

Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Albert Jacob; Ms Margaret Quirk; Mr Shane Love; Mr Frank Alban; Chairman; Mr
David Templeman

Division 55: Parks and Wildlife, \$210 626 000 —

Ms J.M. Freeman, 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.

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

Mr R. Hughes, General Manager, Swan River Trust.

The CHAIRMAN: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard staff. 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. 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 principal clerk by Friday, 19 June 2015. 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: Questions? Member for Gosnells.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I want to begin by asking the minister for some detail about the dramatic cuts in the Department of Parks and Wildlife's expenditures, noting that the estimated actual figure has gone down from \$217 million to \$210 million. I refer to page 639 of the *Budget Statements* but specifically to the full-time equivalent levels indicated on pages 645, 646 and 647. How many staff have been lost to help the government achieve this \$7.25 million cut?

Mr A.P. JACOB: I thank the member for Gosnells for the question. As has been announced already on the way in, the Department of Parks and Wildlife has gone through some rounds of voluntary redundancies. From memory, I believe the most recent round was some 50 staff members who put up their hands. That is part of the reason why the member will see, if he is looking at page 641, that the estimated actual has somewhat exceeded what the budget was, because we had to pay out those voluntary redundancies. I will hand over to the director general to give more details about any further redundancies that have occurred within the past financial year. However, I stress that all of these have been voluntary redundancies.

Mr J.R. Sharp: Some of the movement in FTEs relates to attrition as well as to specific redundancies. Some positions have not been replaced. There have been some situations in which work areas have been restructured and reformed. I do not have an exact number in that regard, but it is an ongoing process. The 50 redundancies reflected in those numbers were voluntary severances undertaken in December 2014.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: There are some dramatic cuts in different service areas relative to the 2013–14 budget. Service area 1 is down 20 staff; service area 2 is down 36 staff; service area 3 is down 27 staff; service area 4 is down 26 staff; and service area 5 is down 12 staff. Is the minister telling me that all those were voluntary severances?

Mr A.P. JACOB: Yes, that is correct, as well as some natural attrition. The member did not reach service 6, which has seen a gain of some 10 staff.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Based on the figure from 2013–14, extra people have been put into prescribed burning and fire management, but when it comes to bushfire suppression—surely this is the area in which the department should treat the cause and not just the symptoms—the department has decreased its staff by two.

Mr A.P. JACOB: No, if the member looks at it over the period, bushfire suppression is being maintained; and, indeed, with the 50 or so targeted redundancies, at every point we have required that the firefighters —

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I am sorry, I did not hear what the minister said about bushfire suppression. He made a comment about that relative to fire management.

Mr A.P. JACOB: There is a very minor fluctuation from 132 in 2013-14 to 130 in 2014-15 and 130 again in 2015-16.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: The minister made a comment about the importance of the activity. I did not hear because the acoustics here are not the best.

Mr A.P. JACOB: I am reiterating my comments, member for Gosnells. I am correcting the statement that the member made that there has been a dramatic drop in bushfire suppression numbers. That is not the case. The bushfire suppression numbers have been maintained, and the prescribed burning and fire management service delivery numbers have actually been boosted in this budget. So I am just clarifying the context for that. Again, bushfire suppression numbers have been maintained in this budget. If the member looks at page 646, prescribed burning and fire management numbers have been boosted in this budget, which leads me again to the initial question, which is around the voluntary redundancies. Although those have been targeted within a range of business areas from within the Department of Parks and Wildlife, bushfire suppression and fire management have been quarantined from those rounds.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Further question, Madam Chair.

The CHAIRMAN: Member for Gosnells, you will get lots of further questions so you do not need to yell across the chamber. Come through, further questions. Member for Gosnells, further question.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Thank you, Chair. I refer to service 3, “Conservation Partnerships”, on page 645. As we have discussed before, the Land for Wildlife program no longer has officers working in the regions. Is that correct?

Mr A.P. JACOB: For everybody else’s benefit, is the member talking about page 645?

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I refer to service 3, “Conservation Partnerships”, on page 645. I did reference it.

Mr A.P. JACOB: It is one of the areas in which we have made some changes. Yes, it is correct that some positions in Land for Wildlife have been taken back. There is still a staff level within Land for Wildlife, which I believe from memory—the director general will correct me if I am wrong—is one FTE spread across two positions part-time. However, the program will continue and we will look at a community partnership model for how we take that program going forward.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Staff levels in the regions have gone from 3.5 FTEs to none and the minister is telling me that that is through voluntary severance or natural attrition.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Yes.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: That is not what I am hearing from people who used to work in those roles.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Perhaps the director general would like to answer.

Mr J.R. Sharp: There are a number of part-time positions, which equates to 3.5 full-time positions, but there were in the vicinity of eight—I will ask Dr Margaret Byrne to give the exact figures on that in a moment—servicing the regions. All of those positions have been vacated by way of voluntary severances. The program is being maintained as part of the off-reserve conservation system that is not being serviced by people placed part-time in the regions. That is an efficiency that we looked at during our review of our activities, keeping in mind that our priority was keeping people on the ground in frontline positions. Dr Margaret Byrne might like to respond.

