

Chairman; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Peter Tinley; Mr John McGrath; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Ian Britza; Mr Bill Marmion

Division 11: Fisheries, \$49 749 000 —

Mr J.M. Francis, Chairman.

Mr W.R. Marmion, Minister for Environment representing the Minister for Fisheries.

Mr S. Smith, Chief Executive Officer.

Mr B. Mezzatesta, Director, Regional Services.

Dr D. Gaughan, Acting Director, Research.

Mr B.R. Power, Acting Director, Corporate Services.

Ms H.G. Brayford, Director, Aquatic Management.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIRMAN: It is my intention, unless anyone objects, to not read out the Chairman's statement again. The member for Kimberley has a question.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: I refer to the subheading "Major Spending Changes" on page 180 and the line item "Barramundi Stocking in Lake Kununurra". How many barramundi fingerlings will be released through this program; and, of that number, what percentage of fingerlings is it estimated will be lost out to sea? I want some understanding of the losses. Given that a lot of research has been undertaken by the Department of Fisheries, has anything been done about providing funding for a fish ladder at Lake Kununurra? Previous governments have talked about it, but it is really important to the health of Lake Kununurra. There are three parts to my question.

Mr W.R. MARMION: I will do an introduction and allow Mr Smith to provide the detailed response. This particular item relates to additional recurrent funding totalling \$695 000 from this year over the budget and forward estimates period. It will allow, as the member mentioned, restocking of barramundi into Lake Kununurra.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: About how many?

Mr W.R. MARMION: I will get to that. It will greatly increase recreational fishing and tourism in the area. In terms of specific numbers into the ocean, I will ask Mr Smith to provide that extra data.

Mr S. Smith: This project is very much a new approach for us. We have really been getting into stocking in recent times. In fact only a few weeks ago I was in Dampier Creek releasing some barramundi up there for Broome fishers. That was a very small scale release of about 1 000—they were not fingerlings, they were actually about a foot long.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: They were a good size.

Mr S. Smith: Yes; a catchable size.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: Give them a couple of seasons; I'll be right there, mate!

Mr S. Smith: I do not know the actual number for this particular release of barramundi into Lake Kununurra. I can certainly check that for the member.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: If you could, please.

Mr S. Smith: It is certainly on a much larger scale than the release in Dampier Creek. It would be a quantum increase on those numbers. The project itself will have research with it. At this stage we do not know how many will end up downstream. It will depend in part on the weather conditions, because it may be that some of them end up downstream as a result of flooding.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: Those redclaw might eat them all!

Mr S. Smith: Perhaps. We will see what happens during the program. Part of this project is about seeing what happens with them. We would like to see tagging occur with it. That is what we did in Dampier Creek. All fish released there have been tagged. We will get the findings from that over the next two to three years. That will help inform the best way of stocking, in Lake Kununurra anyway. But the experience in other states, particularly stocking of lakes in Queensland, has been highly successful. It has virtually led to a new industry emerging there for recreational fishing, related to tourism. We certainly think this project has the potential to do the same sorts of things in the Kimberley. We expect it to be very successful. As I say, there is a lot of research to be done around the project to make sure it is successful.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: Will those fingerlings be big enough to tag before they are released? Is the new lot tagged?

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Mr S. Smith: We would like to tag all of them if possible—we certainly think it will be. In terms of the size, tagging will not be a problem irrespective of whether they are fingerlings or larger size —

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: They will not be that big, though, will they?

Mr S. Smith: No. However, we can in fact tag fish of that size. We tag marron, for instance. We have also tagged some of the freshwater fish that we release into lakes and things around Perth. We use different types of tags, of course. For the ones released into Dampier Creek, the tags were a couple of inches in length. We tried a couple of different types of tags. We also have different forms of tagging—some are virtually the size of a pinhead. They can be seen under fluorescent lights and so on. It depends on the nature of the fish—how big it is and what we are trying to achieve from the tagging—as to how big the tags are and what form they will take.

The other part of the member's question related to the fish ladder. We have been looking at whether we can put in place a fish ladder. We see some merit in a fish ladder. A lot of work has been done to put together a business case, as the member is probably aware. The cost of it is in the order of \$5 million, which is somewhat prohibitive. It would achieve, we think, the same sort of outcome that we will get through this stocking program in generating a recreational fishing experience in Lake Kununurra.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: We're over catfish, mate!

