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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

Tuesday, 23 May 2023

Legislative Assembly

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ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

The meeting commenced at 9.00 am.

Division 24: Education, \$5 871 014 000 —

Ms M.M. Quirk, Chair.

Dr A.D. Buti, Minister for Education.

Ms L. Rodgers, Director General.

Ms M. Sands, Deputy Director General, Schools.

Mr J. Bell, Deputy Director General, Student Achievement.

Mr J. Peckitt, Deputy Director General, Education Business Services.

Ms J. Healy, Executive Director, School Curriculum and Standards.

Ms R. Lee, Executive Director, Strategy and Policy.

Ms P. Beamish Burton, Executive Director, Finance and Commercial Services.

Mr R. Thomson, Executive Director, Infrastructure.

Mr R. Miles, Director, Teacher Registration.

Mr S. Ward, Chief of Staff, Minister for Education.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: The estimates committees will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point—no rhetoric and no preamble, please. Consideration is restricted to items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must relate to a page number, item or amount related to the current division, and members should preface their questions with these details. Some divisions are the responsibility of more than one minister. Ministers shall only be examined in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon Friday, 2 June 2023. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

We are dealing with division 24, Education. I give the call to the member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 349, new initiatives and the line item “Inner City Primary School Business Case”. The business case project is over five years at a cost of \$1.3 million. How long does the minister foresee it will be before this school is actually built?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The budget allocation is for the business case, not for the actual building of the school. It is scheduled to open in the first term of 2028.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Further to that, the minister visited Highgate Primary School. I have visited Highgate Primary School. Given that the inner-city primary school will be another avenue, I guess, for those students, what arrangements are in place and what does the minister see happening over those five years for Highgate Primary School?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The Department of Education has been involved in consultation with the school and the local government authority, and the school has been in negotiations with the local government authority. We are looking at the allocation of other open spaces that could be used for activities and whether we can purchase other land that would then relieve current school parking. The government gave money to Highgate Primary School and part of that was used for a car park. It is hoped that if we can purchase other land, or have some other land allocated to us, it will free up that parking area for school purposes. We are also looking at using double-storey transportables on the existing car parks to alleviate some of the issues. As I said, the City of Vincent is looking at adjacent public open spaces that could be used by the school.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I guess that the minister is referring to the oval across the road. Will that be used by students for recess, lunchtime et cetera. Is that what the minister is saying?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As I said, member, negotiations are taking place. There has been no determination of the details of that agreement, but we are looking at available public open space nearby that could be used by students at Highgate.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Given the minister's experience in the world of education, does he think it is appropriate that we jam more transportable buildings, whether they are single or double storey, onto that particular site?

The CHAIR: Member, that seems like you are seeking an opinion, and the minister has not actually mentioned another floor on that particular building.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: He mentioned a double-storey transportable, Madam Chair.

The CHAIR: All right.

Dr A.D. BUTI: If the member had asked me that question 20 years ago, I would have said no, but if the member was to look at the transportables we have now, he would see that they are state of the art. I went into a transportable at one school, and I could not tell that it was a transportable. It is the clever use of available space, and if a double-storey transportable is the best use way to use that space, that is what will happen. I should also add that part of that business case allocation in the budget is to look at what needs to be done at Highgate in the interim. It is all part of the business case. The education department has been working on this for some time and, as I said, negotiations are happening with the school to see what it believes is the best option and how the City of Vincent can help in that process.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does the minister have modelling on how many students would potentially go from Highgate to the new inner-city primary school near the WACA? I assume that a couple of hundred students might drift across and take pressure off Highgate.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The member is right. The proposed new inner-city school will alleviate a significant proportion of the enrolment pressure on Highgate Primary School currently. The initial capacity of the new inner-city school will be 600 students and up to 800 at stage 2.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 349, new initiatives and the temporary regional incentive for teachers. There is an allocation of \$9.276 million and then nothing in the forward estimates. The program had an allocation of \$3 million last year and \$9.2 million is budgeted for this year. Has it had any success in attracting teachers to the regions?

[9.10 am]

Dr A.D. BUTI: Absolutely. In regard to that spending, 48 remote and regional schools were identified as being the hardest to staff. This initiative has been incredibly successful in attracting staff to those schools that have been hard to staff.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the minister enlighten us with any numbers for those 48 schools?

Dr A.D. BUTI: All I can say is that those schools have been staffed. There has been a full allocation of staff for the staff they required. I should also say that that payment is only part of the strategy. As the member would know, there are other parts to that strategy, including the use of teacher flying squads for those schools if need be. It is not only for the attraction of staff; it has also been used to retain staff, which has been very, very important. The success is in the fact that those schools have been staffed. Moreover, 791 fewer days of flying squads were used in term 1 of 2023 compared with term 1 of 2022 because of the success of that fund.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The minister spoke about retention. Do the teachers who go out to the regions and get the incentive have to sign a contract that requires that they complete a two or three-year term or is it just the attraction of extra salary et cetera?

Dr A.D. BUTI: They receive an up-front payment, but they have to serve at least one year to get the full payment allocated under that fund.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Has there been discussion around higher education contribution scheme relief for teachers in conjunction with this? We see the program for nurses, which is part of the government's budget. Has there been discussion about providing this relief to teachers who go to the regions?

Dr A.D. BUTI: At this stage, we have our policies and strategies in place. They have proven to be successful and we are working with that at the moment. We continue to progress the current policies that have been successful.

The CHAIR: Member, that question required only a yes or no answer. If the member wants more information, he will need to phrase his questions differently.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thanks, Madam Chair. We know that last year there were 672 student-teachers.

Dr A.D. BUTI: What budget item is that?

The CHAIR: What is the budget item? Is the member still on page 349, "Temporary Regional Incentive for Teachers"?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Yes, that is right. How many teachers in their final year of training have ventured out with those regional incentives or are they all fully qualified teachers?

Dr A.D. BUTI: To be able to teach in one of these classes, a person has to be registered with the Teacher Registration Board of Western Australia.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I was referring to temporary registration and when a principal brings on —

The CHAIR: You did not refer to that at all, member.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Sorry; further question. I am now referring to it.

Dr A.D. BUTI: We do not have temporary registration; we have limited registration.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Have any limited registration teachers gone out as part of this regional incentive program line item?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I do not have those details. The member can put that question on notice.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can I ask for that to be provided by way of supplementary information?

The CHAIR: It could be put on notice, member. There may be a bit of trouble getting information within the time frame of 2 June.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is there any chance of it being provided by way of supplementary information?

Dr A.D. BUTI: No. The member can put it on notice if he wants.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Okay; I will put that on notice.

Ms M.J. DAVIES interjected.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I beg your pardon, member.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Just another example of the transparency that we see from this government.

The CHAIR: I hope you are not canvassing my ruling, member.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I again refer to page 349, “Ongoing Initiatives” and specifically “School Bus Services”. This line item has suddenly appeared in the education budget. Have there been discussions between the Minister for Education and the Minister for Transport pursuant to the inquiry into the student transport assistance policy framework? Can the minister provide some detail as to why this has just appeared and what it is paying for?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Is the member trying to claim credit because he was a member of the review committee?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I do not mind if the minister wants to give me credit!

Dr A.D. BUTI: Things do not just appear. Obviously, they might just appear in the budget when we see the budget on the day. Discussions take place. We are a government that very carefully considers the policies and budget items that we put into the budget. As the member would know, school bus services are delivered and managed by the Public Transport Authority. The member is well aware of that, having been a member of the review committee that he just mentioned. This money has been allocated to cover the increased costs of establishing and continuing the budgeted bus services—that is why. It is additional money because of the increased costs of the service that is delivered, but it is still managed and run by the PTA.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What are the additional services? Are they extra services that go between district high schools?

Dr A.D. BUTI: They are for nominated Aboriginal primary schools and students attending intensive English centres.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Are they in regional or metropolitan areas?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I do not have a list in front of me, but it would be a combination of both. Indeed, some of the nominated Aboriginal primary schools would be in the regions. I do not have a list of the increased bus services.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the minister provide that detail as supplementary information?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I can give it to the member right now. The Aboriginal schools are East Kalgoorlie Primary School, Djidi Djidi Aboriginal School and Moorditj Noongar Community College. The primary IECs with pre-primary to year 6 are Eddystone Primary School, Koondoola Primary School and Nollamara Primary School; and those with year 1 to year 6 are Beaconsfield Primary School, Dianella Primary School, Highgate Primary School, Parkwood Primary School and Thornlie Primary School.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Highgate Primary School has a lot of English as a second language students. Is this to transport students from other areas to that school to help advance —

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does the minister see results coming through from the review? Have there been any discussions between the minister and the Minister for Transport? Some of the recommendations made by the committee are for implementation in 2024.

[9.20 am]

The CHAIR: There are a couple of questions there, member. Do you want to split them up?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: There were some key recommendations for the 2024 school year. Does the minister think they will see the light of day?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As the member for Roe would know, the government responded to the recommendations in the report of the committee that the member served on, as did the parliamentary secretary. He knows what the government's response was. The education department continues to work on it.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have a further question.

The CHAIR: You are flogging a dead horse, but go on.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: No, I do not think I am flogging a dead horse. I know the parliamentary secretary is very interested as well because we put up a lot of recommendations and some were specifically for the 2024 school year, particularly in relation to district high schools and nearest appropriate school. Neither of those recommendations was taken up by the government; it said they would be referred for the 2024 school year.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The Department of Education is working with the Public Transport Authority's *School Bus Services* to consider the four recommendations that relate directly to education.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is the minister confident that by, say, August or somewhere around there something will be in place for 2024 for those couple of recommendations?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Why would the member say August? Why not September? Why not July? Why August?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: There were a couple of recommendations concerning the nearest appropriate school and district high schools. What I am asking is: will they be in place for the 2024 school year?

Dr A.D. BUTI: In regard to the recommendations that have been accepted by the government, they are all on track.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Okay. Thank you, Madam Chair; I will take that as a yes. We look forward to —

The CHAIR: All right; there is no need for editorialising. Is anyone else seeking the call? I call the member for Central Wheatbelt.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 362 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and to the line item "Additions and Improvements to Agricultural Colleges" under the heading "Other New Works". Could the minister please provide details of these works over the forward estimates?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Could we what?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Could the minister provide details of what the works will entail? Where will the funds be spent?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am sure we can.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: That is excellent.

