

Division 58: Parks and Wildlife, \$200 199 000 —

Ms L.L. Baker, Chairman.

Mr A.P. Jacob, Minister for Environment.

Mr J.R. Sharp, Director General.

Dr M. Byrne, Director, Science and Conservation Division.

Mr P.D. Dans, Director, Regional and Fire Management Services.

Dr J. Byrne, Director, Corporate Services.

The CHAIRMAN: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard staff. The daily proof *Hansard* will be published at 9.00 am tomorrow.

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. It will greatly assist Hansard if members can give these details in preface to their question.

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 committee clerk by Friday, 30 May 2014. 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.

I now ask the minister to introduce his advisers to the committee.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIRMAN: Member for Gosnells.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I refer to the wildlife management service area on page 665. I note the dramatic drop in staffing numbers from 800 to 780. Can the minister detail which programs will be lost because of that reduction in staff numbers?

Mr A.P. JACOB: I will go to the director general in a second to give a little more detail. That is a part of our voluntary separation scheme, and those numbers certainly form a part of that reduction. That has been well targeted, particularly towards back-office functions; it does not affect front-line delivery. Front-line operations will continue, albeit there have been some voluntary separations and they are reflected on page 665. With Madam Chair's indulgence, Mr Sharp would like to provide more detail.

Mr J.R. Sharp: In relation to the voluntary severance scheme, 45 positions were accepted. They ranged across the agency. There are currently 1 590 staff. That represents a proportion across the wildlife management area, which covers science and nature conservation. It was not allocated specifically in any program area but was across the —

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Sorry, I am having trouble hearing.

Mr J.R. Sharp: It was proportionate across the range of activities undertaken within science and conservation. It was not in any specific program area or specific activity.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: The department has lost 20 staff in the wildlife management area—the minister says they are back-office type tasks—and the director general said that no programs have actually been cut. Have all programs in the previous financial year—I am especially thinking of species recovery programs—been carried over into this current financial year?

Mr A.P. JACOB: Yes.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: And into the next financial year?

Mr A.P. JACOB: Yes.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Will they have the same staff as previously?

Mr A.P. JACOB: Yes. The species recovery programs are continuing. We have not cut any species recovery programs as a result of the voluntary separation scheme. As the member saw in the budget papers, that area had about 800 or so staff, or the lion's share of staff. Understandably, it gets its percentage share of voluntary

Chairman; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Albert Jacob; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr John McGrath; Mr David Templeman; Mr Frank Alban

severances, which, in this case, has been around 20 spread across a range of areas, particularly targeted towards back-office functions. There has been no program reduction as a result of these voluntary separations.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I am not asking about the reduction in the number of programs. It is very easy to say the programs are continuing. Has the staffing effort put into each of those programs been reduced?

Mr A.P. JACOB: I will happily pass to the director general, if he wants to give a more detailed response to that one.

Mr J.R. Sharp: In terms of programs as defined in the budget papers, wildlife management is a program area. It is one of the three major programs of the agency. A reduced number of staff are working in that program area, as there are in the other two program areas of parks and forests. The voluntary severances are apportioned across all three program areas. If the member is asking about specific activities, no specific activity has been changed or taken out of operation as a result of the voluntary severances.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: The minister might have to provide this by way of supplementary information. If I was shown a list of all the species recovery programs and put next to each one of those the full-time equivalent effort, comparing the current year with the next financial year, I would see a reduction in the staffing effort in a number of those species recovery programs, would I not?

Mr J.R. Sharp: It would be very difficult to do that. I will refer to Dr Byrne in a moment. There are a range of contributors to species recovery programs, including external agencies—voluntary and government agencies—in various parts of the organisation, whether it be regional services, people in the regions, people in the science division or people in nature conservation. They all contribute varying parts of effort at varying times, depending on the species recovery program. There has been no change in those activities.

Mr A.P. JACOB: I will throw to Dr Byrne, and I will make a couple of comments straight after.

Dr M. Byrne: Activities are undertaken within the nature conservation area in both science and regional services, and in the policy area. We have maintained all activity around the specific species recovery programs that we have around planning and on-ground activities, and the research that is being undertaken. A reduction in staff numbers has not occurred across the species recovery areas of the wildlife management service.

Mr A.P. JACOB: In terms of maintaining activities or driving to outcomes, that will not only be maintained; in fact, that has continually grown across this government with initiatives such as the Kimberley science and conservation strategy. There has been particular growth in areas such as the Kimberley. That has been well funded in previous budgets, and continues to be well funded in this budget, as well as other growth in other areas. In terms of outcomes and programs, that is being well maintained, if not expanded.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Is the minister telling me that he cannot produce a list of all the species recovery programs that shows the FTE effort that goes into each one of those programs?

Mr J.R. Sharp: I am indicating it would be very difficult to do that, but I could ask the question of Dr Byrne.