[2.10 pm]

Dr M. Byrne: When we evaluated the program, we looked at the regional delivery of the program. The program has been in operation for 18 years and has been very successful. The environment in which it operates has changed and there are much more effective ways of delivering information these days; there are a lot more community groups and natural resource management groups that actually operate in that space delivering information for wildlife management to the community and private landholders. We are in discussion with some of those groups to see whether we can get more effective delivery of information to landholders across the board by integrating our work to their work. Those discussions are ongoing and we hope to enter into a community partnership arrangement to be able to deliver that service in a similar way to what we did before.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: These people were working under contract. What the department has really done is it has failed to renew their contract. Is that the case?

Mr A.P. JACOB: The director general has answered that question, and I will pass it back to him again in just a second, but I will give a bit of context again for other members, just so everyone is aware. Land for Wildlife is an off-reserve program, so it does not deal with land that is held under the Conservation and Land Management Act and it does not deal with land that sits within the tenure of the state government or the Department of Parks and Wildlife. We are principally talking here about private property land, and it has been a good program to run.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: There is two million hectares of land.

The CHAIRMAN: Member for Gosnells!

Mr A.P. JACOB: It has been a good program to run and it will continue as well. There is also a context to this and that is the community partnership model and the level of volunteerism and engagement that the Department of Parks and Wildlife enjoys from the community at large. Indeed, in the last 12 months we had some 4 345 volunteers engaged through the Department of Parks and Wildlife, which has seen over 506 000 hours of volunteer work.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Point of order, Chair; this is not the question at all.

Mr A.P. JACOB: I will get to that, member for Gosnells.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I asked about —

The CHAIRMAN: Member for Gosnells, you have lots of questions.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: The minister is wasting time.

The CHAIRMAN: I get to decide that.

Mr A.P. JACOB: In line with the level of volunteerism that we enjoy in a range of service areas in the Department of Parks and Wildlife, off-reserve conservation is certainly one of those areas for which we believe a community partnership model is a good way to take it forward in the future. With regard to the question about the level of voluntary redundancies that has applied in the Land for Wildlife area, I will hand back again to the director general.

Mr J.R. Sharp: My understanding is that all of those who left the program took voluntary severances, but I will check that again with Dr Margaret Byrne.

Dr M. Byrne: Yes, that is right.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: How many of them were working under contract?

Dr M. Byrne: One of the people was working on contract and that contract has not been renewed. The remainder took voluntary severances.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I refer to spending changes on page 641 and my question relates to prescribed burning. As we know, additional funding was given from royalties for regions. Given that funding source, can we infer that the prescribed burning will be conducted in regional areas only this year?

Mr A.P. JACOB: No, member for Girrawheen, that is not the case. Indeed, this funding supplement, \$20 million over four years, equates to a 50 per cent supplement on top of the existing budget for prescribed burning, which sits at around \$10 million or so per annum. Prescribed burning in and around the peri-urban fringe will also continue and will be contained within that existing prescribed burning budget; however, the royalties for regions top-up funding, which is to address and break the back of the significant backlog that we have been carrying for some years now, will be particularly targeted within regional areas. The vast majority of prescribed burning is conducted within regional areas.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Does the minister have a list of the areas earmarked for prescribed burning over the next year; and, if so, can he provide it by way of supplementary information?

Mr A.P. JACOB: Essentially, yes, we do prepare burning plans. In the first instance I might pass over to Peter Dans to provide some more detail on what our next 12-month burn plan is.

Mr P.D. Dans: For 2015–16 an indicative program has been developed. It includes 269 burns in our Swan, south west and Warren regions, totalling over 460 000 hectares. There is no way that we will achieve 460 000 hectares, but there is lots of capacity built into the program so that we have a number of burns to choose from depending

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on the weather conditions and fuel conditions that are prevailing. We generally over-plan and then aim to maximise our delivery within that suite of 269 burns that we have planned for.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Is it possible for the minister to provide a list of those 269 areas proposed in the next year?

Mr A.P. JACOB: Yes, it will be. Just following on from Peter Dans' comments, I will provide some context for prescribed burning and our 200 000 hectare target. It seeks to achieve 40 per cent to 45 per cent of the state forested areas carrying a fuel load of less than six years. It does not seek to achieve the entire forested area having a fuel load of less than six years; it seeks to reach 40 per cent to 45 per cent in a mosaic burn right across the landscape. Decades of experience in science have shown that that is the best way forward. The supplementary information will be a list of intended burns for the coming 12 months.

[Supplementary Information No B37.]

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I am aware that the scheduling of prescribed burning is dependent on weather conditions, and the minister would of course be aware that one of the controversial aspects of this practice is the possible adverse health effects on people with respiratory conditions. The weather has been favourable for prescribed burning this year. Can I be advised on how many occasions the health department was given advice to issue health warnings and, if possible, the dates on which those warnings occurred?

Mr A.P. JACOB: I thank the member for Girrawheen for that question. I will hand over to the director general for any specific health advice.

Mr J.R. Sharp: There is an advisory system in that process that provides advisory notices on every occasion there is a burn prior to the burn occurring. Mr Dans will be able to outline the detail of how that is achieved.

Mr P.D. Dans: On a daily basis when we intend to conduct prescribed burns, we have a distribution list. Obviously there is one list that goes to various media outlets, particularly regional outlets, and there is another distribution list that goes to organisations such as the health department, air traffic control at the various airports in Perth, and I believe also to organisations such as the Asthma Foundation and the like. The list indicates where the burns will be on a particular day. If conditions are such that smoke might impact a populated area, we will follow up with alerts to media, and again to health and other organisations, outlining that smoke may impact residential areas or major arterial roads in the forthcoming hours or days or whatever. We provide general advice for people with respiratory complications to follow the advice of their health professional.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: A couple of prescribed burns have been near, I think, Kwinana Freeway or similar areas such as Forrest Highway, and there has been an issue with obstructing or obscuring traffic flow in the area. Can the minister outline who is responsible for ensuring that adequate and timely notice is given of smoke likely to impact on traffic flow?