Dr A.D. BUTI: In total, funding of \$6 847 000 will be spent on works for a number of colleges and farm schools, including the Western Australian College of Agriculture Cunderdin. They range from small amounts of around \$12 000 through to \$1.772 million for Cunderdin.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Could the minister provide the details of the funding across the forward estimates?

Dr A.D. BUTI: No, I will not provide the detail. If the member wants that sort of detail for every single college—what work will be done, what bricks will be used, what angles will be followed and so forth—she should put it on notice.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I have a further question. Can the minister confirm which of the agricultural colleges will receive funding over the forward estimates?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Cunderdin agricultural college, Coodanup Farm School, Esperance farm school, Harvey agricultural college, Kojonup farm school, Manjimup farm school, Margaret River farm school, Morawa agricultural college, Mount Barker farm school, Narrogin agricultural college, Pinjarra farm school and Denmark agricultural college.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Minister, just to confirm, Cunderdin agricultural college is on that list. That is not what the minister said in Parliament the other day.

Dr A.D. BUTI: No. I did not say there was no funding; I said the funding that was being asked for was not being received.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Thank you. Can the minister confirm that business cases have been put forward by Cunderdin agricultural college over a number of years and that they have not been met by this government?

Dr A.D. BUTI: You tell me: has it?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I am asking the minister.

Dr A.D. BUTI: You know the answer, so why ask?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I am asking the minister to confirm it.

The CHAIR: Minister, it is the member's job to ask the questions. It is your job to answer them.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I have been here for a while; I know how this works. It is an interesting dance.

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is why it would have been better if, rather than being a smart-arse last week, you had waited until today.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: That is unparliamentary language, minister. I have every right to ask questions about issues in my electorate during question time. That was an inappropriate comment.

Dr A.D. BUTI: It certainly was and I withdraw that comment.

The CHAIR: Excellent.

Dr A.D. BUTI: But the member also said something inappropriate, which we will deal with in another section. In regard to Cunderdin, the member knows the various demands and requests that have been made by the college. Not all those have been met in this budget, obviously, because of the allocation that has been made. I explained last week that an amazing number of demands are put on the education budget. We are prioritising what we fund, and that is the funding allocation in this budget.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Thank you. Given that the minister was very careful with his wording in Parliament last week, which was that the college had asked for funding and the full amount was not provided, could the minister advise what was requested and what will be provided over the forward estimates?

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is part of the budget process and remains cabinet-in-confidence.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Okay.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The member can correct me if I am wrong, but I assume that the focus of her question is probably the student accommodation at Cunderdin. That was not funded. That is what I imagine was the basis of her question last week. That is why I answered it in the way that I did.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I thank the minister; that is one of the requests that I know has been made, in addition to staff housing and upgrades to, I think, the piggery shed and other facilities on the school grounds. My interest in asking the question is that I know that when this government came to power, it started to garnish the agricultural education farm provisions trust and change the way that —

The CHAIR: There are probably about three questions there, if you can split them up.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I can. Is the government still taking a 20 per cent dividend from the agricultural provisions trust?

Dr A.D. BUTI: No.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: No?

Dr A.D. BUTI: No.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Thank you.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I just have a further question on residential colleges. I am wondering whether there is any update on St Andrew's residential college in Katanning, with which I think the director general is very familiar.

Dr A.D. BUTI: A final decision on the future of the St Andrew's Hostel is yet to be made. Discussions continue. As the member would know, the history of this is very sensitive. Community consultation is a key part of that decision-making process.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I agree that it is a very sensitive issue. I also know that there is a high demand for accommodation, as the minister well knows. I have had many inquiries. I guess this question has been there for two or three years now. Can the minister give us any time line on the decision?

[9.30 am]

Dr A.D. BUTI: The department is hoping to have this consultation process completed by midyear and a report made available for the minister's consideration.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is the minister saying —

The CHAIR: Is this still under the agricultural schools and farm schools item, or has the member gone off on a tangent?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It is sort of linked to that in some way. I have a final question on that one. The consultation with the community will take place and the minister is confirming that a decision will be made midyear, or just after —

Dr A.D. BUTI: No.

The CHAIR: That is not what he said. The member has to listen to the answers.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Thank you, chair, for listening to my answer. I said that the department expects that the consultation will be concluded by midyear and a report will be provided for the minister's consideration. Can I just reiterate that this is, as the member knows, very sensitive, because there are victims of sexual abuse. This has to be treated in a very careful manner, including the consultation process. I have said that the department hopes to have its consultation completed by midyear and to compile a report for the minister's consideration.

The CHAIR: Member for Kimberley.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Just a further question.

The CHAIR: I have given the member for Kimberley the call.

Ms D.G. D'ANNA: I refer to the provision of menstrual products in public secondary schools outlined on page 349 of paper No 2. Can the minister provide an update of the rollout of this election commitment?

Dr A.D. BUTI: This is a government policy that we are very, very proud of. We believe that there should be no barriers to education and that includes, of course, ensuring the health and wellbeing of our students who attend schools. No student should miss out on accessing period products. I am proud to announce that, as a commitment, public secondary schools began receiving their period products last term at no cost to the schools or the students. My understanding is that the rollout has been going well and will continue as the term goes on. The period products are now available. They are an essential fundamental health necessity, and cost should not be a barrier to accessing this very important medical assistance.

Just before I finish, I should also add that back in 2021, when a survey was conducted on this matter, it found that almost 125 respondents missed a class due to their period and three-quarters said that when they did attend school during that time, they found it difficult to pay attention. This is really incredibly important. I would also like to commend the Minister for Training for announcing that this initiative will now be extended to TAFE campuses across the state, which is another example of this government removing barriers to education for Western Australians.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Is there any measure of the uptake of it in terms of either the quantity of products or percentage of students or some such measure in the schools?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I do not think so because there are privacy issues. We could work out how many products have been removed from the dispenser, and I am sure that is being done, but it was rolled out in only term 1, so it is a bit difficult to say at this stage.

The CHAIR: I am sorry to have cut off the member for Roe earlier, but he will concede that the questions he was pursuing were on a different line item. If he wants to go back to it, that is fine.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Yes, I concede that, chair. As the minister said, it is a very sensitive issue.

The CHAIR: Let us get on with it.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Okay. I refer to the Rockingham Senior High School and Education Support Centre and Safety Bay Senior High School outlined on page 362. That pair of schools has been allocated a total of \$100 million. When were those schools built?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As the member very well knows, because he mentioned them in press announcements, they were built in the 1970s.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Were those schools involved in the statewide audit process?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes. That is why it is called a statewide audit, so they would have been involved.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I thought that the statewide audit was still underway at the moment. Were those schools pushed to the front of the line as part of the statewide audit compared with other schools of a similar vintage?

The CHAIR: There are a couple of premises that we have not yet established are correct. The minister might want to expand on whether the audit has been completed.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The audits are done on a revolving-calendar system. An audit is done every three or four years. Not every school is audited in one year; it is a revolving system. On the member's question about whether these schools were pushed to the front, is this member making some —

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am trying to establish —

The CHAIR: It sounds like an imputation to me, member.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am trying to establish how the statewide audit system works.

The CHAIR: I think the member is making an imputation.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The minister is saying that the statewide audit system is a revolving system. I am trying to get an understanding of how it works.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The McGowan government made a significant commitment to invest in our public schools. That is why the audit takes place. Not all schools are audited in one go; they are audited over a period of time. I do not have an understanding of the day in, day out mechanics of it. My understanding—my advisers may correct me on this—is that the auditors determine which schools will be audited at any particular time. That is my understanding, but I stand to be corrected. I should also add that it is managed by the Department of Finance, so it might be a question to pose to the Minister for Finance.

Ms M.J. HAMMAT: I have a question on the funding for these schools. Can the minister please explain how this funding will impact on the Rockingham and Safety Bay communities?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I thank the member. I have paid a visit to these schools. It would be very hard to argue that these schools are not worthy of this level of investment. The investment in those two high schools will transform the two senior high schools into vibrant and engaging learning centres that will support the students, teachers and other staff members, including the gardeners. There is also an ed support centre in Rockingham. The idea of this investment is to more fully allow for not necessarily an integration, but the better utilisation of the facilities across the two centres. That is part of the \$60 million. If the member visited Safety Bay Senior High School, he would also agree that it is in need of this investment. That funding will be used to upgrade classrooms, provide specialist facilities and do other refurbishments. Our goal is to ensure that we provide a quality fiscal environment for our education system. As the member knows, we have over 830 public schools in Western Australia and the overall budget is over \$6 billion. The funding for these two schools that the member picked out also sits alongside more than \$350 million in new infrastructure spending in this budget.

[9.40 am]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Speaking of sensitive issues, can the minister understand how the community of Esperance, when the Premier —

The CHAIR: What is the line item for that!

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: — has two schools in his electorate —

Dr A.D. BUTI: Excuse me—line item?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: This is a further question about the statewide audit that the people of Esperance were told that they have to be involved in —

The CHAIR: The line items are Rockingham Senior High School and Safety Bay Senior High School.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: — yet I cannot see any trace of how the Rockingham and Safety Bay Senior High Schools were involved in the statewide audit. The schools in the Premier's electorate were built in the 1970s —

The CHAIR: Minister, that question is rhetorical. I would not answer it.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: — and the Esperance Senior High School was built in the 1960s.

The CHAIR: Minister, I would not answer it—next question.

Dr D.J. HONEY: In answer to the minister, were those schools audited as part of the audit program? Did this expenditure result from an audit?

The CHAIR: You will need to say “when” because the minister has already given evidence —

Dr D.J. HONEY: No, in this expenditure.

The CHAIR: Do you mean for this last year?

Dr D.J. HONEY: Yes. Is this expenditure that they have announced as —

The CHAIR: That is not what you asked.

Dr D.J. HONEY: — the result of an audit?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Every school is audited as part of the building condition assessment.

Dr D.J. HONEY: How often should a school expect to be audited? For example, should a school expect to be audited every five or 10 years?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As I said in a previous answer to the member for Roe, it is every three to four years.