Mr S. Smith: I can understand. This particular initiative will cost just under \$700 000 over four years versus \$5 million for a fish ladder. We think it is an economic way to go. We will see what the research findings come up with. In the meantime we have implemented some fish ladders around the state, on a smaller scale, but we have been implementing some. The findings from that might well lead us to look at fish ladders for places like Lake Kununurra in the future.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: What is the difference between a fish ladder, and a fish lift, which I think was talked about for Kununurra? I know that a ladder is a staggered approach, whereas a lift actually zooms them up and dumps them in. Is that correct?

[5.10 pm]

Mr S. Smith: Yes.

Mr W.R. MARMION: We would all like to know what is the difference between a fish ladder and a fish lift. Mr Smith will assist.

Mr S. Smith: That is my understanding of it as well. A fish ladder is essentially a series of pools, and the fish go up in gradual stages, whereas a fish lift is essentially lifting them up, as the name would imply. I will check with Dr Gaughan, who is the head of our research division, because he may be able to elaborate on the difference.

Dr D. GAUGHAN: That pretty much covers it. A fish ladder is a series of staged pools. A fish lift, I guess due to the nature of the morphology of the land there, is a tank of water, and you just lift it up, open up the top, and the fish swim out.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: Can we have a choice, then? Can we have both?

Mr W.R. MARMION: I will ask Mr Smith to answer that question. He also might elaborate on the difference in cost, because it sounds to me as though a lift might incur a recurrent cost to the state.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: There are two different seasons, so we could have a lift for the dry and a ladder for the wet—fish stock for all seasons!

Mr S. Smith: I cannot fault the intent! We would certainly like to have a multitude of things there, including fish ladders, fish lifts, and the possibility of stocking. Funding is obviously the constraint. We think stocking is the most cost-effective way of achieving the outcome that we are after.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I refer to page 180, the heading "Major Spending Changes", and the line item "Northern Fisheries Protection—Recreational Fisheries Compliance in the Pilbara and Gascoyne". How many extra fisheries officers does this additional funding equate to, and how many fisheries officers are there in total?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is that a personal question?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I'm over it!

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: Don't pick on him! He was only caught once!

Mr W.R. MARMION: We will not talk about marron, Mr Chairman! I will defer to Mr Smith to answer this question about the actual numbers.

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Mr S. Smith: We expect that the \$200 000 will be sufficient to employ one community education officer, who will deliver school-based education programs and promote the department's activities in the Pilbara and Gascoyne regions. The funding at the moment is for only one year. We would be keen to see additional funding in future years so that we can continue those activities. We think there is a great need for it, given the expansion of activity through the resources sector, particularly in the north of the state. We think this need will continue into the future. But this one year will give us the opportunity to demonstrate how significant that need is, and for us to then go back to government and seek ongoing funding if it is warranted.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: How many fisheries officers are there between Kalbarri and Broome, covering obviously the Gascoyne and the Pilbara? Given that the Gascoyne and the Pilbara have probably the highest number of boats in this state per head of population, it would be nice to know how many fisheries officers there are in that area.

Mr W.R. MARMION: Fisheries has all that data on that across the state. Mr Mezzatesta is the best person to answer that question.

Mr B. Mezzatesta: I will run through the list of fisheries officers in the north of the state: Exmouth, four; Denham, five; Carnarvon, seven; Karratha, three; Broome, 12; and Kununurra, one.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Given that the Pilbara has the highest boating population in Western Australia, why are there only two fisheries officers in the Pilbara?

Mr W.R. MARMION: It may be that they are all honest boaties in the Pilbara! Mr Smith may be able to provide an answer to that question.

