

**Division 47: Parks and Wildlife, \$208 092 000 —**

Ms W.M. Duncan, Chairman.

Mr A.P. Jacob, Minister for Environment.

Mr J. Sharp, Director General.

Dr J. Byrne, Director, Corporate Services.

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

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

Mr R. Hughes, Director, Rivers and Estuaries.

Dr M.E. Rayner, Acting Director, Forest and Ecosystem Management.

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

[Witnesses introduced.]

**The CHAIRMAN:** Welcome, members. This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. It is the intention of the Chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. 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 that the minister 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, 3 June 2016. 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 give the call to the member for Gosnells.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** My first question refers to page 536, the river system health target in the outcomes and key effectiveness indicators table. The figures at the bottom of the table note that the aim is to achieve 58 per cent of the targets for river ecosystem health in the Swan and Canning Rivers. Where are the post-mortem results for the dead dolphins?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I thank the member for that question. The post-mortem results are yet to come. My understanding is that the mother was in a significantly decomposed state. The time line I have been given from recovery, which was Friday just under a week ago, was under two weeks, so I expect results on that in the next week or so. Preliminary results on the calf have come through, but given the calf passed away some time after the mother, the focus will be on the mother.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** Sticking with page 536 and the river ecosystem health targets, if the minister is only aiming for a 58 per cent achievement rate, is he taking seriously things such as the algal blooms in the Canning River over the last couple of months and, indeed, these latest dolphin deaths?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** We are taking those issues very seriously.

I briefly acknowledge the student councillors from Kinross College who have come in to watch estimates for a short time today. It is good to have all of you here.

Speaking on river health more generally, the Swan and Canning Rivers estuary system has a range of health challenges, and we do not shy away from that. Most of those are due to historical land-use decisions, some going back almost 200 years. It is a radically changed ecosystem from the opening of the harbour mouth and previous uses, such as tip sites that were arranged along the banks of the Swan River in historical times through to industrial uses along the banks of the Swan going back, in some instances, a century or more. We are seeing over time a gradual improvement in the river health system. The targets that are reflected in the budget papers show a gradual improvement in the river health system and are realistic targets for where we currently sit. We are continuing to work on river health.

I will address two inferences in the member for Gosnells' question. The first one is around algal blooms or even spikes, for example, in nutrient activity or bacterial activity in the Swan and Canning Rivers. This is my fourth year in this role, and what we typically see—I am sure the member for Mandurah would have seen this in his time in this role—is that when the first rains come through following a summer period, we get an initial spike

because the drainage systems are flushed out and there is all sorts of matter, such as decomposing leaves and animal faecal matter, washed into the Swan and Canning Rivers in those first few weeks following the initial deluges of rain. To bring my response back to the dolphin incident at Elizabeth Quay last Friday, my understanding is that the female dolphin was of a significant age, so it could well have been natural causes.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** She was 30, and they live to 50. She just reproduced; it was not natural causes.

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** We are yet to get final results, but I have not seen anything yet that would indicate it was linked to river health.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** The minister just talked about trying to fix the ills of the past from things such as tip sites that have long been closed down. What has been the minister's reaction to the possibility that a brand-new construction on the banks of the Swan—namely, Elizabeth Quay—is responsible for sewage leaking into Elizabeth Quay and into the river?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I am not aware of any instance in which leakage of sewage from Elizabeth Quay into the Swan and Canning Rivers has been raised. Although there were some sewerage issues within Elizabeth Quay to do with the plumbing, there was nothing to link that issue to further leakage back into the Swan and Canning Rivers system.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** I have a further question.

**The CHAIRMAN:** We will come back to the member for Gosnells.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** Is there a limit on further questions?

**The CHAIRMAN:** No, there is not, but questions are very broad ranging.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I am happy to defer to the member.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** The minister just referred to the connection between Elizabeth Quay and what goes into the Swan River, and it appears from what the minister is saying that it is a minor issue. Is it not the case that the whole design of Elizabeth Quay assumes that it will be flushed and that the flushing mechanism maintains the water quality? In that flushing mechanism, we will see sewage leaking out of Elizabeth Quay. It has been well documented that we have sewage at Elizabeth Quay.

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** No, it has not.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** We have had the faecal counts go up. The monthly testing has demonstrated that.

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** No; that is not correct.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** It has been well reported.

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I will answer the member's question.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** The minister is now saying that Elizabeth Quay's flushing is not going to have a negative impact on the Swan River.

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** No, member. I thank the member for the question. There is no linkage; the member is trying to link two very separate things. My earlier answer referring to the spike in faecal bacteria in the Swan and Canning Rivers system was that it is a regular event; it occurs every year when we get the start of autumn rains and we get the flushing out of our drainage systems in the metropolitan area into the Swan and Canning Rivers system. We have an entire summer's worth of build-up of leaf matter and all sorts of litter and detritus.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** Not in Elizabeth Quay where the swim leg of the triathlon was cancelled!

**The CHAIRMAN:** Member for Gosnells, allow the minister to answer, please.

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** That is reflective of instances that are part of the river system that are found every year within the entire river system, because there is inevitably faecal matter, particularly dog and other animal faecal matter, in some of that drainage intervention.

With regard to the incidence of sewage plumbing issues at Elizabeth Quay, at no point has there been a sewage leakage in Elizabeth Quay—period. There are separate issues to do with the plumbing of Elizabeth Quay, and those are being addressed, but the bacterial or faecal issues in and around Elizabeth Quay are regular issues that long before Elizabeth Quay was constructed, the Swan and Canning Rivers system faces at that time of year.

[2.10 pm]

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** Is the minister is happy that the Metropolitan Redevelopment Authority is conducting only a monthly water quality testing regime to detect things such as faecal matter at Elizabeth Quay when his own department is doing weekly testing in other parts of the Swan and Canning estuary?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I am not sure that I can answer on behalf of the MRA, but my understanding is that the MRA's testing regime is along similar lines to that of what the Department of Parks and Wildlife is doing into the future.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** The minister is saying that he does not think there is a connection between faecal matter and Elizabeth Quay and water quality in the Swan River, but then he is having to acknowledge that there is only a monthly testing regime going on at Elizabeth Quay.

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** No, member. I am not saying that I do not think there is; I am saying that there is no link and —

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** How can the minister be sure when there is only a monthly testing regime?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** There has been no showing of a link. The Department of Parks and Wildlife and the Swan River Trust's weekly testing regime continues and has been continuing. Elizabeth Quay is part of the Swan and Canning River system. It is the same water body and our weekly testing continues, and those results are up on the website.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I refer to the department's full-time equivalents on page 542 of the *Budget Statements*. Can the minister confirm that 83 FTEs have been lost over the last two financial years and that another five are proposed to be lost in 2016-17?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** Member, whereabouts specifically on page 542?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I refer to paragraph (b), which highlights that the number of full-time equivalents is declining.