Dr M. Byrne: The way staff work on species recovery programs is not specific necessarily to a particular species at any one time. They cover a range of processes, particularly threatening processes, undertaken in recovery planning and implementation of programs. It is quite difficult to allocate specific numbers of FTEs to specific individual species. The activities are broadly across a range of species to target recovery of broad-scale populations.

[2.10 pm]

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: So, the minister cannot tell me about the planning effort, the rehabilitation effort or the stakeholder liaison effort—all those things essential to a species recovery program. The minister cannot tell me the DPaW staff effort that goes into any of those areas relative to a particular recovery program. First of all, can the minister tell me how many recovery programs the department has on the go right now? Can he give me one simple answer to that, please?

Mr A.P. JACOB: I will pass over to Margaret on that in a second, but the overall effort is being maintained; in fact, if anything, it will be growing as we go forward. It is not a simple matter of breaking it down to individual species by species. Staff will shift from species to species. For example, in different seasons, breeding programs require a greater staffing intensity and staff may move to another one, and fire seasons may require staff to move to other areas. However, the overall management of that area and the overall management of the species recovery programs will be continuing, and at the level that they have been at. I will pass to the director general to respond to the second part of that question and to Dr M. Byrne for the final part of that question.

Mr J.R. Sharp: We cannot identify people and the FTE effort by a species recovery program. Dr Margaret Byrne can answer further in a moment, but there are species recovery programs that deal with multiple species, for instance. So, we have multiple species and we have differential effort according to season and whatever the

Chairman; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Albert Jacob; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr John McGrath; Mr David Templeman; Mr Frank Alban

requirement is. As a general comment also in relation to voluntary severance, it was targeted often to people on the basis of a range of criteria in terms of the level of impact that it had on activities, but also met the needs of people who were either ill or incapacitated. A range of criteria were considered that impact upon the effectiveness and efficiency of programs. I maintain that the voluntary severance scheme has not reduced efficiency or effectiveness in any of the activities, and perhaps even possibly has enhanced them.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: It has taken \$4.5 million out of the agency, though. That is how much the agency has paid.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Madam Chairman, just before we go on to that, I do not know whether Dr Margaret Byrne wants to comment on the number of current species recovery programs.

Dr M. Byrne: I can tell the member that we have 109 species of endangered animals that have active management plans, 218 species of plants covered by a recovery plan, and 35 threatened ecological communities covered by a recovery plan.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I also want to ask about the effect of those redundancies identified by the member for Gosnells. Twenty positions will go from the current year to 2014–15. The minister said that they were from back of house, but is he able to outline what those positions are?

Mr A.P. JACOB: I will just pick up quickly on the question that the member for Gosnells threw out earlier. The monetary amount, in my understanding, has a direct link to the voluntary separation scheme as well, so the two are interlinked. The director general gave a few examples earlier and I am aware of a couple of those. He might like to give a couple of examples of specific voluntary separation schemes and how they were applied.

Mr J.R. Sharp: I do not have the exact list of positions in front of me. We can make those generally available. I would need to check with Dr John Byrne on disclosure about people. However, the scheme deals with a range of activities, whether they were people doing science work, technical officer work on this program, field work or office-based work. They were office-based people spread across the agency according to a range of criteria.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am interested in what Dr Sharp said, because if they were doing field work, technical work or science work, it does not sound as though that is back-of-house work that the minister referred to. Is it possible to get a list of the positions? We do not need to know the individuals; we want to know the positions that they held. The concern is that the government said that they were back-of-house duties and that they did not affect the actual field work that is being done or the front-line services. If that is the case, how efficiently is the department being run in the first place if it can get rid of 20 people and it does not affect anything?

The CHAIRMAN: Supplementary information is being requested from my understanding.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Dr John Byrne, I think, had a response that he wants to give in the first instance on that.

Dr J. Byrne: We can certainly provide the member with a list of positions. We prefer not to provide the names for privacy reasons. Most were office-based functions. In my area, for example, we lost a project manager who had set up an electronic document and records management system. We lost several people in the People Services Branch; they improved productivity there. There were a few people in field-based areas and we considered the circumstances of each case. Some people were generally getting older and were unable to do tasks suitable for firefighting, for example. We found some people in regional areas who predominantly were confined to office-based functions. We can certainly provide a list of positions for the member.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Thank you. If I understood correctly, it would be possible for me to have that list. We do not need to know the individuals, but the positions would be useful.

The CHAIRMAN: Just for Hansard, I understand that the minister will provide some supplementary information.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Yes, I will provide some supplementary information around voluntary severance schemes within the wildlife management area of the Department of Parks and Wildlife.

[*Supplementary Information No B62.*]

Mr J.E. McGRATH: My question relates to page 668 of the *Budget Statements*. Under “Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies”, I note that there is no funding in the out years for the Kimberley Toad Busters. As this is an area of deep concern for the state, can the minister explain to me how we are going with fighting cane toads and where we are sitting at the moment with our government programs?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: They will be in South Perth before you know it, member for South Perth!