The CHAIR: That is more like it.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will just add, for the local member, the BCA for Esperance Senior High School was completed last week and a report is due in August.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Pleased to hear it.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to page 349 of budget paper No 2, division 24, and the first table of capital appropriations. Mosman Park Primary School sits in my electorate. I think the minister is familiar with it; his predecessor certainly visited the school. This school is in desperate need of an upgrade and funding. I searched the budget papers and I could not find anything related to that school. In terms of facilities, it would have to be one of the poorest schools in the metropolitan area. Are there any plans at all for this school? I do not see anything about this school in the forward estimates.

Dr A.D. BUTI: My office and the department have been working closely with the local council and the Mosman Park School for Deaf Children on the proposal for an onsite car park. I would like to thank the council

and the community for their ongoing advocacy in this respect. It is also good to hear that the local member is well aware of the situation. The member would be very pleased to know that funding to the tune of \$2.5 million of the asset and maintenance program will be allocated towards that project.

The CHAIR: That is a Dorothy Dixier, member!

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am thrilled.

The CHAIR: Excellent!

Dr D.J. HONEY: The minister mentioned the school for the deaf children, which is, as the minister knows, co-located with the Mosman Park Primary school. Each deaf student has a helper to provide that student with individual care. At the moment, when a student needs individual care, the helper and the student have to sit on the verandah —

The CHAIR: Member, we are moving from capital to recurrent.

Dr D.J. HONEY: No; this is capital expenditure. Are there any plans to upgrade the facilities for the school for the deaf children so that they can have individual one-on-one spaces?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The department is always actively considering how it can improve facilities, particularly for students with special needs, but I cannot give the member any commitment today.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Sorry, I should have asked this next question as a follow-up to my other question. The minister may have mentioned this in his answer about the funding for the modifications to the car park and extending that campus, but what is the timing for that, please?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The decision was made quite recently. I do not have a time frame on it, but if the member just writes to me, I am sure that I can give him the answer in due course.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Thank you.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: This is a very easy question that we have already had conversation about. I refer to page 362 of budget paper No 2, volume 1 and the agricultural colleges. How much has been allocated for the Western Australian College of Agriculture, Cunderdin; and, what were the works for?

The CHAIR: The minister actually gave the answer, which was \$12 000, but the member has asked what it was used for.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am not sure I have that information available—if the member can just wait a minute. The money for the preventive maintenance and minor works assessment program will be used for things such as the removal of asbestos; the assessment of deteriorating structural flaws; removing mould that is visible on the walls, ceilings and floors; removing corrosion from steel columns; roof repairs; termite infestation and damage; and any issues with the piggeries or sheds. I am not saying that all the \$1.772 million will be used for those issues at Cunderdin, but they are the sorts of projects that it will be used for.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 360 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, “Additions and Improvements to Residential Colleges: Minor Works”. Can the minister expand on where that funding will be delivered across the residential colleges?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I did mention the list.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: No, this is not for the agricultural colleges. It is for the residential colleges, which is on a separate line.

The CHAIR: It is about a third of the way down under the line item on Harrisdale Primary School. The actual line item reads, “Additions and Improvements to Residential Colleges”.

Dr A.D. BUTI: We do not have that information available, but if the member puts it on notice, I am sure we will provide it.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is there is no opportunity to provide it as supplementary information, minister?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Put it on notice and we will provide it.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 349 and ongoing initiatives at the bottom of the page that lists “Suicide Prevention School Response”. A one-off figure of \$560 000 has been provided for the 2024–25 out year. Can the minister explain what this program is and why there is no other provision for future funding?

[9.50 am]

Dr A.D. BUTI: That allocation in the budget under “Suicide Prevention School Response” relates to specific funding for that program, which is run by the Mental Health Commission, but there is other considerable funding for the wellbeing of students, as the member would know, for school psychologists, Gatekeeper suicide prevention training, strengthening interagency partnership, and activation of interagency communication processes. A number of other measures are not part of that specific program, including chaplaincies. The member should not think that

just because we mention that amount of money under that provision there is not other money available for the wellbeing of students. Above that item is the “National Student Wellbeing Program”. We made a major commitment to increasing school psychologists.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the minister outline where in the budget these other measures are that he is referring to?

Dr A.D. BUTI: If the member looks above the item he was at, there is “National Student Wellbeing Program”, which is obviously one of the areas. That is all part of it, under “Total Cost of Services”.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I guess I find it a bit strange that there is a one-off item in the 2024–25 year, nothing in 2023–24 and nothing in the further out years. Can the minister describe for me why this has popped up as a one-off item?

Dr A.D. BUTI: That program is being funded now. The budget item that the member referred to, “Suicide Prevention School Response”, is for the continuation of the program for a further year, but as I stated, there are all these other measures for the wellbeing of students that come under the total cost of services. It would be a very wrong and mistaken attitude to have that the only way we can try to reduce suicide is by that particular program. That is one avenue. A considerable amount of money has been spent for wellbeing and more school psychologists are working in our public system than ever before. In 2021, the state government committed \$42.2 million to employ more than 100 FTE additional school psychologists over the next four years. For public schools, this funding will provide an additional 100 FTEs, as well as additional supervisors and lead school psychologists. We are providing significant amounts of money for the wellbeing of students.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Further to the 100 school psychologists, have they all been employed? Are they in place, or are they still being attempted to be employed?

Dr A.D. BUTI: We are on track to meet the timetable of that commitment. As of 30 April this year, an average of 435.1 of the school psychologist FTEs were employed across the public system, which is an increase of 376.7 FTE since 2021.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer again to “Ongoing Initiatives” on page 349. Straight below, the bottom line item is “Swimming and Water Safety Program”. Last year was funded, this forthcoming year is funded, but there is nothing in the forward estimates. Can the minister explain the situation and what will happen to this program?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The funding allocation is additional funding to the normal funding that provides for that program. We have provided that to try to attract swimming teachers to allow interschool and outer-school programs to take place. That is additional funding to the normal funding that takes place.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is the minister confident that by the end of the budget year 2024, further funding will not be needed to attract teachers and that by 30 June 2024 it will be wrapped up and we will have enough swimming teachers for the next three or four years?

The CHAIR: That is a yes or no answer, member. If you want to elicit more information, I suggest you maybe rephrase it differently. Minister, you are either confident or you are not.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am confident that the programs in place now are addressing the issues that have to be addressed. We continue to build our swimming instructor workforce, including funding of increased swimming instructors and targeting year 12 and university students to be swimming teachers.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The member for Central Wheatbelt and I share concerns about the number of swimming teachers in the regions. We seem to have a situation in which our schools —

The CHAIR: Ask a question. Is the problem specifically acute in the regions, and are you undertaking any special measures to address that? That is the sort of question you ask, but fire away.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Okay. I am getting some good guidance from you; thank you, chair.

We are concerned about the regions. Does the department have any specific programs aligned to meet the need for extra teachers in the regions?

Dr A.D. BUTI: We do everything possible to ensure that every school has a swimming program. That is part of the additional funding and part of the policy to target year 12 and university students. We are doing everything we can to ensure that we have swimming programs in every school. It is, of course, a challenge, as the member very well knows.

The CHAIR: I will not be doing that again, I just thought I would give you a little hint.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Any hint is always appreciated, chair.

I refer to Government Regional Officers’ Housing on page 350. Firstly, what houses and where? Do we have a description of what areas the government is targeting throughout the state, and how many houses and in what locations?

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is really a question that the member should direct to the Minister for Housing, because Communities does an annual audit of what houses and what deficiencies are in what areas. The member can address that to the Minister for Housing.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Surely the Department of Education has some target areas? There is \$3.5 million, then \$4.3 million and then \$5 million in the out years. Does the minister have a particular area that the Department of Education is targeting?

The CHAIR: I will allow that, minister, because it relates to your portfolio.

Dr A.D. BUTI: We are targeting every area that needs to be targeted. We need to work on this in conjunction with the Department of Communities.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is it the south west, the wheatbelt or the Kimberley? What areas are the most difficult to house and what areas are the department targeting?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: As part of that allocation, are there any improvements in the security arrangements, especially in the wheatbelt, the Kimberley and the Pilbara areas?

The CHAIR: I suspect that might be in the minister's portfolio purview.

Dr A.D. BUTI: What areas in particular, though?

[10.00 am]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: In the Kimberley and the Pilbara where we are having difficulty with teachers being traumatised by various parts of the community. Is the minister looking at improving security there? I can start naming towns if the minister likes? I am just worried about security for those young teachers up there in the regions.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes. We all worry about security, member. The member mentioned the Kimberley, and the member for Kimberley will let him know that it is a large area, but I assume the member is referring to Halls Creek as one of the areas; is that right?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing.

Dr A.D. BUTI: We have just done a major investigation into the Halls Creek situation, and we hope to look at what measures we can put in place to improve safety. I should also add that the Department of Communities, which is the department that runs housing, has a standard security remit.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: My question is about security on the school, not that.

The CHAIR: No. We are on Government Regional Officers' Housing. Is that it?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I have a follow-on question about the safety aspect. I refer to page 355 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the asset investment program, but the minister might be able to direct me to where it fits better. Where would I find the installation of perimeter fences for schools? Specifically, so that I am being up-front, Northam Senior High School has had incursions, like I suspect many schools have, of outsiders coming onto school grounds, causing problems for students and staff. I am trying to understand whether there is funding, and how does a school get it if there is no funding? I presume this is an issue at many schools.

Dr A.D. BUTI: This is not actually a line item; is that right? Is this just general budget matters? Is that what the member is looking at?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I asked that under the asset investment program on page 355 because I could not find the upgrades to senior high schools' infrastructure anywhere in the budget. I am happy to be instructed that it is somewhere else in the budget, but my general question is: is there funding for a perimeter fence for Northam Senior High School; and, if not, what do we need to do to escalate that?

Dr A.D. BUTI: There are a couple of things. Obviously, sometimes there is a need for fences to be put up.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I agree.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I feel that it is better for the community to be invited, but I know that in some cases that is not possible. Schools have to have funding in their one-line budget for minor works or maintenance, so that is where significant amounts of the funding for this would be.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Therefore, the minister's advice is that it should be funded from within the school's budget, or is there another opportunity for the school to seek funding from the department?

Dr A.D. BUTI: There is a one-line budget, but there is also an annual opportunity to make an application for measures to combat vandalism. Therefore, there will be an assessment of vandalism in various schools and then there is an application process in which they can seek funding to assist in that.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The minister said "vandalism". There is vandalism at the school on occasion, but this is actually about people coming onto school grounds during school and causing altercations between students and staff. Therefore, is there a specific program that deals with school fencing from that perspective? I am sure it is not just an isolated issue for Northam Senior High School.