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I thank the member for Mandurah for the question. Parks and Wildlife has gone through, more in previous budgets, a restructure of our FTE load as a way of managing our budgets going forward to address the state's fiscal position. We addressed that in last year's budget. Most of those were within previous budget periods. There is no significant flow-on effect for this coming budget. However, to address what happened in previous years, I will hand over to the director general of Department of Parks and Wildlife or whomever he wishes to nominate to give a bit more detail.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I just want the minister to confirm those figures.

**Mr J. Sharp:** The FTE figures indicate the 2014-15 figure of 1 533. There was a reduction into this year's FTE count. The figure the member referred to is a difference of five FTEs between the current year and projected into next financial year. There are areas in which there is a change in that number because that figure includes staff who are on contract and where there are funding programs that come to an end, that would explain some of the difference of the five in the coming year.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** The minister can confirm the reduction in FTEs over the last two financial years. In addition to the 83 FTEs lost over the last two financial years, there was also a reduction of 50 FTEs in 2013-14 as part of the voluntary severance scheme. Can the minister confirm that since 2013-14, or over the last three financial years, the department has lost 133 full-time equivalents—just a simple yes or no?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I will pass over to Dr Byrne or Mr Sharpe to give further detail.

**Mr J. Sharp:** There is an element in which the 50 is already represented within that figure. Dr Byrne will explain that.

**Dr J. Byrne:** I confirm that the 83 reduction includes the 50 voluntary severances not added to but included in the reduction shown in the budget statements.

**Mr F.A. ALBAN:** I refer to page 536 and total cost of services for service 6, "Prescribed Burning and Fire Management". As the minister knows, there are several major parks in my electorate. How has the additional \$20 million allocation announced in the 2015-16 budget and provided for over four years for prescribed burning enabled the Department of Parks and Wildlife to achieve its prescribed burning targets? How will funding be used in the 2016-17 year?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I thank the member for Swan Hills for the question. As he referenced, there was an announcement in last year's budget of an extra \$20 million allocation for the Department of Parks and Wildlife on top of its existing \$10 million per annum; that is, \$20 million over four years on top of the existing \$10 million per annum provided to the department for prescribed burning to address a historical backlog because

Chairman; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Albert Jacob; Mr David Templeman; Mr Frank Alban; Mr Bill Johnston; Dr Graham Jacobs; Mr Shane Love

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in previous years we fell well short of our prescribed burning contract. What this funding has and will continue to enable us to do is extend the employment contracts of existing seasonal land management employees as required to maximise our burning effort, and that includes meeting the cost of travel and accommodation, overtime and allowances, heavy plant and machinery and aircraft. It allows us to commence burns later in the day when required for safety and security reasons. It also allows for additional contracted earthmoving machines, water tankers and road and traffic management supplies to be placed on standby to be engaged readily to assist with prescribed burning. It also allows designated teams to undertake the more complex burns on Parks and Wildlife-managed lands, those that do not get a high hectare count, but are critical because of their adjacency to residential areas and high value assets. I am pleased to inform the house that the department has achieved more than 34 prescribed burns in Parks and Wildlife's three south-west forested regions, with another 92 burns partially completed. The last overall total that came through to me was some 157 229 hectares moving towards a 30 June final target of 200 000. Given that this is an important matter, I will ask Mr Peter Dans to provide the latest figure for our hectare target of prescribed burning.

**Mr P. Dans:** This morning the year-to-date achievement was 161 934 hectares, which is our best achievement since 2009–10, so the trend is certainly heading in the right direction,

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Given that the department has not achieved any of its targets in the last five or six years, what is the total amount of underachievement over that period of time?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** The 200 000 hectare target builds into a more longitudinal target. I am trying to answer the question directly —

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** The minister does not seem to be.

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I am. The goal across south-west forested areas is to have 45 per cent of Department of Parks and Wildlife-managed land with a fuel age of six years or less. That is the large goal and that breaks down to a 200 000 hectare per year target. Some years, particularly following on from the work orders that we received after the Black Cat Creek fire, we have fallen significantly short. The \$20 million over four years is part of playing catch up to that —

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** I take a point of order.

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I am getting to the answer.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Member for Cannington.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** I asked a very simple question, which was: over the last five or six years, how much has not been achieved against that target? I am sure the future is important, but I was not asking about the future. I asked about the minister's achievements.

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** In answer to that question, with a target of 45 per cent of south-west forested areas having a fuel age of six years or less, we currently sit at about 35 per cent of south-west forested areas with a fuel age of six years or less. I do not know whether Mr Dans —

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** That is not the question I asked.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The minister is about to refer to his adviser and that may assist you, member for Cannington.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** I would like an answer to the question I asked, not an answer to a different question.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I allow the minister to refer to his adviser.

**Mr P. Dans:** I do not have a figure for the exact shortfall. I can tell the member what the achievements have been for the past five years. That is quite easy and then it is as simple as subtracting that achievement from 200 and add the five up. I do not have that calculation here. The minister made the point that the objective is 45 per cent of Parks and Wildlife managed land in the south west with a fuel age less than six years. We were 35 per cent at 30 June 2015 and we will be greater than 35 per cent at the end of the current financial year.

[2.20 pm]

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Could I get as supplementary information the six-year underachievement of the controlled burn program.

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I am happy to take that on as supplementary information. That is why I was trying to give a lengthy answer. I need the member to explain exactly how he wants the data.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** I am happy to describe what I want. The minister asked me a second ago whether I would describe what I want, and I am happy to do that in the form that the adviser—I am terribly sorry I do not know his name—put it: the annual total, the annual achieved and the underachievement for the last six years.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Minister, are you happy with that?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** Yes, we can do that.

[*Supplementary Information No A76.*]

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** I refer to page 539, “Bushfire Suppression”. The employee full-time equivalents for the 2016–17 budget year is intended to be 140 FTEs. Obviously, there are commanders and policy people—all sorts of people in that total. How many of those 140 FTEs are firefighters out on the fireground?