Mr S. Smith: In the allocation of staff around the state, it is obviously a matter of trying to balance priorities. The population centres are obviously around the metropolitan area, and in different places around the coast. We try to allocate our staff according to the areas in which we have the greatest need. What we have done in the last 12 months is introduce mobile patrols. We have found that mobile patrols are particularly effective in increasing our capability up and down the coast. Fishing around the state is obviously seasonal, depending on what particular species and so on are being pursued. Therefore, there are times when activity is greater in the north of the state versus the south and so on. We are using the mobile patrols to increase our presence, and also to move staff between areas and seasons, so that we can ensure that we have a good presence at places like the boat ramps during the busy time in a region, whether it be the Gascoyne, the Pilbara, the Kimberley, the south coast or elsewhere. It is also a matter of looking at what the need is. We have a number of ways of ensuring compliance. One of those is at-sea compliance. We have fisheries vessels, and we board other vessels at sea. Given the number of vessels in the north, it is important that we have a presence. But we have other tools as well. For instance, we go to boat ramps, because the boats that are launched have to come to shore somewhere, so we can cover a large number of people by having a significant presence at boat ramps. We have also introduced cameras at some boat ramps, and that helps from not only a compliance perspective but also a research perspective. It is about more than just the number of staff, although we have increased staffing, and we have improved the way in which we deploy those staff.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Just to focus on Karratha, do the fisheries officers have the ability to go out to the islands with the current vessel they have? How far out to sea can they go to ensure that they can catch or monitor fishing practices? I often hear of people going for their lives and catching as much fish as they possibly can, and then going to the islands further out and filleting the fish, freezing them and bundling them together, and often people cannot see whether they have caught undersized fish or fish that they should not be catching.

Mr W.R. MARMION: I am interested to hear the response from Mr Smith.

Mr S. Smith: We have also heard those reports, and we share the member's concern about that. We have heard reports of people catching large volumes of fish, filleting it and freezing it and sending it back to Perth, and continuing on with fishing. We do not think that is particularly appropriate or in keeping with what we are trying to achieve for recreational fishers in this state, and we would like to see that sort of practice stopped. We are looking at measures such as a ban on unaccompanied consignments of fish. But, before we introduced anything like that, we would first go through a consultation process. The minister has directed us to work on the statewide fisheries review, which will look at simplifying and strengthening some of our rules. That will deal with some of those sorts of issues.

The member also asked about vessels. The department has a range of vessels located around the coast. Some of those vessels are located at particular offices. Each office, typically, has at least one small vessel, and the vessels vary in size, depending on the need. We also have some patrol vessels that move around near the coast depending on the need. We allocate a certain number of days of the patrol vessel's time to each region, based on

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where we think the risks are. For instance, if we think there will be a need in the north, we will allocate a certain number of days to the bigger vessels to go into deep water. Bear in mind, we have responsibilities out to 200 nautical miles because our responsibilities extend into commonwealth waters—not just state waters—and therefore we have the capability of going into those waters, and we do that. We also make our vessels available for other government agencies such as the Department of Environment and Conservation.

[5.20 pm]

The CHAIRMAN: The member for Kimberley has been angling for a question!

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: Yes; thank you very much. You are very kind, Mr Chair. There are two parts to this. First of all, in the last year, how many professional or commercial fishers and recreational fishers have been prosecuted—not counting the fellow in Broome—by the department?

Mr W.R. MARMION: I wonder whether the member can direct me to the page and line item in the *Budget Statements*.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: It is about the same issue.

Mr W.R. MARMION: I defer to Mr Smith.

Mr S. Smith: I will get Mr Mezzatesta to comment. I am not familiar with the specific numbers of prosecutions, although I will add before Mr Mezzatesta speaks that in the past 12 months we have been trying to ensure that our focus on compliance is not just about prosecutions. We have put a lot of effort into making sure that we are getting the message out there that Fisheries is around. We think the vast majority of fishers will do the right thing if they know what the rules are, some will do the right thing if they think there is a reasonable prospect of coming across a Fisheries officer, and then there is a small minority who will try to get away with anything. They are the ones whom we want to target for prosecution. For the other group, we have focused on increasing our presence; and have therefore been doing things that we have not always done in the past, such as working with the police force. An example is joint roadblocks. When the police pull over a vehicle to breathalyse the driver, we also check whether any illegal fish are on board the vehicle.

If I can, I will take a moment to share an anecdote. One of the first roadblocks we participated in at the invitation of the police was on Forrest Highway. The police found several drink-driving breaches and we found in excess of 40 undersized marron breaches on that day.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: Crustacean offences!

Mr S. Smith: Yes; and that was on an inland road. We have followed up those roadblocks and have in fact been fortunate enough to stop people from this place—none with any undersized product—and our profile has been on the rise.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: The message is getting across.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: There is always a problem when we do something very well!

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: We adapt!

The CHAIRMAN: Members will stop baiting each other! Please continue, Mr Smith.

Mr S. Smith: We have also made sure our fisheries officers walk the jetties during the tourism season to talk to people and hand out promotional information. Our mobile patrols are very prominent, with bright livery. We also have vehicles without much livery for surveillance and other operational uses.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: Yes, at Willie Creek and places like that!