Dr A.D. BUTI: From my understanding, member, this has not generally been raised with the department—not with me anyway and I do not think with the department. However, if Northam Senior High School or others have that issue, I would suggest they raise it with the Department of Education.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have a question.

The CHAIR: Is it on this, bearing in mind that we have trespassed a little way from the line item?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Chair, may I add something?

The CHAIR: Yes.

Dr A.D. BUTI: There is also the option of hiring security guards, which the department will fund.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Okay. Thank you.

Dr A.D. BUTI: But, hopefully, we do not get to the stage at which we need to have a security guard during school time.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: That might be a bit much.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have a further question to what the minister was saying. When we look at a situation like that at Churchlands Senior High School the other day that had an incursion of people who do not belong to the school —

The CHAIR: Member, we are completely off the line item. This was asset investment. The budget lists the specific schools, and I gave the member for Central Wheatbelt a bit of latitude, but it is a bridge too far.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I will move to a new question. I refer to page 350 and the support for teaching and learning excellence. Paragraph 4 states —

The Department continues to strengthen support and resources to improve the quality of teaching ... to deliver the highest quality of education ...

Once again, we saw the situation at Churchlands high school the other day. What strategy does the minister have in place to support teachers who are involved in these incursions onto the school grounds by people who are not students?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The member would know that the previous minister released the 10-point strategy to combat violence. As the member also knows, this incredibly challenging issue has been around for some time; it is not that the situation has just started happening now. Obviously, with the advent of the filming of these events, it is receiving a wider audience. The department, through this strategy and other initiatives, has made a major statement about not accepting violence. Governments will not be able to solve everything. We need parents, students, the community, the Department of Education, teachers, principals, gardeners and cleaners to all say no to violence. That is what will solve this issue. Therefore, if the member is looking for the government to have a magic wand, it does not. But we have, as I said, made major inroads here; for instance, since 2019, principals have been directed to suspended students who intentionally attack or instigate a fight with another student or film fighting between students. Principals have been instructed to move to exclude any student who physically attacks school staff. A school with special education needs and behaviour engagement must provide assistance to students who may have complex needs and engage in violence. However, the number one issue is that we as a society have to say no. There is this policy in place now, and I, as minister, am looking at other ways that we can strengthen this policy going forward. But if the member is asking how we are going to stop it, I say “we” is not just the education department; it is us as a community.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I agree with what the minister is saying. It is very challenging. It is a community issue. Does the minister have any strategies for the use of mobile phones in schools—perhaps some sort of change of scenery—because it is not working?

[10.10 am]

Dr A.D. BUTI: The department and I banned the use of mobile phones basically in all primary schools. In high schools, they can be in a student’s bag but cannot be used. The situation that happened that the member referred to, maybe not that one, but a lot of situations happen offsite. In regards to mobile phones, we banned them. Primary school students are not allowed to bring them to school. In high school, students may bring phones to school but they must stay in students’ bags and not be used.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: We saw a situation the other day in which there was a fight inside a classroom, obviously during school hours, and it was filmed.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The students broke the rules and the principal is responding as a result.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does the minister have a policy change that might alleviate some of the situations in relation to usage of phones on school sites?

The CHAIR: I think the minister has already answered that.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am not sure what else the member would expect me to do.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is the policy that students cannot use a mobile phone at all during school hours in a secondary school?

The CHAIR: Minister, I think the answer is yes, is it not?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have a question relating to supporting teachers. I know this issue is a challenge because teachers are told not to get involved in fights, but, at the same time, they have a moral obligation. Will there be any change in policy in relation to teachers having to break up fights or the like? It is a double-edged sword. They are told not to get involved; that is the policy.

The CHAIR: They will not be using one of those, member.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am trying to lay out the challenges that our teachers have in schools. They are told not to get involved, but, then again, they should be involved.

The CHAIR: Okay: are there going to be any changes to instructions for teachers as to how they intervene in these instances?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thank you, chair.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Principals work closely with teachers in regards to how they should control and react to violent situations. That is all part of the 10-point action plan. Action 4 reads —

Clear advice for principals, teachers, and education assistants on authority and responsibility to take action.

We have these new guidelines —

School staff to get clear advice on what actions are expected, appropriate and considered reasonable. This includes guidance on when physical contact is reasonable.

That is the situation now. Will there be a change in policy? As we speak, this is the policy. We will wait and see what happens in the future.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: As the new Minister for Education, are you looking to implement any further additions to the 10-point plan to improve the situation that seems to be deteriorating?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will tell the member: I take this matter very seriously and I am always considering how we can improve the situation.

Dr D.J. HONEY: What support network or mechanisms have been put in place by the Department of Education for teachers? I do know a bit about this matter, having a teacher in the family. The anecdotal information I received from teachers is that they are terrified to intervene and that they will not get support from the department, and that they will be charged with assault. It seems to me, from the information I have received, that teachers do not feel they get support. Is there specific support —

The CHAIR: There are about four questions there.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am asking one specific question.

The CHAIR: What is the specific question?

Dr D.J. HONEY: Is there specific support for the teachers to assist them in this matter and give them guidance?

The CHAIR: Full stop.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am sorry to hear that assertion that they feel they will not be supported by the Department of Education. That is not the case. If that is how they are feeling, they should speak to their principal to change the attitude or the feeling they may have. They are supported. They are supported by their principal and they are supported by the education department. If they require counselling due to the stress that these violent situations may place on them, they will receive that assistance.

Dr D.J. HONEY: The minister outlined the good increase in school psychologists to support students in schools. Is there a parallel formal support process outside of simply talking to the principal or deputy principal for teachers who need assistance when they suffer violent acts?

The CHAIR: Excellent question, member.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes, there is. There are school chaplains who provide assistance to principals. We also have collegial principals—outstanding principals who provide a mentoring advisory role for principals. That is in place. As I said, the education department will assist in any way that it can.

I add in regard to this violence issue and so forth, we have set up schools of alternative learning centres that will assist schools with intensive support of students proving to be particularly difficult. In 2022, 170 places were provided in schools of alternative learning settings in 10 sites around the state.

The CHAIR: I think the member for Cottesloe asked about support for individual teachers rather than the hierarchy in the school.

Dr A.D. BUTI: You are right, chair. I was just adding what else we do in regard to the violence issue. The department also engages external providers to help in regard to employee support services and occupational physicians to assist employees with non-work-related matters and medical conditions. It also provides counselling services for staff and immediate family, and mediation services and training to resolve any interpersonal conflicts between employees.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does the minister have any intention of increasing the exclusion and suspension policy in relation to this school violence?

Dr A.D. BUTI: This estimates process appears to have the habit of wanting me to announce every new policy or program that I will do over the next year. We are dealing with this budget; we refer to this budget. In regard to any announcements I make in the future, the member will probably be the second person to hear.

The CHAIR: The member for Mirrabooka has a new area of inquiry.

Ms M.J. HAMMAT: I refer to page 362 of budget paper No 2 under “Additions and Improvements to Primary Schools” and “Additions and Improvements to Secondary Schools”. Can the minister provide an outline of the funding for the Waggrakine Primary School and the Wanneroo Secondary College and the provision of education support facilities generally in Western Australia?

Dr A.D. BUTI: This is an incredibly challenging area with an increase in the volume of students with complex or special needs. We have increased funding significantly in this year’s budget, which includes the expansion of specialist learning programs for students with autism spectrum disorder and an increase to the educational adjustment allocation to support more students with undiagnosed disabilities and learning difficulties. The 2023–24 budget continues to support students with disabilities and additional needs with an additional \$137.6 million allocated over the forward estimates. This includes a \$12.4 million investment into the establishment of a new inclusive education support program with facilities at Wanneroo Secondary College that will accommodate up to 80 students. That program will be inclusive to enable students to access education at their level of need. I am really proud of the work that we are doing in that space. Waggrakine Primary School in Geraldton will receive funding for improvements and new infrastructure. That is \$53 million for the regions and \$9 million for Waggrakine Primary School.

The CHAIR: I have one question from the member for Central Wheatbelt and an indication that the opposition wants to continue with this division until about 11.30 am, so members can let me know if and when they want a comfort break.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 353 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and public secondary education. My question specifically relates to the provision of School of Isolated and Distance Education. I could not find a better reference in the budget papers, but I presume it comes under public secondary education. Could the minister reflect on whether there has been an increase in the number of students participating through SIDE?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes, there has been an increase.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Further question.

The CHAIR: Maybe the minister can answer the first question—or has he?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I said there has been an increase.

The CHAIR: Sorry; further question.

[10.20 am]

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I will go again. If I have to do it by pulling out fingernails, I will. Could the minister reflect on the increase in the last four years and what he anticipates they will be over the forward estimates?

Dr A.D. BUTI: In regard to the primary school numbers, in 2016, there were 134 students enrolled in SIDE. There were also some students who were enrolled in a school but did part of their studies through SIDE.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: In primary school?

Dr A.D. BUTI: They might engage in SIDE because they are travelling. Anyway, let us stick with current students enrolled in SIDE. In 2016, there were 134 students and in 2023, there were 106.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is that primary or secondary?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is just primary. There were 134 students enrolled in SIDE, but some might have been doing just one course, and that increases it. That bumps it up. In 2016, that was 590 students and in 2023, it is 1 025. That significant increase is for languages. Students might be in a school that offers Italian but they want to learn German or whatever, and they can do that through SIDE. In secondary, in 2016, it was 152 students and 331 external; and, in 2023, it was 154 and 1 152 external.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: It was 1 152?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes. They are the students who might be travelling or doing one course here and there.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: For clarification, are those 154 students fully enrolled in SIDE and that is all they do?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes, that is right.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Are the 1 152 students doing a combination of being enrolled in some classes and doing some —

Dr A.D. BUTI: They are enrolled in a school somewhere but they would do one course or some courses, or they might be travelling. I would add—it might be of particular interest to the member and the member for Roe—that obviously in some smaller schools it is not possible to offer the full range of subjects that larger schools can offer so we hope that SIDE can assist with that for some of the more remote and smaller schools.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Sorry; it is hard following this without the figures in front of me. There has been a significant increase in the number —

Dr A.D. BUTI: In external students but not in current students—not in those who are fully enrolled in SIDE.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Further to that, has there been an increase in staffing for SIDE? I understand that it is a separate school that is staffed with a principal and teachers. Has there been a commensurate increase in staffing?