**Mr P. Dans:** The figures that appear in the budget estimate are not particularly useful; they are derived essentially from the dollar value apportioned to that service, including all the corporate support services. The budget allocated to that service as a proportion of the total budget allocated to the department is multiplied by the number of FTEs in the department, so it is not very meaningful. In the south west of the state the department has approximately 288 frontline firefighters; they are the people on the trucks using tools and hoses to work on the fire line, if you like. We have about 100 dedicated fire management officers whose jobs are pretty much 100 per cent related to bushfire management—be that prescribed burning or bushfire suppression. We probably have about another 450 to 500 staff members who assist in incident management team roles when the situation requires. All in all, it varies a little from year to year. In the last financial year, 920 of the department’s 1 460 staff participated in fire suppression activities in some shape or form.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Of course, like the Army, the department has, I think, four people in the back for every person at the sharp end. I understand that there are a lot of people involved. Were there 288 frontline people, those who are in the trucks with a shovel and a backpack?

**Mr P. Dans:** Yes, 288 people were on the trucks; however, some of those dedicated officers and some of the support officers are actually on the fire line. They are not on trucks; they are in light units. They might be sector or divisional commanders directing the work of the frontline firefighters, but they are certainly on the fire line, member.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** In addition to the 288 frontline people, how many more department staff will be on the fire line ?

**Mr P. Dans:** It would vary from fire to fire, but we would use probably up to 300 additional staff on the frontline.

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** I refer to bushfire suppression at page 539. How many frontline Department of Parks and Wildlife people were deployed to fight the Cape Arid National Park fire in Esperance in November last year?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I will ask Mr Dans whether he has that figure to hand, but I suspect that we will have to provide that as supplementary information.

**Mr P. Dans:** I do not have the precise figure, but I understand something in the order of 150 to 200 Department of Parks and Wildlife staff were deployed to that complex of bushfires in and around Esperance during November 2015. Staff members were deployed to the Cascade and Merivale fires and some worked on the Cape Arid fires. I believe in the order of 150 to 200 staff members were involved over the duration of the incident.

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** What impact did fighting those fires in Esperance in November have on the department’s budget?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** The budget is structured in a way that we have the budget that we have before us but when we reach the end of the season there is often an overspend because we do what we need to do to fight fires and then we address the budget implications afterwards. That is yet to be addressed for the current financial year. We have a rough figure at the end of the financial year, but I do not know whether we have a specific figure for the Esperance fires at this stage.

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** When can we have information about the cost to the Department of Parks and Wildlife of fighting the fires in Esperance in November?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** That figure will be finalised at the end of the financial year. Just about every year I have been minister we have gone back for extra funding to cover what we have had to cover during the season. I assume that we will be able to give a breakdown figure of the impact of the fires in the Esperance region, but we are not at the end of the financial year yet. I imagine that at the very least the final year figures will be available in the midyear review, if not before. If the member looks at earlier budget papers, he will see that this is where the actual often gets a final bump up from the bushfire suppression response.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I would like to draw the minister's attention to significant issues impacting the agency at page 534. The first, second and third dot points refer to park improvement programs, especially programs that enable people to use national parks. Can the minister provide me with an update on the progress of the establishment of the marine park and the new national park in the Kimberley and the programs for Kalbarri and the midwest?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I thank the member for Moore for the question. The Kimberly Science and Conservation Strategy started as a \$9 million commitment by this government when we came to office in 2008. Following the 2013 election, that grew to an \$81.5 million commitment to establish five new marine parks in the Kimberley, Australia's largest national park over the Mitchell Plateau and a range of other conservation reserves. In this budget, a total of \$18.2 million over the next four years has been allocated to the Department of Parks and Wildlife to establish and jointly manage the proposed Great Kimberley Marine Park network and the proposed Kimberley and Oomeday, or Horizontal Falls, national parks. This takes our total spend on the Kimberley Science and Conservation Strategy to in excess of \$100 million, which is the largest single conservation spend focused on a particular region of any Western Australian government.

That is by no means the only project that we have pursued. Obviously, a project within the member's electorate, which he would be keeping a very keen eye on, is the Kalbarri National Park upgrade, which includes two new suspended lookouts, in a similar vein to those we have recently opened at the Gap in Torndirrup National Park, in Albany. There will be two new lookouts over the Murchison River Gorge, which will be suspended out even further than the one in Torndirrup. It is very significant for the member's electorate, given Kalbarri National Park is the most-visited tourism destination in the midwest, that the budget spend includes funds to seal the final section of road that leads to Nature's Window and the Z Bend. Earlier in this term of government, we managed to seal the first half of that road but some interstate and, certainly, nearly all international tourists have been restricted from visiting this most-popular tourism and iconic conservation destination in the midwest region. The sealing of the road will now give access to all people who come through that area and a brand-new attraction. We have built on what we have already delivered in Kalbarri National Park with the new sealed car park, the brand-new toilets at Nature's Window and also an emergency beacon for people who have found themselves in distress, which does happen from time to time, particularly around the Loop.

[2.30 pm]

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** My question relates to pages 542 and 537 of the *Budget Statements*, specifically service item 2, "Conserving Habitats, Species and Ecological Communities". We have talked about staff numbers—the loss of 133 full-time equivalent staff over the last three years. In this service, from 2014–15 to 2016–17, we see a drop of 48 staff. Can the minister please tell me which areas have been de-staffed?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I will pass to Dr Margaret Byrne in a second to give more detail on that matter. Again, that predominantly reflects issues that we went through in the previous budget. There was a round of voluntary severances and we also addressed structural budget matters within the Department of Parks and Wildlife.

**Dr M. Byrne:** The main areas in which the reduction in staff occurred after a review of our core business in nature conservation were hydrological monitoring, a biodiversity audit and off-reserve conservation.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** Can we please have an exact breakdown of what these roles were in the agency? It is of grave concern that things such as hydrological monitoring and the biodiversity audit have not been made public. These things are not progressing, but we do not have the staff to do them anymore. Can we please have a good, solid list showing 48 positions and what each one was so we know exactly what is not being done when it comes to nature conservation?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I think we can provide a list of the positions that we have worked through.

[*Supplementary Information No A77.*]

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** Can I be very clear that we want to see positions one to 48. It is very clear from the papers that 48 positions have gone. We want to know what each one of those positions was so it is clearly set out.

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I think it is 46 positions. We will provide that list.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** No; 476 minus 428 equals 48.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I refer the minister to service area 2 on page 537. My question relates to the wetlands coordinating group, which is chaired by the minister's department. This group has not met formally since December 2014. There have been a number of requests to the chair, Margaret Byrne from the department, to meet, and several members have only recently written to the minister about the frustration of being denied access to a meeting. Given that the members of that group want to advise the minister about important work that is

being carried out, including issues affecting the Perth and Peel Green Growth Plan for 3.5 million and the wetlands buffer guidelines, why has this group not been allowed to formally meet and provide advice to the minister and why is this ministerial group being chaired by a bureaucrat rather than an independent chair?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** My understanding is that that group is more of an independent advisory group. It is not a formal committee in the sense that others may be. I will pass on to Dr Margaret Byrne to give some more detail.

