

**Division 15: Primary Industries and Regional Development — Services 6 and 7, Fisheries, \$157 434 000 —**

Ms R.S. Stephens, Chair.

Mr D.T. Punch, Minister for Fisheries.

Mr R. Addis, Director General.

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

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

Ms A. Taylor, Chief Financial Officer.

Mr B. Mezzatesta, Executive Director, Operations and Compliance.

Mr R. Fletcher, Executive Director, Fisheries and Agriculture Resource Management.

Mr T. Palmer, Chief of Staff, Minister for Fisheries.

Mr A. Skinner, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

**The CHAIR:** This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. It is the intention of the chair 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 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. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

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. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what 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 principal clerk by close of business Friday, 1 October 2021. 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 through the online questions system.

Member for Moore.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to page 232 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and there are two headings that I would like to discuss. Under works in progress, "Other Works in Progress", is the Geraldton marine finfish nursery facility, which has an estimated cost of \$6 141 000 and no money dedicated to it. Under new works, "COVID-19 Response", is the Geraldton finfish nursery, which has a cost of \$2 657 000 with \$1.5 million to be expended this year. Can the minister explain whether two finfish nurseries will be constructed in Geraldton?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** No; one finfish nursery will be constructed in Geraldton. It is currently going through the planning process as a consequence of some additional engineering works that were required for it. That is part of our commitment, generally, to aquaculture and to the growing of the aquaculture industry in this state.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Can the minister explain why it appears in both "Works in Progress" and "New Works"?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I defer to the deputy director general, Heather. There will be some works that have happened and some works still in progress.

**Ms H. Brayford:** Thank you, minister. The amount under works in progress reflects the funding that was provided originally for the nursery, which was \$7 million, and some work has been committed to the design and preparation for that. The new works is part of the COVID response additional contribution for the preparation of the nursery.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Is the finfish nursery then expected to cost the combined total of those two line items—in other words, \$8 million to \$9 million?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Yes. That is the current budget that is allocated to it. But, as I have indicated previously, some additional engineering design works may require additional funding to be provided. Once we understand the quantum of that, we will have another look at what is required.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Is it the intention for the government to build that in-house? I know that the minister has gone to market and not accepted the tenders. The figures that were in the newspaper were less than the combined figure here, so I am wondering why those tenders were not accepted and why the minister is now looking at kicking off this process again from scratch.

[5.10 pm]

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I will ask the deputy director general to make a response on that matter.

**Extract from Hansard**

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A — Tuesday, 21 September 2021]

p55b-63a

Chair; Mr Shane Love; Mr Donald Punch; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Caitlin Collins