Mr A.P. JACOB: I can recall two occasions around Kwinana Freeway in recent months. In the context of that, the Department of Parks and Wildlife is not the only agency that does prescribed burns, and I think both those occasions near Kwinana Freeway were due to other burns. I will hand over to Mr Peter Dans in case that is incorrect.

Mr P.D. Dans: There was a bushfire in the Spectacles down near Thomas Road on the western side of Kwinana Freeway in January or February this year. That did actually spot over the freeway and burnt, under a sea breeze as I understand, to the east to an area called Sandy Lake. That area is a peat swamp and it has continued to smoulder. On occasions when it is a very still night and conditions are more conducive to the formation of fog, smog has impacted on the Kwinana Freeway. Main Roads Western Australia, the Bureau of Meteorology, the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and the Department of Parks and Wildlife have produced a good collaborative effort to issue warnings to motorists through variable messaging signs and putting traffic management contractors in place. Main Roads is leading the charge in that regard, as it would. However, the smouldering of the peat swamp will probably continue until the watertable in that area rises and extinguishes the smouldering peat, which we expect to occur in the coming months once we get a little more rainfall on the coastal plain. A second incident occurred near Lakes Road on Forrest Highway where a burn off on private property to the east of the highway created smoke, which again caused a traffic fatality.

[2.20 pm]

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to page 643 and "Services Summary". The first line item refers to the provision of parks and visitor services. Has any progress been made with negotiations on the future of the Wedge and Grey squatter shack settlements, which are in my electorate, and what is the government's intention with respect to the future management of those settlements?

Mr A.P. JACOB: Indeed, this has been a long-running issue within the member's electorate. The Wedge and Grey preliminary planning report was prepared in 2014 by the Department of Parks and Wildlife in consultation

with the two shack-owners associations as well as other stakeholders. That report was considered by cabinet in February this year and its recommendations were noted. The report has identified a number of zones where shacks are in environmentally or culturally sensitive areas and will require removal. A significant number of shacks will be retained; however those shacks will need to meet building, health and safety standards in order for those shack owners or leaseholders to maintain long-term tenure. The Department of Parks and Wildlife is now proceeding towards the next stage of that planning process. A coastal engineering consultant has been contracted to undertake a hazard assessment consistent with the state's coastal planning policy, which sits under the Department of Planning, and a final Wedge and Grey plan is expected to be completed by early 2016.

Mr F.A. ALBAN: I refer to sixth dot point on page 642 related to forest management. How will the government implement initiatives in the “Forest Management Plan 2014–2023” within the constraints of the budget?

Mr A.P. JACOB: The Department of Parks and Wildlife and the state government is absolutely committed to managing the south west native forests in an ecologically sustainable manner. Our blueprint for doing so is the forest management plan for 2014–2023, which gives a clear policy direction over the next decade, and this plan will continue to be implemented within this budget. The department continues to focus on work that relates to its core role within that, which is a land manager that manages access to the state forest and timber reserves for timber harvesting, water production in mining and for recreational purposes and a range of other uses within state forest. Considerable progress has been made to develop working relationships and arrangements between the department and the Forest Products Commission as required by the forest management plan. These working relationships will clarify responsibilities and allow for greater self-regulation by the Forest Products Commission into the future, which should hopefully improve the efficiency and effectiveness of both agencies.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: How will the minister achieve that with 26 fewer staff than the department had in 2013–14?

Mr A.P. JACOB: As I said, all the outcomes from the forest management plan continue to be met within the department's resources within that area. Although some areas within the department have seen 50 voluntary redundancies, for example, and some reductions, all those areas under the forest management plan will continue to be resourced. In addition, a range of other functions go somewhat above and beyond the forest management plan and have also been retained within this budget.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: It is like the magic pudding—26 fewer staff and the department can still do the same job. How will the department do it? The minister has not explained that yet; he is just pretending that the department will come up with resources to do the jobs of 26 people who are no longer there.

Mr A.P. JACOB: The department was resourced above and beyond the requirements of the forest management plan. The department is still resourced above and beyond those requirements, which will continue to be met as well as a range of other targeted programs.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Is the minister admitting that in previous years those people did nothing?

Mr A.P. JACOB: That is not what I said at all.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: The minister said that the agency was over-resourced.

Mr A.P. JACOB: No, I said that there is resourcing within that forest management division that goes beyond the requirements of the forest management plan. My answer specifically related to the requirements of the forest management plan 2014–2023, which will continue to be met and resourced within the Department of Parks and Wildlife. That is not the only thing that we do.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: My question relates to the creation of a new department headquarters in Bunbury. I refer to page 648 in volume 2 of the *Budget Statements* and also page 213 in the *Economic and Fiscal Outlook*. It was estimated that \$250 000 would be expended for the business case. Has that business case been presented to the minister yet and is it available to the public?

Mr A.P. JACOB: That work is ongoing. It is not yet available to the public and I will ask the director general to make a few comments on that in a second. It is a particularly exciting project for the Department of Parks and Wildlife and the state government. We gave a clear commitment at the last election to decentralising state government agencies outside of the central business district to not only suburban areas, but also regional centres. This has been a long-held goal of successive state governments within Western Australia. Now we have seen not only the commitment but also the dollars going behind that commitment to see the Department of Parks and Wildlife have its new headquarters in Bunbury on Koombana Bay. The site has now been identified and it is an absolutely superb site. Bunbury is our most significant regional centre in terms of population —

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Can we just stick to the question please, minister?