**Dr M. Byrne:** The role of the wetlands conservation committee is to assist agencies to coordinate the actions in the state wetlands policy that was established in 1997. Most of the actions under that policy are now either complete or ongoing. The wetlands coordinating committee has played a strong role in ensuring the coordination of those actions to date.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** When these members have been requesting to meet, why has a meeting not been convened, particularly about the status of the wetlands buffer guidelines, which have a 10-year gestation period? These members have written to Dr Byrne, saying that they want to meet to advise her on a range of issues within their jurisdiction and they are not getting that meeting. Why? They last met in December 2014, 18 months or so ago.

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I certainly have not been receiving correspondence since December 2014, nor can I recall any correspondence about the group meeting to work on wetlands buffer guidelines.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Will the minister convene or allow a meeting of the wetlands coordinating group to be convened? The problem is that a department member is the chair. If it is an independent body, as the minister mentioned, why does it have a departmental chair, who is ultimately required to call the meetings?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I think Dr Byrne gave an explanation of the purpose of the committee. It is more of an internal committee to provide advice towards achieving targets under existing policy instruments.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** But it is a ministerial committee to advise the minister. The members want to get together and meet so they can give him advice, but they are being obstructed from meeting. Will the minister allow a meeting to be convened as soon as possible as the independent members are requesting?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** Again, I cannot recall any correspondence from them to me —

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Maybe the minister can ask his director to respond.

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** — asking for a meeting on wetlands buffer guidelines. I cannot recall any such meeting. I will pass to the director general or Dr Margaret Byrne.

**Mr J. Sharp:** I am not aware of a recent request for a meeting. Considerable work is being done on wetland protection under the strategic assessment for Perth and Peel, plus we have been involved in considerable negotiation with both the Department of Planning and the Office of the Environmental Protection Authority about guidelines for wetlands.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** We can shortcut this. I understand that letters have been sent to the chair, one of the department's employees, requesting meetings. Why has the chair not acted on that request?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I will pass to Dr Byrne.

**Dr M. Byrne:** Yes, I have received a request to meet. The request to meet was about providing advice to the minister on the green growth plan. As I explained to the independent members who had requested the meeting, the membership of the wetlands coordinating committee includes a range of government public servants. Under the arrangements for public servants, they are not able to provide advice on government policy, so it was inappropriate for the wetlands coordinating committee to be providing that advice under the green growth plan. The independent members of the wetlands coordinating committee were encouraged to make independent submissions to the green growth plan during the public submission period.

Could I just add that in relation to the chairing of the committee, the state wetlands policy actually states that the chair of the committee will be a member of the Department of Parks and Wildlife.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** How many requests has the chair received for a meeting since the last meeting in December 2014?

**Dr M. Byrne:** To the best of my knowledge, I have received three requests.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Over which period of time? When were those requests received?

**Dr M. Byrne:** Since the last meeting in September 2014.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Again, three requests but no meeting has occurred since December 2014. Is it not strange that a ministerial advisory committee set up to give the minister advice on important issues associated with wetlands coordination, including the ongoing work on the wetlands buffer guidelines, has not met since 2014? Does the minister not find that quite strange and unacceptable?

[2.40 pm]

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** Not necessarily, member for Mandurah. First of all, as Dr Byrne said, the policy instrument and the goals of that policy instrument have largely been met. Through the function of this existing committee, there is a diverse and large range of advisory committees at all levels that sit within the environment portfolio and provide advice. We often find that the people who are members of these committees often sit on other committees as well. This government has a policy position more generally of streamlining committee places, but that is not something that has been pursued with this one because, for one thing, it is directly linked to a state policy instrument. My understanding is that the committee was set up for a specific outcome under a policy instrument —

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Why has it not been dissolved?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** That is not what I am saying, member for Mandurah. I understand that the committee was set up under a specific policy instrument going back to the 1990s. If that is correct, it is largely achieving those outcomes, but if the policy instrument itself, which requires a departmental staff member to chair the committee, is still in place, then it can continue in that role. During the time in which we find ourselves, the focus of this government for that area in particular has been the Perth and Peel Green Growth Plan for 3.5 million or the strategic assessment. Our own community advisory committees have fed in, and continue to feed in, information to the green growth plan. They have been engaged at every step along the way.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** The minister said that other groups provide advice to him on wetland issues in the green growth plan. Which committees are those?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** A community reference group has been set up as part of the green growth plan. I know that the Conservation Council of Western Australia had a membership on that committee. I do not know whether we have further details of other members who were in the community reference group for the green growth plan—no, we do not.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** How many pieces of correspondence, reports or minutes has the minister received from the community reference group on wetland buffer guidelines?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** The answer off the top of my head would be none, but I can find that out for the member. I would have to go back through my correspondence to find out how many pieces of correspondence I have received from it about wetland buffer guidelines.

[*Supplementary Information No A78.*]

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** On page 539 of the budget papers, I refer to service area 8, “Protection of the Swan and Canning Rivers System”. I note that 52 full-time equivalents have been allocated to the protection of the Swan and Canning Rivers system. I note Mr Dans’ answer to my last question, in which he made it clear that an allocation of staff was not an allocation of a person because they might be doing other work as well. Of those 52 FTEs, how many are working exclusively on the Swan and Canning Rivers system?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I will refer that question to the director general for a breakdown of those 52 FTEs.

**Mr J. Sharp:** I will answer first and then pass over to Mr Hughes. The answer is all 52 FTEs and possibly more. There are several areas in which the staff working within the Swan River Trust prior to amalgamation had been placed in other work units that were working on the Swan and Canning Rivers system. Others are also working on the system. So, 52 are assigned, but some of them are sitting in other parts of the agency. Predominantly, they have been located in the public communication and education program areas that have been integrated to handle media and other inquiries. The other area in which efficiencies can be made is the area that manages and coordinates the department’s 4 700 volunteers, so Swan River Trust staff have been incorporated into that group and we are getting the multiplier effect. Mr Hughes might be able to be more specific.