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**Ms H. Brayford:** The original tenders for the project were not considered to be value for money so we decided to look at an alternative approach to delivering it. The tenders that were received—I think there were two—were not considered to represent value for money. They exceeded the estimate for the works at the time.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Were they in excess of the figure that is in the budget at the moment or were they less than that figure?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I think it is reasonable to say that the project is not quite the same project. There are issues associated with the engineering, and water delivery and circulation, which have been factored in. That might well require additional funds, as I have indicated.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Can the minister confirm why the delays have taken place? What were the significant reasons that the project has been delayed?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** As I have indicated previously, we have had a couple of issues. Firstly, we have had a pandemic. Secondly, engineering issues have been identified. Thirdly, there have been issues within the finfish industry itself. As the member knows, Huon Aquaculture has been going through an issue associated with possible acquisition by a third party. It has been working through that, so it is yet to commit to a venture in Geraldton. As a government, we are still committed to that project. When we have a final design, we will consider the business case associated with that. As part of that business case, there will be an examination of the potential take-up of the finfish that come out of that nursery.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Given that there have been these problems with Huon, as the minister just outlined, does the minister still have confidence that this project will be delivered in Geraldton?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** We are still proceeding with the project, so I certainly have confidence in the project. It is not just a matter of Huon. It is a matter of engineering issues, which were unidentified at the time. We are now addressing them through proper business planning. The pandemic has intervened as well. A number of factors have delayed this project.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** It seems strange to be saying that the pandemic has interfered with the project when that has not been reported anywhere that I recall. There have been issues, which have been reported, around the withdrawal of commercial interests et cetera but I have not heard of any delays caused by the pandemic. In fact, tenders were received that the government did not accept.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** It would be difficult not to imagine that the pandemic has had an impact right across all projects. It certainly would have had an impact on Huon's forward planning. Yes, I think the pandemic has had an impact on the rollout of this project. The project requires a sound plan for building the nursery and it requires an agreement with an off-take operator who will grow out the fish.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Has the minister had discussions with any other groups about establishing yellowtail kingfish in the area?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** In the Geraldton area?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Yes.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The director general confirms there have been no new inquiries. We had Ms Starling's operation in the Geraldton area in the past. She suspended those operations but we are confident that there is an aquaculture industry to be had in that area and that is why we remain committed to the project.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I do not think that actually getting rid of all the fish is suspending the operation. Have there been any other approaches to establish this industry anywhere else in Western Australia?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Is that an ocean industry or an on-land industry?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** An ocean industry.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** No.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 222 and marine park compensation about two-thirds of the way down. Can the minister outline what this expenditure relates to, given that there is no budget allocation for this year? What did that relate to in the previous year?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The department administers the Fishing and Related Industries Compensation (Marine Reserves) Act, known as FRICMA. Under that act, it is necessary to compensate commercial fishers who apply for compensation who suffer a loss in the market value of their licences as a result of the marine parks being closed for commercial fishing. The potential need for government to fund compensation is a consideration when decisions around marine parks are made. In 2020–21, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development was resolving compensation claims arising from the implementation of the Ngari Capes Marine Park. The abalone managed fishery was the most significantly impacted, with other fisheries, such as marine aquarium, specimen shell, west coast demersal scalefish, south coast demersal scale longline and demersal gillnet impacted to a lesser extent. The Ngari Capes Marine Park requires \$2 million and funds of \$375 000 were approved in 2019–20 and 2020–21. The

remaining \$1.25 million was approved in 2021–22 following receipt of applications and value of compensation reliably assessed by DPIRD on a fishery-by-fishery basis.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** My understanding of the Ngari Capes Marine Park is that compensation has not been finalised, given that fishing exclusions came into effect in April 2019. Is the minister refuting that, saying that everything has been finalised?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** No, I am not refuting that at all. We certainly know that it has taken longer than expected and there has been disagreement on valuations for some fisheries. Those matters were referred to the State Administrative Tribunal, so it has been going through that process.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** There do not appear to be any line items in the current year or the out years for that compensation. How does the minister account for further negotiation on the Ngari Capes Marine Park?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** We have to identify what the value of the compensation will be. Normally, that matter would be addressed during the midyear review process. The important part is getting to an agreed position on the compensation that is payable.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Would it not be appropriate to have some sort of line item in readiness for a projection, I assume, for that marine park and perhaps others as well?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I will defer to the deputy director general but the normal practice is for an adjustment to be made once a compensation is known and there is uncertainty about what the level of compensation will be based on the assessments that have come forward and the resolution process that is before SAT. I will ask the deputy director general to put in additional information.

**Ms H. Brayford:** That is largely correct. Under the compensation act, a separate appropriation is required to deal with the compensation once the marine park zoning scheme is enacted and the fisheries closures are in place. We can then determine eligible and ineligible applicants pursuant to the act. This item reflects the best available information for the Ngari Capes Marine Park. As new marine parks come onstream with their zoning schemes and fisheries closures, a separate appropriation is sought to address the compensation, as the minister said.

[5.20 pm]

