

Chair; Mr Vincent Catania; Dr Tony Buti; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Lara Dalton; Mr Shane Love; Mr Stuart Aubrey

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**Division 15: Primary Industries and Regional Development — Services 1 to 7, Agriculture and Food, \$622 103 000 —**

Ms A.E. Kent, Chair.

Dr A.D. Buti, Minister for Finance representing the Minister for Agriculture and Food.

Mr T. Hill, Acting Director General.

Mr L. O’Connell, Acting Deputy Director General, Industry and Economic Development.

Mr C. Binning, Acting Deputy Director General, Primary Industries Development.

Ms H. Brayford, Deputy Director General, Sustainability and Biosecurity.

Dr M. Carbon, Executive Director, Biosecurity.

Ms M. Taylor, Chief Finance Officer.

Mr C. Thurley, Chief of Staff, Minister for Agriculture and Food.

Mr G. Hamley, Chief of Staff, Minister for Culture and the Arts.

[Witnesses introduced.]

**The CHAIR:** The estimates committees will be reported by Hansard and the daily proof will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. The chair will allow for 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. A member should preface their questions with these details. Some divisions are the responsibility of more than one minister. Ministers should 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 agreed to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by the close of business Friday, 3 June 2022. If the minister suggests a matter to be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system.

We are dealing with division 15. Member for North West Central.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** Minister, I understand that this is not your normal portfolio, so I will go easy. I refer to page 219 under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency.” The second point states —

The Department is addressing the workforce shortages with additional funding of \$7.5 million allocated in 2021 under the Reconnect WA program ...

Was a detailed assessment undertaken of the effectiveness of the program to date as part of the budget submission process?

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** I will ask Mr Hill to say who should answer that question.

**Mr T. Hill:** Thanks, Minister Buti. I will go to Carl Binning.

**Mr C. Binning:** The program is administered as part of COVID recovery. The program has been successful in relocating people and attracting people to the regions. It is bound by the COVID process. I am unaware of a detailed ongoing assessment, but I can report uptake of the current round.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** Mr Binning said that the program is successful. How is the government measuring that success? Can the minister please elaborate on how it is being measured? How does the government know that people are going to the regions? Who are the people going to the regions?

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** I will throw to Mr Binning in a minute. I do not think we need to know every single characteristic of each person who is going there.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** That is not what I asked.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** But obviously Mr Binning might be able to elaborate.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** Are they from overseas? Are they interstate?

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** They would not have come from overseas until more recently, because the borders were closed under the former federal government and former Prime Minister Morrison. It is nice to say “former Prime Minister Morrison”. Obviously, there were international border closures. They have now been opened, so one would expect that the traditional backpackers, who have been a constant and reliable source of labour for the regions, will come back into play, but I ask Mr Binning to elaborate.

**Mr C. Binning:** The success of the program has really been measured in the context of the overall ability of our primary industries in the first instance to be able to continue their work. That has been extremely challenging during

Chair; Mr Vincent Catania; Dr Tony Buti; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Lara Dalton; Mr Shane Love; Mr Stuart Aubrey

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the COVID period. But I would note that this year, there was a record harvest of 24 million tonnes, and the harvest was brought in thanks to the hard work of our regional communities. This program has contributed workers to that program. In the latest round, there have been 410 applications, of which a total of 180 have been approved, 155 are pending and 73 have been declined. They are relatively evenly distributed across the regions, with the south west leading with 39.5 per cent and the wheatbelt with 18 per cent. Goldfields–Esperance has 11.3 per cent and the Kimberley has 10.7 per cent. The distribution will vary over the course of the year depending on where the work pressures are. It will build up in places like Carnarvon now as the growing season rolls in and then conclude in the March–April period in the south west with the wine industry.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** I am glad that Carnarvon was mentioned, because I have a media statement here dated Tuesday, 24 May, released by Ministers Hon Alannah MacTiernan and Hon Roger Cook about this Reconnect WA package. It goes through the areas to which people can apply to go. The media statement is about The Paid Escape—often tourism leads into agriculture and agriculture leads into tourism—and it states —

The Paid Escape website advertises jobs across WA in a wide range of regional areas including Albany, Bunbury and the South-West, Broome, Esperance, Exmouth, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie, Karratha, Kununurra, Mandurah and Peel, Margaret River, Merredin, Northam and Port Hedland.

