

**Division 63: Environment and Conservation, \$216 766 000 -**

Mr M.J. Cowper, Chairman.

Mr D.A. Templeman, Minister for the Environment.

Mr K.J. McNamara, Director General.

Mr R.P. Atkins, Director, Environmental Regulation.

Dr J.C. Byrne, Chief Finance Officer.

Mr R. Sippe, Director, Strategic Policy.

Mr A. Walker, Director, Regional Services.

Mr P. Sharp, Acting Director, Parks and Visitor Services.

Mr S. Dawson, Chief of Staff, Office of the Minister for the Environment.

**The CHAIRMAN:** This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be published by 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 account. This is the prime focus of the committee. While 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. 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 the intention of the Chairman 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 asking 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 he agrees to provide and 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 committee clerk by 8 June 2007, 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 and, 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 8 June 2007.

It will also greatly assist Hansard if when referring to the program statements volumes or the consolidated account estimates, members give the page number, item, program, amount in preface to their question.

The member for Capel has the first question.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** I think I might have a question or two. I refer the minister to the fifth dot point at page 1094, which refers to the forest management plan 2004-13. The point is also repeated at page 1098 but I do not think we need to go into too much detail about where it is related.

My questions concern state forest timber production. What is the average age of trees now being held for harvest in the jarrah and karri forests? I am looking for the range of trees being harvested and the average age.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** The average age of trees?

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** Yes, in both jarrah and karri forests. The minister would be aware that a mixture of forest is harvested. Generally, the karri forest is different. What is the impact, in an environmental sense, of the average age of the trees being harvested and the range of the ages of the trees now being harvested?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I thank the member for Capel. The director general will give a general response. I am not sure whether I can provide information on the average age of trees this evening.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** It might be a question that is more appropriate for the Forest Products Commission. That might be one of the answers. I dread to think that I am giving the minister the answers to the questions I am asking. Perhaps the minister can provide supplementary information if he does not have the information with him.

**Extract from Hansard**

[ASSEMBLY - Wednesday, 23 May 2007]

p326b-344a

Chairman; Dr Steve Thomas; Mr David Templeman; Ms Katie Hodson-Thomas; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr John Quigley; Ms Jaye Radisich; Mr Murray Cowper; Mr Paul Omodei

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**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I will ask the director general to make a general comment and I can then arrange for supplementary information.

**Mr K.J. McNamara:** All I can add to the answer is that, under the forest management plan, the overall sustained yields are set and old-growth forest is fully protected. As for the average ages of individual trees that are logged, it is something we would have to ask our technical experts to see if they have the data. I am sure it would be across quite a wide range. We would have to provide that as supplementary information.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I am happy to provide as supplementary information the information that the member for Capel has requested.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** Would the minister mind if I asked further questions because I think he will need to provide supplementary information for them as well and I might as well run them out so we can then move forward.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I caution the member that we need to be specific about what is being supplied.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** I will be extremely specific.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Pacific or specific?

[7.10 pm]

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** Pacific is an ocean; specific is a trend.

The information I seek from the minister to be provided as supplementary information is the range of ages of the trees being harvested in the jarrah and karri forests and the average age of those trees; the average bole size of the trees now being harvested; and whether there has been a major shift in those average ages and average bole sizes since the introduction of the 2004-13 management plan and whether that is then a result of the plan. I am happy to explain this in a nutshell. That is the information I am seeking but my intention is to determine whether, because of the introduction and impact of the old-growth forest logging policy, we are now harvesting trees at a much earlier age with a much smaller bole size. I am happy to put that out there very early from a political perspective. I recognise that the minister probably does not have that on the top of his head, and probably nobody would; it is a very technical question. If the minister can provide the answer by way of supplementary information, I would be very intrigued by it.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I am happy to provide the supplementary information as requested by the member.

[*Supplementary Information No B19.*]

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** My question relates to the last dot point on page 1094, which reads -

Streamlining of procedures to reduce processing delays for clearing permit applications while still maintaining the protection of native vegetation.

The Keating review, which I think was undertaken in 2005, made recommendations that altered the way the department measured the time taken for the approval process. Can the minister advise whether the time taken is now shorter as a consequence of those recommendations, and compare that with the process for clearing permits in previous years?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I thank the member for Carine for the question. As the member will be aware, in 2006 the then Minister for the Environment outlined reforms of clearing controls to Parliament. The aim of those clearing controls was to streamline the processes, as the member highlighted in her question. By streamlining that process, there was also an expectation that the environmental outcomes would be improved. The implementation of the key elements of the reforms is underway and will be ongoing over the coming year. I will highlight a couple of the key elements of the reform, and then I will ask the director general to respond to the second part of the member's question. The key elements of the reform include the adoption of a more risk-based and outcomes-focused application -

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** I am sorry, I did not quite hear the minister. Can he please talk a little slower?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Sure, I am also aware of Hansard. I apologise; I should have mentioned at the beginning the need to be clear, and I will try to speak directly into the microphone.

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** I am aware that we need to ensure that we speak slowly so that Hansard can ensure that it is transcribed.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** Be theatrical.

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** We know that the minister can be.

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**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Of course. The key elements of the reform include the adoption of a more risk-based and outcomes-focused application assessment process. This is to ensure that resources are applied to applications with higher environmental risks and those that are of a greater priority. The other reform elements include the establishment of target time lines and public reporting of those time lines when they are achieved. The duplication of third party appeal provisions has been removed, and time lines for appeals periods have been reduced. The other elements include increased clarity and certainty of exemptions for mineral and petroleum exploration and other development activities where these are subject to approvals under mining and petroleum legislation; extension of exemptions to state agreement act projects where the clearing is subject to another approval; and increased compliance monitoring of approved permits and process auditing. Target time frames have been set for all applications and weekly internal reporting is undertaken. That is the current position. The amendments to the regulations were gazetted on 30 March this year with regard to transitional exemptions for exploration under the Mining Act 1978. The native vegetation regulatory reform reference group met on 27 March this year. That group will oversee the reform process.

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** Do we have a time line on that reform process?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** That is the second part of the member's question. The member is asking for an overall time line for the rollout of this process. I refer to the director general.

**Mr K.J. McNamara:** The process is ongoing. With the introduction of significant new legislation in 2004, it is well known that some backlogs built up. We have set the target of 90 days, and we worked strenuously to knock off the backlogs we had. A lot of effort was put into the mining and petroleum sector last year, and by and large the target time lines have been met in that sector. Through a working group with the Office of Development Approvals Coordination, the Chamber of Minerals and Energy and others, including conservation groups, significant reforms were put in place. Regulatory changes were gazetted this year and we are much closer to achieving the target time lines. The same discipline is being rolled out across other sectors, including roadside clearing and other forms of development. We have made a lot of progress in reducing the turnaround times, but we still have a little way to go in achieving our targets of 90 days across the board. That is achieved mostly by stronger processes, and scrutiny and management of the existing process. We will be looking at some further reforms in legislation.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** Is there empirical data showing how often the 90-day target is met, in absolute figures?

**Mr K.J. McNamara:** We have the figures from our tracking. I do not have them with me tonight, but we have the statistics.

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** Can we be provided with the information by way of supplementary?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** The member is asking for supplementary information regarding the achievement of the 90-day target. I am happy to provide that as supplementary information.

*[Supplementary Information No B20.]*

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** I refer to the sixth dot point on page 1094, which concerns fire management for biodiversity. Is the area burnt by wildfires or fires not deliberately lit included in figures for the department's analysis of fire reduction burning? The target of 200 000 hectares a year is set for fire reduction burning, and the department has assessed itself by that measurement. In any of that analysis, are wildfires or fires lit by arson included in those figures?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** The short answer is no, not in the target figures, but I think the director general can provide some further information to clarify how the targets are assessed.