Dr A.D. BUTI: There has been an increase in staffing. I do not have the actual numbers, but I can provide the member with that number at a later stage.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Thank you, minister. I will follow that up. Can the minister comment on the subjects that have seen an increase in student numbers?

Dr A.D. BUTI: In primary schools, it is particularly in languages, but SIDE has also become a registered training organisation offering certificates, and that has seen a major increase.

The CHAIR: I welcome students from Como Primary School to the public gallery. I note that their local member, the member for South Perth, Mr Baker, is down here working very hard and listening carefully.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Has there been a large increase in the use of SIDE by district high schools, especially for years 9 and 10?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I do not have a figure for districts but I have it for the regions. There has been a decrease. If we look at secondary education and compare the figures for 2016 with 2023, we can see that there are 27 students in 2023 but the number of students taking one subject or doing training has increased significantly from 248 in 2016 to 1 081. I think it is a very good story. We are enabling regional students to do courses that they otherwise might not be able to do. Also, there is the RTO aspect of it.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It certainly is, minister, because we have an issue with having two or three students in years 9 and 10 and SIDE provides that assistance. There was no teaching in the first week of SIDE; it was all about enrolment et cetera. That put students behind the eight ball by one week. Does the minister have any comments about that?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Although, as the member mentioned, the first week was taken up with determining student numbers, that was partly because the new principal, who is incredibly keen that SIDE students do not feel isolated, was working out the number of students, where they are and their particular needs so that over the course of the year teachers can also travel to the students to do some face-to-face instruction.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Should that sort of preparation not be done the week prior to school starting because the SIDE students doing ATAR did not get one scrap of learning in the first week? That has put them behind the eight ball by a week.

Dr A.D. BUTI: As the member would know, there are industrial issues with what can be asked of teachers prior to the beginning of the school term. It was done during that week in order to ensure that proper preparations could be made and the principal was able to allocate teachers efficiently, which will have beneficial effects later on.

[10.30 am]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: An Australian tertiary admission rank student doing School of Isolated and Distance Education —

The CHAIR: Not quite so argumentative, member, because you are breaching the standing orders.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Will an ATAR student doing SIDE have to reconcile themselves with the fact that they will have one week less of learning?

Dr A.D. BUTI: No. What they will have to reconcile themselves with is the fact that for the first time, they will have face-to-face learning. They have not had that previously.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the minister enlighten me as to the location of SIDE? I have heard that its headquarters will be shifted; is that correct?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Given that SIDE has been so successful, we are considering options for its location.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is the Leederville site potentially going; and, if so, where will the new headquarters be?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The Leederville site is not going anywhere.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I know that it is not going anywhere, but will it be off-loaded to a different department?

Dr A.D. BUTI: At the moment, the Leederville site remains its base.

Meeting suspended from 10.31 to 10.41 am

The CHAIR: Members, we continue with division 24.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 350, “Other”, specifically the line item “Revision to RiskCover Fund Insurance Premiums”. Why is this funded in 2023–24 and not in the out years?

Dr A.D. BUTI: That item in the budget primarily relates to increased costs in workers compensation and property insurance and it is in line with the government’s approach to managing revisions of premiums. Forecasted increases beyond 2023–24 are subject to a future report back on strategies to mitigate premium increases in future years.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What does RiskCover insure?

Dr A.D. BUTI: RiskCover funds workers compensation, property and business interruptions, general and professional liability, motor vehicles, cyber risk and miscellaneous.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What is the current workers compensation liability held by the Department of Education and what categories are the most claimed?

The CHAIR: I suspect that is relatively detailed and may not be appropriate.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Chair, you are right. I will provide what I can and if it is not sufficient, the member can let us know. In regard to workers compensation, examples of the causes of injuries include being hit by a moving object; body stressing; falls, slips and trips; hitting objects with part of the body; and mental stress.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: How many principals are currently on workers compensation?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The member might want to provide that question on notice.

The CHAIR: I think that is probably better put on notice, member; I suspect it is not readily to hand.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The minister said that the budget line item for the year coming will cover a future premium increase right through the out years, and that is why it is not listed in the out years.

Dr A.D. BUTI: No. In regard to future years beyond what has been allocated in the budget, as I said, that is part of the whole-of-government approach. If it is beyond 2023–24, it will be subject to a future report back. It is projected at the moment.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am interested in the projections for student numbers.

The CHAIR: What line item and page?

Dr D.J. HONEY: Sorry. It is page 349 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, division 24, on the capital appropriation for future capital works. What work has been done on the projection of student numbers in the western suburbs? The minister would realise—there was a fault on our side on this—that projections around student numbers some while ago led to City Beach Senior High School being shut down. In fact, Swanbourne Senior High School was also shut down and Shenton College was constructed. That college is now pretty well overwhelmed with students. There is also Bob Hawke College. Considerable infill is now going on in the western suburbs. Will Bob Hawke College be sufficient to meet the future projected growth of student numbers in the western suburbs?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The budget provides funding to look at enrolment pressures across the state, including in the western suburbs.

Dr D.J. HONEY: A number of people from the area have indicated that it was a mistake to shut down City Beach Senior High School—as I said, that was not the minister’s government’s decision, I believe—and that this site should be kept for a future high school in the area. Are there any plans to divest that site from the Department of Education or is that site going to be retained for future potential use as a high school?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is being retained at the moment. It is retained by the Department of Education as we speak.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Is the minister aware of any plans to divest that site?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am not aware of anything. At the moment, there are no plans to divest it, but there have been no decisions. Its long-term future may change in the months ahead, but, at the moment, divestment of that site is not on the agenda.

Dr D.J. HONEY: What is the projected number of students at Bob Hawke College once the expansion of that campus is complete?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I might throw this to Mr Peckitt to answer.

Mr J. Peckitt: We expect the projection for Bob Hawke College to 2025 to be between 1 893 and 2 032 students. The school is built, with stage 2, to accommodate 2 000 students.

The CHAIR: A luxury, but anyway.

Dr D.J. HONEY: If there are almost 2 000 students on that campus, will there be adequate sports facilities for that campus? It is quite a constrained location.

Dr A.D. BUTI: There is shared usage of the famous old Subiaco Oval. I must say that I am a great fan of the shared use of facilities.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 350 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and to the third paragraph on the significant investment of \$533.8 million to support students with disability and complex behaviour. Considering the length of time it currently takes for children and families to get an autism assessment, how is the department supporting children who show signs of complex behaviour conditions without the funding and physical resources required to assist the families, students and teachers?

[10.50 am]

Dr A.D. BUTI: The member raises an important issue. Obviously, the diagnosis aspect is within the Department of Health's parameters, but in regard to what the Department of Education is doing, we have changed the eligibility criteria for individual disability allocation. It is now aligned with the 2018 national guidelines for the diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. This means that when an assessment team determines that it is appropriate, autism spectrum disorder diagnoses can now be made by a single practitioner and that will then be verified by a second practitioner with the skills and expertise in the assessment and diagnosis of ASD, which will streamline the assessment process and reduce the impost on families. I should also add that I think it is \$8.9 million—I stand to be corrected by my advisers—of additional funding for undiagnosed challenging behaviours.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: As the minister knows, at the moment —

Dr A.D. BUTI: Sorry. Just wait a minute, member. I am checking whether it is \$8.9 million in the 2023–24 financial year. It is actually \$31.9 million in extra funding over the next four years to help students with additional learning needs in literacy and numeracy.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: As the minister knows, we have 17 000 children waiting for paediatric assessments and a two-year wait for autism assessments. Given this funding, what does the minister anticipate the time frames will reduce to, or will they reduce?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Member, I do not know what it will be reduced to. We put this money in to help the situation. I hope that there will be major improvement, but I cannot give the member a number by how much it will be reduced. It is a problem and we have put significant amounts of money into it. As I said, we are changing the eligibility criteria with regard to the assessment.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Will there be any further funding of education assistants within this particular program?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I might ask the director general to answer that.

Ms L. Rodgers: In terms of our funding for EAs, this government, as the member is aware, has increased the commitment for education assistants in schools. In terms of the commitment for disability, an additional \$533.8 million is being invested to support students with a disability. As the member knows, principals manage their one-line budget, and we would expect them to undertake a functional-needs assessment of the students who have learning difficulties and make sure they support them in the most appropriate way. That might be a dedicated EA or it might be other supports within the classroom, but at the moment we have met the government commitment within the department and there has been an increase in education assistants.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to contaminated sites remediation under “Other” on page 350. That is the fourth line down. Does this funding include the removal of asbestos?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It does include the removal of asbestos.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Given that there is no further funding in the out years, does this mean that all schools will be asbestos free at the completion of that budget allocation?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is not the end of the funding. In regard to asbestos, there is also an asbestos remediation program that provides funding up to 2026–27.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: There is no further funding in the out years. Is this minister saying that there is —

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is under another program. It is another line item, but there is further funding for asbestos removal.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the minister outline to me the amount of funding in that particular line item?

Dr A.D. BUTI: In 2021–22, there was \$2 403 000; in 2022–23, it is \$3 million; in 2023–24, it is an estimated \$3 million; in 2024–25, it is an estimated \$3 million; and it is the same for 2025, 2026 and 2027.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thank you. Has the contaminated site removal et cetera been completed for East Fremantle Primary School and also Merredin Residential College?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Mr Peckitt to answer.

Mr J. Peckitt: East Fremantle Primary School is not a contaminated site, but the department has worked through the asbestos issues at that school. The funding that we have, which the minister just outlined, is for broader asbestos work across a range of schools where it is deemed required.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Has any further progress been made at Merredin College? For context, I think the solution was to fence off the site and put a sign on it saying “Don’t Enter”.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will give some initial comments and Mr Peckitt might want to elaborate. Any site where we think there may be an issue will be fenced off. I will see whether we have information for Merredin College. We do not have the details with us at the moment.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Can that be provided by way of supplementary information?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will help members to not waste their energy on repeating themselves. They can make whatever comment they want, but I will not be providing supplementary information. If members want to put the question on notice, they may.