Mr A.P. JACOB: I am responding to the question, member for Gosnells.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Where is the business case? The minister just told me that he has not done it.

Mr A.P. JACOB: I said it is being prepared. Significant work has been undertaken —

The CHAIRMAN: Members! Do not argue across the chamber; speak through the Chair.

Mr A.P. JACOB: I will get the director general to make a few comments on that in a second, but this is quite a good news story and a good opportunity —

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: No; it is not an opportunity to do a media release.

The CHAIRMAN: Members! Minister, can you make your answers brief, please? You have a tendency in the house to give us a lot of information. If you can keep it brief, that would be extraordinarily helpful.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Absolutely, Madam Chair. Before I hand over to the director general to talk about what work has been done on the business case, I was trying to say that if anyone has a chance to go past that site they will see that activity has already commenced there.

Mr J.R. Sharp: The initial allocation of \$250 000 has not been fully expended yet, nor has the business case been completed. Due diligence has been done on the proposed site in terms of environmental clearance and heritage matters. A number of consultancies have been undertaken to underpin the business case, and land assembly planning matters must also be dealt with. The local authority wishes to develop to the west of the site, so concurrent work is happening in terms of assembling the land with the City of Bunbury and the Department of Planning. That will form the basis, when the due diligence is completed with the site, for the business case to be finalised.

[2.30 pm]

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Can the minister explain why \$18 million has been received from the royalties for regions fund for this project—we accept the virtues of the project—without a business case having been made, when, normally, to receive money from royalties for regions, a business case has to be publicly displayed?

Mr A.P. JACOB: I thank the member for Gosnells for the question. If he would let me finish answering the initial question, I would have gotten to the exact point of that one. In the first instance, the money has been allocated; it has not yet been provided. In the second instance, this was an election commitment. This was a key election commitment under the environment and biodiversity policy and \$18 million was the allocated funding towards a new Bunbury headquarters, hence why \$18 million is the amount that continues to be allocated towards this project.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Is this going to develop stage 1 of the project?

Mr A.P. JACOB: Yes.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Not stage 2?

Mr A.P. JACOB: What this will go towards is housing for 100 staff, from recollection, located in Bunbury at Koombana Bay, with the long-term goal of some 300 staff being located at that site. Another element of what I was seeking to explain before is that part of the significance of this site is its gateway potential into the south west, and a lot of our key national parks and conservation areas are contained within the south west.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I do not need this information now; it is not relevant.

Mr A.P. JACOB: The member for Gosnells does not like the answer, I am sorry, but that is the answer to the question.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: It is not relevant information to my question.

Mr A.P. JACOB: It is relevant to the question.

The CHAIRMAN: Member for Gosnells, I am now timing the minister for you, but I do not need you to call across at him. Minister, can you keep your answer brief, please.

Mr A.P. JACOB: I will attempt to do so, Madam Chair, but it does require context to the question. The question was specifically around the staffing at that site. The significance of that site and also this commitment is not just a matter of sheer numbers. There is a range of services which Department of Parks and Wildlife offers. In the first instance, this can provide a shopfront into our Parks for People program, which is our accommodation. In the second instance, the reason that it is a particularly good long-term site to base the Department of Parks and Wildlife is the science potential of that particular site. It sits adjacent to the southernmost white mangrove swamp area within the state, is adjacent to an estuary inlet, is also adjacent to a coastal area and is very close to forested areas, so a range of science staff will also be based at this site in the long term. I expect we will continue

to see more and more of our science staff move into this site. I am talking here of far longer term, beyond even stage 2, because it is a particularly good location.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: How is it that the minister is going from currently 80 staff in Bunbury to 100 staff and then describing it as the headquarters for DPaW? How can a staff of 100 be a headquarters staff?

Mr A.P. JACOB: The short answer to that is that it is 100 additional staff, member for Gosnells.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: So it is 180 in total?

Mr A.P. JACOB: Yes.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I refer to page 647 and the full-time equivalent employees engaged in bushfire suppression. Can the minister outline what measures the Department of Parks and Wildlife is taking in succession planning for bushfire suppression personnel? In that context I also want to ask: they are obviously subject to workforce renewal policies, so how is that going to impact on loss of corporate knowledge?

Mr A.P. JACOB: I thank the member for Girrawheen for that question and I will hand over to the director general and then maybe Peter Dans on succession planning, but I will make a couple of quick comments. Firstly, all Department of Parks and Wildlife firefighting staff have been considered as frontline staff for the workforce renewal policy, so that obviously does not attract that 40 per cent harvesting on staff turnover. Secondly, in my time in the role as Minister for Environment, one thing that has particularly impressed me—I have had the opportunity to visit most of our regional offices and hand out service medals to our staff—has been the longevity of our staff and also the staff retention, particularly within these firefighting service areas. When I had the opportunity to hand out service medals in Pemberton, for example, there was close to 2 000 years of firefighting service, including one individual who had 47 years of experience with the department, and that stretches right back to some staff getting their 15-year service medal and some younger ones as well. I will hand on to the director general.