**Mr K.J. McNamara:** The target area for our prescribed burning program in our three south west forest regions is in the order of 200 000 hectares per annum. We have met that target over each of the last three years, in general terms. Because it is the period over which we measure our performance, this financial year is heading to be short of the target because the rains occurred earlier in the autumn season and precluded some of the burning we would normally do. We do not include wildfire areas in the figures on whether we achieve the prescribed burning target. However, in planning the following year's burning, not only do we take account of what has been achieved in prescribed burning, but also we take full account of what has been burnt in wildfires.

[7.20 pm]

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** Is the 200 000 hectares a year, which seems to be an annual target that the department is aiming for at the moment, likely to vary? If there were a massive wildfire outbreak in the next year, would that impact on the target of 200 000 hectares that has been set and how it is measured?

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**Mr K.J. McNamara:** In terms of taking account of what has been burnt in wildfires, as well as through prescribed burning, the theoretical answer is yes. However, the level of wildfire in this state over quite a number of years has not really necessitated any variation from that broad 200 000 hectare target.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** I assume that the burning that occurs in the north west is completely independent of that process and has no bearing on what goes on in setting targets?

**Mr K.J. McNamara:** The target that we have enunciated is for what we call our three south west forest regions, largely from Moore River through to Walpole; that is, the south west forest belt. We do prescribed burning in the mid-west region north of Moore River, we do it on the south coast from Denmark across to Esperance and further, and we increasingly use prescribed burning and mosaic burning in the north and interior of the state. However, we do not have a set numerical annual target for those other areas in the same way as we do for the south west forests.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** I refer to the eighth bullet point from the bottom of page 1094. It refers to the Contaminated Sites Act 2003 and specifically to the increasing public focus on remediation and the availability of a public database of sites. Can the minister provide me with some information on the status of that database, the number of sites on it, its use etc?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I thank the member for the question. As he would be aware, the contaminated sites legislation was enacted in 2003. As the identification and reporting of known or suspected contaminated sites progresses, it is anticipated that these sites will be registered. The 2003 act came into effect in December 2006. The aim of the act is to protect the community's health and the environment by ensuring that known or suspected contaminated sites are identified, investigated and cleaned up, if necessary. With regard to the enactment of the act, there has been a six-month period of grace during which penalties do not apply. That period will expire at the end of this month. The department has been very conscious of the need to ensure that relevant bodies are aware of the need to comply with the registration provisions by that date. As such, as at the end of April, 257 sites had been reported to the department, and these are in addition to the 1 200 sites that DEC already has on its records. Those are the current figures on the database. The department has also issued about 1 900 notification letters. The member asked about the database. Can the member repeat the last part of the question?

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** My query was about the use of the public database.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I will ask Mr Atkins to answer the specific part of the member's question.

**Mr R.P. Atkins:** I do not have to hand the figures for how many sites have been logged on the database. The member will appreciate that once sites have been registered, they need to go through an assessment and classification process before they are formally entered on the database. It is early days yet, and so the number of sites on the database is relatively small compared with the figures that the minister has just provided.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** The minister referred to the six-month period of grace for an offence. Is the minister referring to an offence of not registering a site?

**Mr R.P. Atkins:** The act requires people who know or suspect that a site is contaminated to report that site to the department. There is a six-month period of grace to allow people time to understand the provisions of the act and to report their sites. After the six-month period, which expires on 31 May, if people know or suspect a site is contaminated and do not report it to the department, they will have committed an offence under the act.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** For a prosecution, there would have to be proof that the person knew that the site he or she owned was contaminated.

**Mr R.P. Atkins:** That is correct.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I refer to the significant issues and trends listed on page 1094 of the *Budget Statements*. Reference is made to the continued focus on government and community efforts to stop cane toads expanding their range from the Northern Territory into Western Australia. It is listed on page 1098 as a major achievement for 2006-07. It states that the cane toad initiative continued to focus on keeping cane toads out of Western Australia through field and awareness programs with community involvement. I note that it is not referred to as a major initiative for 2007-08. I have a four-part question. First, where are we up to in the war against cane toads; secondly, after the recent wet in the Kimberley, has there been any evidence of cane toads advancing into Western Australia; thirdly, are there any colonies or populations known to have established themselves in Western Australia; and, finally, what is the furthest south towards Perth that a cane toad has been detected?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Is that in the state of Western Australia?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Yes, in Western Australia.

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**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I thank the member for the question. As the member will be well aware, the cane toad is an insidious creature. Each female cane toad has the capacity to produce up to 30 000 eggs at any one time. The latest statistics indicate that cane toads are still at least 100 kilometres east of the Western Australian-Northern Territory border - that is, on the Northern Territory side! The answer is no to the question about whether cane toads are in Western Australia at this time. The answer is no to the question about the cane toad's progression south. However, we are very much aware that this creature challenges the state a great deal in what it could do if it made its way into the northern Kimberley area of the state. Of course, if that were to happen, its progression, certainly through the Kimberley area, would be aided by the environment in that area, particularly, as the member has mentioned, during the wet season. That would allow it to spread. The member may be aware that the government has had an ongoing program to fight the cane toad advance. In addition to that, there is the excellent work being done by the local community in Kununurra, the Kimberley Toad Busters, members of which I have met with recently.

[7.30 pm]

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Do those people go across the border to the frontier?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Yes. The Kimberley Toad Busters is a group of very dedicated volunteers in the north of the state.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** It is an excellent group.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Yes, it is. Usually, on the weekends in particular, it will have a program of toad busting. The people will gather at Kununurra and head to various sites in the east. At weekend periods and also during extended periods in the dry season, they actively collect toads at various sites at which the toad has been identified in the Northern Territory. The other work is being done by the Stop the Toad Foundation, which has received funding from the government in the past also. It is important to note that only today there was an announcement that some major funding has been achieved by Professor Morahan, a zoologist at the University of Western Australia. He has been successful in gaining further funding of \$274 000. His focus will be on research. He is also seeking funding from other sources.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Is this for a biological weapon?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** It is known as genomic research. Perhaps I could be given a quick lesson on what genomic means. It is a biological research project. The reality is that since 2004 we have committed to and spent up to \$10 million on this battle. Of course, the campaign has been varied. It has included information and also on-the-ground work. The Department of Environment and Conservation continues to support the Kimberley Toad Busters in its work. However, the reality is that this is a very difficult challenge that we face in this state. We know that since 1934 when the toad was introduced, it has spread throughout Queensland and has entered the state of New South Wales. It has also travelled into the Northern Territory and is within 100 kilometres of our border. The department will continue to work with community organisations and with various scientists to ensure that we do everything possible to prevent the toad from making its way into our state. However, we need to bear in mind that this is an insidious creature. It has already caused major damage to a number of faunal species in the Northern Territory and in Queensland because of its poison. It is a poisonous amphibian. We face a grave challenge in trying to ensure that this insidious creature does not get a foothold, or a toad-hold, in the state of Western Australia.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Can I have a bit of further information? Is this a multi-agency approach? This creature has a reputation for piggybacking on all sorts of cargo. I wonder whether there is money going into not only the minister's agency, but also other agencies to fight it.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** There is a very strong partnership with the Northern Territory government, and various educational mechanisms are provided to travellers who are moving from the Northern Territory into the Kimberley region of Western Australia.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Are there inspections on the major highways?

**The CHAIRMAN:** Excuse me; the call will now go to the member for Carine.

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** I was quite happy for the member to follow up with that question, because I had a follow-up question also, Mr Chairman. However, if the Chairman wants to give me the opportunity to ask my substantive question -

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I will put the question and the member can adopt it. It is about inspections.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** We will come back to cane toads with another substantive question, and the member is welcome to jump in then.

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**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** My question relates to the first dot point of major initiatives for 2007-08 on page 1107, and it is about the “Perth Air Quality Management Plan”, including development of a policy framework for haze in the Perth metropolitan region and expansion of the wood heater buyback program. How much will be spent on the wood heater buyback program? That is the first part of my question. Secondly, which suburbs will be eligible and which will be excluded, and can the minister tell us why?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I thank the member. The member is referring, of course, to the “Perth Air Quality Management Plan” and air quality monitoring. The “Perth Air Quality Management Plan” is the primary planning document for improving air quality in Perth. This budget continues the government’s strong commitment to implementing the “Perth Air Quality Management Plan”. I am pleased to report to the committee that as a result of ongoing commitment to this area, the government has identified in the “State of the Environment report: Western Australia draft 2006” that this is an issue that needs to be pursued. We know that haze has particular impacts on the elderly and on people who suffer from asthma etc. Therefore, we are actively pursuing the buyback scheme and encouraging people to convert their fire-burning wood heaters to gas heaters.