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I thank the minister for that explanation. My next question flows on from that. What level of confidence does the minister have in the prospective negotiations with Esperance-based fishers who will be potentially impacted by the proposed south coast marine park?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** It is far too early to comment on the issue of compensation when we are yet to determine what the impact will be. We certainly recognise that there are difficulties with the length of time it takes to arrive at an evaluation of the loss and a settlement agreement under the Fishing and Related Industries Compensation (Marine Reserves) Act. We will look at that closely once we know what the impacts will be. At this stage, we are still in the consultation phase for the creation of the marine park.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Does the minister have an understanding of the amount of fear and concern in the whole Esperance community about the Recherche Archipelago? We have a real lack of clarity on what the fishing zone will be. I have had several different groups come into my office at different times. Does the minister have an understanding of the amount of fear that they hold about the future of their industry, which is in jeopardy because of something over which they have no control?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Change always generates some anxiety and uncertainty. I met with a group of fishers on the south coast. We had a very open conversation about the issue and their concerns about the process. The director general and the director general of the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions have also been to Esperance and met with stakeholder groups, and there will be an ongoing process of engagement with fishers. The Western Australian Fishing Industry Council has also been involved in that consultation. I expect that there will be a solid consultation process with fishers and that we will do our very best to arrive at an outcome that is suitable for the marine park and for the fishers. But it is the change process, and we have to work through that.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Does the minister have a time frame for the consultation period? When does he foresee it will wrap up, or finalise, on that area?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** DBCA has issued a consultation framework that outlines how the consultation process will take place. It will lead to a draft, and the director general advises me that that will be probably within 12 months.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I may come back to that but I will leave it there for the moment. I wanted to express my concerns and the concerns of my constituents. My final question relates to a regional economic development grant to the fishing industry on the south coast. It seems to be not a conflict but concerning that on the one hand the industry is being helped out, but on the other hand some of its fishing zones may be closed down. I am rather concerned about that from the perspective of the sardine industry and the like.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I will take that as a statement more than a question. RED grants are under Minister MacTiernan's portfolio, not mine. As a government we are committed to diversifying and adding value to every possible industry. I am sure that Minister MacTiernan has taken that into account in relation to the support she has provided to the fishing industry. I am certainly keen to see how we can value-add to the industry, and as a government that is certainly our intent.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to page 225 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the outcomes and key effectiveness indicators. The second last line item "Proportion of fish stocks identified as not being at risk or vulnerable through exploitation" has a target of 95 per cent. The last line item "Percentage of commercial and recreational fisheries where acceptable catches (or effort levels) are achieved" has a target level of 90 per cent. Why was a level of 90 per cent chosen as being acceptable? Surely, a target should aspire to achieve an acceptable level for the complete catch. Also, in regard to stocks at risk due to overexploitation, can the minister confirm that the Shark Bay pink snapper stocks are in a very terrible situation and outline the key measures the department is undertaking to arrest that situation?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I am advised that the 90 per cent catch rate is in response to the impacts of climate change because it will inject a level of uncertainty on how the stock will roll out into the future. I will ask Mr Rick Fletcher to respond to the question about pink snapper because he will have the scientific detail behind that.

**Mr R. Fletcher:** Can I clarify whether we are talking about the oceanic pink snapper stock or those inside Shark Bay itself, because they are quite separate stocks?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I understand the inside stocks are at risk, but I could be wrong.

**Mr R. Fletcher:** There is currently a recovery plan in place for the oceanic stock. It has been in place for some time. The recovery plan for that particular stock involves both reductions in the total allowable catch for the commercial sector and restrictions on where and when they can catch in terms of the spawning aggregations that occur. Areas are closed during that period. That is in terms of the oceanic stock. There are a number of stocks within Shark Bay. At least three or four separate snapper stocks within Shark Bay itself have been subject to various recovery plans over the last 20 or so years. At this point, we are not looking at any specific management arrangements for those stocks apart from what is in place now, but we certainly do monitor what is going on in each of those stocks and review it if necessary.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to paragraph 6 on page 223 and the claim that the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development is world leading in research and development and the science of fisheries. What statistics does the minister have to support the notion that Western Australia is a world leader in fisheries research and development and science, and on what scientific outcomes does he base the claim?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** It is an outstanding group of researchers based in Hillarys; certainly, that I have experienced, and I am sure Mr Fletcher would agree! We have achieved fantastic outcomes in marine stewardship. I think 98 per cent of our fishery is regarded as sustainable. The fisheries themselves are very well regulated. We have had excellent feedback on that and I think some independent verification. I will ask the director general to explain that. My impression of the research capability in the department is that it is absolutely outstanding. It has been doing some outstanding work in understanding both fish management and the particular species we have on the west coast. I will defer to the deputy director general.