Mr J.R. Sharp: Succession is a very significant issue and we take it very seriously. We have a couple of programs specifically aimed at that, and I ask Mr Dans to outline the basic elements of those. The additional funding, of course, is significant in that regard as well because although we look at full-time positions, a number of these will be part-time and seasonal positions with which we build a much wider cadre of firefighters. There is a specific program dealing with succession.

Mr P.D. Dans: The government allocated new funding to Parks and Wildlife in the 2012–13 budget, following Mr Keelty's investigation into the Margaret River bushfire. A specific portion of that was put in to establish a fire management development program to address one of the suggestions of Mr Keelty; that is, a formal succession management program needed to be put in place. That has been done and it is progressing extremely well. That program aims to accelerate the development of experience in mid and lower level officers in fire management by moving them rather frequently around the state, transferring them every 18 to 24 months. We have had the first rotation and it is going particularly well. A couple of staff have moved out of that program into more senior and permanent positions and we have recruited another cohort of about half a dozen into it in the last six months. It is progressing extremely well.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I think the minister said that the target was about 460 000 hectares this year, or we have heard that it is about that. Has there been an increase of personnel numbers commensurate with that more than doubling of the target?

Mr A.P. JACOB: Just to clarify for the member for Girrawheen, that does not represent a doubling of the target and that is not a particularly unusual figure. That generally represents what the potential burning figure would be and we never achieve towards that. Our target remains 200 000 hectares. The burn will accommodate well above and beyond the 200 000 hectares. That again goes back to my comment that what we actually target is 40 to 45 per cent of our state forested areas having a fuel load of less than six years. The potential burn, depending on the weather and a range of conditions, will usually work towards that 200 000 hectare target, although the planned provision will often be in excess of 400 000 hectares.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Can the minister provide, by way of supplementary information, details of seasonal, casual, full-time and part-time DPaW personnel, their average age and their years of experience?

Mr A.P. JACOB: I am conscious of 19 June being the deadline, so given that level of detail, maybe the member for Girrawheen is happy to put it on notice.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: No.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: That is not a fault of us. The government rescheduled the estimates period. The member has asked a practical question.

The CHAIRMAN: Let us just have one at a time. Member for Girrawheen, you were asked whether you were happy to put that on notice.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: No, I am not, Madam Chair. This is all information that the minister should have readily to hand in the course of his deliberations and his work in the succession planning.

Mr A.P. JACOB: If the member wants it to be by way of supplementary information, we can endeavour to do that.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Excellent; thank you.

[*Supplementary Information No B38.*]

The CHAIRMAN: Minister, can you just outline what you undertaken to provide as way of supplementary information?

Mr A.P. JACOB: My understanding is that it is a breakdown within that FTE figure that we contained for firefighting staff numbers; essentially, how individuals breakdown within that FTE and the length of service of those individuals.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: And the average age.

Mr A.P. JACOB: And the average age.

[2.40 pm]

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Or age, I suppose.

The government has promised presumptive cancer laws to be extended to volunteers and DPaW employees. Where is that at, minister? I know the Minister for Emergency Services made that commitment but given that it impacts on DPaW personnel I wonder at what stage we can expect to see laws or administrative arrangements to cover DPaW personnel.

Mr A.P. JACOB: As the member implied, it is a question for the Minister for Emergency Services. However, the intent remains for those laws to apply to volunteers in Parks and Wildlife as well as DFES firefighters.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Does the minister have no idea where that is at? Has he not been briefed by the minister?

Mr A.P. JACOB: Member for Girrawheen, I am not the Minister for Emergency Services.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: The minister has been briefed by the Minister for Emergency Services and, presumably, he will be aware of some time frame.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Again, member for Girrawheen, that is a question for —

Ms M.M. QUIRK: That is a yes, is it?

Mr A.P. JACOB: That is a question for the Minister for Emergency Services. I have obviously been involved in the policy formulation around that and I support it applying to Parks and Wildlife firefighters, and that is the government's position and that is what will happen.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: What impact will these laws have on the budget and staffing levels?

Mr A.P. JACOB: That is a question for the Minister for Emergency Services.

Mr F.A. ALBAN: I refer to line item 8, "Protection of the Swan and Canning Rivers System" under the service summary on page 643, particularly in relation to the rehabilitation of the protection of the foreshores of the Swan Canning Riverpark. Can the minister explain how the \$3 million funding over three years will be directed and how this investment will improve our foreshores and water quality?

Mr A.P. JACOB: I thank the member for Swan Hills for the question. There is a long-standing program of providing around \$1 million a year towards the riverbank program, on which we typically partnered with local governments along the Swan Canning Riverpark on a matched funding basis. That went towards a riverbank restoration or river walls and a range of measures. In last year's budget the state government took a decision to double that funding for three years. So the last financial year, or the financial year we are currently in, being the first and then the next two years will take that to a \$2 million commitment from the state government, which, on a matched funding basis sees a minimum of \$4 million going into riverbank works, river stabilisation, river walls and a range of projects. For 2014–15, key projects have included in particular the Mends Street river wall in the City of South Perth, which was an election commitment from the member for South Perth funded through this program. Also, \$300 000 has gone towards the Garvey Park foreshore restoration area within the City of Belmont; \$100 000 to prepare the Cygnia Cove natural area management plan, which included a constructed wetland within the City of South Perth; \$79 000 towards the Bath Street Jetty foreshore stabilisation within the

City of Bayswater; and \$14 000 towards Ashfield Parade foreshore within the Town of Bassendean. They are two examples of what that funding has gone into.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I refer to paragraph (a) referring to the Swan River Trust under “Outcomes and Key Effectiveness Indicators” on page 644. In previous years we had statistics on the rate of noncompliance with approvals. Indeed, there was a 31 per cent noncompliance rate in 2012–13, and a 34 per cent noncompliance rate in 2011–12. Where is the non-compliance rate in this year’s outcomes and key effectiveness indicators, given that we were promised, with the merger of the Swan River Trust and the Department of Parks and Wildlife, that we would get all the same information as ever before?