Mr S. Smith: The main point is that from our perspective compliance is not just about prosecutions. However, Mr Mezzatesta may be able to assist.

Mr W.R. MARMION: Mr Chairman, I do not know that Mr Mezzatesta has the data. It is however published in the annual report and we could dig that information out and provide it by way of supplementary information. Does the member want it on a year-by-year comparison and broken into regions?

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: Yes; because the Kimberley is very important, as the minister knows!

Mr W.R. MARMION: I thought the member might like the Kimberley highlighted.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: It should be top of the list.

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Mr W.R. MARMION: Mr Chairman, I am happy to provide by way of supplementary information a breakdown of the number of prosecutions in the different regions of Western Australia comparing this year's figures with last year's figures.

The CHAIRMAN: I am happy that the minister has explained the supplementary information that he will provide.

[Supplementary Information No A51.]

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: I have one more question before we close this division. Of the 12 positions located in the Kimberley—I know it sounds a lot—how many are dedicated to monitoring the pearling industry?

Mr W.R. MARMION: I defer to Mr Smith.

Mr S. Smith: If I were to get Mr Mezzatesta to answer that, I suspect that his answer would be that those staff are not allocated full time to any one particular fishery. Our fisheries officers operate across a range of fisheries.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: Exactly.

Mr S. Smith: At certain times of the year they will focus on barramundi and at other times they will focus on other species, depending on where the greatest need is.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: But the Kimberley is the only region that regulates the pearling industry and we therefore need 12 fisheries officers. I am just making a point. Thank you.

Mr P.C. TINLEY: I refer the minister to page 180, “Major Spending Changes” and the line item specific to “Aquatic Biosecurity”. Does the department still inspect vessels overseas? Noting the point about the 200 nautical-mile limit, what procedures does the department have in place for the inspection of tourist vessels from interstate and overseas?

Mr W.R. MARMION: They are very good questions. It is an important issue. I believe there have been some problems with mussels in some ports. Perhaps, Mr Smith will answer this one.

Mr S. Smith: I will answer the first part of the question and then hand over to Ms Brayford to fill in the rest of the details.

The first part of the question was about the number of vessels we stop outside WA waters—out at sea. Our responsibilities for aquatic biosecurity are limited to state waters; the commonwealth has its own aquatic biosecurity arrangements for commonwealth waters. We have been working with the commonwealth over the past 12 months on how best we can ensure a smooth interface. We do not want to be stopping vessels that the commonwealth is regulating if we can avoid it. Obviously, if there is a risk to the state that the commonwealth is not covering, we will stop those vessels and take action if it is required. However, we are trying to work with the commonwealth wherever possible, and we have been successful in that work. In terms of the funds and the purposes for which they are being allocated—I will hand over to Ms Brayford.

Ms H.G. Brayford: Thank you. We have a number of aquatic biosecurity obligations through the state for those waters inside three nautical miles and, also, by arrangement with the commonwealth because of the movement of vessels across the three nautical mile limit. This funding will assist us to put in place more risk-based assessment processes and procedures that will allow us to focus on the high-risk vessels, including, for example, the high-risk ports around the world where we need, with the commonwealth and the contractors providing the use of the vessels, to be able to track vessel movements into state waters and into our ports. We are working on a risk-based process to develop more sophisticated procedures and policies to enable us to identify those vessels that we need to along the coastline. The work will include the development of procedures and policies, as I explained earlier, and the development of field officers with particular biosecurity skills, including the ability to identify pests and to work with accredited inspectors who have the ability to identify animals as they arrive. There will also be a role for community education to ensure that when people see something, they know how to identify those things that might be a threat to the state and how to report that threat. In summary, there is a range of policy and procedures, some in-field work and community education.

Mr P.C. TINLEY: What role does the department play in the inspection of illegal foreign fishing vessels? I think we all acknowledge that in the last financial year there has been an increase in reported incursions. If so, by how many and what biosecurity risk do they present?

Mr W.R. MARMION: I defer to Mr Smith.

[5.30 pm]

Mr S. Smith: The commonwealth takes care of illegal fishing by foreign boats in commonwealth waters; it is only when those vessels reach state waters that we become involved. I am not aware of any incidents in the past

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12 months of foreign vessels coming into state waters without having been intercepted by the commonwealth first.