There is a bit of a gap between some of these towns. Given that Carnarvon is a tourism destination but also obviously has horticulture, pastoral, and fishing industries, why has Carnarvon not been included in this list?

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** I do not know about the media statement. But as the member read in that media statement —

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** I am happy to show you.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** No. But as you read yourself, member, it said “including”. The list was not exclusive; it just said, “This is a list.” Maybe Carnarvon should have been included. But as Mr Binning told the member, Carnarvon is in the program, so he can rest assured that Carnarvon has not been forgotten. Do you want to add anything, Mr Binning?

**Mr C. Binning:** Member, the threshold criteria is 100 kilometres from outside of Perth—that is the destination—so all parts of regional Western Australia will qualify under the program. The new part of the program has also been extended to include tourism and hospitality.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** I take that as a bit of a faux pas in today’s joint media statement.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** I am more worried about the budget than the media statement.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** In regards to this program, which is part of the budget, it was stated that 175 people have been successful in this Reconnect program and that it has been successful. Given that the agriculture sector has been wanting up to, I think, 10 000 or 7 000 employees, let alone the hospitality sector, which needs maybe 20 000 employees right across Western Australia, how can it be said that 175 workers going into regional WA is successful when tens of thousands of people are needed to come in?

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** Member, I do not think it was ever envisaged that this program would attract 10 000 people. As the member would very well know, there is a skills shortage in most industries in Western Australia and Australia. The reason we have a skill shortage is due to the outstanding economic management of the Western Australian government. The program has been successful, because as Mr Binning told you —

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** Nothing to do with borders being closed?

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** As Mr Binning has told the member, the program has attracted a number of applicants, a number of whom have been successful. It will continue. As the member knows, in the normal course of events, international tourists and backpackers will come back into play. The borders have not been open that long. Yes, there is a dire shortage of labour in the regions, as there is in the city. Any program such as this, which is seeking to attract workers, should be congratulated, and hopefully it will continue.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** I have a further question. Minister, clearly 175 —

**The CHAIR:** Member for North West Central, can you just wait until I give you the call before asking the question? Member for North West Central.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** Minister, clearly 175 workers is not enough when we have a shortage of tens of thousands of skilled workers. Is the minister saying that this is a successful program delivering workers to regional WA?

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** Yes, I do.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** I think everyone in this room will beg to differ.

[1.10 pm]

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 228 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. Halfway down the page, it states —  
investment of \$5 million in the Wild Dog Action Plan ...

Chair; Mr Vincent Catania; Dr Tony Buti; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Lara Dalton; Mr Shane Love; Mr Stuart Aubrey

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While the minister is looking it up, I know he is expecting questions on sheep and cattle but this question is about wild dogs, emus and kangaroos. Can I have some detail on what sort of fencing will be completed under this plan?

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** Before I pass this question on to whomever, as the member knows, this plan includes actions to build the capacity of industry to manage the threat to livestock, the completion and upgrade of a state barrier fence, centres for exclusion cell fencing, funding for contracts, wild dog control and sterilisation of dogs in Aboriginal communities. Projects have been utilised in the Indigenous land use agreements down Esperance way. Construction in Esperance has recently commenced, with a capital budget of \$2.033 million to be carried over 2021–22 to 2022–23. I will ask Mia Carbon to elaborate.

**Dr M. Carbon:** The wild dog action plan and state natural resource management funding provides funding for repair, replacement and extension of the fence. Once the program that is detailed in the budget papers is complete, the entire fence will be built to wild dog standards for the first time.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer the minister to the Esperance–Ravensthorpe dog fence scenario, which commenced several years ago. The majority of the fencing materials are still sitting in the yard in Esperance. Can the minister give a guarantee that this will be completed by 2025–26 when the out year funding is completed?