The CHAIR: It is almost time for the changing of the guard. I want to say a couple of things for Hansard. I was poorly advised; it was not Como Primary School but Caversham Primary School. If the *Hansard* could be altered accordingly. I also welcome to Parliament House members of the Milparanga Established Leadership Program who are in the gallery.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to the rate of participation in education, which is the top line under the heading “Outcomes and Key Effectiveness Indicators” on page 352. Can the minister inform me what the rate of participation is in the key Kimberley towns of Broome, Fitzroy Crossing, Halls Creek and Kununurra?

[11.00 am]

[Ms C.M. Collins took the chair.]

Dr A.D. BUTI: I might ask the director general to provide an answer, but we do not actually have the detail for the region at this stage. We could get it if the member wants to put the question on notice, but I do not have that information here.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Does the minister believe that participation in those communities is at a satisfactory level?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I want participation to be as high as possible. I have given the member my answer.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Sorry, I thought the minister was going give me some further information. I asked whether the minister believes that attendance is satisfactory. I am sure that he has visited those communities; I know that he is a diligent minister. My understanding is that in Halls Creek, Fitzroy Crossing and Kununurra the great majority of students do not attend school, and there is almost no attendance by students in years 11 and 12. When I was last in Halls Creek, not a single child in year 12 regularly attended school. In my question, I do not mean a child that has attended school once during the census at the start of the year; I mean children repeatedly attending school. That lack of attendance is reflected across those regions. Does the minister believe that that is satisfactory?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As I said, I want attendance to be as high as possible. The department has a number of initiatives in place to try to improve attendance. Before I outline some of those initiatives, I should add that with a strong economy, some, but not all, of those students who would normally be in school are in employment, which is a good thing. Some of the programs that we have put in place seek to case manage targeted groups of students. We have reinstated communication strategies and introduced events to make the school more attractive so that it is seen as a cool place to be. We are focusing on contacting parents about unexplained absenteeism. We have formed partnerships with other third parties such as the Stephen Michael Foundation in the Shire of Laverton to implement rising leaders’ programs for high school boys to improve the level of attendance. We have run a senior leaders conference in Kununurra that included a focus on sharing attendance improvement strategies. Attendance officer support is also provided at community meetings and on home visits and on country learning. This is a very difficult area. As the Minister for Education, it concerns me when students are not at school, but the Department of Education is doing what it can. As the member would know, this is about more than just the education department; other community initiatives also have to be addressed.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Given those programs, have we seen any material improvement in attendance at those schools in the last 12 months?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes, in some schools, and not so in other schools.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Do you have any —

Dr A.D. BUTI: I do not have that information in front of me, but if the member wants to put it on notice, we will try to help him. The director general has told me that we can provide that information.

The CHAIR: Member, would you like to put that on notice?

Dr D.J. HONEY: Yes, I would like to put that on notice. Are there attendance officers at those major regional centres who help students to attend school?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Are those attendance offices located in those communities or do they travel to those communities from a major regional centre?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask the DG to address that.

Ms L. Rodgers: They work from the regional office. In some instances, they are school based, but they work directly with the schools in need.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I will do this question in two parts; hopefully the minister can be tolerant of this. Is the regional centre Broome; and, in which communities is an attendance officer located?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The region is the Kimberley.

Dr D.J. HONEY: No, where are they located? The director general said that they were located at a regional office in some communities.

Dr A.D. BUTI: We might be able to provide further information if the member puts the question on notice. We have an officer in Broome and we have just appointed a dedicated youth attendance officer to start in Halls Creek during term 2.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to new initiatives on page 349 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and specifically the independent review of Western Australia's university sector. Nearly \$1 million has been provided over those two years. When will the review be released and will it be made public?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The university review should be completed in October. It is a six-month review and the final report should be handed to government in late September 2023. What happens after that remains to be seen.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is this review looking at universities and their early offers? Does the minister have any comments to make on the early offer situation?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is not directly related. I do not know what the independent review panel's final report will say on this, but the member knows that there has been a lot of commentary on this matter. I believe that the member has agreed with some of my comments on this subject. The department and the School Curriculum and Standards Authority are looking at this issue of university pathways.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I agree with the minister in some ways. Does the minister think that there is a concrete way forward with this? The Premier said that we need to have an inquiry about the early offer process and the minister tends to agree with him. Can the minister enlighten us as to where he thinks this is going?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I have met with the vice-chancellors and outlined my expectations. As I mentioned, the School Curriculum and Standards Authority is looking very closely into how we can improve the ATAR participation rate. We are also looking further at the whole issue of pathways to university. SCSA and the education department are both looking very carefully at this issue.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does the minister foresee that the early offers will return to being made in September, like in the eastern states, so that students—as the minister said when he first came into office—do not take their foot off the pedal too soon with their studies?

[11.10 am]

Dr A.D. BUTI: Universities have agreed to delay it to July, as of now. We are still seeking clarification, but at least three universities have said that they will not be giving unconditional offers anymore. We are still working out what it means when they say “unconditional offer”.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 349 of budget paper No 2, volume 1 under “Spending Changes”, following on from the member for Roe's question on the review of Western Australia's university sector and the line item above, “Business Case Development—Targeted Secondary Schools Enrolment Relief”. The note about the two states —

Existing Department spending has been reprioritised to meet some or all of these costs.

Could the minister advise what was unfunded to fund those two line items? What was bumped down the list and where did the funding come from?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Mr Peckitt to answer.

Mr J. Peckitt: Each of our capital works projects have a level of contingency associated with them; they do not always get fully utilised. When that is the case, we redirect a portion—that will not impact any project—to help fund that line item.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Could the minister elaborate on the line item “Business Case Development—Targeted Secondary Schools Enrolment Relief”?

Dr A.D. BUTI: We continue to look at the whole issue of school enrolments and the staffing requirements of that. We will continue to look at that throughout the state.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Sorry, minister; I am not quite sure what problem the department is trying to address with the development of the business case.

Dr A.D. BUTI: We are looking at what relief needs to be acquired in our education system to meet increased demand.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Does the minister mean in relation to staffing or the additional funding of secondary schools? Sorry, minister; I do not understand.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will pass this to Mr Peckitt.

Mr J. Peckitt: Not long ago, the former minister announced the Shenton modular to take place to support growth at Shenton College. Part of that announcement was to do a business case to look at broader relief in that area. This line item will be about developing a business case to look at broader relief to Shenton College and the schools around it.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Specifically, is it in relation to Shenton College numbers and the impact that is having on the schools in the surrounding catchments?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes. My general response earlier was to say that although this item is looking at particularly what Mr Peckitt just said, we are always looking at what needs to be done to provide relief to enrolment pressures.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to paragraph 6 on page 350 under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”. Can the minister tell us what strategies the department has engaged to attract and retain high-quality professionals, particularly to locations that have proven to be difficult to staff?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask the director general to provide a response.

Ms L. Rodgers: We have been undertaking some global initiatives to meet the challenge of teacher supply. One of those particular initiatives is the Teach for Australia initiative. Our pre-service teachers are also given the opportunity, through the board, to work in schools under limited registration. We have a teacher relief pool. We have launched a casual staff seeker app. Although schools often have a catchment of relief staff that they access, we now have a statewide app that enables all schools to access teachers who would be outside their immediate remit. On top of that, we have been recruiting internationally. We have 1 100 teachers in the pipeline who are interested in coming to Western Australia. We brought some international teachers into Western Australia at the start of this year and we are lining up further teachers to bring into the state at the start of semester 2. We are providing opportunities for our staff to be retrained. The member will appreciate that some of our science teachers might want to teach maths or other things. We are providing the Leap program for those teachers to train in different curriculum areas. We spoke today of the attraction and retention initiatives. We have put in place that additional funding to support teachers to either stay in regional schools or, indeed, be encouraged to go to regional schools. We have in place the teacher service induction program and the remote connection program under Teach in WA to support our staff in country regions. Two incentive programs have additional benefits for those in remote locations and, indeed, country regions: they get additional travel allowances and weighting in regard to their salary. There is one other thing I have forgotten to mention, but I will stop there.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: As the minister knows, there is concern about some of our experienced teachers leaving the system. Is there any attempt or program to bring them back onstream?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As the member knows, we are always trying to make the profession welcoming, and also as attractive as we can for people who are there. There has been a decrease in those leaving and retiring from the profession.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am pleased to hear it. How many principal positions are currently vacant?

Dr A.D. BUTI: We would like the member to put that on notice. We do not have an answer for the member at the moment.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: This is the Department of Education. Surely it must know how many principal positions are vacant at the moment.

Dr A.D. BUTI: As far as vacancies, there are none.

The CHAIR: There are no vacancies.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: There are currently 28 principal positions advertised on Jobs WA.

Dr A.D. BUTI: There is a principal in every school. As the member would know—he is experienced in education—there could be an advertisement because a school might have an acting principal or a permanent position has come up. The advertisement of a position does not necessarily equate to a vacancy. I am told that, at the moment, no school in Western Australia does not have someone in the principal role.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I appreciate that there are acting positions and people in every school. I understand that, but the question was: how many substantive principal positions are currently vacant?

The CHAIR: Member, that question has been answered by the minister.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I think he sidelined it with a bit about acting principals.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Excuse me, we do not need the member’s commentary; this is not a football match. I am doing all right as a centre half-forward! We do not have this right in front of us. Is the member asking what substantive positions are vacant? I am not 100 per cent sure.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That is correct.

Dr A.D. BUTI: We will provide that on notice.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What is the standard number of applicants for substantive principal positions, say, for levels 3, 4 or 5?

Dr A.D. BUTI: There is no standard number. It varies from school to school.

[11.20 am]

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to both page 364 of budget paper No 2 and the “Statement of Cashflows” on page 367, but I will focus on employee benefits at the top of page 364. We go from about \$4.5 billion to \$4.985 billion, which is an increase of about 10 per cent in the cost of employees, yet when we look at the total number of FTEs, it went from 42 719 to 43 266, which is only a 1.2 per cent increase. Given that the wages policy of the government was for a 3.5 per cent increase, can the minister please explain this significant increase in employee costs of around 6.5 per cent above that?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes, I can, member, but I will allow Mr Peckitt to do it. He can do it much, much better than I can.