Mr P.C. TINLEY: Therefore, the answer is probably none.

Mr S. Smith: Correct.

Mr P.C. TINLEY: In the budget line item I referred to previously, there is a near doubling of the spend estimated in 2011–12 and 2012–13. What accounts for that significant jump in spending? Is it all the programs that were outlined?

Mr S. Smith: From the current year?

Mr P.C. TINLEY: Yes.

Mr S. Smith: The funding provided for the current year was in response to our detection of breaches. Some foreign pests had come into the Western Australian state waters and we sought some emergency funding from the government to put measures in place. We have done that; they have been successful. We detected where the pests had come from. The pests, which were Asian green mussels, had come in on Defence Force vessels —

Mr W.R. MARMION: I would keep away from that!

Mr P.C. TINLEY: I think Mr Smith more accurately means the Navy!

Mr S. Smith: Yes, I mean the Navy! I should add that the Navy has cooperated fully with us. We are pleased that that money has been well spent. We have prevented a potential outbreak of Asian green mussels, which would have had a major impact on the Fremantle port and potentially other ports around the state. The money allocated to our department for the next two years is money for additional initiatives that reflect the risk posed not only by the Navy or recreational vessels, but also from the increased activity in the north of the state through mining, oil and gas, for instance, and vessels coming into Western Australia. I think that Ms Brayford has gone through what that money will be allocated to.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: I refer to the cost of services on the income statement on page 187 of the *Budget Statements*. I gather that regulatory fees and fines include the new licence fees for recreational fishers, is that right?

Mr W.R. MARMION: Yes.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: What has been the take-up of recreational fishing licences? Is it as high as the department expected? Why, according to the projected budget figures does the take-up taper off towards 2014? Is the department expecting fewer fishermen out there? Can the minister give some other explanation for that?

Mr W.R. MARMION: Mr Mezzatesta should be able to answer this question.

Mr B. Mezzatesta: The department had originally estimated that about 60 000 recreational fishers would take out boat licences. The number, as of last week, was about 108 000; therefore, there are more people than anticipated taking out those licences. The year 2010–11 will be the first year in which we have a full-year profile of those licences. I think the number will sit around that 100 000 mark and I do not expect it to grow significantly in the out years; I expect revenue to sit at the current level.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: This is a general question. When the licences were brought in, there was much concern about the sustainability pressures on fish stocks. Under the new licences and fishing regulations two dhufish are allowed to be caught per boat. Some recreational fishermen I know say that it is a bit problematic when four fishermen with a licence are on the boat and someone catches two dhuie. What do other fishermen do? Do they turn around and go home? If they catch another dhuie, they have to throw it back. There have been a few issues with those regulations. A report that came out today—I think it may have been a commonwealth report on marine sanctuaries—suggested that we do not have great problems with the sustainability of our fish or any great issues with fish numbers diminishing, as we are led to believe. Is there any possibility that we could see some of these regulations altered as fish stocks maybe rise or will our recreational fishermen have to accept that this is the new way of fishing in the modern era?

Mr W.R. MARMION: I know that the member for South Perth has a particular interest in catching dhufish!

Mr J.E. McGRATH: I have never caught a fish in my life; I like eating them!

Mr W.R. MARMION: Maybe he has a number of friends who catch dhufish. Mr Smith may want to outline how the rules are going, what impact they are having on the fish stocks and what the future might hold for the fishery stocks.

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Mr S. Smith: I will try to cover all the different elements of the member's question. I should begin by elaborating on Mr Mezzatesta's comment that we predicted about 60 000 fishers would take up the recreational fishing licence in the first year. That estimate was based on the experience of New South Wales and Victoria when a similar licence was introduced. Those states found a drop-off in recreational fishing in the first year and then the take-up of licences reflected a return to normal levels within a couple of years. We expected the same trend in Western Australia. It turned out that that was not the case; the take-up rate of the licence here was much higher than that experienced in other states. Perhaps that is because of the way in which it was introduced; that may well have been part of it. We put a lot of emphasis on the fact that all revenue raised from that licence goes back into recreational fishing. The recreational fishing community has said many times to us that people do not mind paying for a licence provided that the funds go back into recreational fishing. That probably explains why we already have 100 000 recreational fishers with licences.