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** I am looking at the budget line item that the member referred to, which refers to the expenditure of that money for the wild dog action plan. I am sure the member would appreciate that I am in no position to give any guarantees. If he wants to write to the minister concerned, he should feel free.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** Will any of the \$5 million budgeted for the wild dog action plan part of completing the Murchison vermin cell. I think the fence that covers 53 pastoral stations. Also, is there any funding to provide any cell network within that vermin cell project?

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** I refer to Dr Carbon to elaborate.

**Dr M. Carbon:** There has been significant investment in cell fencing in the pastoral regions of Western Australia. Under the current wild dog action plan, there are no further plans to extend that funding beyond what has already been agreed.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** The Murchison vermin cell that is in the Mt Magnet–Murchison area has been completed. Can you give me a breakdown of the cost of the completion of works of the Murchison vermin cell that the department has given?

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** If the member wants to put that question on notice, he may.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** I am happy to take it as a supplementary.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** If the minister wants to put that question on notice, he may.

**The CHAIR:** Sorry, minister; what was the decision?

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** If the member wants to put the question on notice, he may.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. Does the minister agree to provide supplementary information —

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** No.

**The CHAIR:** So a question on notice?

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** Yes.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Can the minister confirm whether any thought has been given to contracting out the extension of the Esperance barrier fence to farmers and other contractors in order to complete it in a timely manner?

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** I defer to Dr Carbon.

**Dr M. Carbon:** A number of options have been looked at for the completion of the Esperance extension, including a cell fence option that would involve people completing the cell on their own land with materials supplied under this program. That results in a fence that is then not a state asset and not on a reserve, so it is not necessarily the best long-term option. That is absolutely an option that has been put to growers in the region. Currently, there is a preference to continue with the current construction plans to ensure that we have a state-managed asset on a reserve for the entire length of the extension.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Minister, it could basically be a blend of different arrangements to complete the fence in a timely manner, given that we are already three to four years behind schedule to stop the incursion of wild dogs.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** Dr Carbon, correct me if I am wrong, but I think you basically said that you are looking at all possible options. Is that correct?

**Dr M. Carbon:** That is correct. There is already a blend of construction types underway, looking at road reserves and crown land.

Chair; Mr Vincent Catania; Dr Tony Buti; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Lara Dalton; Mr Shane Love; Mr Stuart Aubrey

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**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Will there be any gaps left in the fence? Will this completely close off the south west land division or areas behind the fence or will there still be a gap in the fence between the coast and the rest of the state barrier fence?

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** I will ask Dr Carbon whether she can elaborate on that.

**Dr M. Carbon:** There will be some small gaps remaining in the fence due to things like rivers and heritage sites, which cannot be fenced.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to the line item “Severe Tropical Cyclone Seroja—Assistance Package” on page 219 of budget paper No 2. I assume this is the money that was being administered by the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development mainly for rural recovery. I would like to have an understanding of the disbursements of the \$26.4 million that is outlined. Will this money fund a number of grants or packages that are known and certain or is there still some uncertainty about the amount of money that will be expended out of that \$26.4 million in the coming year?

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** As the member would realise, and I am sure hopefully appreciate, the government has been committed to continuing to support recovery efforts with regards to the effects of cyclone Seroja. and Under the commonwealth disaster recovery funding arrangements, the commonwealth and state governments are jointly funding a package to provide relief measures for primary producers across 16 local government areas whose assets or prime production were affected by cyclone Seroja. To date, more than \$730 000 has been paid to primary producers under the various grants. The government is committed to continue to support those who were affected by cyclone Seroja.

[1.20 pm]

**Ms L. DALTON:** I refer to page 219 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the spending changes related to biosecurity. Can the minister outline how the investment is supporting the state’s ability to respond to biosecurity threats?