Mr J. Peckitt: There are two main contributors to those increases in costs. The first is, as the member mentioned, wages growth—the rising costs of salaries across the forward estimates. The second is enrolment growth. The budget includes funding for projected enrolment growth across the forward estimates so that when enrolment growth comes, we have additional teachers, education assistants and others to support those additional students. Therefore, those two combine to be the main contributing factors to those increases in costs across the forward estimates.

Dr D.J. HONEY: The papers indicate that the FTE growth was only 1.2 per cent. I appreciate that, in total numbers, it is a reasonable number, but in percentages, it is a small number. I would have thought that the wages budget would have grown in proportion to that or somewhere around it on top of the 3.5 per cent. Maybe we would get to a five per cent increase, but we have seen an almost doubling of the increase in wages cost. Therefore, are some FTEs not accounted for in the budget papers?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Mr Peckitt.

Mr J. Peckitt: There are other additional costs; for example, leave liability is forecast to increase across the forward estimates, and when that increases, it causes an increase in employee benefits.

Dr A.D. BUTI: There is also the attraction and retention benefits scheme of \$8.4 million.

Mr J. Peckitt: That covers the main items of leave liability, wages growth in terms of salary growth, and enrolment growth. In the current financial year, we also had the cost-of-living payment, which was a one-off payment that boosted it for that one year.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Is it possible to give me an approximate breakdown of that? Even if we look at the 3.5 per cent and 1.2 per cent figures, we might say that accounts for around half of the increase.

Dr A.D. BUTI: We can do it, chair. There is a \$354.8 million increase of school-based salaries due to a combination of the new public sector wages policy and forecast student enrolment growth. There is a \$49.3 million increase in non-school salaries under the new public sector wages policy. There is a \$21.1 million non-cash adjustment to reflect the department’s forecast leave liability expenditure. There is a \$9.3 million increase in attraction and retention initiatives to address teacher supply pressures. There is \$8.4 million in additional attraction and retention benefits for teachers and principals from the bargaining for the School Education Act Employees’ (Teachers and Administrators) General Agreement 2021. There is a \$7 million reclassification of contracts and expenses to employee benefits following a review into the employment contract of casual employees. There is also \$3.2 million for Government Regional Officers’ Housing rental payments. Those are the main things.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Good luck, Hansard!

Dr D.J. HONEY: Thank you very much. Yes!

I have a further question.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Not as fast as that.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Has the leave liability expenditure increased because government incentives are causing teachers to stay longer, which is growing that leave liability, or has there been a reassessment of leave liability for teachers?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am not sure how long the member has been in Parliament. This was a policy back when Troy Buswell was Treasurer. Teachers and other public servants have notoriously not taken long service leave, so this policy tries to ensure that they take the long service leave. The member’s question is counter to his argument because if teachers did have that stress and so forth, they would take their leave. They are not being forced to stay on. We are actually trying to make them take their long service leave; we are not asking them to remain.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I was not trying to allege some failing of the government on this. I was interested to know whether there had been some unusual increase in leave liability that arose out of an audit or whether this was just normal growth of leave liability.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Mr Peckitt to add to this.

Mr J. Peckitt: There is some complexity as well in the calculation of leave liability. It picks up things such as the projected wages growth as well as the connection to the bond rate. Therefore, when those things go up, the leave liability naturally increases. Given our workforce is increasing year on year, naturally the leave liability will increase year on year because of those additional staff, but also the cost of staff is going up.

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is nothing unusual.

Mr G. BAKER: I refer to page 350, budget paper No 2, volume 1. Under the heading “Support for Teaching and Learning Excellence”, it refers to delivering a high-quality education to Western Australian students. Can the minister provide some more information about the phonics initiative?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As we all know, literacy skills for students are very important from an early age, and we require all public schools with primary-age students to deliver an early-years literacy approach that includes the planned and structured teaching of phonics. The teaching of phonics is an essential component of an effective literacy program, alongside other essential components including oral language, phonological awareness, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency and writing. The term “phonics” refers to the ability to identify the relationship between letters and sounds when reading and spelling. The phonics initiative requires principals to confirm in the second semester census that the phonics knowledge and understanding of all the year 1 students has been assessed. The department has established an expected proficiency in this assessment to ensure that teachers are delivering a rigorous phonics program for students and they are reflecting on their impact on student learning. The expected proficiency is being developed in consultation with major stakeholders, including the Dyslexia-SPELD Foundation.

We will of course continue with this program and its initiatives, which support schools in assessing phonics progress early with frequent and ongoing monitoring to effectively identify and support students requiring intervention and extension across all year levels. To implement the initiatives, support, including consultancy, training and professional learning, is available for schools when required. Schools also have access to the quality-assured set of departmental-endorsed resources, including evidence-based instructional practices, curriculum-allied phonics programs and assessment tools to monitor, assess and support early intervention, and a self-reflection tool to assist schools to ensure that evidence-based and research practices are being implemented in the teaching of phonics.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 349 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the line item “Adopting and Adapting the Australian Curriculum Version 9.0” under the new initiatives. Obviously, we have \$3.792 million in the 2023–24 budget and it then goes up substantially for the two following years before dropping off. Can the minister explain what year it will be fully in place?

[11.30 am]

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will get the director general to answer. Chair, I am mindful of the time. We were going to 11.30 am, so this might be the final question.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: There is one or so more questions, and then we will wrap it up.

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is 11.30 am now. Yes, director general.

Ms L. Rodgers: I thank the minister. The funding will provide for resources to update and develop the curriculum and support materials, as well as assist teachers to prepare to deliver those materials and become familiar with the Western Australian curriculum. We know that WA will adopt and adapt the national curriculum, and this program will enable us to do that. We will also have additional targeted support in areas of mathematics, humanities and social sciences. These have been the areas in which we have seen the most significant changes in the Australian curriculum, and indeed there are additional resources in regard to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture.

The funding also provides a half-day of relief for teachers of pre-primary through to year 10 mathematics across the public, Catholic and independent sector. For the program’s rollout in 2023, we are looking at English from pre-primary to year 6 in phonics, and health education and physical education, which includes consent education and first aid; that is already being looked at. In 2024, the focus will be on English, health and PE, science in P–6, and we will be looking at the implementation of English, health and PE, consent and first aid, in regard to what is going on in the classroom. In 2025, we will be looking at science, mathematics, humanities, social science and technologies. Implementation in 2026 will be science, mathematics, humanities, social science and technologies. In 2027, the final year, the implementation will be in the arts.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have one final new question, if I can, Madam Chair?

The CHAIR: Noting the time, I will check with the minister. Is it okay to do one final question?

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is fine, so long as we make sure we have time for the other divisions.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 349 and the item “Business Case Development—Targeted Secondary Schools Enrolment Relief”. What is this for and why is the funding coming out? Obviously, it is for enrolment —

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will just cut you off there, member. The member's colleague the member for Central Wheatbelt asked exactly the same question. It has been answered.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Apologies.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Can we finish education now?

The appropriation was recommended.

Division 3: Department of the Premier and Cabinet — Service 4, Aboriginal Affairs, \$24 264 000 —

Ms C.M. Collins, Chair.

Dr A.D. Buti, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs.

Ms E. Roper, Director General.

Ms F. Hunt, Deputy Director General, Aboriginal Engagement and Community Policy.

Ms S. Meaghan, Special Adviser, Native Title.

Mr A. Brender-A-Brandis, Chief Financial Officer.

Ms T. Ninnette, Executive Director, Aboriginal Engagement.

Mr D. Stewart, Executive Director, State Services.

Mr S. Hayden, Special Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: The estimates committees will be reported by Hansard and the daily proof will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point. Consideration is restricted to items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must relate to a page number, item or amount related to the current division, and members should preface their questions with these details. Some divisions are the responsibility of more than one minister. Ministers shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 2 June 2023. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

I give the call to the member for Central Wheatbelt.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to the heading in budget paper No 2, volume 1, on page 62, "Aboriginal Affairs and Native Title Agreements". My understanding is that native title agreements that were settled by the state and between proponents and traditional owners prior to the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act coming into play were written with the 1971 definition of Aboriginal cultural heritage. Will the introduction of the new legislation have an impact on existing native title agreements?

Dr A.D. BUTI: No. Is the member talking about native title agreements?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I am talking about agreements already in existence, such as the south west land agreement and the Yamatji agreement. They are the ones settled by the state, but there are others between project proponents and traditional owners obviously. Will there be any impact from the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act coming into play on 1 July? Will they need to be rewritten or revisited or will it happen automatically?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Some components of the native title agreements will not be affected. It depends on what we are talking about. Various government departments are working through possible implications for the standard heritage agreements that are part of native title settlements, such as the south west settlement, Yamatji nation Indigenous land use agreement and the Esperance Nyungar Indigenous land use agreement. They are looking at that. A template has been developed. The Department of Premier and Cabinet is working closely with the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage and the State Solicitor's Office to consider the impact of the new act on the operation of existing Indigenous land use agreements and standard heritage agreements.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: There are implications of that that the state will be working through. Will they be settled before 1 July or is that likely to continue beyond that date when the new act commences?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The plan is that the work being done currently will be completed by 1 July.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 62 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, new initiatives and the native title team expansion. Could the minister advise the number of project teams and their size? For example, there is the native title team and the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act team. What are those teams within the department and how many staff are in each?

[11.40 am]

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will make some general comments about the native title team expansion. We are incredibly proud of our work in native title. We lead the nation. We are working through 136 determinations in Western Australia, which is 54 per cent of the nation's native title determinations. We have reached landmark decisions, such as the south west settlement and the Yamatji Indigenous land use agreement. The final registration of the Tjiwarl settlement was just yesterday. They are groundbreaking settlements. As I said, there are 136 determinations and we need an appropriate number of people working in the department's native title team. We sought additional funding over the forward estimates to expand the team to include seven FTEs on a recurrent basis. The allocation also includes provision for one FTE within the Department of Treasury. Basically, as I said, it is to deal with the increase in the number of native title determinations.