The member correctly mentioned that the new licence was part of a package of things to deal with a decline in some fish stocks. Demersal scalefish stocks were of particular concern. The licence was part of the package put forward by the recreational fishing industry and at that time, we were grappling with the science telling us that we needed to reduce the catch of demersal scalefish in the west coast bioregion by 50 per cent for both the commercial and recreational sector. Since then we have found that the measures introduced have been effective for both the commercial and recreational sector. The catch has fallen by that order of magnitude. It varies slightly between the different demersal scalefish species. The key species, such as dhufish, snapper and baldchin groper, are experiencing a fall in catch to the order of what we wanted. As a result, the measures that were put in place are effective in managing those stocks and we expect the stocks to be rebuilding. That is certainly what the evidence is suggesting. The report that the member mentioned that was in the media today was released by our department, and Dr Gaughan was on the radio this morning talking about the report. I am sure he can elaborate if the member is interested in any detail of the report. Included in the report is the consideration of those particular species. Essentially, the message is that the fisheries management arrangements that have been put in place are effective in achieving what we want—that is, sustainable stocks. It seems that fisheries management tools are effective; therefore, we may not need to use some other tools to manage those stocks. The good thing about that is that, as the stocks are rebuilt, we can look at other measures. Can we relax some of the measures that are in place? That may not be possible depending on what happens with population pressure and advances in technology. The member would recognise that some advances in recreational fishing technology, the use of things such as fish finders and so on, has meant that the efficiency of the recreational sector has increased dramatically. The ownership of boats has also increased substantially. If that sort of trend continues, even if stocks improve, it may not be possible to increase bag limits. As a department we are also trying to look at some other things that we could do so that our role is not just about reducing effort or cutting bag limits or possession limits in the future, even when there is population pressure or technology advances. We have been looking at how we can increase fish stocks and how we can build the productive capacity of the waters of this state. On the commercial side, it is through things such as aquaculture but there are also things that we could be looking at for the recreational sector which could improve the stockholding capacities of waters in Western Australia. We are keen to pursue some of those stock-enhancement initiatives. In fact, the government allocated some funds for that purpose this year. The money that is listed on page 180 under "Royalties for Regions — Fisheries Research and Attraction" is directed at those sorts of initiatives that hopefully will allow us to increase —

[5.40 pm]

Mr J.E. McGRATH: Is that going to go to dams in the country?

Mr S. Smith: No, those initiatives are expected to primarily be directed at the marine environment rather than fresh water. We have already done some things in fresh water and we continue to stock trout, marron and so on but we think there is potential for stock enhancement in the marine environment, which will include improving the stockholding capacity of things such as snapper, potentially dhufish and baldchin groper. That may mean that we can relax the arrangements for possession limits. The key thing is ensuring that recreational fishers can continue to enjoy the experience of recreational fishing and that there is a reasonable prospect of catching things.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I have a further question on the issue of licensing. What increases will be forthcoming for recreational and commercial fishing licences next year?

Mr S. Smith: I will take recreational licences first. We do not have any plan to increase recreational fishing licences, nor do we have any plan to introduce any new licences. There were some changes last year, which we have been bedding down. That saw the introduction of the recreational fishing from boat licence, which is \$30 per annum, aside from those who receive a concession.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: That is about as popular as berley on the carpet.

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The CHAIRMAN: Member, I ask you to direct your comments to the minister, not to the advisers.

Mr S. Smith: We have found that that licence has been very well received by the recreational fishing community. Obviously, people would prefer not to have to pay any money, but the acceptance has been very high and well in excess of the levels expected for Western Australia based on other states. We are pleased with how that introduction has gone. At the same time, the other licence categories for recreational fishing were moved to \$40 per annum last year. The move to \$40 meant some went up and some went down but all of them are now set at \$40, aside from the recreational fishing from boat licence, which is \$30. We do not have any plan to change those rates or introduce new licences.

Mr M. McGOWAN: My question relates to major spending changes on page 180. The budget estimate for the capes marine park is \$815 000. Why is it necessary to spend more money on research on the capes marine park when, as I understand it, that proposal has been around since it was finalised in 2006 with numerous studies and analysis, consultation and so forth? What will the money be spent on and when does the minister expect the capes marine park will come into existence?

