal there, and I am keen to look at that.

**Ms L. METTAM:** As the minister said, it has been challenged in recent times. Lighthouse revenue is down 60 per cent and caves revenue is down 30 per cent. There is also the challenge of enjoying visitors to the region from the eastern states as well. Has any progress happened on the six-point plan since January? I understand there was a meeting in January with DBCA.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** It is a plan that has been put to me and was one of my first visits as minister to inspect the damage that was done. The focus now is getting those caves operating and replacing the destroyed infrastructure; that is the first priority. But this is a longer term ambition, and it is great that it has local support in the local community down there, and the council and chamber see it as adding to the experience in the southwest. There is a lot of connectivity to the DBCA caves in the area. It is just something that we need to look at in the future. I cannot point to anything in this budget that talks about that, but there are so many projects right across the state that are deserving of attention, and many are getting attention now. We have an ambitious program, whether it is at Karijini, Kalbarri, further afield or closer to home, but this is one that has a good plan that has been presented and I am keen to look at it further in the future.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to page 708 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, under “New Initiatives”, “Climate Action—Carbon Farming on Lands Managed by the Department”. I am aware that the department has a lot of pastoral leases and the like, so I assume that is the type of area it might be seeking to do this on. I just wonder whether the department has an idea of how much atmospheric carbon would be sequestered with that expenditure of \$6.362 million.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** It might have been a question that we could have attempted in the last division. DBCA’s expertise is not in terms of —

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** It is in this division.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Yes. We are talking about climate issues, but in terms of emissions into the atmosphere —

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** That is carbon farming on DBCA land. Carbon farming is actually the harvesting of carbon on the land.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** That allocation is about extra FTEs. It is not about any measurement of carbon.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Sorry?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** That reference you made, I am informed, is about the addition of six FTEs to be able to manage that program. DBCA has the tenure of land. The government as a whole is looking at options for carbon farming and sequestration. There has been the appointment of six FTEs to manage that program. It is about what this agency can do to plant vegetation and to encourage that to happen, but it is not strictly on the emissions side.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** It is not on DBCA land?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** It is on our land. It is DBCA managed land. I will refer to Jason Foster to further clarify.

**Mr J. Foster:** Thank you, minister. As the minister said, the new initiative provides us with resources so that we can undertake feasibility studies on lands that we currently manage on behalf of government, on our conservation estate and also on unallocated crown land that we manage on behalf of the state. In terms of the member’s question about quantifying carbon tonnage or outcomes, we cannot do that until we actually undertake the feasibility studies because the rangelands will be very different to the outcomes we are getting in the south of the state.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Thank you. That has cleared it up for me.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** It is not this agency’s job to quantify that measurement, is it? It is our job to make sure that programs are a success.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

**Extract from *Hansard***

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B — Thursday, 26 May 2022]

p392b-395a

Chair; Mr Shane Love; Mr Reece Whitby; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Libby Mettam

---

**The CHAIR:** That completes consideration of the estimates by this committee.

*Committee adjourned at 7.00 pm*

---