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** How much will be spent?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** The \$500 rebate will be provided to households that agree to remove their wood heater and replace it with a flued or ducted gas heater.

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** The minister said \$500?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** That is what is offered.

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** And which suburbs, minister?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I am going to give the member the figures. There is an additional amount of \$400 000 for the rebate to encourage homeowners to convert. Last year, 800 rebates were provided to households in the Perth metropolitan area. An additional \$100 voucher is available to people participating in the program for a liquefied petroleum gas-run heater. A subsidy is, in my understanding, available to people in the metropolitan area.

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** So it is available for the entire metropolitan area. Does the minister know how many people applied?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Yes. Last year -

**The CHAIRMAN:** That is the member for Carine’s third question.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** My understanding is that in the first round last year, a further 800 rebates were offered in the metropolitan area. The member wants the figure for the 2006-07 period?

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** Yes. Can the minister provide that by way of supplementary information?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I am happy to provide that for the member.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The member is seeking the number of people who have applied for the subsidy -

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** For the 2006-07 period.

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** And the suburbs.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** And the suburbs they were from?

[7.40 pm]

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** Yes, if that is available to us.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I will if I can; we may need to go by postcode.

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** Yes, by postcode, minister.

[*Supplementary Information No B21.*]

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** Are there any suburbs excluded from it in the Perth metropolitan area? I ask the question because there was concern in my electorate, particularly in the Duncraig area, where air quality was a huge issue.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I will clarify this, but as I say, my understanding is that it is a rebate available for all suburbs within the metropolitan region boundary.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** I refer to the sixteenth dot point on page 1094. It reads -

Reduction in reliance on landfill through waste avoidance, recycling . . .

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I refer also to page 1110, under "Major Initiatives For 2007-08". I can give the minister some other references if I need to. The question relates to waste avoidance and the waste levy. What was the total amount collected from the waste levy for 2005-06; and how much does the minister expect to collect in 2006-07?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** The first part of the member's question was about 2005-06?

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** Yes; how much was collected from the waste levy and how much is expected to be collected in the current financial year?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Approximately \$5 million for 2005-06. What is expected for -

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** I ask how much the minister expects to collect for 2006-07. I realise that we are not yet through the full financial year. What does the minister expect to collect in the current financial year?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** The expected income is \$11.1 million for 2006-07.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** Is that related to moving from \$3 to \$6?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** That is correct.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** Has the money that was previously collected from the levy on local governments to run recycling programs, which has since been removed, been returned to those local governments? If so, how much money was returned in comparison to the payments that were previously made to those local governments or other organisations to facilitate recycling and waste minimisation programs?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I will ask Mr Atkins to respond.

**Mr R.P. Atkins:** The first scheme that replaces the recycling rebate scheme is called the zero waste planning scheme. It is a scheme under which local governments are asked to develop a strategic plan for waste management and, in particular, waste avoidance and waste reduction, and to increase their recycling efforts. It is planned to spend approximately \$3 million on that to provide assistance to those local governments in preparing the plans. As the member would appreciate, a fair bit of work goes into those sorts of plans. As a follow-up to that, once those plans are in place, there will be a zero waste incentive scheme which will provide funding to assist local governments in implementing the key outcomes of their zero waste plans.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** I will probably have to go through the minister for this question. There was a management system in place and a scheme to allow funding to occur, but funding for recycling was removed from local governments. I will give the minister a particular example. In the southern Perth metropolitan area, the Regional Resource and Recovery Centre in Canning Vale is a project run by a conglomeration of five local governments in the southern suburbs called the Southern Metropolitan Regional Council. It was funded directly under the previous funding system which came about as a result of the waste levy and which assisted in recycling. Was that funding removed in preparation for a new system? Is the new system redirecting funding back to those people who are recycling?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I will ask Mr Atkins to respond.

**Mr R.P. Atkins:** The previous scheme was a rebate paid on the amount of waste that was diverted from landfill, and it was paid after an assessment process that took place six to 12 months after the diversion assessment period. It was a direct rebate to local government. It was not specific or tied to resource recovery or recycling; it was just a simple rebate and it was up to local governments to determine how the money was used. The scheme was terminated because it was not able to focus those rebates into resource recovery. Some local governments did; others did not. The scheme was also a capped scheme, so within the capping - which at the time was about \$2.3 million, or 50 per cent of the levy that was raised - the larger local governments that were diverting larger amounts of waste got an increasingly large share of the \$2.3 million, and smaller local governments got less. The replacement scheme is designed to focus the expenditure of funds specifically on resource recovery and recycling programs.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** My understanding is that the previous scheme was scrapped a year or so ago. Those councils that were receiving \$2.3 million might argue about whether they were putting that money into recycling. However, some of them were putting it into recycling. Is it true that the money has now been removed from their budgets, at least for the current financial year, and that there may be a mechanism in future for that money to come back? At this stage we do not know what that is, and we are taking it on trust that it might occur. Under the previous system, which the minister could have continued for a year, those councils would have been able to continue to be subsidised for a recycling program that obviously costs them money.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Mr Atkins?

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**Mr R.P. Atkins:** The previous scheme was phased out over a six-month period. It was scaled down; it was not chopped off summarily. There has been an approximately six month hiatus between the last payments under the previous scheme and funds flowing under the planned preparation scheme.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** Has any of the funding that has not gone back to local governments to contribute to that scheme gone instead into paying Department of Environment and Conservation staff for waste management issues? Where is the money that has not been paid out? Is it sitting in an account, waiting to be given in the next \$3 million, or has it been spent elsewhere?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Mr Atkins?

**Mr R.P. Atkins:** All of the levy funds are held in a trust account. The landfill levy provisions of the Environmental Protection Act require that those funds can only be used for resource recovery. The funds that were not used to continue the rebate scheme are accumulating in the trust fund.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** Resource recovery also includes research, so it could have been spent in the meantime on some form of research or research into administration.

**Mr R.P. Atkins:** There are funds that finance that work, but that is a separate allocation to the proportion of the trust fund that was used for the RRRS rebate scheme. Those funds are accumulating in the trust account and will start to flow out through the zero waste plan and zero waste incentive schemes as they ramp up.

[7.50 pm]

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** When will it start coming out?

**Mr R.P. Atkins:** It has started now.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** I refer to the fourth dot point on page 1099 under major initiatives for 2007-08. What is the Saving Our Species initiative? Is it a school-based initiative or a much broader initiative than that? I would like some information from the minister on that.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** The Saving Our Species initiative is related to the core business of the department, which is biodiversity conservation. The Saving Our Species initiative was commenced in 2006-07. The primary focus of the initiative is to fund effective actions and deliver long-term biodiversity conservation benefits through short-term strategic and targeted investment. There are more than 70 projects across the state that focus on six key theme areas. They include invasive and pest animal control, which relates to an investment of \$2.3 million in 2006-07; environmental weed control, an investment of \$1.3 million; biological survey and research, an investment of \$2.19 million; phytophthora dieback control, an investment of \$1.265 million; threatened species recovery, an investment of \$2.387 million; and the state cane toad initiative. I am happy to table for the member the document that outlines this initiative.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** By sheer coincidence, he has it at the table for the member's question; sheer brilliance!

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** Who would have thought it! I thank the minister for that.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I ask the minister to supply it to the member rather than table it. Documents are not tabled in estimates committees.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Yes. I will make sure the member receives a copy.