Mr W.R. MARMION: I will give an introduction on where the funding is generally going and also take a stab at when the marine park will come about. The funding of \$815 000 per annum from 2011–12 to 2014–15 totals \$3.26 million. It is part of the overall allocation of \$14.26 million to both the Department of Environment and Conservation and the Department of Fisheries to invest in both the establishment and management of the capes marine park and the Dampier Archipelago marine park. Money allocated to the Department of Fisheries will be used for the provision of fisheries compliance services associated with the parks. This funding will be used to provide for two additional FTEs and the construction of a new vessel, which will be used as a compliance platform for the Department of Fisheries and the Department of Environment and Conservation. Hopefully the capes marine park will be finalised before the end of this year.

Mr M. McGOWAN: How much of that money will be spent on further studies and analysis?

Mr W.R. MARMION: I will see if Mr Smith has that breakdown.

Mr S. Smith: The money allocated to the Department of Fisheries is primarily, if not all—I will seek clarification in a moment—for compliance purposes. It will fund our fisheries officers to monitor compliance with the arrangements for the marine parks. That is the key function that we have in this. The Department of Environment and Conservation is responsible for the establishment of the marine parks. It will be doing most of the research. We also see some merit in conducting research into the impact of the marine park on fish stocks and spawning, so we would like to ensure that suitable research is covered in the funding for those activities. I will just check with Mr Mezzatesta to see whether he has a breakdown but I know that the vast majority is going to the compliance activities because we are responsible for fisheries compliance within the marine park.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Does the minister have the concurrence of the Minister for Mines and Petroleum and the Minister for Fisheries for the creation of these two marine parks?

Mr W.R. MARMION: I am working with the Minister for Mines and Petroleum on finalising the detail around the marine park.

Mr I.M. BRITZA: I refer to the third dot point under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency” on page 181 of the *Budget Statements*. It refers to the sustainability pressures in fisheries, including the west coast rock lobster fishery. Can the minister explain how the introduction of the quota system, particularly this season, has influenced the sustainability and the economics in this department?

Mr W.R. MARMION: I thank the member for the question. As everyone knows, the rock lobster industry is really important to the economy of Western Australia. The transition to a full quota system commenced this season, with each fisher being allocated an individual catch limit. Aside from the obvious sustainability benefits associated with being able to manage the catch in the fishery to a target level, as a result of the new quota arrangements being there for the first time, fishers do not need to compete with each other to take the available catch. They have the flexibility to optimise their economic return by choosing when to fish and how much to catch. Importantly, the changes have been received positively by the industry, which is now taking advantage of the increased flexibility to optimise economic returns. I am advised by the minister that in this regard unit values in the fishery, a key indicator of the value of the industry, have more than doubled since the Minister for Fisheries announced his decision to transition this fishery to quota management. I also understand that the average beach price achieved for rock lobster this season is significantly higher than those achieved last season. In terms of what is ahead, the Minister for Fisheries has recently agreed to further increase the flexibility provided under the new arrangements by removing weekend fishing quotas in the later part of this season, and the minister is currently consulting with industry with regard to returning the fishery to a full quota system next

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season. Mr Smith might like to elaborate further about the prosperity of the current rock lobster industry and its prospects for the future.

[5.50 pm]

Mr I.M. BRITZA: I have a further question before Mr Smith answers. When I first came into this place, I had to go down to Fremantle and make a speech. At that time I knew nothing about the fishery, but my speech had a lot to do with the puerulus count. I wonder if in the answer Mr Smith could give a forecast on how that puerulus count is going.

Mr W.R. MARMION: I will be interested in the answer.

The CHAIRMAN: As will I, but I quickly remind members that we have only 10 minutes left. I did not read out the Chairman's statement, but it refers to keeping questions and answers short so that we can get through as much as possible.

Mr W.R. MARMION: Perhaps if Mr Smith can link the fish stock and the puerulus, it might be useful knowledge.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: I would like to put a further question before he answers.

The CHAIRMAN: Let us get on with it.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: The minister referred to increased flexibility for lobster fishermen, and we have a quota system that is working well, which is great. How can there be increased flexibility when lobster fishermen are not allowed to fish on Friday, Saturday or Sunday? I have raised this with the minister, and I did read in the newspaper that this might be addressed.

Mr W.R. MARMION: I mentioned that in my answer. The minister flagged that at the end of the season he is looking at relaxing that condition. Mr Smith might be able to answer some of the other questions that have been raised.