**Mr R. Hughes:** The other area to add to that list would be the riverpark operations area. Some eight FTEs are deployed in the Swan region, and those staff are mainly involved in on-water field operations.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Is the explanation that only eight people are directly engaged in the river, and the other 44 are engaged in a range of tasks within the agency, which includes a focus on the river?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I will hand over to the director general.

**Mr J. Sharp:** They have a focus on the river, but not other duties in the department. A group of 52 FTEs are focused on the river and the river system, but there are more than that in terms of the multiplier effect. The eight who work directly on the river are also part of the Swan region, in which staff also manage the landscape and the reserves in the river system catchment.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** I apologise for not having fully understood the answer—I regret that. Eight people work on water—I think that is a good summary—and then there are 44 FTEs. Of course, some of those FTEs, as a body will spend 25 per cent of their time on this and 75 per cent of their time on that. How many people are not shared between programs? How many people are working on just the Swan and Canning Rivers system? I understand the multiplier effect, but I do not want to know about that at this stage. I am looking for those who are specifically working on the Swan and Canning Rivers system.

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I defer to the director general.

**Mr J. Sharp:** The answer is 52.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** The efficiency indicator in this section that I am referring to is the cost per hectare of managing the Swan Canning Riverpark. Why is there no actual outcome for this task? Why is it that the only indicator of success is reducing cost and not improving the quality of the river?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** Budget papers can take us only so far, member for Cannington. This is a budget paper. It is not geared towards environmental outcomes per se. It is perfectly reasonable to have an indicator that gives us an idea of how much the state is spending per hectare on average to manage a given part of the conservation estate. Fortnightly reporting on river health can be found on the department's website. The river protection strategy is now in place and a range of other annual reporting mechanisms as well, which focus far more on ecosystem health. I would not say that that efficiency indicator is necessarily geared towards making it cheaper or more expensive; it just highlights how the state's spend flows into the riverpark when we compare it with the rest of the conservation estate.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Is the minister saying that this efficiency indicator could be better if the amount was higher?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** No. When we look at the other pages in the budget, the cost per hectare is often an indicator used to make comparisons across business units for what is delivered where. It is a reporting measure to show essentially where the spend is flowing in terms of what results, so people can make their own judgement from that. It is more of a budget mechanism than being geared towards an ecosystem health measure. There are plenty of other ecosystem health measures that we report on not only annually, but also regularly.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** I hope I get an answer this time. This is the minister's budget paper, and it has the efficiency indicator as the average cost per hectare of managing the Swan Canning Riverpark. I want to establish whether it is a good thing or a bad thing for this indicator to go up or down. What is the department trying to achieve? Is it better for it to go down or is it better for it to go up? If I am to judge the efficiency indicator, I have to know what it is that the department is trying to achieve, otherwise I cannot see whether the department is achieving what it wants to achieve.

[2.50 pm]

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** The member is asking for my personal judgement on the success —

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** No, I am asking why this was put in the budget papers.

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** Because it is a reporting measure, but I judge our —

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** So it is a meaningless reporting measure?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** No. I judge our effectiveness by what we are achieving in terms of ecosystem health, and we report on that separately to the budget papers. I do not see the budget papers as a suitable instrument to show how the health of the Swan and Canning Rivers system overall is improving, or how, even more importantly for me, the Swan and Canning Rivers ecosystem health is trending.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** That is because the minister does not understand his job.

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** Okay.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** It is taking money under false pretences.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** Indeed.

I refer to the second service area on page 535, “Conserving Habitats, Species and Ecological Communities”. I also note the responses to questions on the second Western Australian biodiversity audit asked by Labor members in the Legislative Council committee budget meetings last year. I have a simple question: when will the second biodiversity audit, which we found out cost \$571 000 and involved 110 experts, be publicly released?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I will hand over to Dr Margaret Byrne to give some more detail about the biodiversity audit.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** It was just a simple question: when will it be released?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** Yes, and I am keen to give the member for Gosnells a very simple answer if I can hand over to Dr Margaret Byrne.

**Dr M. Byrne:** The biodiversity audit is an evidence-based and expert opinion-based assessment of terrestrial and marine plants and animals. We have captured the information in an electronic database. The database is available to staff of the Department of Parks and Wildlife to deliver information relevant to conservation planning and management. The information is available to the people who need it.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** I have a further question. The minister would be aware of his government’s open data policy, released by the Premier on 3 July 2015. That policy is aimed at making data and information available to the public, and it includes raw data that is not subject to analysis and interpretation. Why can the biodiversity audit database and final report not be publicly released?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I will ask Dr Margaret Byrne to add some more detail to answer that question, if I can, in the first instance.

**Dr M. Byrne:** The biodiversity audit database is a complex database. It is not readily released in terms of a specific document. People can come and use the database. If they come into the department we can give them a computer, we can set them up and they can look at the information presented in the database. It is difficult to make that available publicly through the current web systems because of firewall issues et cetera. But the information is readily available if people are prepared to come into the department and look at it.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** Is the minister not prepared to trust the public accessing it by some other means? The first biodiversity audit was released with no problem and complete transparency. I think it was released in 2002 to the public. But with the second biodiversity audit, despite what the Auditor General said in his report into our rare and threatened species, the minister is not prepared to trust the public of Western Australia with that information, unless it does it under the supervision of someone in the Keiran McNamara Conservation Science Centre.

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I think the difference is that it is available for public use as a database—as an electronic document, not a printed document, which I understand the first biodiversity audit was. Dr Margaret Byrne may have more to add.

**Dr M. Byrne:** Yes, the audit is an electronic database; being a database, it cannot readily be printed and made available. It is searchable, so people have to know the information they want to find to use it effectively.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** I have a further question. I just do not understand why, in this electronic age, it cannot be made accessible to people and why it is being said that the only way people can access this audit database is by physically going to the Department of Parks and Wildlife. It is impossible in this day and age that we are so limited in our ability to release such an important wealth of information.

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I did not catch the question there, member for Gosnells.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** Why is the minister not releasing it?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** As we have said, it is publicly available at the Keiran McNamara centre, which also houses the herbarium and a number of libraries that many people routinely access. The Keiran McNamara centre is not only the headquarters of the Department of Parks and Wildlife; in many ways it is a public library for anyone from resource proponents to community groups that seek to access that information. It is publicly available.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Would the minister release it on a CD or a drive for anybody to take away? If they brought a drive in—a large thumb drive costs, like, 20 bucks—and gave it to the department, would the department put the database on that drive?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I will seek some more advice from Dr Margaret Byrne on this, as it sits within her area. I go back to the member for Cannington’s earlier question when I say that there is also, to my mind, intellectual property rights considerations from a government perspective. That is not my area of expertise, so I will pass to Dr Margaret Byrne.