Mr A.P. JACOB: I thank the member for Gosnells for the question. Those effectiveness indicators are measured through an aggregation of water quality targets that include chlorophyll A and dissolved oxygen in the estuary as well as nitrogen and phosphorous targets. In relation to the question around planning compliance or structural compliance around the development control area in the first instance, I will hand over to the director general to give further information.

Mr J.R. Sharp: In relation to the question on the key effectiveness indicator, that is an aggregation of the number. I will ask Mr Hughes to provide the specifics on that information, which will be made available.

Mr R. Hughes: By agreement with the Office of the Auditor General, the key effectiveness indicators were changed in preparing the single service that now appears in the budget papers under Parks and Wildlife. This indicator is constrained to ecological health indicators. Of course, we maintain compliance statistics in-house and we are happy to provide that information.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Can we ask members and advisers to speak into the microphone; I am struggling to hear.

The CHAIRMAN: Mr Hughes offered to provide details. Is that by supplementary information? Can the minister outline what that supplementary information will be?

Mr A.P. JACOB: We were talking about noncompliances in the last financial year within the development control area. Is that correct, member for Gosnells?

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Yes.

[Supplementary Information No B39.]

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: On the auditing of development approval conditions monitoring, the minister promised that with the merger of the Swan River Trust and DPaW there would be no weakening of transparency, yet he is saying that he is happy that those sorts of indicators are not in the annual budget. How can that be?

Mr A.P. JACOB: We are only too transparent on that and we are only too happy to provide the information.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: But not in the budget.

Mr A.P. JACOB: That is correct; it is not contained within the budget papers as a stand-alone item.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Can the minister advise how many level 3 fire incidents DPaW retained control of this year?

Mr A.P. JACOB: I presume the member is referring to —

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Northcliffe, but I do not know whether there are any others.

Mr A.P. JACOB: — bushfire suppression in general. The question does not relate specifically to a budget paper page.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Page 647.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Mr Sharp, what category 3 incidents did we respond to in the last financial year?

Mr J.R. Sharp: I do not have that information available. Mr Dans might be able to answer that.

Mr P.D. Dans: The government took a policy position in early 2012 that the DFES commissioner would take control of all fires declared level 3 fires in Western Australia. As such, we did not control any level 3 fires except on delegation from the commissioner when he delegated a Parks and Wildlife incident control, as was the case at both the Lower Hotham and the O’Sullivan fires, which were the Northcliffe fires.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: A number of issues have been raised in relation to the Northcliffe fire and I understand it is subject to a major incident review, which has not been released yet. Can the minister advise how long after ignition of the fire the Department of Fire and Emergency Services was advised?

Mr A.P. JACOB: As the member implied in the question, the major incident review is ongoing for that particular fire.

Mr J.R. Sharp: I cannot answer that question. There is a State Emergency Management Committee convened to review fires and we will look at the outcomes of that review.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Why was a decision made to bring firefighters from Victoria?

Mr A.P. JACOB: I would not say it is standard practice, but it is not unusual practice. Indeed, our own firefighters often travel to other states, in some instances even overseas. I believe we sent some firefighters to Canada this financial year. It is often based on an as-needs basis and the Victorian bushfires were a very good example of that. We send some of our firefighters over there and from time to time when we require it, they send theirs to us. In combination, the O'Sullivan and Lower Hotham fires were the largest, most sustained and most resource-demanding bushfires that we have experienced within the south west of Western Australia in the last 50 years, so it would certainly have met the threshold where assistance was more than welcome. I do not know whether Mr Dans wants to fill in with any further comment on that.

[2.50 pm]

Mr P.D. Dans: The department had been pretty well fully engaged with bushfires since early January, with the Bullsbrook fire, which the member might recall burned for about two weeks. There were a number of other fires around the Perth hills and in the south west, and then the ignition of fires by lightning moving across the south west land division on 29, 30 and 31 January. Fatigue was most definitely setting in. A number of staff had worked shift after shift for seven days a week, with rest periods. The decision was made early in the life of the O'Sullivan fire. It was apparent that it would be very much a campaign fire that might burn for 20 or more shifts. In the interests of firefighter safety, the maths just did not add up that we could satisfactorily resource that fire from the Department of Parks and Wildlife, the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and volunteer bushfire brigades, particularly when the lower Hotham fire escaped containment lines and ran well to the east early in February. It was quite apparent then, and in discussion with the Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner it was agreed that the state would make a request, first and foremost, to Victoria for additional resources.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Is the minister aware that one Victorian crew sat around and was never tasked with firefighting duties?

Mr A.P. JACOB: The short answer is that I am not aware of that. I do not know whether Mr Dans or Mr Sharp have any awareness of that.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: The minister would have heard via the media that there were some issues about feeding firefighters, who did not receive food at the Northcliffe fires. Has the minister received a briefing on the matter, and does he know the reason for that?