[5.30 pm]

**Ms H. Brayford:** I would like to confirm two points for the minister. Firstly, the KPI shows that 98 per cent of our fishing stock is not at risk of fishing. That is a very good result and it is a result that has been fairly consistent over the years. We work very hard at maintaining that long-term sustainability. Secondly, the Marine Stewardship Council is the independent world-leading third-party standard that fisheries sustainability is assessed against. We have 10 fisheries that are currently certified. We had the world's first certified fishery, the rock lobster fishery in 2000, and that covers the vast majority of the value of our commercial fisheries. Recently, the Exmouth Gulf prawn and Shark Bay prawn fisheries were recertified without condition, which means there was no requirement for additional work for the next certification. That, in itself, is a remarkable outcome and bodes well for the science and the fisheries management that we do and also for the support of industry as well, because we are very much partnered with the industry in the Marine Stewardship Council space. That is a good record and we lead the world in that program.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I would add that it is about not only the research capabilities, but also the partnerships that the department has built with the commercial and recreational sectors. The feedback that I get from both about the department's research capability is that it is really outstanding.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** With the world-leading research capabilities —

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Do I detect a note of sarcasm, member?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** No, it is here in black and white at the sixth dot point.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I would not believe it of the member anyway.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I am just reading it.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The member is celebrating the world-leading research!

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Further to the point made by the member for Moore about the number of, and outcomes for, snapper in the Westport project, can the minister tell me how many FTEs are based at that fishery? Does the minister think that figure will stay constant or will it ramp up as the Westport project comes closer to being?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Is the member referring to the FTE in the research component of the Westport project, as opposed to the fishery?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Yes; that is right.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Four FTEs are dedicated to that project.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Does the minister believe that number will be maintained over the next four or five years as the project progresses?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** That number of FTE will be maintained, but if there is a requirement to ramp it up, the agency will discuss that with me.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** There is a lot of concern about the snapper breeding grounds in that area. With the world-leading research, is the minister confident that that breeding ground will not be disturbed by the Westport project?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I am very confident in the capability of the people involved in doing the research and their understanding of what the outcomes for that fishery will be.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Is that research being done to understand the impacts of the development of the port?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Yes. It is about understanding the ecology of the resource, and that is part of the key input into the environmental review process. The environmental approvals will require an understanding of that ecology, and this project is around the science behind understanding that.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Does the minister think that within four or five years the department will have completed an understanding of all the impacts of the development of Westport on the fishing stocks in Cockburn Sound? Is that what the minister is saying?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** No, I am saying that we have a very good scientific project that is looking at researching and understanding the ecology, and that will form a key input into the environmental approvals process for that project. It is the job of the environmental regulator to consider that information.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I turn to page 230 of budget paper No 1. Under the heading “Agricultural and Fisheries Natural Resource Management”, it states —

This service supports the sustainable management of the natural resources that underpin Western Australia’s primary industries.

In regard to that, I ask about the rules that were brought in for recreational fishers on, I think, 1 July. How closely do the rules that were brought in align with the consultations that were had with organisations such as Recfishwest especially, and what discrepancies, if any, are there between what Recfishwest suggested and what the government put in place?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Sorry; can the member repeat the latter part of the question?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The department brought in the new rules on 1 July. Consultation took place, I believe, with organisations such as Recfishwest in drawing up the new rules. I am wondering how closely the new rules align to the results of that consultation and whether there might be some discrepancies between the views that Recfishwest put forward and the rules that were ultimately adopted.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I do not have any detail about any discrepancies between the final rules and Recfishwest’s view. It was very strong on promoting those changes in the discussions I had with Dr Rowland from Recfishwest, who was very supportive of the changes, and there was a recognition that there is a sustainability issue for that fishery. The recreational fishers have an interest in maintaining the sustainability of the stock into the future, so my understanding is that there was agreement without discrepancy, but there may be something minor that I am not aware of.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** My understanding is that there were quite a few matters that were not followed, and I wonder why that was, but the minister is denying that there was any discrepancy between —

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I am not denying it; I am just saying that I am not aware of any, and Recfishwest certainly has not raised any directly with me.