Mr A.P. JACOB: I thank the member for Mandurah for that, and I thank the member for South Perth for that question. Since 2008, the Liberal–National government has invested very heavily in a cane toad strategy, putting

about \$7.8 million into the fight against cane toads up until this point. The member has to realise that in 2008, cane toads had not crossed the border into Western Australia. They actually came over the border into Western Australia from 2009. A lot of our initial funding went to the Kimberley Toad Busters, which is that line item the member mentioned, third from the top of the table on page 668. That represents the last year of funding of \$300 000 that Kimberley Toad Busters received from us. It actually received a total of \$1.5 million from the state government in its fight against cane toads. It has made a fantastic effort in what it has done. However, it has not achieved a slowing down in the number of cane toads; in fact, it has had a negligible effect on cane toads. Cane toads are here, they are established and they have advanced at a rate of about 50 kilometres per annum into the Kimberley. Accordingly, our cane toad strategy is now shifting into a second phase. That has three clear arms. The first of those is that we seek to protect wildlife in the first instance ahead of the cane toad front. Bear in mind that we have not yet had an extension of cane toads, which gives us some hope in this area. As the first part of that strategy of protecting wildlife, we have identified 30 priority islands in the Kimberley, which is again part of that growing species recovery and wildlife management that I mentioned in answer to the earlier question. We will be having population banks of wildlife from the Kimberley established on those islands in advance of the cane toad front. It is often when the front comes through that the most damage is done.

The second part of our strategy, and it is quite a key one, picking up on the member for Mandurah's interjection, is to prevent the new populations of the toad establishing in other parts of the state ahead of that front, such as preventing hitchhiker toads or satellite populations establishing. Part of that is keeping those islands free of toads and part is also making sure that they do not establish in more southern areas of the state ahead of that work. Very good work has been done on that area, and a lot of discussion has taken place in the public arena about how that work has been done. We find a cane toad in the Perth region on average once every six months or so. Often there is not just one; sometimes we find a number. However, we do tend to find them, we find them quickly and we have a very good response in place. We have been putting good resources into that.

The third arm of our strategy going forward is in research. Cane toads came to Australia in 1936, from my recollection, and nobody as yet has found a biological solution that targets the cane toad to the exclusion of other native amphibians. However, we are continuing to research biological or scientific methods that will be able to control the cane toad population going forward. As I said earlier in answer to the question, although they do have a localised effect as they go through, in the 80 or so years since cane toads were introduced into Australia, in Queensland in the first instance, there has not yet been an extension. Although there are pressures on local populations, there is hope that we can manage this well in the Kimberley and stem the flow of toads to other parts of the state, as well as banking a population of native fauna on islands ahead of that cane toad front.

[2.20 pm]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I refer to page 664, service 1, "Parks Management", and specifically the table that shows the income figures. Do those income figures include licence fees for recreational shooting?

Mr A.P. JACOB: No. We do not allow recreational shooting in national parks in Western Australia.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: That is fine. But there is shooting that takes place —

Mr A.P. JACOB: Not in a recreational sense. There may from time to time be a targeted control of ferals, but that is done in a coordinated way, in a specific time period and in a specific area. There is nothing new to that practice. That has been ongoing for many decades. But there is not a recreational shooting scheme in Western Australia.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Is the minister aware that a committee of the Legislative Council is looking at the introduction of recreational shooting in parks that are under the control of the minister's department? Has the minister or his department done any work on—if this proposal is given sanction by his government—the impact this would have on walkers and users of the Bibbulmun Track and cyclists and walkers who use the Munda Biddi Trail, who might be at threat if the government allows such a use of parks that are under the minister's control? Has the minister made a submission to that inquiry?

Mr A.P. JACOB: The short answer to the first part of that question is no. I am aware that a committee of the upper house—obviously we are from the lower house—is doing an inquiry into this. I cannot remember the terms of reference off the top of my head, but essentially recreational shooting in nature reserves I think would be a good summation of that. I am not presupposing whatever the outcome may be of that committee inquiry, and certainly we are not entertaining a change of policy in that space.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: But surely —

Chairman; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Albert Jacob; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr John McGrath; Mr David Templeman; Mr Frank Alban

Mr A.P. JACOB: Member, it was a long question, and I will give an answer to that. I remember that we put in a submission to that inquiry. I am happy for the director general to give a bit more detail on the nature of that submission if the member wants.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Would the minister be able to provide a copy of the submission as supplementary information?

Mr A.P. JACOB: I am not sure, given that is part of the deliberative process of the committee, whether that is appropriate supplementary information for us to provide.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Has the minister asked for advice from his department about whether it supports any, or limited, use of the state's nature reserves and national parks for such purposes; and, if so, what is that advice?