**Dr M. Byrne:** A database cannot just be put onto a thumb drive —

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Of course it can.

**Dr M. Byrne:** — the software that runs the program has to be on it as well.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Yes, but that is for somebody else to worry about.

**Dr M. Byrne:** Potentially the database could be put onto a thumb drive —

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** It could be put on as an ASCII file.

**Dr M. Byrne:** — but it is of no use without the actual software on which the database platform is built. That is why it is a database system. The actual software system needs to present so that the database relates to the software, otherwise people will not be able to query it or access the information.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** I have a further question. Is it possible for this database to output an ASCII file?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** To what?

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Output an ASCII file.

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** The simple answer to that is that I do not know. I will see whether anybody else does. Does the member want us to take that on notice?

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Or is it the only database in the world that cannot output an ASCII file?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** Does the member want us to take that question on notice.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** I am happy for the minister to. There is not a database in the world that cannot output an ASCII file—let us face it.

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** Okay. We can take that question on notice.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Okay.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Minister, can you describe what you are going to provide?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** The member for Cannington is asking whether it is possible for the biodiversity audit, as a database, to be output as an ASCII file. Can the member for Cannington spell that for us?

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** A-S-C-I-I. It is an acronym.

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I am aware of that; it is not one I have come across.

[*Supplementary Information No A79.*]

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

**Mr F.A. ALBAN:** I refer to the eighth dot point on page 534, under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”. Can the minister provide an update on the work being done to control feral cats under the wildlife recovery program Western Shield, in light of the trials being undertaken using Eradicat, and to what extent will it be able to protect threatened animals from predation?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I thank the member for Swan Hills for this question. Since its inception in 1996, the government’s flagship wildlife recovery program, known as Western Shield, has achieved an at least 55 per cent reduction in fox numbers in south west baited areas. This has seen the sustainable improvement of around 30 native animal species populations, and is credited with at least 53 threatened mammal, bird and reptile species remaining in existence within those baited areas. In addition, because it is not only a baiting program, there have also been 37 successful translocations of threatened native animal species that have also contributed towards species recovery. That includes breeding programs, sanctuary zones and, ultimately, translocation back into wildlife areas. Under the landscape scale program, around one million poison baits are laid annually in over more than 3.8 million hectares of Parks and Wildlife–managed land. This can be as far north as the Pilbara, through into the forests of the south west and also to areas to the east of Esperance. Integrated feral cat baiting, using Eradicat, and fox baiting trials under the Western Shield program continue in several locations. The focus with Eradicat includes Dryandra Woodland, south coast sites such as Fitzgerald River and Cape Arid, as well Two Peoples Bay and Mount Manypeaks Nature Reserves. The first use of Eradicat at Kalbarri National Park, in the member for Moore’s electorate, is due in August this year. That trial is being conducted as part of a \$1.7 million program funded by the Australian government’s threatened species strategy. The member for Moore would be aware that we have also recently released further black-flanked rock wallabies into Kalbarri National Park, having just rediscovered them as a species within that national park. Emergency feral cat baiting was also conducted in the member for Eyre’s region at Cape Arid National Park and also at Two Peoples

Bay Nature Reserve following the severe October and November 2015 bushfires in which around 90 per cent of the known habitat for the critically endangered western ground parrot in Cape Arid was affected.

Bait uptake trials are underway in the upper Warren near Manjimup to assess the impact, if any, on non-targeted species within the region, as well as to identify the best time to target feral cats. Species that are the focus of our protection from predation by both feral cats and foxes through Eradicat, but particularly cats, include Gilbert's potoroo, the western ground parrot, woylies, numbats, black-flanked rock wallabies and noisy scrub-birds, as well as the dibbler, and also any other threatened or non-threatened wildlife that can benefit from the program.

[3.00 pm]

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I refer to the third dot point on page 534 of the *Budget Statements* on marine parks and sanctuary zones. An allocation of \$530 000 per annum is made for the management of the proposed Yawuru Nagulagun/Roebuck Bay marine park. Lots of submissions were made in this process, including one from the Australian Marine Sciences Association that highlighted a critical flaw in the government's plan—namely, the lack of any marine sanctuary zones within that marine park. Given the pre-eminence of this scientific association—they are leading marine scientists—why has the Minister for Environment ignored its scientific advice on the sanctuary zone?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I have not ignored it would be the simple answer. The draft management plan has gone out for public consultation. The department has received a large amount of feedback and it is considering that feedback. It is yet to release the final management plan. Having gone through a number of releases of draft management plans—probably more than any minister has in the history of environment ministers in this state—with the expansion we are undertaking to our marine parks, I have been through this process a number of times now. One thing I would say is that a one-size-fits-all approach to marine park planning is not something that can be used in a Western Australian context. What is appropriate in the great southern will be very different from what is appropriate in the midwest and in the Kimberley, and will be different from the needs and concerns and environmental pressures faced by marine parks in the Kimberley, very widely, even though many of them are directly adjacent to one another. One of the key factors this government has undertaken in preparing the draft management plan for Roebuck Bay has been the removal and buying out of the two gillnet fishing licences that sat within Roebuck Bay. That action from the government has achieved remarkable results in a short period. All the anecdotal feedback I have received is that fish stocks have bounced back remarkably. In the Roebuck Bay instance, the most bang for your buck, if you like, for a conservation outcome was buying out those two gillnet fishing licences and that has been very well received. The department has released the draft management plan for Roebuck Bay. Obviously, much of that is being done in partnership with the traditional owners, the Yawuru people, and all submissions will be given due consideration as we prepare our final management plan.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** The submission from AMSA states —

The lack of one or more marine sanctuary zones fails to recognize the strong scientific case that marine sanctuary zones are a well-documented management tool for conserving marine biodiversity.