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** As the member would appreciate, biosecurity risks are increasing from year to year due to many factors, such as volumes of trade, climate change, and changing land usage. In 2021, the department concurrently managed six biosecurity incidents, including the Queensland fruit fly, red imported fire ants and the kharpa beetle. The successful eradication of the Queensland fruit fly alone saved WA’s horticulture industry and economy an estimated \$38 million for the year in lost production and market access. Our government is investing in addition \$15.1 million between 2021–22 and 2024–25 to reinforce the state’s biosecurity capabilities and how to protect our agriculture and fisheries industries as well as our natural environment and way of life. An additional 22 FTE biosecurity positions will strengthen the department’s capability and capacity to respond. Separately, an independent review of the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007 has commenced, which will ensure that WA has legislation that can meet future needs and challenges. In addition to the review of the act, the department is also developing a biosecurity road map, which will identify the changes required to ensure that WA has a fit-for-purpose sustainable biosecurity system into the future.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** In relation to the Biosecurity Management Act that the minister just referred to, there appears to be a recoup of money mentioned in the budget documents on that same page under “Other”—“*Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007—Declared Pest Control Activities*”. Why are those amounts of money mentioned? Can the minister explain what that line item refers to?

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** With regards to the biosecurity and funding, there has been no reduction in the expenditure for existing recognised biosecurity groups. The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development advised that this line item also includes a forecasting error of \$4.6 million over the forward estimates period, which will be corrected in the mid-year budget review process. The actual reduction forecasts spent over the forward estimates period is \$3.6 million rather than \$8.2 million as stated. This reproduction reflects the removal of the funding provisions for the Carnarvon Growers Association recognised by biosecurity groups, and Warren Biosecurity Inc. There has not been any reduction in expenditure for existing recognised biosecurity groups.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to the national water grid fund mentioned on page 218 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. Given the recent and recurrent declarations in both Grass Patch and Salmon Gums in the Esperance region of water deficient, can the minister confirm whether any funding has been allocated through the national water grid fund to improve the catchment for the Grass Patch dam?

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** I do not think it is for the purpose the member is stating. As he would know, in May 2021, the then deputy prime minister announced a new funding pathway for small infrastructure projects—the national water grid connections funding pathway—and requested that WA submit a package of proposals for funding of up to \$20 million for construction projects by 30 June 2021. The commonwealth required at least matched funding by the state with inclusion of a third-party contribution permitted. Accepted projects needed to be delivered by 30 June 2023. Three projects have been submitted by the department, which were accepted for funding of \$7.2 million across the three years from 2021–22 to 2023–24. Those three projects are the Cave Springs Road tail water return system, the Gascoyne irrigation scheme and modernisation, and the Wongutha independent water security pilot.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 232 and the line item “Agricultural Senior Officers Committee”, which has seen significant changes in funding over the forward estimates. Can the minister explain to me what this committee does, and also what are the changes in funding?

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** The Agriculture Senior Officers Committee is responsible for biosecurity issues. There is obviously a commonwealth Agriculture Senior Officers Committee that is responsible for biosecurity under the national cost sharing arrangement. Ms Brayford might want to elaborate on the funding of this committee in relation to biosecurity issues.

**Ms H. Brayford:** As part of the 2022–23 bilateral budget process, the Expenditure Review Committee approved bringing forward \$2.342 million of funding from 2022–23 into 2021–22 to provide the Queensland government with support with its red imported fire ant eradication program. That has resulted in the estimated actual to be \$2.342 million higher than budget. That is part of a national agreement to support Queensland’s efforts to deal with the red imported fire ant, which is a very significant pest.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** The minister may need to correct me if I am not on the right portfolio. I refer to paragraph 11 on page 220 of budget paper No 2 relating to recreational fishing.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** No, that is a bit fishy, mate!

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** I turn to the fourth line of paragraph 1 under “Explanation of Significant Movements” and the reference to “Carnarvon Flood Mitigation Works Stage 2”. I think that comes under the department.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** Yes. What was the member’s question?

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** My question relates to the decrease in the total cost of service relating to the Carnarvon flood mitigation. Early last year—it was in January or February—Carnarvon experienced a flood. It has not been tested. We built a levee system in 2013, which was made up of 17.5 kilometres of levees to protect the horticulture and agriculture industries and try to mitigate flooding in the future, which removes topsoil, causes havoc for the horticulturists, especially those with crops, and causes damage to the soil. The first flood in 10 years had an impact. The levee system worked up to 80 per cent, maybe more. I think the minister will be going to Carnarvon on Thursday, so he might be able to understand where I am going here. There is a bridge over the Gascoyne River called the Bibbawarra Road Crossing. Everything west of the bridge was affected, but the east was fine. I think 37 plantations were affected by the flood mitigation not working or not adequate enough to be able to protect those plantations. Is there any scope in the funding set out in the budget papers to look at ways in which those plantations can be protected? A lot of submissions have been put forward to complete the flood mitigation works because they could not be completed until there was another flood to see whether what was built would work.