Mr A.P. JACOB: I asked the department to keep me apprised of the advice as it was putting it to the committee. But my understanding is that that advice is part of the committee's deliberative process. Irrespective of what that committee is pursuing, we are not entertaining any change in policy beyond what has been standard practice for decades now, and that is essentially that there is no recreational shooting scheme within nature reserves. But what does happen from time to time, and would have happened under the member's tenure as Minister for the Environment as well, is that where we have a localised problem with a particular feral species, there may be times when the department will bring in either a contractor or partner with another group, and that would be geographically limited and time limited, and I imagine it would be well advertised in that local area. The director general may want to add to that.

Mr J.R. Sharp: The policy position that has been represented by the minister and has been the policy for some time is that clubs and associations have been part of feral eradication programs, but only if that is part of a designated and planned and controlled activity.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Minister, surely the department has considered what the costs would be of administering any access to this so-called conservation hunting in national parks. Surely there must be a view in the agency that can be expressed publicly as to what research has been done into how much it would cost to administer the access of these people into national parks and nature reserves, and, indeed, into state forest.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Member, the short answer to that is no, because we are not exploring that.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: So how could the minister then make a submission to the inquiry without having considered that issue?

Mr A.P. JACOB: My recollection of the submission is that it essentially outlines the status quo and how it operates, to inform the committee in its deliberations.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: So the minister was not able to provide a summary of what the risk might be to the state's tourism reputation, recognising that things such as the Bibbulmun Track and the Munda Biddi Trail are promoted internationally as tourism adventure highlights for people coming to Western Australia; the minister was not able to say that those could be at risk should the committee advance its thinking on this matter. The department has not done any internal work that would have led to a quality submission.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Madam Chairman, we are straying very far afield here. I do not mind debating the substantive point, but we are straying well off the budget papers and starting to talk about a committee—which no member of the Legislative Assembly is even a part of—and what its deliberations may be. As the member well knows, I as minister do not have any control over what a parliamentary committee does, and I am not seeking to influence what it may do. The committee will bring down its report, and there will be a range of recommendations in that report—I have no idea what they will be—and I will give a response at such time. But what I can outline for the member is our current position, and I think I have done that quite well, which is that we are not entertaining any changes to the system as it stands.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: It seems that the minister has not prepared his submission, either. The minister has not done the basic work on what the costs would be in all those terms—risk to tourism reputation and cost to the agency in administration. Surely that would have formed part of the background work for the submission.

Mr A.P. JACOB: I think the member is playing a cute game there. I am not trying to avoid anything. All that work will come out when the committee report comes out. I am simply making the statement that a submission to a committee is part of that committee's deliberative process, and it is not appropriate—in fact, my understanding is that it may even be a breach of privilege—to start going down that avenue. It has nothing to do with the budget papers before us. That is simply the rules of the parliamentary process. So could I bring us back to the budget papers, Madam Chairman.

Chairman; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Albert Jacob; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr John McGrath; Mr David Templeman; Mr Frank Alban

The CHAIRMAN: Certainly, minister. I will just clarify that it is my understanding that if a committee hearing is in confidence and the committee has not released any of the submissions or posted them for public availability, it is indeed a breach of privilege to give a submission to another person. However, I think the question was more about the minister's position, so it is up to the minister.

Mr A.P. JACOB: I cannot go into detail. But my understanding is that typically any submissions would be made public at the time the report is published.

The CHAIRMAN: It is up to the committee. It does not have to do that.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Yes, it is up to the committee. It is out of my hands.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I have a question about the formulation of the new biodiversity conservation act, which is referred to at pages 664 and 665. It affects a range of service areas. It is also referred to at page 662.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Just let me find that. I cannot see that at pages 664 and 665.

Ms S.F. McGURK: We will go to page 662. The last dot point at page 662 states that priority will be given to preparatory work for the proposed new biodiversity conservation act to replace the Wildlife Conservation Act. Can the minister tell us what that preparatory work is and whether it involves liaising with stakeholders to ensure that there is support for that act?

[2.30 pm]

Mr A.P. JACOB: I thank the member for the question. This is a clear election commitment of the Liberal-National government, but it is also a considerable task. It seeks to replace the Wildlife Conservation Act 1950, a 64-year-old piece of legislation that I think every member in both chambers agrees is due for an upgrade, but that is by no means a quick and easy task. The member's colleague the member for Mandurah had similar carriage at a time when he was in government, and other governments have also done a range of work on this legislation. It is not an easy task; however, it is a high priority and a focus of ours. Considerable preparatory work has already been undertaken ahead of the formal drafting of a proposed bill for a biodiversity conservation act. Our work to date has included the preparation of a proposed regulatory impact statement and extensive consultation across government on the specifics to be covered within the proposed bill, as well as its interaction with other legislation and programs, which all need to be considered as the bill is prepared. The proposed bill's major intended focus will be, as I said, to replace the outdated Wildlife Conservation Act 1950, which is actually the nation's oldest piece of biodiversity conservation legislation. The intended new features will include greatly increased maximum penalties for illegal actions with threatened species, up to \$500 000 compared with the \$10 000 currently under the 1950 act, to provide real deterrence to actions that people will, hopefully, never take under that act. It will also include enhanced opportunities to achieve accreditation from the commonwealth government to eliminate the duplication of approvals involving biodiversity, as well as more backing for cooperation with landowners and communities.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I raise a point of order. I was not actually asking for the details of what would be contained within the legislation, but what the preparatory work will be, particularly with regard to consulting the stakeholders.