The minister says that he has not made a final decision, but surely scientific advice such as this from a peak body is very important for his consideration. Will he take note of such an important peak body and its assessment of his draft?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** The department will take note of all submissions it has received, be they from interested people in the science community, interested people in the environment community more generally, people who have an interest from a recreational fishing perspective or people who have an interest from a tourism perspective. All those views will be taken into consideration and given due regard in the preparation of the final management plan. As I have said consistently, the views that will receive the highest level of consideration will be the views of the Yawuru people, who will be the joint management partners.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** What is the time line?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** The time line is what it takes from here, member for Mandurah. I think we have achieved a remarkable result in the draft management plans and also in the final creation of parks. There is certainly no lack of funding to achieve this process. I do not think for a second that anybody could accuse this government of not resourcing the creation of the Roebuck Bay marine park. This is done in partnership with traditional owners and these are consultative processes that will be worked through.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** What impact is the minister's consideration of climate change issues having on the marine park strategy?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** They are picked up generally through the draft management plans and obviously changing climate impacts in different ways in different areas of the state. Most people would agree that, from a state

perspective, a key responsibility of the state in a climate change response is in our land management role, and that is where the government does a lot of the heavy lifting. Although the federal government sets a lot of the policy direction for what is a global problem, a lot of the heavy lifting is done in a land management sense. A conservation program like the Kimberley science and conservation strategy, from what little of Western Australia can do, makes a significant impact in the expansion of the conservation estate. Obviously, that means that, in a certain sense, a reduction in what could otherwise have been potential emissions coming from that area is a big part of the Kimberley science and conservation strategy. There has been a vastly improved fire management regime over Kimberley lands and there is a significant carbon benefit that comes into that as well.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** What is the plan to deal with the bleaching of the corals off the Kimberley coast?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** If a Minister for Environment could control the weather, any Minister for Environment would love the opportunity to do that. I am on the record as saying that we have concerns around bleaching that we have seen in Kimberley corals. Whether it is permanent or temporary bleaching is yet to be seen. I think that directly goes into the Kimberley science and conservation strategy. Western Australia is facing a warming climate and bleaching of coral reefs is almost one of the canary in the coalmine responses to that. We must be clear eyed about what we can realistically do in a response sense—I do not mean in a symbolic gesture; I mean actions from a state-based perspective—to achieve outcomes. One of the best things we can do is create the largest terrestrial national park over the Mitchell Plateau. Rio Tinto has given up its tenement over the bauxite leases on the Mitchell Plateau. Obviously, as a national park, nutrient leaching and other impacts will not be what they could otherwise potentially have been and the creation of these places as marine parks and managing them as such is the best thing we can do from a state environmental perspective.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Is any part of the Kimberley conservation strategy for the marine parks involved in responding and trying to reduce carbon emissions?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** It is responding in the first instance to better land management practices, but the savannah burning has significant carbon benefit. I could try to be cute and say that we planned our marine park strategy in advance in anticipation of any early warming, and that may have been a factor in the earlier thinking—I was not there—but it is fortuitous in that the best response the state can have for the Kimberley coral reefs is to continue to create the marine and adjacent terrestrial parks, as we are doing.

[3.10 pm]

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** The seventh dot point on page 534 of the *Budget Statements* states —

Western Australia has a unique and highly significant biodiversity that faces threats and complex challenges, requiring integrated multi-disciplinary approaches to conservation and management.

I want to ask specifically about the Land for Wildlife program. I understand from the answer to question on notice 5317 in the Legislative Assembly that four additional properties have been included in the current financial year. What is the expectation for more properties being added to this program?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I will pass that to the director general for a response.

**Mr J. Sharp:** Additional properties have been added to Land for Wildlife. To support the program, we entered formally into a relationship this week with the natural resource management state-level body to support and encourage further properties to be added, and for existing properties to be supported. The department will continue to play the role of registering and recording, but a supportive role is being played by the NRM groups. Dr Byrne can outline what we anticipate. I think we have had five additional properties.

**Dr M. Byrne:** In this financial year, five additional properties have been registered with the Land for Wildlife program.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** The director general said that he had delegated—I am using my word, not his—the responsibility to the NRM groups. What additional cash will be given to the NRM groups for that new responsibility?

**Mr J. Sharp:** We have not given them any additional cash. We have entered into a partnership for that role.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** We know that the government has gutted the Land for Wildlife program. The staffing level has been reduced from 12. How many people at the Department of Parks and Wildlife are working on Land for Wildlife now—is it 3.5?

**Mr J. Sharp:** I cannot give an exact figure, but it is in and around that figure.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** We have gone from adding an average of 90 properties a year to the program—we can refer to question on notice 5317—but since the government has gutted the program, we are down to four properties, although Dr Byrne says five in the last 12 months. Now the government is hoping to get a free service. Can the minister confirm that the government will not pay these NRM groups anything for their role in this partnership?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** The government funds NRM groups significantly.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** No, it does not; the federal government does.

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** The state government provides significant funding to NRM groups as well.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** They are 90 per cent funded by the federal government.

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** The state government provides significant funding to NRM groups.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** After gutting the program from adding 90 properties a year for the last decade to adding only five in the last 12 months, does the minister concede that gutting Land for Wildlife was a bad decision?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** No, I do not. I will address the issue of federal funding for a second, if I can —

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** No, it is irrelevant.

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** No, it is relevant, because it was part of the question. I will address that for a second if I can, because it is one of my biggest frustrations, and I am sure one of the biggest frustrations of previous environment ministers. I want to talk about what we have done as a state government in funding the area of greatest need, being the Kimberley. We do not make decisions on environmental funding based on the location of marginal seats. As a state, we have a long tradition of funding areas of environmental need. Western Australia would be very lucky to get anywhere near its population share of federal funding, yet it occupies a third of the continent. There is a very strong argument for far more federal support for Western Australian environmental programs. On any logical basis, we should receive at least a third. Of the 15 nationally recognised biodiversity hot spots, eight are in Western Australia. An argument could be made for more than half of federal environmental funding for Western Australia. Any opportunity we have to receive a federal contribution towards environmental outcomes in Western Australia is a good result, as far as I am concerned.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** I agree that the federal Liberal government gives a very bad deal to Western Australia. I am not going to get into an argument about the atrocious handling of this state by the federal Liberal government; I agree with the minister entirely. That is why I agree with the Treasurer that people in Western Australia should not vote Liberal; that is fine. How many additional properties is the minister targeting to be added to the Land for Wildlife estate over the next four years?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I will pass that over to the director general to give some thought about who is best placed to answer that question. If ever the opposition is looking for a weak spot in this government's environmental space, targeting us for expanding the conservation estate does not come anywhere near stacking up. Under this state government, we have seen in excess of a 200 per cent expansion of our marine park estate alone.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** But no sanctuary zones.

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** That is also not true, member for Gosnells—not even close. Not only has this government presided over a more than 200 per cent increase within one term of government in the marine park estate, it has also created the 100<sup>th</sup> national park, and it is in the process of creating the largest terrestrial park in Australia. This government has had a bold vision, and has pursued with not only finances but also political will an expansion of the conservation estate that has never before been seen in this state. It is good to have Land for Wildlife partnership programs. We can pick them up, but they do not come anywhere near in terms of hectare and conservation value what this government has achieved in expansion of the conservation estate.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** The government does not want to work with private parties.