Mr A.P. JACOB: I will hand over to the director general on that one specifically, but when I had the opportunity after a couple of days to go through Northcliffe, I was impressed. I toured the logistics side that was at the back of that fire. Not only the level of effort going into those logistics but also the quality of food being provided, when I had the opportunity to go through, was first class.

Mr J.R. Sharp: The review of the fire will deal with issues about resourcing and claims that were made about inadequate resources. That will all be part of the broader review of the fires, and if that were the case, it will emerge in that review.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Am I to understand that the catering arrangements are coming up for tender and that there will be a review of those arrangements?

Mr A.P. JACOB: I will pass that question on to Mr Dans.

Mr P.D. Dans: The Department of Parks and Wildlife undertakes its own catering at bushfires. I understand that the Department of Fire and Emergency Services has fee-for-service arrangements with external providers and that may be the arrangement the member is talking about.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: It appears that firefighters from Denmark, who would have had knowledge of the local vegetation, were in fact tasked to go to Boddington, and then firefighters from Perth and Bunbury were tasked to go down to Northcliffe. Is there any way to avoid those sorts of scenarios happening in the future?

Mr A.P. JACOB: I thank the member for Girraween for the question. I will hand over to Mr Dans to respond to that in further detail. However, I will most certainly bow to the expertise of the incident controllers in that particular fire. They are very experienced people doing the absolute best job they can in some very tough circumstances.

Mr P.D. Dans: If indeed those situations did occur, it is unfortunate, but when a resource request is put in for an agency to provide resources to a fire, it takes the first available resources. They may be resources more distant from the fire, but they are available on request. Over the course of the fire it is possible to realign and recalibrate and have crews from the local area assigned to a local fire. As resources are required, we generally take whatever we can get our hands on, even if it involves a bit of travel time.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Can the minister advise how many prescribed burns have escaped in the past 12 months?

Mr A.P. JACOB: For specific information on escaped prescribed burns, I will hand over to Mr Dans.

Mr J.R. Sharp: We publish that information annually, and it is available, but perhaps Mr Dans may know off the top of his head.

Mr P.D. Dans: That would certainly be in our annual report for the 2014–15 financial year. I am not aware of any escaped prescribed burns that have required active and sustained suppression action. Most burns might have embers that will spot over boundaries, and might burn a couple of square metres, but that is quickly attended to by crews on patrol. We define an escape as something that requires a sustained suppression effort to bring it under control and extinguish it. We can provide the information, but it will generally be wrapped up for the financial year in the annual report.

Mr R.S. LOVE: My question relates to service 2 on page 643, “Conserving Habitats, Species and Ecological Communities” as a priority. I am aware that for a number of years Western Shield has been operating to control foxes in Western Australia. Will that continue, and to what extent might it take on other animals, such as feral cats?

Mr A.P. JACOB: I thank the member for Moore for the question. Indeed, since its inception in 1996, Western Shield has become the government’s flagship wildlife conservation program. It has achieved at least a 55 per cent reduction in fox populations throughout south west baited areas. We have also seen sustained or stable improvement in around 30 native animal populations and at least 53 threatened mammal, bird and reptile species remain in baited areas as a result of the Western Shield program. There have also been 37 successful translocations of threatened native animal species, which has contributed to their recovery. In 2015, activities were refocused towards core areas to protect wild populations of native animals that are threatened by foxes as well as feral cats. Those areas include the upper Warren, the Fitzgerald River biome, Dryandra Woodland, Kalbarri National Park in the member for Moore’s electorate, Peron Peninsula and Julimar forest. Two other smaller sites at Two Peoples Bay are also being targeted to afford protection to the Gilbert’s potoroo, which is the rarest mammal on the planet.

The program remains a landscape-scale program and some one million baits are distributed annually across 3.5 million hectares. Excitingly, this year we hope to see particularly strong reduction of predation by feral cats, with the registration of our new bait, Eradicat, by the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority. This bait, a retooling of 1080 poison specifically focused on cat baiting, has now been licensed for landscape-scale operations, and it has already successfully reduced feral cat numbers in trial areas including the Shark Bay World Heritage area, the northern goldfields and the southern coastal region.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I refer to the line items for plant and equipment on page 648 of budget paper No 2 and also on page 323 of budget paper No 3. I notice that \$7.1 million has been stripped from the plant and equipment maintenance budget. What impact will that have in the way of maintenance failure, lack of capacity and cost blowouts when maintenance has not been carried out and things have to be replaced?

Mr A.P. JACOB: Is the member for Gosnells referring to the line items under the “Completed Works” heading on page 648?

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: On page 648 there is a line item for plant and equipment and there is a program there.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Does that sit under “Completed Works”?

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: It is under “New Works”. Also, on page 323 of budget paper No 3, under “Minister for Environment; Heritage”, there is a line item for \$7.1 million of cuts to plant and equipment. The minister has styled it as “Total Efficiency Savings”, but my question is: is that not a false efficiency because equipment will break down because there will not be the same quality of maintenance procedure?

[3.00 pm]

Mr A.P. JACOB: The short answer is that it is better answered on page 648. “Works in Progress” is the first heading and then “Completed Works”. Around two-thirds of the way under that heading is “Plant and Equipment”, “2014–15 Program”.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I am not referring to “Completed Works”.

Mr A.P. JACOB: I know, member. However, when we look at “New Works”, “Plant and Equipment”, the 2015–16 program has \$3 423 000, the 2016–17 program for plants and work has \$3.645 million, the 2017–18 program has slightly over \$4.5 million, and the 2018–19 program has slightly over \$5.5 million.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: The minister has described this in budget paper No 3 as a \$7.1 million total efficiency saving. Obviously, there are significant cuts to plant and equipment maintenance—why?