Mr A.P. JACOB: I outlined that in the first part of the question.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Then what is the budget allocation to undertake that sort of consultation?

Mr A.P. JACOB: At the moment, the work has been done within government and we are working very hard towards a draft of the bill. Typically, a piece of legislation would not be listed as a line item, but we acknowledge that that is a key piece of policy of key interest, which is why we made a point of including it in the budget papers. The work is being followed through with internal resources.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: We are all aware of the strong community interest in the future biodiversity conservation act. Why does this budget have no money in it that the minister can point to—I suspect there probably is—that would enable community forums to be held and the department to actively go about the state discussing the sorts of things people want to see in the BC act?

Mr A.P. JACOB: I cannot think of a time when I have ever seen a line item in the budget papers for the process of a piece of legislation. The legislation will proceed through this place. It is a very democratic process. A minister ultimately introduces a bill, but it must go through both chambers that are representative in and of themselves, and that alone is a task that will most likely take years from this point. Our goal is to achieve that by 2017. One thing I certainly do not intend to do is overcook the consultation, which was the experience of the previous government. It was a commitment of the previous government that came into power in 2001. It is a very large piece of legislation to bring through Parliament. It is a very complex piece of legislation and the best way

Chairman; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Albert Jacob; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr John McGrath; Mr David Templeman; Mr Frank Alban

to delay it forever would be to consult unnecessarily. It will be fully consultative in the way that our entire parliamentary system is set up to be fully consultative, and it will form a part of that process.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Will there be specific and separate consultation and stakeholder involvement in the formulation of the new act; and, if so, what methods will be used to undertake that consultation?

Mr A.P. JACOB: The process through this place is very public. I do not yet know whether the legislation will come out as a green bill or be simply introduced straight into this place, but the very nature of passing legislation in and of itself is very open and democratic, and it is well open to public scrutiny through the fourth estate and all the stakeholders who have an interest. We are not at the point of making a decision on whether we build a secondary apparatus of consultation around this legislation; that decision will be weighed up against time considerations. The former Liberal government back in the 1990s had a go at it and did not get there; two terms of Labor government had a go and did not get there. I am conscious that it has been an arduous and long process, so time is a consideration for this bill as well. However, whether we build a secondary apparatus of consultation around that bill is not a decision we have made.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I think the minister has answered my question. At this stage he does not plan to do any separate consultation with stakeholders or the community about the formulation of this legislation.

Mr A.P. JACOB: No, that is not actually correct. We have not yet made a decision about whether that is the way to take it forward. It is pertinent to point out that the consideration of whether a secondary structure of consultation is included must be weighed up with time line considerations, given this bill's history with past governments.

Mr F.A. ALBAN: I refer to the first paragraph on page 663. With regard to the department's role in fire management, I understand that after the bushfire in Albany in October 2012, WorkSafe WA issued the department with a series of improvement notices. Can the minister tell me what the department has done to comply with these notices and thereby improve the safety of fire crews? I am interested in this matter because I have nine volunteer fire brigades within my electorate.

Mr A.P. JACOB: I thank the member for Swan Hills for the question. I imagine a range of parks and wildlife officers serve throughout that area in both controlled burns and response to burns when and as they may happen. The member is correct: WorkSafe issued the now Department of Parks and Wildlife 10 improvement notices following the Black Cat Creek fire when we tragically lost a parks and wildlife firefighter, Wendy Bearfoot, near Two Peoples Bay. The department has completed nine of those improvement notices. A lot of them related to training and information for all staff involved in fire suppression. They also related to personal protective equipment, escape routes and better reading of spot weather forecasts. The nine improvement notices contained significant upgrades to all the equipment, and they have been met. They included the provision of fire blankets and heat reflective shields in fire trucks, the replacement of lagging and plastic components with non-flammable components and a range of other factors. There remains one outstanding notice that applies specifically to vehicle water spray protection systems that are for use in the event of a burnover or an entrapment.

I point out to members that the Department of Parks and Wildlife fire managers have consulted very closely with its front-line staff, those who fight the fire on the coalface, over the measures needed to comply with this crew protection requirement. However, it may take up to September this year to fully fit our fleet of 110 trucks with the water spray deluge system. We have been working on some technical difficulties with the system, but that time line and extension has been approved through consultation with WorkSafe. Although considerable work has been done to upgrade our fleets, kit out our firefighters and have better training, processes and procedures in place, our primary focus continues to remain on our crews and not putting them in a position in which they face the prospect of a burnover in the first place.

Ms S.F. McGURK: How many full-time and seasonal staff are operational on prescribed burns?