**Ms J.A. RADISICH:** I refer to the eighth dot point on page 1113 under major achievements, in relation to the state-local government sustainability partnership agreement. In particular I am interested in the department's role in the City of Swan's sustainability partnership agreement. The sustainability partnership agreement, as the minister would probably be aware, was signed in 2005. It has the participation of a number of government departments, including the minister's department, the Department of Environment and Conservation. To date there has been no specific financial commitment by the state government to support the initiative, which is opposite to the case of the Maddington-Kenwick partnership. I raised this matter with the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and to date have not had a satisfactory response. I am wondering how the minister's department is finding the implementation of his department's aspect of the partnership. I do appreciate the minister's in-kind support, but it lacks that overarching leadership and funding to carry it through.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I thank the member for Swan Hills for her far-reaching question. The sustainability function of the initiative was transferred to the department mid last year.

**Ms J.A. RADISICH:** From the Department of the Premier and Cabinet?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Yes. The department is continuing to work on this initiative with the various local authorities, as the member for Swan Hills has highlighted, including my own in Mandurah. Mr Sippe is able to provide an update on this initiative, which I think will answer the second part of the member's question.

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**Mr R. Sippe:** My recollection is that the department's financial commitment to the partnership agreement is of the order of \$40 000. Although we have no specific budget allocation for that in next year's budget, we are proposing to carry forward from this year's budget that sum of money to meet that commitment.

**Ms J.A. RADISICH:** But the department has not been supported in any way by DPC?

**The CHAIRMAN:** Does the member for Swan Hills have a further question?

**Ms J.A. RADISICH:** I have a further question. The department has not been supported in any way by DPC, yet the responsibility that originated with DPC was transferred to the Department of Environment and Conservation last year.

**Mr R. Sippe:** Yes, that is correct, and we will meet that obligation.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I will change the subject for a moment. The desalination plant is now running and I want to ask the minister a question about the outfall.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Can the member detail the line in the budget papers, please?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I do not know whether I can detail the line. It comes under the first dot point on page 1093. I want to ask about the desalination plant since it has been operating and how the outfall has been going compared with the modelling that the agency was doing prior to the start of the desalination plant. Did I articulate that question sufficiently well?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Yes.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** The department must by now be getting actual real readings that can be compared with the computer modelling.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** As the member would be aware, conditions were set and the Environmental Protection Authority reported on the project. Part of the role of the department is monitoring those conditions. I will ask Mr Atkins to give the member an update with regard to his question.

**Mr R.P. Atkins:** Of course, as the member said, it is early days yet, but the monitoring over the summer period has shown a reasonable relationship with the expected performance of the desalination plant. There have not been any so-called oxygenation events, which are low oxygen conditions as a result of the outfall. Some fairly detailed additional monitoring and modelling has been conducted by the Centre for Water Research, which is still being undertaken and analysed. We will get a much better picture after a 12-month period. We are moving now to one of the two critical periods, which is the autumn period when we tend to have calmer weather and therefore less energy to mix the vertical water columns. So the period that we are going through this time of the year is one of the important periods. Does that answer the question?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** Yes, and the question contained this sub-question: given the computer modelling, are any of the readings exceeding the predicted results?

**Mr R.P. Atkins:** I cannot give the member specifics on that, but the data that I have seen shows quite a reasonable relationship with the modelling data. I cannot give the member quantitative figures but we will be expecting to get a full report from the Water Corporation after the first 12 months, which should provide the sort of information that the member is seeking.

[8.00 pm]

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** The second dot point under "Major Achievements For 2006-07" on page 1103 of the *Budget Statements* refers to workshops and meetings with regional tourism industry stakeholders to obtain feedback on the department's initiatives and to establish stronger relationships with the tourism industry. As the minister would be aware, I am very interested in that area. How many workshops and meetings were held during 2006-07? Who from the Department of Environment and Conservation conducted the workshops and meetings? Who were the stakeholders? How does the department measure the success of its relationship with the tourism industry?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** The member has asked for specific details so I will ask the director general to respond first. Mr Peter Sharp may be able to respond to the third and fourth questions.

**Mr K.J. McNamara:** One of the statutory purposes of national parks and marine parks and one of the purposes of other categories of land we manage is to provide for nature-based tourism and recreation. It is an important function. We invest a lot of money in park facilities and access and so on. We have licensing and accreditation regimes for tour operators. We have in the order of 11 million visits a year. It is a very important function. We have put a lot of effort into our relationship with the tourism industry and Tourism Western Australia. A review was conducted recently by Mr Eddie Watling, who has a long-established career in nature-based tourism in

Western Australia. That review involved a lot of consultation and obtained very good feedback. It is due to be released in the not-too-distant future. Mr Sharp is better placed to answer the more detailed question about the workshops and stakeholders.

**Mr P. Sharp:** To the best of my recollection, we ran six workshops last year. They were conducted by Mr Rod Quartermain in conjunction with our regional staff and some staff members from the Tourism Council Western Australia. The stakeholders involved were commercial leaseholders and licence holders that the department works with, as well as representatives from local tourist bureaus and the local community. They were all invited to attend. How do we measure the success? We have no formal empirical measure other than to assess the comments that are coming back to us in a qualitative manner. The workshops were well received by attendants.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** I refer to the fourth dot point under “Significant Issues and Trends” on page 1093, which refers to growing threats to the state’s biodiversity from pests, animals and weeds. Will the minister explain how much is in the biodiversity adjustment scheme? Where is it in the budget? How does it compare with previous years? Have there been any changes; and, if so, why?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I will ask the director general to respond.

**Mr K.J. McNamara:** The biodiversity adjustment scheme was specifically funded with a small amount of money that came from the proceeds of the sale of AlintaGas, if I remember correctly. One million dollars was set aside to target land purchases for landholders who had been affected by a denial of permission to clear. My recollection is that most of those funds have been expended. We have ongoing land acquisition expenditure and there are other instances beyond the biodiversity adjustment scheme in which we have purchased lands that have assisted people with adjustment following denial of permission to clear. The biodiversity adjustment scheme was a one-off allocation of \$1 million.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** Is it now dead?

**Mr K.J. McNamara:** That allocation was several years ago. There has been no further allocation specifically.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** I refer to “Major Policy Decisions” on page 1095 of the *Budget Statements*. The fourth line item refers to a national emissions trading team, which was a very significant government decision. Will the minister provide information about where that is at? I note the \$300 000 that is going forward. Are all the states contributing equal amounts?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** That figure represents what the state has committed. It is a commitment by Western Australia. As the member may be aware, the states and territories have committed to work together to establish a national emissions trading scheme. If the federal government does not commit to that, ongoing discussions will continue through the federation of Australian government groups. The team is a three-person interagency national emission trading team that is being convened by the Department of Treasury and Finance. It is the responsibility of this team to engage in the final phase of designing a national emissions trading scheme. The core business of that team is to represent Western Australia’s interest in the negotiations with the other states and territories.

**Ms J.A. RADISICH:** I refer to the fourth dot point under “Significant Issues and Trends” on page 1093 of the *Budget Statements*. Earlier in the year I visited Walyunga National Park, which is in my electorate, with the previous environment minister. A lot of officers from the Department of Environment and Conservation were working to cull feral pigs in the area, which is a problem for wildlife and human safety. They were having a good success rate at that time. I ask the minister to provide an update on the feral pig situation.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** One of the initiatives of the Saving Our Species program focuses on that particular issue. I ask the director general to respond.

**Mr K.J. McNamara:** The feral pig problem is one that is increasing in severity in the south west, unfortunately aided by some people who choose to release pigs for their own hunting purposes. We are obviously very concerned about that, as is the Department of Agriculture and Food. The department has had long running feral pig control programs in key parts of the south west forests. Under the two-year Saving Our Species initiative, we have ramped up the level of pig control through trapping, poisoning and shooting, with particular emphasis on the Darling Scarp, including the Walyunga National Park and the Avon Valley area and parts of the Swan coastal plain, particularly between Mogumber and Waroona. There has also been emphasis in the southern forests around Manjimup and towards Lake Muir. There has been a lot of extra officer effort and time and resources dedicated to dealing with feral pigs, which is one of many feral species that challenge us. They have certainly been the subject of some heightened effort over the past couple of years and we hope to continue that. There is also good collaboration, particularly in areas such as Manjimup and Lake Muir, where the department-managed land is interspersed among private farmland. There is a good cooperative effort with landholders and joint control groups and programs.