Mr S. Smith: The puerulus count is one of the key issues, if not the most important one, for the rock lobster fishery. By way of background, the puerulus is the baby rock lobster and we record the level of settlement of those baby rock lobster. That is an indicator for the total catch in three to four years. We have been doing it for over 40 years and we know that it is over 95 per cent accurate as a measure of what the catch will be. Several years ago it was particularly alarming for us that the settlement of those puerulus crashed down to levels which had not been experienced previously. That is why, when we knew there was going to be a problem, the minister had to take action to reduce the catch dramatically so that some of the existing stock would be saved for future years and also to protect the breeding stock. We had two years of the lowest settlement of puerulus on record leading up to the current season. The results for the current season have shown an improvement. They are still low by historical standards; nonetheless, they are showing improvement and that is during a season when the environmental conditions are not conducive to good settlement of puerulus. We are hopeful but not yet satisfied that we are through the worst of it. We are optimistic that we are heading in the right direction. Certainly, the advice we received is that if environmental factors were behind the low puerulus count, we should see a gradual improvement. That is what we are seeing now. That has been confirmed by some independent studies. That fishery has Marine Stewardship Council certification, which is an international process by which we are audited each year. They have done an audit in the past 12 months and have confirmed that the measures in place are appropriate and the fishery is heading in the right direction. We are pleased with where things are going.

To answer the other question relating to when the fishers can and cannot fish, there was a restriction on fishing on weekends. The government consulted with fishers at the start of the season over whether they would prefer to see that ban on fishing on Saturdays and Sundays removed. The majority view was that there should be a ban on weekends this season, for lifestyle reasons particularly. That view has changed as the season has gone on. When we consulted with them again in recent weeks, they supported a shift so that they would be allowed to fish on weekends for the remainder of the season. So, during the winter period, bearing in mind they have only a few months left to catch their quota and it is the first time they have fished in this way in that fishery, it will give them more flexibility to get out and fish. From our perspective, we are also keen to see increased flexibility with fishers being allowed to fish on weekends because during winter there can be a safety issue and the weather conditions can make fishing more treacherous, so we would like them to have the option of fishing on any of seven days a week, if they so choose.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: I refer to page 180 under the heading, "Major spending changes" and the line item is "Kimberley Science and Conservation Strategy — Establishment and Management of Eighty Mile Beach". Where are the officers involved in the establishment of Eighty Mile Beach based and how many are there? How many commercial licences will be affected and what has been put in place to address this? What effect is

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expected to be felt by the recreation sector, and why has Eighty Mile Beach been included, considering everybody regards it as part of the Pilbara anyway?

Mr W.R. MARMION: I will ask Mr Mezzatesta to provide this information.

Mr B. Mezzatesta: I can answer some of those questions but not all of them necessarily. The compliance services that would be required for the Eighty Mile Beach marine park will be based out of Broome, and we have two officers allocated within that budget.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: I have a general question that can go under the Kimberley science and conservation item, or whatever, but it is about aquaculture. I recently went to Taiwan, where there is a big aquaculture industry. We have a great opportunity here to have a similar type of industry. How much progress are we making in the aquaculture industry?

Mr W.R. MARMION: I thank the member for the question. I am advised that there are a number of very successful operations up and running at the moment, and I can point to four that are of particular interest to me. Aurora Algae Pty Ltd, formerly Aurora Biofuels Pty Ltd, holds an aquaculture licence for the culture of several species of marine microalgae at a site near Karratha—the member for North West is well aware of where it is. The three products produced from the algae are biodiesel fuel, protein rich biomass and omega-3 fatty acids. One of the key benefits of this project is the utilisation of carbon dioxide in the growth of the marine algae, which obviously is a carbon offset. I will rapidly finish up. Another aquaculture company is Marine Produce Australia, which cultures barramundi in sea cages at the aquaculture site at Cone Bay, north of Derby. Excluding algae and pearls, Marine Produce Australia is the largest aquaculture producer in Western Australia. There are two other companies that I do not have time to go through, but Cognis operates a major aquaculture facility at Hutt Lagoon.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: Can we have that as supplementary information?

Mr W.R. MARMION: The information about Hutt Lagoon?

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: Yes, minister; it is all relevant.

Mr W.R. MARMION: The whole lot?

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: Yes.

Mr W.R. MARMION: There are also two abalone farms down in the south.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you, members. That is the end of that answer because we are out of time and I have to deal with this now.

The appropriation was recommended.

Meeting suspended from 6.00 to 7.00 pm