[1.30 pm]

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** As the member would appreciate, the government has committed a million-dollar fund to assist fruit and vegetable growers affected by the Carnarvon floods in 2021. The Carnarvon Flood Plain Management Working Group has prepared a report and outlined recommendations for improving management in this area for the horticultural industry. That report is currently under consideration. The preparation of that report included funding to undertake surveys and a new model to understand how the flood mitigation infrastructure constructed in 2015 is impacting existing properties and to assess new structure options to reduce impacts on properties. The member raised some good points, and they are all being considered as we try to better the management of the flood issues in Carnarvon.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** On the same page, page 223, it states —

This service facilitates high-impact regional development and primary industry initiatives that contribute to economic growth, diversification, job creation and strong communities, with a focus on attracting the investment needed to grow regional Western Australia.

The minister will not know the answer to this question, but his advisers will. The Gascoyne food bowl initiative seeks to increase the horticulture area by 400 hectares. Can the minister or his advisers provide an update on that 400 hectares? Does that land need to be developed? Has it all been sold; and, if so, when will the 400 hectares be developed and be in production?

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** We are unable to provide additional information to what is in the budget papers, but I am sure if the member put the question on notice, a minister will respond.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** This is a major initiative by all political parties in government over a period of time to develop 400 hectares. It is significant to the Carnarvon region, significant to the food bowl and significant to agriculture in this state. Tens of millions of dollars have been spent on this project. The Minister for Agriculture and Food has been advocating and announcing proponents who have purchased part of the 400 hectares. I think that it is important that we know where our taxpayers’ money has gone and whether this land has been sold, is going to be developed and what hurdles, if any, are preventing this land from being developed so we can increase the amount of horticulture and food supply and security to Western Australia and the world.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** I will ask Mr Liam O’Connell to answer this question.

**Mr L. O’Connell:** Thank you, member, for the question. As the member would be aware, there has been very significant investment over an extended period of time by various state governments to expand the food bowl and the supporting infrastructure as well. There was an expression of interest by three successful proponents, which were announced in the last year. They were Fruitico, Durmo Quality Produce and 4 Ways Fresh. My understanding—we may need to take this on notice—is that negotiations and discussions are ongoing. Some further development conversations are happening. Yes, we are happy to provide some additional information.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** I am happy to take it as a supplementary.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** If the member wants to put it on notice, we will provide the information.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to the third line item on page 219 of budget paper No 2, “Sustainable Pastoral Land Management”. There is an amount of money in the out years of 2024–25 and 2025–26. What is the purpose of that program and how will that be taken forward?

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** There have been substantial pastoral land reforms and land management projects. In 2017, the Office of the Auditor General reviewed the conditions of the state’s pastoral lands and regulatory efforts. As the member would know, in some of those areas, economic sustainability is a pastoral concern. We are considering how we can engage better with respect to the use of that pastoral land. Money has been provided for three years to enable the hiring and training of additional staff needed to implement risk space management of the pastoral estate, which is one of the key processes needed for pastoral land reform. These staff enable increased monitoring activities, making better use of remotely sensed data and the development of new onground methodologies to measure rangeland conditions that will support and improve compliance outcome. That will cost \$2 million. Additional funding of \$1.1 million a year will enable the retention of these newly trained staff to continue the program of work already initiated to further develop and improve pastoral land reform outcomes.

**Mr S.N. AUBREY:** I refer to the fourth line item, “Western Australia Agricultural Collaboration” on page 219 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. Can the minister outline how the government is increasing the state’s research and development capacity?