[8.10 pm]

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** I refer to the eighth dot point at page 1094, which relates to weeds and feral animals in the state. How much is allocated for the control of weeds and feral animals on unallocated crown land measured as a total cost per hectare or square kilometre, whichever measure is used? The minister may be aware of the committee report that recommends that the Crown be bound by the same regulations as apply to private landowners. That has ramifications for the department. Has any modelling being done on what impact that would have on the costings of the department?

**Mr K.J. McNamara:** Our expenditure in the current year on weeds and feral animals is in the order of \$3.1 million for weeds and about \$6.7 million for feral animals. Indeed, only this morning we announced some extra sponsorship to improve the feral animal control works through the Western Shield program. Western Australia is a very large state and the area of unallocated crown land and unmanaged crown reserves is in the order of 89 million or 90 million hectares; it is a very large part of the state. Clearly, it would be preferable to have more resources than that to control feral animals across such a large area as well as the 25 million hectares of department-managed lands under the Conservation and Land Management Act. The job is a very big one. In a perfect world we would have more money to control goats, pigs, donkeys, feral camels and all the rest as well as all the weeds that challenge us. There is a lot of emphasis with the unallocated crown land on wild dogs as they affect neighbouring pastoralists. We give a lot of priority to neighbour relations under our developing good neighbour policy on those lands. Across 90 million hectares, the total amount that is spent on weeds and feral animals by our department is probably in the order of \$1 million to \$1.5 million. We would obviously like to do more, but we are able to make some difference in key areas with that funding.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** The second part of the question was whether there was any modelling on the impact of a decision to bind the Crown. If that were to be implemented, how would that impact on your business?

**Mr K.J. McNamara:** We and the Department of Agriculture and Food have jointly estimated what it would take to more adequately control feral animals and weeds across such a large area. There would need to be a significant increase. To some degree, feral animal control is like asking how long is a piece of string. We can spend enormous amounts of money going down to the last few animals or plants. For example, Australia has already spent \$187 million trying to eradicate red imported fire ants in Brisbane and Mackay, and we contribute to that because it is a national problem. These are very expensive things to do. To do the job much more adequately across 90 million hectares would probably take something in the order of \$10 million to \$15 million to make a very significant difference.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** I have one further question. Concerning feral animals, is there any movement on building a dog fence to stop the feral dog problem on the boundaries of the pastoral areas? I know it is a huge concern in the mining and pastoral areas. Can the minister give an update of which way he might go on that?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** With regard to dogs, the Minister for Agriculture and Food has jurisdiction over that particular issue. I am not aware of any advancement of proposals for fences or things of that nature. Certainly, it is an issue that is of concern to rural and agricultural producers. The question is best directed to the Minister for Agriculture and Food.

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** I refer to the sixth dot point under "Major Initiatives For 2007-08" at page 1104, which refers to the tourism road improvement program. There are continued capital works projects relating to visitor infrastructure and tourist roads under the "World Class Parks initiative". There is also reference to completing the construction of the Pinnacles visitor centre. I also refer to the tourism road improvement program at page 1114. The 2005-06 program refers to an estimated total cost of \$3.471 million and the 2006-07 program refers to \$4 million. I am a little confused about the current estimated expenditure and I wonder whether the minister can expand on it for me and explain what that infrastructure is.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I thank the member for the question. I understand she wants some further clarification of what the \$4 million is to be spent on and what the \$3.471 million was spent on.

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** Exactly.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I will ask Mr Sharp whether he can provide the details with regard to those two line items.

**Mr P. Sharp:** In our capital works program that we run for parks and visitor services, we allocate \$2 million for main roads funding and \$2.6 million for road maintenance. With regard to the expenditure on roads around the Pinnacles and the development of the Pinnacles, we are spending \$6 million on the visitor centre, and associated roadworks comes in with the extra dollars that the member has identified.

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**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** That is not clear to me. I am asking what the \$3.471 million was spent on in 2005-06. Mr Sharp said that \$2.6 million is for road maintenance. Is that in that figure as well?

**Mr P. Sharp:** It is probably better if I try to get the details because it is a very complex program and I do not have the figures available now.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Perhaps it is a question we can take on notice.

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** Would the minister prefer me to put it on notice or by way of supplementary information? The minister has been very accommodating.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I know I have. I am feeling very generous this evening.

The director general may have some additional information that may help with clarity.

**Mr K.J. McNamara:** I can certainly clarify that the total amounts shown for road expenditure in the budget papers include the element we apply to the maintenance of existing road networks. The \$2.6 million is included in the total figure. On top of that, we have new roadwork over and above that. I know that, for example, in recent years we have spent \$1 million on a road into Hawks Head at Kalbarri, and \$1.5 million in the Lesueur National Park on a circuit road for tourism purposes. Those are examples of our initiatives.

[8.20 pm]

**Ms K. HODSON-THOMAS:** That actually clears it up. I thank the minister.

**Ms J.A. RADISICH:** My question relates to the major initiatives for 2007-08 on page 1111 of the *Budget Statements*. The second dot point refers to container deposit legislation. I appreciate the fact that the minister has been in this portfolio for only a short time, but in my view the government has taken an inordinate amount of time to introduce container deposit legislation, to which I know the community will respond extremely well, and it will provide a massive environmental benefit. What efforts are the minister and his department making to progress this important initiative?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I thank the member for her question, and I share her eagerness for an appropriate container deposit scheme for Western Australia. The member may not be aware that an advisory committee chaired by the member for Perth reported to me in April. The stakeholder report investigated the introduction of a container deposit scheme for Western Australia, and what that scheme might look like. The advisory committee investigated various schemes throughout the world, including the scheme that has been operating in South Australia for the past 20-plus years. On receiving the report, which was commissioned by a previous Minister for the Environment, I asked for some detailed economic analysis work to be done on what the scheme would look like in Western Australia, and the cost of the scheme.

**Ms J.A. RADISICH:** Can we really put a price on saving all that landfill?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** There is certainly a desire to see a system that is appropriate for Western Australia. As soon as that analysis has been completed, I will be in a position to make a determination about what scheme would be best for the state, and the implications of the introduction of such a scheme. It is important to note that as technology improves, particularly in the area of recycling, opportunities arise for new businesses to be created with a focus on recycling and the collection of recyclable material. One of the problems for Western Australia in the past has been that many of the businesses able to deal with recyclable material have disappeared from the state, which makes it difficult. There is an argument that the introduction of a container deposit scheme would create opportunities for businesses to re-establish in Western Australia, and that is part of what is being analysed. I share the member's concern and I understand that there is wide community support for the introduction of such a scheme.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** I made a promise to the member for Mindarie that I would come back to cane toads. I am sure he will be intrigued. I refer the minister to the seventh dot point on page 1094. This topic can also be found in the fourth dot point on page 1098, and it also occurs in the budget in the form of the \$500 000 grant to the Stop the Toad Foundation. Can the minister give an indication of the number of cane toads that have been collected, or busted, by the Stop the Toad Foundation, and the number that have been busted by the Kimberley Toad Busters?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** As the member asked previously, and as I responded then, I have asked both of the two organisations mentioned to prepare reports on the success of their particular toad busting activities. That review process is currently underway. Both of the organisations have provided information, particularly last year, through report processes, about the numbers. I do not have those figures in front of me, but I am happy to provide the information from their reports, or the member may be able to gather it himself. The numbers of toads busted by Kimberley Toad Busters varies, depending on the sites they visit and the time of the year they visit those sites. The success rate is very high, and having met with the Kimberley Toad Busters recently, I can

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say that the figures and the success rate they were able to provide were impressive for the number of people involved. I will ask the director general to elaborate a little further on the question.