Mr A.P. JACOB: I am answering the member’s question. It is contained on page 648 of budget paper No 2 under “New Works”.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: That is not the answer.

Mr A.P. JACOB: There is a range of plant and equipment budget allocations not only for this financial year but also in every financial year going forward —

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Explain the \$7.1 million cut.

Mr A.P. JACOB: I am explaining that it is not a cut. Funding is growing —

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Yes, it is.

Mr A.P. JACOB: There is funding growing in all of the out years in budget paper No 2.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Page 323 of budget paper No 3 shows a \$7.1 million cut. Does the minister admit there has been a cut of \$7.1 million?

Mr A.P. JACOB: No. I am saying that page —

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Why does it appear on page 323?

The CHAIRMAN: Members, can I just call a halt to this for a minute. Hansard is struggling to catch all of your comments. I will ask the member for Gosnells to restate his question and for the minister to answer it directly. We will go to the member for Gosnells first for the question again, please.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Page 323 of budget paper No 3 clearly shows a \$7.1 million cut under “Plant and Equipment”. How is that not going to seriously impact on the operations of the agency?

Mr A.P. JACOB: The answer to that question is if the member read it in correlation with budget paper No 2, plant and equipment is well funded into the out years.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: The minister has just cut it by \$7.1 million.

Mr A.P. JACOB: The answer is the answer, Madam Chair.

The CHAIRMAN: Member, I think the minister has answered the question. The member might want to think about rephrasing or reframing it.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: We can move on.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I also refer to “Completed Works” and “New Works” on page 648. What crew protections have been installed in appliances and what are still to be installed? How much is retrofitting and how much is new vehicles with these protections already in the appliances?

Mr A.P. JACOB: I thank the member for Girrawheen for the question. Following the Black Cat Creek fire, 10 improvement notices were applied from WorkSafe to the Department of Parks and Wildlife. Those required a range of not only processes, but also upgrades through plant and equipment as well as a range of new safety equipment. My understanding is that all of that has now been rolled out. I will hand over to Mr Dans to give any further information.

Mr P.D. Dans: The minister is correct; all of the fleet modifications arising from the improvement notices have been completed and were done so around October 2014. That included the fitting of roll-down radiant heat shield curtains, replacement of some plastic components, the shielding of critical wiring and hydraulic lines and the like. I am pretty sure that is most of it. The 100-vehicle fleet in service is now all fitted. The member will see “Firefighting Fleet Replacement” under “New Works”. About 10 trucks a year are rolled over, sometimes 12, sometimes nine; but in the order of 10. They will all now be fitted and delivered with those new crew protection features that we put in place following the fire at Black Cat Creek.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Does that include sprinklers and GPS enhancements?

Mr A.P. JACOB: In vehicles, particularly inundation in vehicles where the carrying capacity is at a level they can work, my understanding is there are some technical challenges with some of the lighter vehicles. I will pass over to Mr Dans again.

Mr P.D. Dans: Member, I omitted a key component, which is the deluge systems. It is fitted in all of the heavy fleet. As the minister alluded to, we are now investigating, firstly, radiant heat shield curtains in the light fleet. It is probably achievable in the Toyota LandCruiser cab chassis but in the smaller, light fleet, like Toyota HiLuxes, it is probably not going to be achievable without obscuring the driver's vision of the road.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I refer to "Desired Outcomes" on page 643. The minister discussed the ecological health of the Swan and Canning Rivers. What measures are being budgeted for wetlands such as the Yellagonga catchment?

Mr A.P. JACOB: I thank the member for that question. The Yellagonga catchment sits within our regional park program. In terms of a specific budget breakdown and where that sits within regional parks and perhaps Yellagonga, I will hand to the director general. I also point out that currently before the Legislative Assembly is the Conservation and Land Management Amendment Bill 2015. It includes, for the first time, recognition of regional parks under the Conservation and Land Management Act. That amending legislation will give a specific head of power around regional parks for the first time and is currently before the Legislative Assembly.

Mr J.R. Sharp: There is no specific allocation for Yellagonga as a wetland. It is contained within a regional park that has its own management plan. It is within the works that are undertaken in the environmental management activities of that regional park that protection occurs for that wetland.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: In addressing issues relating to algal bloom and the like, is that the responsibility of relevant local governments?

Mr J.R. Sharp: Yes, there are ongoing discussions about those factors that impact upon the regional park from outside the park, with the two major local authorities alongside. A range of planning matters contribute to the water quality in the lake. There is ongoing dialogue between our regional parks unit and both of those local authorities.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Is it true to say the state government is not contributing anything towards those efforts?

Mr A.P. JACOB: Not contributing anything to? I missed the last part.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: The efforts in terms of Yellagonga.

Mr A.P. JACOB: No, not at all, member. I took a grievance from —

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Can the minister provide what contribution he is making, by way of supplementary?

Mr A.P. JACOB: There is not a specific line item that sits under regional parks or Yellagonga. The government provides a range of services not only through the Department of Parks and Wildlife, but also in partnership with local governments. I took a grievance in the house from the member for Girrawheen around the midge spray, for example. My understanding is we are now licensed for that more selective larvicide, which is very good news for the health of the lakes going forward. That is an example of where the state government puts up funding in partnership with local governments for good outcomes in regional parks.

The appropriation was recommended.

[3.10 pm]