**Extract from Hansard**

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A — Tuesday, 21 September 2021]

p55b-63a

Chair; Mr Shane Love; Mr Donald Punch; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Caitlin Collins

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**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Okay. Certainly, I have had some issues raised with me by members of Recfishwest, but I do not know whether that is the view of the entire organisation.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Recfishwest has an awful lot of members and I am sure that there is a diversity of views within that organisation.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I have a couple of questions that I would like to ask about what has been announced in the budget for recreational fishing. Is all the funding that is derived from the recreational fishing licences attributed to the recreational fishing account and spent on services relating to recreational fishing? How is that verified and what checks and balances are there to see that that is the case?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Can the member relate that to a line item?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** If the minister wishes. I refer to the net appropriation determination and the first item on page 240 under the heading “Regulatory Fees”, which are the fishing licences. Where does that money go? Does it all go to the recreational fishing account, and is it all spent on services relating to recreational fishing?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I will ask the director general to comment on that.

**Ms H. Brayford:** Maybe the deputy director general can take that one!

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Sorry—the deputy director general. I promoted you!

[5.40 pm]

**Ms H. Brayford:** All the receipts from recreational fishing licence fees are provided to the recreational fishing account, which is the trust account. Under the current funding arrangements, 15 per cent of those receipts are provided to Recfishwest to support it in its representational role; 25 per cent, which is approximately \$2 million per annum, is provided to the recreational fishing initiatives fund, which provides for community-based fishing programs; and the remainder is used for the purposes of recreational fisheries management, compliance and research.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Did the deputy director general say that some of it is used for research into recreational fishing?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Deputy director general.

**Ms H. Brayford:** It will be used for the purposes of recreational fisheries management.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** If research were required to ensure a better use of the existing fish resource—for instance, recreational fishers being able to avoid shark bites up north—would that be something that the department would fund itself as a matter of research, or would it come out of the licence fees to which recreational fishers have contributed?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Deputy director general.

**Ms H. Brayford:** It could be used for that, but we would probably also seek to leverage funding through external research organisations, potentially—so, through the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation as well. That is a source of funds, but also external funds through research providers.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Now that we are talking about that issue, is any research being planned to ameliorate that problem of lots of fish being taken just before they get pulled into the boat, which I would have thought is having a dramatic impact on the stocks of fish?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** We clearly recognise the impact of shark depredation; it has come to me on quite a few occasions. There can be nothing more frustrating for a fisher than to see a fish come up, and suddenly they have half a fish. It is a serious issue, and the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development has been undertaking a number of projects designed to better understand and address shark depredation. There has been a world-first study, which is part of that quality research that I mentioned earlier, that independently tested the efficacy of three different shark deterrent devices. Those results will be finalised shortly, but in case there is some new information, I will ask the deputy director general to brief you.

**Ms H. Brayford:** Thank you, minister. In terms of the communication, which I think was the question, there has been some communication and extension of those results at regional workshops. A research report is being prepared as we speak, which will be made available to the public, and also a more technical fisheries research report, which often finds its way into a scientific journal. We are also looking at doing signage at key boat ramps in the north west with some high-level messaging about how to reduce depredation or bite-offs, and an ongoing social media campaign. We are looking to extend those results into the community to assist fishers in mitigating the impacts of depredation.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** It is a serious issue, member, and we are certainly keen to find a way forward for fishers to reduce the impact of shark depredation.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I was talking about this only yesterday with someone who has just come back from up north. They said that at any given time, six or seven sharks were circling around the boat. It is now having a massive impact

on the recreational fishing industry, and probably the tourism industry, to some extent. What urgency is the minister giving to finding remedies that might be able to ameliorate this problem?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I am very keen to see some options for fishers that can reduce the risk of bite-offs. I am not sure whether any material has been published yet. I will defer to the deputy director general. I think we are not far away from publishing material.

**Ms H. Brayford:** We are aiming to publish material in mid-October, minister, but, as I said, we have done some regional workshops with the community.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 225 and the sixth point, “Agricultural and Fisheries Biosecurity and Integrity”. Can the minister explain the \$12 million reduction in funding from 2020–21 to 2021–22?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I will ask the director general to respond to that question for the member.