**Mr K.J. McNamara:** While I do not have precise numbers with me on the toads that have been busted, such figures, while useful, also need to be treated with some care at the same time. On the one hand, it is very easy to go where cane toads are abundant and collect and kill many of them, but a lot of the effort is directed at the front, where we do not necessarily know how far the cane toads have reached. We are searching at the front and ahead of the front to detect where the cane toads are. Sometimes a nil result from an expedition is good. The simple numbers are not the only answer. We are asking the Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre, with which we have worked closely on a number of other fronts, to help us with an examination of the effectiveness of the various methods being used.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** Dr Tony Peacock is the chief executive officer of that organisation.

**Mr K.J. McNamara:** Yes, we know Tony Peacock very well. I was in the north of the state last week when Tony was last here, but two of our staff met with him on Friday morning to discuss precisely this matter.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** I commend Tony; he is a very good operator. How much state government money has gone to the Stop the Toad Foundation, including various grants and money from Lotterywest? In comparison, how much money has the state government put into the Kimberley Toad Busters?

[8.30 pm]

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** An amount of \$500 000 was provided to the Stop The Toad Foundation.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** Yes, originally, plus the grant from Lotterywest?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I do not have the amount provided by Lotterywest.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** It was \$32 000, from memory.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** The member asked what the department provided and that is what I can provide him with. The 2005 allocation of \$500 000 to the Stop The Toad Foundation was a one-off allocation. Both the Stop The Toad Foundation and the Kimberley Toad Busters are seeking further government funding. Through the department, both groups have been provided with temporary funding of up to \$12 000 a month while the review process that I have mentioned is conducted.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** Is that \$12 000 each?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Yes, that amount has been provided to each group while the independent review process is underway. I am also aware that the commonwealth has previously provided money to the Kimberley Toad Busters.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** I commend to the minister the Department of Environment and Conservation office in Kununurra, and Errol in particular. Their work on cane toads is to be commended. I am certainly not casting aspersions on the quality of that work. I think it is very good. I am glad that the director general referred to busting cane toads in areas where they are congregating but are not necessarily having a good outcome. I am reminded of the pictures of the Stop The Toad Foundation's great toad muster. Among the dust of Auvergne lagoon, where the cane toads congregated because they had nowhere else to go, thousands of toads were picked up. I am pleased that the director general has said that in some circumstances there is no value in picking up toads that will probably die from a lack of water anyway. I am glad that the director general realises that. Can the minister confirm that the Auvergne station bust of, I think, 2003, which was ostensibly done by the Stop The Toad Foundation, was attributed inaccurately to the Kimberley Toad Busters and that that group took the rap for what was, in the end, a bad exercise that put offside and alienated the owners of that station?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** The member has referred to an incident in 2003.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** I have given the minister the wrong date and that does not help. I think it was 2005.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I have met with both groups and obviously there have been some ongoing issues between the groups. I have been trying to ascertain the effectiveness of their regimes and what they are able to achieve. I do not have a view on the allegation of one group being blamed for or hijacked, which I think is what the member is suggesting, in that 2005 incident.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** That has happened, but the minister needs to now lead that process. He can prevent a similar incident from happening in the future and bring those groups together, if he is clever enough to do it.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** An attempt has been made to have mediation between both groups and, unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, one of the parties has not taken up that offer. The offer was made by the previous minister to engage in a mediation process. To be totally honest, we have moved past that process now.

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It is one of the reasons that I have asked for an independent review of the activities of both groups, so that we can ascertain the best way forward in supporting the actions to prevent the cane toad's expansion into Western Australia. That is why the review process is underway. I am not interested in getting involved in personalities and clashes of the past. I do not think that is appropriate at this stage. What I want to do is find out what is effective, what has been effective and what will be effective into the future, and harness the goodwill that exists in the community, particularly in the Kimberley region, and continue the fight against this potential invasion.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** I refer to the sixth dot point on page 1094 and to fires, prescribed burning and fuel reduction burns. Some concerns have been raised with me while travelling around the state about fuel loads within close proximity of townships managed by the department. I refer to Denmark, Walpole, the member for Warren-Blackwood's home town of Pemberton and other towns, including Dwellingup, which is of great concern to me. We all well know that Dwellingup faced the very perilous threat of fire during the last fire season. What is being done to reduce those fuel loads and to prioritise the department's fuel reduction program? The people living in these towns feel threatened by those fuel loads. I understand the principle of mosaic burning, but some areas have not had fuel reduction burning in more than 30 years.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I thank the member for his question. I acknowledge his concern, particularly as he mentioned the Peel region's recent experience with the Dwellingup fires. It is important that the director general responds to the question first of all in a general sense, and then Mr Alan Walker, who directly covers the prescribed burning program for the department, can also respond.

**Mr K.J. McNamara:** I briefly outlined the overall prescribed burning approach in answer to an earlier question. We seek to keep some areas long unburnt for biodiversity conservation reasons, but we also place a very high priority on the protection of life and property and the towns that the member has mentioned. Just a few weeks ago I was at the national meeting of the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council, at which there was a long discussion about fire. We distributed some maps at that meeting that showed that in the Perth hills fire of January 2005, the prescribed burning that we had done near Mundaring and the prescribed burning that we had done near Pickering Brook were major factors in bringing that fire under control and avoiding more damage than there was. Similarly, the analysis of the fires in Dwellingup earlier this year that we have just completed showed that in the surrounds of Dwellingup itself, we had burnt something like 48 or 50 per cent of the forest in the past six years and that provided a high degree of protection, which was once again very significant in the strategies that we undertook to fight the fires and in helping us to be successful in protecting Dwellingup and other areas.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Mr Alan Walker will also add to the answer to the question.

**Mr A. Walker:** In answers to previous questions this evening, there has been reference to the program of 200 000 hectares of prescribed burning that is conducted annually. A number of factors are taken into account in developing the candidate burns in any season and in any year. One of the specific targets that we aim for is to burn around towns and where there are aggregations of private property and rural landholdings on which life and property would be threatened should a wildfire occur. I think we have been very successful in recent years not only in having achieved close to or, in one year, exceeding the 200 000 hectare program, but also in targeting areas around towns such as Jarrahdale, Dwellingup, Collie, Pemberton, Walpole and Manjimup where there are fuel loads in some areas that need to be reduced to provide adequate protection for those town sites. We have done burns, including quite large aerial prescribed burns, in areas adjoining those communities. The town of Denmark is actually surrounded by mostly private property. The department does manage some small nature reserves.

[8.40 pm]

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** For instance, Monkey Rock, on the way to the Lights Beach road, has fuel loadings of 90 tonnes a square hectare.

**Mr A. Walker:** Yes. I think the member might need to address the Shire of Denmark through the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, because that is not land managed by the Department of Environment and Conservation.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** It is part of the William Bay National Park, in fact. Lights Road, Monkey Rock and right through to William Bay Road are part of the national park, I think. There is a strip that runs into the William Bay -

**Mr A. Walker:** There is a strip along the coast between the William Bay National Park and Ocean Beach that is managed by the Shire of Denmark. I guess William Bay National Park is some distance from the town of Denmark. However, there was a prescribed burn in the William Bay National Park in the last season that has gone by. In relation to the private property around the town of Denmark, one of our concerns is - this was borne out in the recent fire that threatened the town of Dwellingup - that the fuel loads on private property in many

cases have not been burnt for 30 or 40 years, which is in stark contrast to areas of state forest, national parks and other reserves managed by the Department of Environment and Conservation. The areas that carry high fuel loads in areas managed by the department are generally those that have been mined for bauxite and rehabilitated, and where the young regeneration is susceptible to fire damage until about the age of 20 to 25 years, and sometimes up to 30 years. The same applies in karri regrowth, where young regeneration is susceptible to fire for some time before prescribed burning can be carried out safely.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** I have a further question. I have been debriefed after fires, most recently after the fire in Toodyay. In Dwellingup, for instance, districts that used to be districts in their own right have been joined to become super districts. I make reference to the joining of Mundaring, Serpentine and Dwellingup into a super region, which goes virtually from York to Waroona. Why is it that 10 years ago we had three crews of nine stationed at Dwellingup, and now we have two crews of six to manage the situation in Dwellingup? Currently, there are only two crews of six; ten years ago, there were three crews of nine, making 27. Therefore, it has gone from 27 down to 12 in Dwellingup alone.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I will ask the director to respond.