Mr A.P. JACOB: I thank the member for Fremantle for that question. Mr Peter Dans is well across all things related to fire, so I will ask him to provide some detail on that.

Mr P.D. Dans: Our historical benchmark has been to count the number of conservation employees or front-line firefighters in the south west of the state. The benchmark this year was 288, which is made up of more or less 190 permanents and about 98 seasonals. We maintain that figure through the peak of the fire season. The seasonal contracts for employment have started coming to an end as the rains have come across the south west of the state.

[2.40 pm]

Ms S.F. McGURK: That is a standard. For how many years has that number been maintained?

Chairman; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Albert Jacob; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr John McGrath; Mr David Templeman; Mr Frank Alban

Mr P.D. Dans: We have been working to that number, or plus or minus five or so, for the last three or four seasons. Certainly, since the new funding for fire management came to the Department of Parks and Wildlife in the 2012–13 budget process, we have been working to that number.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Further to that, that was an extra \$32.9 million as part of the 2012–13 budget that we rolled across, and it has contributed significantly to upgrading our equipment and our fleet. I had the opportunity to see some of those general upgrades.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I wonder whether the number of people involved in prescribed burns over that time has been as was just outlined. Is the amount of land that is being undertaken about the same or has it changed over that period?

Mr A.P. JACOB: Just to clarify that question, can the member be a bit more specific? Does she mean in terms of a hectare target or how many hectares of controlled burns we achieved? We measure two different factors; we have controlled burns on one side and our response to fire incidents on the other side.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am talking about prescribed burns. Was the amount of land that the department undertook prescribed burns within about the same over that five-year period that was mentioned in answer to the question about staff numbers?

Mr A.P. JACOB: I will have Mr Dans respond about the five-year average, but from year to year, it fluctuates quite significantly. We did not shy away from the fact that the 2012–13 year was a particularly low year. A big part of the reason for that was that, as I said, the money we had for the fleet upgrade took a lot of our trucks out during that year. As well as that, prescribed burning is ultimately dependent on the weather; if the weather conditions do not go our way, we do not have the opportunity to light fires. We cannot light fires in a dangerous circumstance when it is too dry, hot and windy; similarly, if the ground is drenched and we have had good rainfall events, as we had in spring this year, particularly in the south west, it does not open up the window of opportunity to do large hectare burns. Although we do have a large hectare burn goal in place, it is important to remember that with prescribed burning, a law of diminishing returns kicks in. Although we have that goal of 200 000 hectares, our priority is those burns that may protect assets and settlements, which, by their very nature, are much smaller burns. In the event that it looks as though the season will not give us the weather opportunities to do large-scale or broadacre landscape burns, which involve tens of thousands of hectares, we start to focus on smaller but very well strategically located burns, which, as I said, have a law of diminishing returns because fewer hectares are burnt, but the burns are far better targeted in protecting assets and settlements.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Can I be supplied with the number of hectares that the department has undertaken prescribed burns on in the last five years and the specific number of staff, both permanent and seasonal, who have been allocated to do those burns?

Mr A.P. JACOB: I am happy to provide that information.

[Supplementary Information No B63.]

Ms E. EVANGEL: I refer to the first dot point on page 680 under the heading “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”. I note that Kings Park, which is in my electorate —

Mr A.P. JACOB: Sorry, member for Perth, but page 780 is not in this division.

The CHAIRMAN: It is in the next division, member for Perth.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: The minister’s response in this area is very interesting. I think it raises the point that the key performance indicator of the number of hectares burnt a year through prescribed burning seems to be a very crude KPI. Why are we not developing a KPI along the lines that I think the minister is suggesting—that is, one that is about where that burning occurs and its proximity to settlements and areas of risk? Why are we not developing a KPI that reflects where the prescribed burning should be?

Mr A.P. JACOB: That is a very good question, and that has always been one of the difficulties with the 200 000-hectare target. I will ask the director general to give a little more background on where that target has come from and how it has developed, and maybe I will make a few comments after.

Mr J.R. Sharp: The target was developed some years ago. It is based on calculations of the seven-year rotation across, largely, the south west area that is prone to burning so that areas are burnt once every seven years. We are working on other criteria. That is the broad target, but within that target, we work hard at seeking priorities on where we get the best return in relation to risk and other factors. I will ask Mr Dans to elaborate on that. The principle is that we maintain that target. It has been well accepted within the community and has a basis that is understood, but we are trying to add to that with our understanding of priorities within that.

Chairman; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Albert Jacob; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr John McGrath; Mr David Templeman; Mr Frank Alban

Mr P.D. Dans: Following Mick Keely’s report into the Margaret River bushfire, the member would be aware that that required the department to completely overhaul its prescribed burn planning and implementation process. That has been done. We are in the process of putting in place another measure—another performance indicator, as the member has alluded to. That will involve prioritising burns into priority 1, 2 and 3 burns. The measure will be around the proportion of the priority 1 burns on the program that are achieved in any burning season or any financial year. That is a work in progress. We have that new burn planning system up and running for the first time in this particular autumn burning season.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I refer to the asset investment program outlined on page 664.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Is the member for Mandurah sure it is page 664?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I hope so.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Is it page 666?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Under the heading “Parks Management”, it states —

Management of lands and waters: dealing with public involvement, visitation and appreciation of the natural environment ...