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** That is also not true. The government is involved in partnerships with the Australian Wildlife Conservancy, Nature Conservancy and others the length and breadth of this state, so that does not stack up either, member for Gosnells.

Who would be best placed to answer the specific question?

**Mr J. Sharp:** No specific target is set for additional properties, and the number of properties is only one measure. There is also the hectare-age of those additions to the estate. The NRM groups are very keen on this partnership, have pursued it, and are very keen to expand and promote the program, because it has integrated well into the ambitions they have for a role in biodiversity outside the tenured conservation estate. I do not think we have a specific target, but we will be working with them to expand the number of voluntary additions to the Land for Wildlife program. We look forward to the Biodiversity Conservation Bill also providing for covenanting in a formal way.

Chairman; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Albert Jacob; Mr David Templeman; Mr Frank Alban; Mr Bill Johnston; Dr Graham Jacobs; Mr Shane Love

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**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** I refer to another very important part of the state—the south, and, in particular services 2 and 3 shown on page 535 of the *Budget Statements*, regarding landscape management and conservation partnerships. What is the 2016–17 budget for each of the six natural diversity recovery catchments?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I will pass that on to the director general.

**Mr J. Sharp:** I do not have those figures in front of me, but I am happy to take the question on notice and give the member some indication of what the spend will be.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Will this be supplementary information?

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** I can perhaps help the director general and the minister, because I have some figures here from 2015–16, and they can tell me whether they have increased those—because they are pathetic.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Would the member prefer that to be provided as supplementary information?

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** Let us provide a bit more information and see whether that will jog some memories opposite. We know the 2015–16 budget allocations for the six natural diversity recovery catchments were Drummond, \$30 000, and Lake Warden, \$13 000. Has that been increased at all?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** As I said, I do not know whether the director general has a specific breakdown of those at hand. If we do not, we can get that as supplementary information.

**Mr J. Sharp:** Input into the recovery catchments is managed through regional and district programs. That is not the sole effort that is expended on recovery catchments. They are part of regional and district activities. The figure would be across the range of activities undertaken within the district or region. I will ask Peter Dans whether that is possible to identify.

[3.20 pm]

**Mr P. Dans:** We could certainly extract figures for relevant catchments as to anticipated budgets for the coming financial year.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** Is the minister aware that the Lake Warden and Muir–Unicup catchments are both Ramsar sites and contain several nature reserves with major salinity problems, and that Muir–Unicup also has acid sulphate problems? Why, then, has there been a drastic reduction in funding? I refer to exact funding for 2015–16 for these catchments, in which Lake Warden received only \$30 000, down from \$450 000 previously, and Muir–Unicup received a zero budget. Why is the minister ignoring the biodiversity values of the south west? The minister likes to talk about biodiversity hotspot values. The south west is the biodiversity hotspot in this state and the minister is neglecting it totally. He does not know the funding amounts going into these natural diversity recovery catchments.

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** Western Australia is a vast state and we put a significant amount of resource effort into all parts of the state, but I would say that the south west gets by far the lion's share of attention from the Department of Parks and Wildlife and the state government environment spend, particularly in recurrent terms—the Kimberley science and conservation strategy and other programs notwithstanding. I do not have the specific numbers down to that level of detail before me. We would have to provide that as supplementary detail. I take the figures that the member threw in at face value, and if I do not have the figures down to that level of detail for this budget, I certainly do not have the context in previous years, and I wonder if that is something the member also wants included in the supplementary budget information.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** As supplementary information, please, could I have funding for each of the natural diversity recovery catchments for the financial year ahead of us?

[*Supplementary Information No A80.*]

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** I refer to details of the parks for people caravan and camping program on page 540. Can the minister provide an update on the work already completed to improve camping and caravan facilities in national parks, and of particular relevance is Cape Le Grand National Park. And, because of the constraints of time, on a related matter in Cape Le Grand National Park, can the minister inform us of the state of the Naturebank site and the progress to an ecotourism facility within the park?

**Mr A.P. JACOB:** I give some context on the parks for people program: we have made significant progress in the third year of what is a four-year program; in fact, we are now seeing the momentum come through. Our commitment is to an additional 450 sites over four years, and we are well on track to achieve that. New and expanded campgrounds have been achieved in Dryandra Woodland at the former Credo station in the Credo Conservation Park in the goldfields. I am not sure of the boundaries there, but that may well be in the member for Eyre's electorate as well. That campground is open and running well. At Cape Le Grand, specifically at Lucky Bay, works are in full swing, as well as at Millstream–Chichester National Park and

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Leschenault Peninsula Conservation Park. Around 130 sites are under construction or planned for construction at Francois Peron National Park, Wellington National Park, Shannon National Park, Leeuwin–Naturaliste National Park and also the Karara National Park—so picking up one in the midwest. In addition, four commercial accommodation tourism leases were upgraded at Wharncliffe Mill in the south west, Coalmine Beach, Dwellingup and the Lions Dryandra Woodland Village. Trails WA and Camping Mate mobile phone applications were developed and a wi-fi connection has now been installed at Conto campground in 2015–16. It is not limited to the accommodation side of it. There are new facilities, for example, at The Gap and Natural Bridge lookouts, as well as at Torndirrup National Park, which opened on 10 April this month. This one in particular builds into other well-known sites such as the Granite Skywalk in the Porongurups, the Valley of the Giants Tree Top Walk in Walpole–Nornalup National Park and the wilderness lookout in Mt Franklin National Park. They are four key lookouts, all within close proximity to each other. I seek a quick update on how Lucky Bay is progressing in Cape Le Grand as well as where we have progressed to with the Naturebank site.

**Mr P. Sharp:** I advise that the Naturebank site was investigated for its cultural and environmental suitability, but some declared rare flora was identified in the area and we subsequently ceased pursuing the Lucky Bay area for a Naturebank site. Stage 1 of the expanded caravan and camping facilities has been completed, and we are entering into stage 2 for the Lucky Bay caravan area.

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** So, the plans for an ecotourism facility have been abandoned? Is that the news?

**Mr P. Sharp:** Yes, the Naturebank site has been abandoned.

**Dr G.G. JACOBS:** Are there any other sites around Esperance or in Cape Le Grand National Park that are potential sites?

**Mr P. Sharp:** We are looking at potential for expansion at Lucky Bay for a component that would take an up-market area, which could go into stage 2 as an alternative, but we are still working on the planning stages.

**The appropriation was recommended.**