**Mr A. Walker:** Yes. I think we are talking about a fire crew as opposed to fire incident managers, and perhaps I will cover that first. The department has probably more than 400 of its permanent staff who are trained and capable of carrying out roles as incident management staff when a wildfire occurs. However, in relation to fire crews, we currently have 300 wages employees - conservation employees - who carry out that task. Those people are stationed at various depots and locations throughout the south west. The situation is that although there might be smaller numbers of people in some depots than there might have been previously, we also have a greater capacity for mobility of crews to respond to fires or, in fact, to carry out prescribed burning in neighbouring regions and districts. Therefore, we draw very heavily on that workforce. When the conditions are suitable for prescribed burning, let us say, in the Dwellingup area, we may well draw on crews from Collie, Nannup or Kirup to join with the crews from the Swan region to carry out prescribed burning or wildfire suppression, depending on the circumstances.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** I have one further comment, and I will leave it at that. Will the minister please undertake a review of the current staffing of our crews throughout the Perth hills and in the areas of concern that I mentioned before? Also, I refer to the 1961 royal commission that took place after the Dwellingup fires and the recommendations that it made. It appears - this was brought home to me very loudly and strongly, as the local member - that the recommendations of the Dwellingup fires royal commission in 1961 have not been adhered to as they were intended to be.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Staffing and the allocation of work within the department are ongoing concerns and issues for me as the minister, and for the director general as the administrator of the department. The staffing levels and the allocation of such resources are ongoing issues. It is important to note, for example, that the whole issue of fire, or response to fire, and strategic planning with regard to fire in the department are examples of the ongoing review process. In the last budget, additional resources were included to purchase more equipment. Some \$5.5 million worth of equipment was purchased from moneys allocated in the last budget. That included a range of resources for combating fires on the ground. As the member would be aware, that equipment included front-end loaders and two cherry-picker machines - I think they are called snorkels. I saw one of those machines in operation when I was in Bunbury earlier this year, having just taken over as minister. We now have two snorkels that were purchased out of that \$5.5 million. They allow staff from the department to target fires high in trees, particularly if they are habitat trees. Of course, additional firefighting equipment has also been provided for.

I think previous questions referred to how we respond to an expanding reserve or reserves that come under the control of the department. We have seen that, of course, as a result of recent policy initiatives of the government. It is an issue that is taken very seriously by me. Indeed, it is a core business of the department also. I can assure the member that we do not need to have a review, because the task of looking at resourcing, where the resources are allocated and where they need to be allocated in the future is ongoing.

The member highlighted a royal commission back in 1961 or 1962. I am not aware of that, but I will make myself aware of that royal commission report and its recommendations, because I take on board the member's concern. Like the member, I had close friends who lost houses in Dwellingup. After talking to people who have been impacted by such a tragedy in which they lost everything - I know that the member has met with a number of people in his electorate who lost every single thing that they owned, the most important of which were their photographs and the special memories that they held - I can do nothing but take this issue seriously. I can assure the member that the issue of fire and the responsibility of the department are very high priorities, which I will continue to review and progress with the director general.

**Extract from Hansard**

[ASSEMBLY - Wednesday, 23 May 2007]

p326b-344a

Chairman; Dr Steve Thomas; Mr David Templeman; Ms Katie Hodson-Thomas; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr John Quigley; Ms Jaye Radisich; Mr Murray Cowper; Mr Paul Omodei

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**Mr M.J. COWPER:** I will just go on record as saying that during that event and subsequent to it, I thought the officers from DEC performed over and above their call of duty, and were exceptional when they were faced with the very serious danger that confronted them. I want to make the point that they did a very good job.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** The member is right. The Dwellingup fire, in particular, was certainly a test of the emergency management legislation that was passed a few years back. I know that the member has acknowledged publicly, as have I and others from the Peel region, the tremendous efforts of DEC staff and all the volunteers and emergency service personnel, as well as the communities of Dwellingup, Pinjarra, Coolup and Waroona, which responded to what was a very terrifying experience. The fact that no human life was lost was quite remarkable. I share with the member his admiration for the effort put in by the community and by government agencies in their response to those fires earlier this year.

[8.50 pm]

**The CHAIRMAN:** I know that the minister likes to give long answers.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I thought that was the longest answer I had given tonight.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Yes, we noticed. I remind the minister that there is about an hour and 10 minutes left to deal with divisions 64 to 67. If the minister keeps his answers a little shorter, he might get through the rest of those divisions.

**Mr P.D. OMODEI:** I take up where the member for Murray left off and express my appreciation to the professional officers of the Department of Environment and Conservation; in particular some of the senior fire people, such as Rick Sneeuwjagt and Terry Maher, who were trained at Southern's football ground at Pemberton. Those who were trained at Deanmill and Imperial were of a slightly lesser quality! However, they are all most outstanding people and I am sure the minister will pass on those comments.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Which budget line does this refer to?

**Mr P.D. OMODEI:** I could tell the minister a few stories about them!

On a more serious note, I refer the minister to the last four dot points on page 1100. Obviously the 2008-10 timber harvest plan is done in consultation with the work of the Forest Products Commission in relation to coupe planning, scheduling, authorisation and monitoring, and the other two items at the bottom of that page as well. Will the minister give an estimation of the volume of first, second and third-grade karri logs and first, second and third-grade jarrah logs that will be harvested in the 2008-10 plan? I do not expect that the minister has those volumes at his fingertips. Will the minister also comment on coupe planning, and in particular on habitat areas and how they have impacted on the yield from harvest coupes? Will the minister also comment on the measurement of utilisation plots and the refinement of the analysis of the actual timber yield, which I regard as fundamentally important to the timber industry right now? Will the minister also indicate whether the log specification will change in that 2008-10 three-year plan? I know that is a long question.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I thank the member. I understand his question is in four key parts: the volume of first, second and third-grade karri and jarrah logs; secondly, the planning processes with regard to coupes; thirdly, the measuring of timber yield; and fourthly -

**Mr P.D. OMODEI:** How will habitat areas impact on the yield?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I will defer to the director general for some general comments and we may need to get some specific responses from the appropriate officer.

**Mr K.J. McNamara:** The three-year rolling plan and the annual plan for the timber harvest always make allowances for a greater level of timber than is necessary to meet the sustained yield set in the forest management plan, the reason being that there are various constraints as one goes into fine-scale coupe planning; seasonal or other factors might come into play. Not all available areas can be accessed in any one year, so the annual plan provides for a greater harvest than the annual sustained yield. However, the Forest Products Commission is bound by the sustained yield in the forest management plan and it seeks to harvest up to that full sustained yield of 131 000 cubic metres of first and second-grade jarrah. The karri figure escapes my mind at the moment. The retention of habitat trees has long been a requirement of forest management in Western Australia. The 2004 forest management plan gave effect to the government policy commitment and the CALM act commitments in respect of ecologically sustainable forest management. My recollection is that the specifications for habitat trees in the 2004 plan increased the requirement to retain habitat trees by one per hectare, compared with the figure in the previous forest management plan. So that has had an impact on yield from harvesting coupes, but increasing the habitat tree number by one would not in my view have a major impact. As for measurement issues, I cannot answer that question here. The impact on log specifications in the future is really a

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matter for the Minister for Forestry and the Forest Products Commission rather than the Department of Environment and Conservation, I think.