**Mr R. Addis:** Thank you, minister. In 2020–21, and, actually, also 2019–20, we had quite significant increased expenditure, largely due to the Queensland fruit fly response in Nedlands and Dalkeith. That was largely wrapped up by December last year or January this year, so that is why there is a reasonably substantial drop-off. That was about \$12 million last financial year. This year, we also got an increase in funding into biosecurity. There was a recent budget announcement to increase our emergency response capability and our general standing surveillance capability, so a couple of offsets, but the net impact is that last year was \$5 million or \$6 million higher than this year and beyond.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I notice in the annual report that DPIRD failed to meet the key performance indicator for biosecurity. What was the shortfall against the target for fisheries, and what does DPIRD intend to do to increase the outcomes of its KPI for biosecurity?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The advice I am receiving is that that is really accounted for by agricultural matters. I will ask the director general to comment on that.

**Mr R. Addis:** Thank you, minister. Biosecurity incidents can happen across multiple years—an incident can occur or start in one year and not be resolved until future years—so we do have ups and downs with that particular KPI. In this case, it is dominated by agriculture biosecurity incursions, and we have had lots of those in the last few years, which is why we are not doing as well as we would like with that KPI. I am not aware that there have been any fisheries incursions in that period.

**The CHAIR:** Through the minister.

**Ms H. Brayford:** There are no declared aquatic responses.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to page 223, the significant issues impacting the agency, and the last paragraph, which is about the implementation of legislative programs in aquatic resources management and other areas. I refer to the Aquatic Resources Management Amendment Bill, which was recently passed by Parliament. This legislation replaces the Fish Resources Management Act and the Pearling Act. As one of the objectives of the new legislation is to have regard to economic, social and other benefits that are likely to vary over time, what is the process for reallocation of resources from one sector to another? We know that sometimes there is competition, if you like, between professional and recreational fishers in an area. I have had concerns expressed to me by professional fishers that there is not enough knowledge of the actual take of recreational fishers, and by recreational fishers that there is not an acceptance by the department of the value of recreational fishing to the Western Australian economy, which is quite substantial. How does the minister propose to manage that conflict going forward and what framework is he going to employ to judge the most desirable social and economic outcomes between two separate sectors operating in the same fishery?

[5.50 pm]

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I remember that the member’s colleague in the upper house Hon Dr Steve Thomas extended a great deal of sympathy to the Minister for Fisheries during the second reading debate on the legislation because of the challenges of getting the balance right with the various interests within fishing, whether it be commercial and recreational, or even within the commercial sector or the recreational sector. It is a challenge but it is not an insurmountable one. I think the act is a very good one to position us for the future, particularly as we adjust to the impact of the changing climate on sustainability. I will ask the deputy director general to brief the member on the technical implementation of the legislation, because I think a lot of what the member is asking goes to how we will transition to the new act and how we will move the various fishing sectors across through the strategies.

**Ms H. Brayford:** There are some clear pathways for transitioning to the new legislation, the main one being the minister declaring a managed aquatic resource. Once the minister declares a managed aquatic resource, we then develop an aquatic resource management strategy. An important part of that strategy, among other things, is that it sets objectives for management, and that goes to the member’s question about social and economic matters. That is an explicit opportunity for the community and stakeholders to look at that resource and what values they place on that resource. That is where those objectives come into play. We are developing for the minister’s consideration a set

of policies and principles around allocation. As the minister said, it is a very complex issue in the fisheries world. Subject to the minister's views, we will seek direct stakeholder feedback on that, with the aim of establishing a set of principles that the stakeholders can agree to and that then allow us to operate through a more certain framework when we start to consider allocation questions and the setting of objectives.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Just to add to that, the importance of engagement with stakeholders and setting up principles in consultation with stakeholders that decisions can then be made against is a really important part of what has been past practice within fisheries and what will guide the rollout of the new act.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Will we see some prescription around the consultations? What factors will need to be taken into account? Will there be a genuine attempt to involve all parties in this, because some people, from both sides of the fence, have concerns that they do not get listened to?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I will ask the deputy director general to comment.