I think that covers my line of inquiry. The department has a program to upgrade and expand camping sites. The minister has indicated that there is a list of 21 formative projects up to 2017. Could he provide detail—I would like this as supplementary information because I do not want to take up too much time—of the conservation parks infrastructure and roads, plus caravan and camping projects, the spend and the time line for the start and finish of these projects? I do not want him to go through the 21.

Mr A.P. JACOB: The member is asking me the question; I am not going to pass up the opportunity to tell him about them!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am asking for it as supplementary information.

Mr A.P. JACOB: I have the information, member.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes, but I do not want the minister to take up two hours to do it!

Mr A.P. JACOB: I have been asked the question, so I am not going to pass up the opportunity to take the member through exactly what we are doing in that space.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The minister is going to give me a stock standard “I’m a great bloke” speech. In this context, I want to raise with him the current review of the Caravan Parks and Camping Grounds Act that is being undertaken by the Department of Local Government and Communities. I am interested in whether his department has made a formal submission to that review, because there are some conflicting issues with the review from an industry perspective and from a caravanning and camping perspective. As the minister knows, a lot of people now have a whiz-bang Winnebago that includes everything, even a kitchen sink, so they are very self-sufficient. Those people want more access to the genuine camping experience rather than being channelled into caravan parks, which is certainly what the caravan park industry would prefer. The minister can give me a spiel about how wonderful he is, but I want to know whether his department has been actively involved in the review and the details of those projects, and, more importantly, I want to know about the spend and the time lines. When will we see this?

[2.50 pm]

The CHAIRMAN: Are we not doing 21 anymore? Is this a different question?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am trying to steer the minister away from it, but I know he will brag.

The CHAIRMAN: Minister, if you intend to read through it, can you be brief? We have eight divisions to cover.

Mr A.P. JACOB: I will, Madam Chair, but there is so much to do; it will take a bit of time to go through it. This is absolutely one of the best good-news stories of the Liberal–National government. It is one of our key election commitments and we are already overachieving in this area. We are coming from exactly the same place; we want to provide affordable holidays for families of all ages and people from all walks of life, from grey nomads with whiz-bang camper trailers to a couple of mates going out. To quickly run through, we have a \$3.3 million park improvement program funded. This funding will continue to focus on addressing visitor risk management issues, as well as preserving existing department assets. That \$3.3 million park improvement program is focused on assets in Karijini National Park, Cape Range National Park, Torndirrup National Park, John Forrest National Park, Walpole–Nornalup National Park, King Leopold Ranges Conservation Park and Woodman Point Regional

Chairman; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Albert Jacob; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr John McGrath; Mr David Templeman; Mr Frank Alban

Park. Concurrent with that, for people with caravans and camper trailers, the \$1.225 million tourist road improvement program will protect the department's 37 000-kilometre statewide road network. There will be a particular focus on upgrading high-value sealed road assets in Cape Le Grand National Park, as well as undertaking road inspections and condition assessments in the Swan region. Ongoing funding of \$400 000 a year is for the Gnaragara Park development. That is not out in the regions, but it caters to those people in the metropolitan area with dirt bikes or off-road vehicles and a recreational lifestyle. That funding will continue. There is \$7 million for the caravanning and camping aspect of Parks for People. As I said, the total royalties for regions funding is \$21.05 million. This fund will provide for up to 450 additional campsites in eight new campgrounds, as well as 11 extended or upgraded campgrounds across the state. It also includes work on the development of communication tools, including wi-fi connections and web-based and smartphone applications. Those are being done internally within government. Indeed, the overall spend on the Parks for People program and the "WA Caravanning and Camping Action Plan" is \$40.72 million over the four years.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Can I ask about —

Mr A.P. JACOB: I am just getting to the list. In 2014 the work of our Parks for People program will focus on campgrounds in the proposed Credo conservation park, Francois Peron National Park, Coalseam Conservation Park, Cape Range National Park, Cape Le Grand National Park, Leeuwin–Naturaliste National Park—I think that is the Conto's campground and maybe the new Boranup one—Wellington National Park, Logue Brook, Lane Poole Reserve, Shannon National Park, D'Entrecasteaux National Park and Dryandra Woodland. We will commence the designing and planning of other campgrounds, upgrades of existing recreational sites and the provision of new facilities at Leeuwin–Naturaliste National Park, Wellington National Park, Leschenault Peninsula Conservation Park and Lane Poole Reserve.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Is the department including dump points in those facilities at the new and rejuvenated sites? A number of local governments are so-called recreational vehicle-friendly and have provided dump points on land within their jurisdiction, but is this a priority for the department? As part of this rollout, will the department provide dump-point facilities for which it would, of course, be responsible?