**Mr P.D. OMODEI:** Can I have a follow-up question?

**The CHAIRMAN:** This is a follow-up question.

**Mr P.D. OMODEI:** Minister, the director general paints a fairly rosy picture, but today's edition of *The West Australian* indicates that the yield in the past two years has been down as low as 118 000 or 114 000 cubic metres from the expected 131 000 cubic metres. There are rumours abounding that the coupes that have been planted are not yielding the amount of timber required and that the quality of timber has far deteriorated from what was expected under the original management plan. I ask the minister: is it not a fact that it is possible that the current management plan may yield only somewhere between 90 000 and 110 000 cubic metres and that the timber industry in Western Australia is actually at risk of collapse and that there will be significant timber volume buy-outs in the near future?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. Certainly there are a number of concerns, and the Leader of the Opposition has highlighted them in the preamble to his question. The upper house member for the South West, Hon Adele Farina -

**Mr P.D. OMODEI:** Yes, who is chairing a committee.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** - through the request of the Minister for Forestry, is actually looking very closely at this particular concern and, indeed, the overall health and wellbeing of the forest industry. I will continue in my capacity as Minister for the Environment to liaise closely with the Minister for Forestry to ensure that the work done by Hon Adele Farina and the information that has been garnered through the stakeholder group that she has been working with are looked at very closely, and that we look very closely at some of the issues that the Leader of the Opposition has raised. I agree with the Leader of the Opposition that that is certainly a concern, and it is certainly a concern for the Minister for Forestry.

**Mr P.D. OMODEI:** Can I make just one final comment to impress on the minister that I understand the importance of protecting the environment? However, I also have a very close understanding of the impact that occurs on towns, communities and families in areas where there are major changes, as occurred under the previous restructure. I want to impress on the minister, as Minister for the Environment, the need for a balanced approach to conservation and production. I know that Hon Adele Farina is chairing a committee of stakeholders to look at what can be done as far as that area is concerned. However, I want to impress on the Minister for the Environment the impact on families and communities in relation to anything that comes out of the forest management plan, the three-year rolling plan and the Forest Products Commission's deliberations; they are fundamentally important to people not only in my electorate but also right up into the metropolitan area.

[9.00 pm]

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I understand that, and I can assure the member that I will take those important issues into account.

**Mr P.D. OMODEI:** Can we have the predicted volumes of timber between 2008 and 2010?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I am happy to provide that information as supplementary information.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Would the minister advise the clerk of the exact question, please?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** The Leader of the Opposition requests the anticipated or predicted volumes for -

**Mr P.D. OMODEI:** First and second-grade karri and first and second-grade jarrah for 2008 to 2010.

[*Supplementary Information No B22.*]

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** I refer to page 1107, service 7, "Regulation of Discharges to the Environment". I particularly refer the minister to the total cost of the service. Given that the government spent \$16.7 million in 2005-06 and then budgeted only \$16.2 million for 2006-07, why was it unable to spend that amount? The government actually spent, according to the budget papers, just under \$14 million for 2006-07. The government has allocated only an additional \$500 000 in the budget for 2007-08. Can the minister explain why there has not been a significant increase and why he could not spend the money he had budgeted in 2006-07?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I thank the member for the question. I can provide an answer. The apparent decline in expenditure of approximately \$2.2 million from the 2006-07 budget to the 2006-07 estimated actual is due to the transfer to another service of expenditure that was previously included in this service. There has been a transfer from one service to another.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** Can the minister tell me which services they are?

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**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I am coming to that. Approximately \$2.5 million for the regulation of native vegetation clearing that was previously included in the Department of Environment service has now been placed in the nature conservation service as part of the formation of the Department of Environment and Conservation. This change is also reflected in full-time equivalent numbers. The increase in expenditure of approximately \$2.7 million from the 2006-07 estimated actual to the 2007-08 budget estimate is due principally to an increase in available funding for this function, derived from industry regulation fees. These are administered under the Environmental Protection Act 1986, and were approved to be increased in the 2007-08 budget process. I hope that clarifies for the member the reason those figures appear differently in the budget papers.

[Mrs D.J. Guise took the chair.]

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** I refer again to service 7 and the area under which monitoring is undertaken. In the past year there have been disasters for the government in terms of ambient monitoring, including Midland Brick and the Esperance Port Authority. That being the case, does the minister expect to receive a significant increase in funding from, I suspect, outside the budget process, to accommodate the increased ambient monitoring that will be required at a number of sites, including those already mentioned?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** The answer to the first part of the member's question is yes. With respect to the second part of the question, the expected income from those fees will, in the view of the department, improve the department's capacity to carry out the works that the member has highlighted. With regard to the Esperance inquiry, the department is obviously working very closely with the committee that is conducting the inquiry. My ministerial office is also working very closely with and providing information to the local member, the member for Roe. However, the fee income increase will clearly, in my view, assist the department in carrying out its important regulatory role.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** Am I to understand that the minister is saying he does not expect an increase in allocations from the consolidated account to fund the processes of monitoring the environment, particularly with respect to industrial discharge? I am concerned, given the history of the areas in question. We could go into some detail, but we do not have time. It is of concern if the minister is relying on additional funds raised by the licensing process and there are no additional funds coming in for the processing of those regulations. I refer to not only Esperance port and Midland Brick, but also other industrial developments from which the minister has removed necessary environmental testing. Some of the proposals will remove the requirement for measurement of sulfur dioxide at significant proposed projects, such as the Bluewaters II power station. The minister will need to have a major monitoring program for such a project. Is the minister telling me that there is no additional funding available from the consolidated account to fund that process?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** The increase in the fees is a cost recovery process, and that is quite appropriate. Those fee increases will provide greater scope for the department to carry out its statutory obligations. The member says that there is no extra money coming in. There is. The fees will provide that into the future.

**Dr S.C. THOMAS:** I understand what the minister is saying, but will he not mind if, over the next year, I hold him to that and make sure that it comes into account?

**The CHAIRMAN:** Member, this is not an opportunity for debate.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I am sure the member will do that.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I have a question concerning greenhouse gases and climate change. They are issues of great concern to the community, as I am sure the minister understands. The Premier recently announced his climate change action statement. What specific measures are planned by the minister's department in the forthcoming year with respect to the Premier's climate change statement?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I thank the member for the question. There is clearly a major appropriation, as was highlighted by the Treasurer in his budget speech a few weeks ago. It highlighted the government's initial response to the phenomenon of climate change, which this government recognises as a major challenge for Western Australians and, indeed, Australians generally, into the future. I will highlight this very briefly, because I know there are other divisions to cover. I will highlight a couple of examples of initiatives in the climate change statement. The first is the low-emission development fund. This has been allocated to establish the low-emission energy fund in 2007-08. The total funding for this over the forward estimates is \$36.5 million. The fund will support technology breakthroughs and large-scale reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. We will be focusing on innovation. It will be applied in areas of Western Australia that have clear and natural competitive advantages. We are looking at geothermal, clean coal and renewable energy technologies as a key focus. The department has been allocated \$750 000 to coordinate the household sustainability audit and education program. That will provide information to address a range of climate change factors, including energy use, water usage and waste and transport issues. The program will be free for householders and will focus on

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what members of the public can do as individuals and families at the household level to tackle the issue of climate change. I have already mentioned the national emissions trading scheme, which is a three-person team that will be led by the Department of Treasury and Finance. The Office of Climate Change and the Office of Energy will participate in that scheme. The budget provides for \$700 000 for the establishment of the Office of Climate Change within the Department of Environment and Conservation. It will support me as Minister for Climate Change to coordinate the implementation of the government's climate change policy and programs. There will also be public awareness and education campaigns, including the "act now for the future" campaign, which will focus on existing initiatives, including rebates and other programs offered to householders and businesses to assist in the behavioural change we are asking of all Western Australians. Members will see information about Waterwise rebates, existing and planned solar energy rebates, TravelSmart initiatives and waste and recycling initiatives that are the focus of that \$101 million campaign. It supports other initiatives across government that are focused on responding to the challenge of climate change.

Another thing is the Indian Ocean Climate Initiative, which the Premier highlighted. Additional funding has been allocated to that initiative, which was announced earlier this year. That initiative specifically looks at adaptation issues for Western Australia. The Premier's climate change statement is the first step in this government's response to the climate change phenomenon. It builds on a number of other initiatives that will place the state at the leading edge of responding to this challenge.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

*Meeting suspended from 9.12 to 9.18 pm*