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** As the member would realise, this is an area that the Minister for Agriculture and Food is very passionate about. She was involved in the government investing heavily to rebuild our agricultural research and development capability. Unfortunately, it was decimated under the previous government. We know that ongoing research and development is crucial to ensuring that the agricultural food sector can continue to deliver economic benefits and local jobs for Western Australians. In this budget, we are investing an additional \$25 million over three years to create a new Western Australia agricultural collaboration and spur the next generation of advances in the state’s agricultural food sector. It is really exciting that this collaboration is bringing together departments, the CSIRO, the University of Western Australia, Curtin University and Murdoch University to strengthen research, development and extension capabilities. This investment will allow Western Australian agricultural research to go to a new level and provide real opportunities to give back a fair share of grower funds and ensure research is designed to meet the geographical and marketing conditions in WA.

There is a strong focus on providing opportunities for the next generation of leading scientists by supporting doctorate students and creating postgraduate positions and early career pathways for researchers. The investment builds on initiatives already underway, such as the \$15 million agriculture climate resilience fund; the \$15 million Carbon Farming and Land Restoration Program; upgraded research facilities at South Perth, Carnarvon, Merredin and Northam; a \$4.2 million investment in carbon capture and emissions reduction science; a \$3.8 million 20-pen sheep feed intake facility at Katanning research station; and a \$10.1 million investment into the oats industry growth partnership. The minister is incredibly passionate about this area. It is absolutely fantastic to have this collaboration between the department, the sector, CSIRO and the various universities in Western Australia.

[1.40 pm]

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Can the minister give me some idea of how the priorities for that project will be decided? What will be the governance or the method of determining what is the best use of the industry and what involvement will grain growers and other farmers have?

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** The universities involved in the collaboration also have to bring funding to the table. They will have their priorities, which have to match the state’s priorities. The overarching priority of the minister is how we use research in this area to create better opportunities for the agriculture and food sector that will provide a long-term economic benefit for the state. The various priorities and criteria will be worked out in due course as the program is rolled out and the various research priorities are identified.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to the sixth item, “Agricultural and Fisheries Biosecurity and Integrity” at the bottom of page 221 of budget paper No 2. To be honest, this is probably close to the most important function in relation

to ag biosecurity. The 2021–22 estimated actual was \$9.872 million. However, we see a drop in this budget year of \$4 million and not a lot of change in the out years. Why are we not seeing a gradual important increase in this biosecurity element?

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** I will talk about a couple of factors and then ask Ms Brayford to elaborate. The decrease in the 2020–21 actuals from the 2021–22 budget was due to an increase in costs in the number of emergency incidents, with the main component related to the Queensland fruit fly incident in Dalkeith and Coolbellup, amounting to \$11 million in 2020–21. By their very nature, emergency incidents are not budgeted, hence reflecting the decrease in 2021–22. There was an increase in the 2021–22 budget from the estimated actuals. I ask Ms Brayford to elaborate.

**Ms H. Brayford:** I think the member asked about the difference between the 2021–22 estimated actual and the 2022–23 budget target. That decrease is mainly attributable to the funding being brought forward from the red imported fire ant eradication program that I spoke about earlier; a decrease in emergency response funding which reflects the emergency responses over a number of financial years, and it is difficult to appropriately schedule those; and also a reduction in the declared pest rate that we spoke about earlier—the error that is contained in there and the closure of the Carnarvon recognised biosecurity group and the decision to not progress the Warren RBG. They are the three reasons for that decrease.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I notice that the previous page, page 219, refers to three programs that appear to have been dropped off the list.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** What line are you referring to, member?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** It is right near the top of page 219. Under “Ongoing Initiatives” is the line item “Biosecurity Incidents and Emergency Responses”, and then “African Black Sugar Ant”, “Ehrlichia Canis Pilot Program” and “Polyphagous Shot Hole Borer”. Funding seems to have dropped away for those three elements, but I notice the red imported fire ant eradication program is continuing. Why have those three been dropped right off in the forward estimates?

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** I will ask Dr Carbon if she can answer that question.