**Ms H. Brayford:** One of the key features of the legislation is that it takes a resource-based approach. Unlike our current legislation, which is often based on sectors or fisheries, under the new legislation, a resource-level approach must be taken. For example, with the abalone resource, the commercial abalone resource or the recreational abalone resource is not specifically managed. When the strategy is being established, it needs to be based on the resource, which means that all the stakeholders that have an interest in that resource need to be engaged and worked with. It is not until the overarching strategy is developed that the move is made to individual sector use plans, which then pick up the rules that, for example, the rec sector or the commercial sector needs to abide by to meet the overarching strategy. By the nature of the legislation, it requires very close liaison with stakeholders and, in fact, sets out a range of steps that need to be taken when drafting the aquatic resource management strategy for a particular declared resource.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I can roll in my question while the member is talking about aquaculture and fisheries natural resource management, because on page 230, it outlines a scenario in which the FTEs in this area will drop from 360 in the 2020–21 budget to 285. Why is there a fall in FTEs and what do we foresee the future FTE will be?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I thank the member for the question. I will ask the chief financial officer to respond.

**Ms A. Taylor:** When we calculate the FTEs for these services, we do not use actual FTE numbers of people; we calculate it based on our salary cap. In this particular service, the salary cap or the salary expense is dropping by about \$2 million between the 2020–21 estimated actual and the 2021–22 budget. That has been mainly due to the fact that we do not budget for overtime. A considerable amount of overtime and some redundancy payments were paid in 2020–21, so those reductions basically have resulted in the reduction of 18 FTEs. In the average FTEs for the service, we also do an allocation of corporate FTEs across the service that is based purely on the percentage share of the total cost of service for this service against the full and the total cost of service for the department. Because the total cost of service is reducing over the forward estimates, the allocation of corporate FTEs also drops against this service.

**Ms C.M. COLLINS:** I refer to page 232 and the line item for the Hillarys facilities upgrade. Can the minister please explain to us what the upgrades entail and how they might benefit the aquaculture industry in Western Australia?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I would be delighted, member. This again points to the research capability of the agency and its world-class research capacity. Would the member like me to keep going? The McGowan government has invested \$500 000 to boost the capacity of the Hillarys research centre in the member's electorate to expand the state's shellfish research capability. Shellfish, of course, is a very important part of our fishing resource. The funding will upgrade the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development's Hillarys research facility, including a new seawater bore, an expanded laboratory and nursery facilities to undertake research into seed production of multiple shellfish species such as tropical rock oysters, scallops, clams and abalone. I am sure that the restaurant industry will be delighted with that growth. Biosecure facilities will also be added to enable tropical shellfish breeding stock to be sourced from the wild and kept separately to minimise disease risk, while also providing ideal reproduction and breeding conditions. It will provide a sound platform for DPIRD's shellfish research and development team to develop purpose-built pilot-scale hatchery facilities to produce selected seed, providing industry with the opportunity to develop a new shellfish aquaculture industry in the regions. As the member will know, our government has a very strong commitment to the development of aquaculture as a new industry and a new value-adding opportunity for the fisheries sector. It will unlock a significant number of jobs. Hillarys researchers will work closely with the Albany shellfish hatchery to develop technology that provides WA's shellfish producers with a competitive advantage and, I might say, is world leading.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I refer to page 237 and the Surf Life Saving WA shark hazard mitigation services. There is an allocation of \$4 million this year and roughly \$4 million in the forward estimates each year. Given that large amount of money, will the minister seek to ensure that the patrols extend to the abalone season, during which a significant



**Extract from Hansard**

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Chair; Mr Shane Love; Mr Donald Punch; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Caitlin Collins

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number of people participate for only a few hours, to ensure that those 17 000 or so people who pay licences are kept safe while they are catching abalone?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** There is a separate agreement for providing support for abalone fishers during that time through the surf lifesaving association. It is a beach patrol.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I refer to page 232 and the Albany shellfish hatchery, which is listed on the top line. I refer to the government's plans to expand the Albany shellfish hatchery. Can the minister please confirm whether the increase in production in shellfish spat is aligned with the carrying capacity of the Oyster Harbour area?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The Albany hatchery is not exclusively for aquaculture in the Albany area; it provides spat throughout Western Australia, including in the Abrolhos and some of the northern areas. It is a statewide production facility, not an Albany production facility.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Is the minister proposing to release the studies undertaken by the state government in relation to the Oyster Harbour area, given that the report was taken down from the DPIRD website following its initial release?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** It will be released. It has been updated and revised and will be released in due course.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** So, will the minister be publicly releasing it?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Yes.

**The appropriation was recommended.**

*Meeting suspended from 6.00 to 7.00 pm*