Mr A.P. JACOB: My apologies first of all to the member for Mandurah. I went through that relatively quickly. I did not want to go into too much detail on all those. I am conscious of the time. I was going to also go to the director general and his feed-in on the tourism side and the "WA Caravanning and Camping Action Plan", as well as legislative amendments. My understanding is that dumping points are also a part of that. I will ask the director general to give the member more detail.

Mr J.R. Sharp: Dumping points are considered in the planning process. We have provided them in some parks. Some of these new parks will have them. It will be determined through the planning, depending on the alternatives available. Yes, we do provide dump points. We have been consulting with the caravan industry and we have participated in the legislative review. There is consideration of what are known as nature parks as a category, which allows for this type of park, and being consistent with the legislation. There is considerable support throughout the caravan and camping industry for these proposals from the industry association.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Finally, is the department involved in the current review?

Mr J.R. Sharp: Yes, we have participated in the current review.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I want to get back to staffing levels across all three service areas. I am looking at pages 664 and 665 of budget paper No 2. The number of 2013–14 budgeted full-time equivalent staff is 1 590. In 2014–15, the target is 1 560. That is a drop of 30 posts.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Where is the member looking for the overall numbers?

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I am adding them across the three different service areas. The key figures are 1 590 in 2013–14 and 1 560 in 2014–15, which is a drop of 30. Obviously, the government is encouraging people to participate in the voluntary separation scheme. I see in budget paper No 3 that \$4.5 million is going into that enticement to people to perhaps take an early retirement, although page 661 of budget paper No 2 shows a voluntary separation figure of \$3.5 million. Could the minister explain that difference to me? The issue I really want to get to is: how is the minister remedying the problem of losing experienced staff and an increased workload falling on the shoulders of more junior staff?

Mr A.P. JACOB: I think in that question an assumption was made on staffing, but I will ask Dr John Byrne to respond. The member correctly noted that at the bottom of page 661, it shows the estimated actual cost of the voluntary separation scheme as \$3.5 million. The top line shows a significant variance between last year's budget and this year's actual, before it come back again, because that was largely voluntary severance working its way through the system. Does Dr John Byrne want to give a more detailed response to that?

Chairman; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Albert Jacob; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr John McGrath; Mr David Templeman; Mr Frank Alban

Dr J. Byrne: First, I confirm the figures the member gave, which were 1 590 and 1 560. We can see those figures explicitly at the bottom of page 667. They show the total picture. It reflects the full year effect next year of voluntary severance that occurred partway through this year. The \$3.5 million is the contribution the government has made so far this financial year to severances. It makes the payment in two tranches. There were about 35 severances by the time that payment was made. We still have another payment of about \$1 million to come. It is promised to us by Treasury and it will come.

We pay them first and then we get the money back from Treasury. That is one of the major reasons the estimated actual this year is boosted relative to the budget next year. Have I answered all of the member's questions?

[3.00 pm]

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I think so; thank you.

Mr A.P. JACOB: I will ask the director general to add a little bit on how that was generally applied across the department.

Mr J.R. Sharp: The last question really related to the structure of the workforce and, as I think I indicated earlier, the allocation of voluntary severances was not to one age or class; it was across the agency and a range of positions and to people with different circumstances. It did not just relate to retirement; it related to people of a variety of ages and situations who offered themselves for voluntary severance. In terms of our workforce planning, we are conscious of the fact that we do have a younger cohort within the agency and it is important that we achieve that. That is something that the agency is focusing on.

The CHAIRMAN: We should break at 3.00 pm to change our Hansard reporters. Could the member hold his question for a brief five or 10 minutes, or whatever it takes, to change our Hansard reporters? We will pick up with a further question.

Dr J. Byrne: I appreciate the accommodation that the committee makes for my disability; thank you.

The CHAIRMAN: It is our pleasure, sir.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: The director general suggested that the voluntary severance scheme would not target more senior staff, but given that junior staff would probably not be eligible, there would hardly be someone who has been in the organisation for a couple of years accessing the very costly voluntary separation arrangements. How can it be that the department does not end up losing its more experienced staff?

Mr A.P. JACOB: In my recollection, the structure of the voluntary separation scheme was one of different tiers on different levels of service. It made no difference in the initial offer whether someone was a newer staff member or had been there for a longer period of time. It was, in its incentive, reflective of terms of service. The longer that a staff member had served, the more they received in reflection of those years of service. Its application was not targeted towards a particular level of service; it was paid out to the people who ultimately got it in reflection of the years of service that they had done.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: It may be necessary to get some supplementary information here. Could the minister indicate the grades of people who have accessed the \$4.5 million?

Mr A.P. JACOB: As the director general said, it was fairly spread out. It is my understanding that there was diversity in that. We have given an undertaking with our earlier supplementary information to provide a list of those roles that had been applied. We have already committed to provide that as supplementary information.

The appropriation was recommended.