**Dr M. Carbon:** These line items refer to current biosecurity responses. Obviously, they are for a finite time. They are budgeted the way they are because they are the nationally agreed programs that end in a certain year. The intent is certainly that that is the end of the response because we have undertaken eradication and reached proof of freedom. If it looks like that will not be achieved as we get closer to the end of that program, those programs are extended.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to page 220 of budget paper No 2 and the list of issues impacting the agency. The tenth issue relates to the Soil and Land Conservation Council. Where in the budget documents would I find funding for the Soil and Land Conservation Council to take forward the soil health strategy? If the funding is not mentioned discretely within the budget, can the minister give me some level of understanding of the amount of money within the budget of the organisation’s activities that will be appropriate to the Soil and Land Conservation Council?

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** It is in the consolidated budget of the Department, so that is why it is not in the budget papers.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** That is fine. It is not an individual line item, but it is part of the budgeted expenditures, so therefore subject to this discussion. Could the minister ask the advisers whether they could provide some indication of the level of resource that the Soil and Land Conservation Council will have through the department’s own resources?

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** I will ask one of the advisers to elaborate, but I can assure the member that the department is supportive of ensuring appropriate maintenance or oversight of the land use with regard to the state’s soil. The department has oversight of the Soil and Land Conservation Council and is leading the way in developing management practices to maximise soil productivity and minimise land degradation. The Western Australian soil health strategy, which was released last December, will guide future activities for the management, protection and improvement of the state’s vast soil and land resources over the next 10 years. Ms Brayford may like to elaborate.

**Ms H. Brayford:** In response to the question, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development provides a full secretariat service to the Soil and Land Conservation Council. We provide executive support and secretarial services and policy support as required. Also, the Commissioner of Soil and Land Conservation, which is a statutory officeholder, works closely with the council and has been involved in the sorts of initiatives that the minister described, particularly around the soil health strategy.

**The CHAIR:** Before I throw to the member for North West Central, I am just looking at the time. We are still on division 15 and we have not gone to division 18. Is that okay? Are members happy? I give the call to the member for North West Central for a further question on division 15.

**Mr V. CATANIA:** I turn to the asset investment program on page 228 of budget paper No 2. Paragraph 2.5 refers to the investment of \$5 million in the wild dog action plan. I asked a question about the Murchison vermin cell. For the minister’s information, it has or will be completed shortly. It has taken a very long time. It is all very well completing the Murchison vermin cell. When we were in government, we put in about \$1.2 million into that cell,

as did the federal government. I think the state government has put in \$500 000. I cannot remember the amount off the top of my head, but it was very little. Are there any funds to be able to clear the Murchison vermin cell? I think it comprises 53 pastoral stations. Is there any funding in this wild dog action plan to fund the RBGs or to fund doggers to clear the cell to actually make it work? There is no point just doing the fence unless there is a program to actually clear and rid the 53 properties of dogs that are causing the problems. Is there any funding to provide that financial support or pay for doggers to clear the Murchison vermin cell?

[1.50 pm]

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** I will ask Dr Carbon to answer.

**Dr M. Carbon:** The wild dog action plan includes funding to complete and upgrade the state barrier fence, which we have already talked about. Those previous incentives for exclusion and cell fencing include the Murchison regional vermin cell. It includes funding for sterilisation of dogs in Aboriginal communities. Yes, it also includes funding for recognised biosecurity groups to employ licensed pest management technicians, or doggers, to undertake dog control. The Murchison regional vermin cell, in partnership with their local recognised biosecurity group, can choose to target that funding within the cell or to their other areas of highest risk.

**Mr V. CATANIA:** The Murchison vermin cell group or the RBG can apply for the funding needed to be able to get the doggers or employ people to clear, bait or whatever is needed, within the cell itself. They can apply for that funding and the government will supply that amount of money?

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** Yes, that is what Dr Carbon said.

**Dr M. Carbon:** The funding is distributed on an annual basis to the recognised biosecurity groups.

**Mr V. CATANIA:** Is it new funding to be able to rid the cell of dogs or is it just the normal funding that one will receive as an RBG?

**Dr M. Carbon:** It is funding under the wild dog action plan. It is separate from the funding that recognised biosecurity groups receive from the declared pest account, which is the declared pest rate plus the state government–matched funds. This is separate and additional funding that recognised biosecurity groups receive annually for the employment of doggers.

**The appropriation was recommended.**