Dr D.J. HONEY: The minister, in the explanation that he just gave, referred to agreements that have already been reached and settled, and said that we are well ahead of the nation in doing that. Given that the south west, in particular, and the Yamatji agreements have been settled, why do we need additional staff? I would have thought that there is now a substantial amount of experience in team and that the hard work has been done with those very large claims.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I think the member maybe does not quite understand that each settlement is different. We are dealing with different country with different requirements that are impacted by government differently and have different composition elements and demands. The Tjiwarl settlement is completely different from the south west settlement. We cannot just use the existing one. When the south west settlement was determined, there was not 136 determinations in the background. I would have thought that 136 determinations would alert one to the fact that more people are needed to deal with the sheer volume of work. In the long run, we are very keen to reach agreement on all these determinations rather than go through a long, tortuous court process, which would be much more expensive to the native title holders and the state.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Just to be clear, minister, is that 136 outstanding determinations?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes.

Dr D.J. HONEY: And what number have been completed?

Dr A.D. BUTI: There might be more.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: How does the department prioritise the 136 determinations? Are they worked on together?

Dr A.D. BUTI: No.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: What is the process?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It depends, obviously, on when the determinations come on foot, their scale and what native title infringements may have happened. It also depends on where the native title holders stand in that process, whether they ready to go to the negotiation table and so forth.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is there an active list of the determinations or agreements that the department is working on currently?

Dr A.D. BUTI: We can give the member a list of the determinations.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I think I can get them through the court. My question, minister, is which settlements and agreements is the department actively working on?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It depends on what the member means; does she mean negotiations or paperwork? It depends on what the member actually means.

The CHAIR: Member for Central Wheatbelt, can you please clarify?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I will clarify, minister. The minister spoke about—apologies if I do not say it right—the Tjiwarl agreement so that has obviously come through —

Dr A.D. BUTI: That has been done. That is registered.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: That has been done, yes. How many is the department actively working on to get to that point?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is difficult to say in the sense that—I am not trying to fudge the question.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I am not trying to be difficult; I am just trying to understand what the department is doing.

Dr A.D. BUTI: And I am just trying to give the member an answer. It is difficult to provide clarity here. For example, I might get a letter from a group on a determination today, but there are two current compensation applications in the Federal Court, and they would be given higher priority at this stage. It is difficult to be precise on this because they are all at different stages and have different demands.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Just to confirm, did I hear correctly that the minister said there is an additional seven FTE within the native title team?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is that in addition to the number of people already working in that team?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will just correct the previous answer. I believe the native title team is working on five compensation claims rather than two. There are two in the court and five outside the court at the moment so that is seven. In regard to the question, we have gone from 22 to 29 staff with the additional seven, but most of them are dealing with the implementation, not the negotiation, of agreements so we needed to increase the number of staff working on negotiations.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 62 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, new initiatives and the Tjiwarl ILUA in the goldfields that was announced yesterday, I think. I have had only a brief opportunity to look at the paperwork, but included under schedule 5 of the agreement is exploration charges for the agreement. There is a \$150 per square kilometre up-front cost and then seven per cent of the annual exploration on the licence or 30 per cent of the annual rent payable to the state. Is that seven per cent rate considered to be consistent with other charges across the state? How does the department take advice on that? The advice from the industry is that it seems out of step with some of the charges in other agreements.

The CHAIR: Member, can you please clarify which line you are referring to?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: It is under new initiatives in the table. It is not listed in terms of funding because the note says that it remains confidential until it is registered, and that happened yesterday.

[11.50 am]

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes; that is right. Does the member want me to provide what the agreement entails?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The minister can do that; I have had a quick look at it.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The package includes monetary compensation of \$25.475 million, which includes \$18.81 million in cash payments to be paid following conclusive registration; \$2.29 million for a research and development fund, to be paid over two instalments over the first two years; \$3 million for an economic empowerment fund, to be paid in two annual instalments over the first two years; a \$1.375 million one-off payment for the implementation fund to be paid following conclusive registration; and up to \$400 000 to fund a socio-economic baseline study. There are a number of other initiatives to support and fund Tjiwarl business and economic empowerment opportunities and the transfer of ownership of land parcels to Tjiwarl, including the grant of freehold preserving native title rights and a process for any future grants of land; the creation and expansion of the Tjiwarl conservation estate; recognition of exclusive rights under section 47C of the Native Title Act; involvement of Tjiwarl in the ongoing management of water on Tjiwarl country; and Tjiwarl-specific future act processes for the grant of certain mining tenements and petroleum titles on Tjiwarl land. There are other things as well.

My team and I are not really sure about the question. We might take it on notice, if the members wants to put it on notice, because we really do not understand what the member is saying.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: It is around exploration charges. The question comes back to whether the government, in negotiating these agreements, consults industry on the charges for exploration. There is a seven per cent charge of an annual exploration expenditure licence, plus an up-front fee. Industry is saying that that seems high as part of the agreement. I suspect it will be raised with the minister in coming days.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I think that question should be asked of the Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety rather than us.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I thought this department was responsible for negotiating the agreements.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes—the agreement of native title, but other agencies are involved. The point is that I do not have the answer and my advisers are unclear. We can continue, but we do not have the answer.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”, specifically “Aboriginal Affairs and Native Title Agreements”. I will ask a new question so that I am clear about this because I am relatively new in this shadow portfolio. Is it correct that the Department of the Premier and Cabinet has the lead role in negotiating agreements?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: It will take advice from other departments, but it is essentially responsible for the settlement and finalising of agreements between the proponents. I want to be clear that the Department of the Premier and Cabinet has the lead.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes. I add that although we take the lead, it is a whole-of-government approach. There are many other departments. The member’s question is not in our division; therefore, we do not have the detail. I am trying to assist the member. The member might have a better chance of getting an answer if she asks the Minister for Mines and Petroleum; otherwise, she should put it on notice and we will try to provide the answer.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I suspect I will be told that it comes under the Indigenous land use agreement, which is listed under this department.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Just put it on notice and we will find the answer.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 67, budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the heading “Government Policy Management — Aboriginal Affairs”, under which the preamble states in part —

The Department provides strategic policy advice and coordination to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs including cross-portfolio advice ...

I also refer to the *Annual report on Closing the Gap: Western Australian government*, which states in part —

Treasury established the Aboriginal Affairs Coordination Unit ... in 2021 to elevate and consolidate advice to the Government on Aboriginal policy outcomes and priorities, and to provide a central point for collaboration ...

There is a unit within the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and a unit within Treasury. I would like to know who takes the lead on advice and policy in setting the strategy and the decision-making because it seems that since the decision to remove the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, a raft of these units are popping up across government. These two are very senior in the hierarchy. Who has the lead and how is the division of responsibilities prioritised?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Ms Hunt to provide an answer to that.

Ms F. Hunt: Thanks, minister. The member is correct. The Department of Treasury and DPC are central government agencies that have complementary but very distinct roles. With respect to DPC’s role in statewide policy coordination, Closing the Gap is a case in point. We take a central agency coordination role bringing agencies together to establish the statewide governance arrangements to respond to that agreement. We work closely with the Aboriginal Affairs Coordinating Unit and Treasury be it in Closing the Gap or taking their advice on matters that relate to statewide fiscal policy. With respect to native title, the teams are highly collaborative with central agencies with a lead role. There is a lot of work in both native title and Closing the Gap. They work collaboratively and often take a coordinating role in supporting line agencies that have various responsibilities, be it under Closing the Gap or, as we have discussed, native title, which impacts multiple government agencies.

Ms D.G. D’ANNA: I refer to page 62, budget paper No 2, “New Initiatives”, specifically the line item “Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations Peak Body”. Can the minister please outline the WA government’s investment in the Aboriginal community–controlled organisation sector?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Thank you very much, member. The whole issue of trying to build up the Aboriginal community–controlled organisation network, capacity and capability in Western Australia is something that the government takes very seriously. We have made the significant commitment of \$6 million over the forward estimates to the Aboriginal community–controlled organisation sector. The funding has been allocated to establish WA’s ACCO peak body and continue support in the Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia. The ACCO peak body, which has been named the Council of Aboriginal Services Western Australia, will provide a centralised point of interaction and collaboration between government, ACCOs and Aboriginal communities. This new investment in the ACCO sector will help to increase capabilities, ensure culturally responsive and secure service delivery and improve Aboriginal employment opportunities. The Council of Aboriginal Services will also assist the WA government to fulfil its commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to page 73 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, “Details of Administered Transactions”. There are ongoing payments under both the south west and Yamatji claims of \$21 million and \$71 million and those go over the forward estimates. Can the minister explain what the ongoing payments are for?

[12 noon]

Dr A.D. BUTI: In regard to Yamatji —

Dr D.J. HONEY: It is at the top of the table headed “Details of Administered Transactions”.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The Yamatji Nation Indigenous Land Use Agreement is a process that will provide \$325 million in cash and \$70 million in economic development initiatives to be delivered between 2021 and 2036. That involves cash payments under the agreement totalling \$325 million over 15 years. The fourth tranche of annual funding of \$15 million is due to be paid into the Yamatji charitable trust in September this year. We also oversee the provision of funding for the mining revenue stream, groundwater investigations and a corporate headquarters under the agreement. We are also providing \$2 million per year over 10 years to the Yamatji charitable trust to fund groundwater investigations under the groundwater investigations project agreement. The third groundwater payment of \$2 million plus CPI will be paid to that charitable trust in September this year. The department leads the implementation and coordinates the 13 agencies with commitments under the agreement. Implementation funding of \$9.845 million has been allocated across the 15-year implementation period to fund the implementation of the activities. In 2023–24, implementation funding of \$659 000 will be provided to the department to fund the FTE salaries for implementation officers, legal advice and logistical support for the governance committees that underpin the partnership approach to implementation.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Within those payments, the minister mentioned issues around groundwater and so on. In reference to the previous question that the member for Central Wheatbelt asked about the Tjiwarl Palyakuwa ILUA, I think the minister mentioned that they had full rights for management of any water on their land. Is this a new policy of the government that the Aboriginal PBCs or equivalent will be given control of any waters on their land?

Dr A.D. BUTI: This is a negotiated settlement. Native title is not just one holistic template for everyone. You have to look at the particular title holders and what is important to them—what their country involves and where water fits into that et cetera. It is not a new policy; it is part of an overall agreement. It will vary between groups in the state. Different agreements will have different outcomes.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I appreciate that they may be individual agreements, but there must be some overarching government policy on this issue. Is there an overarching policy that the control of waters will be given to Aboriginal prescribed body corporates or relevant bodies under future agreements?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The overall agreement is that we will reach an agreement. We will negotiate with the native title claimants on what should happen.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I am on the same page, minister—page 73. I refer to the line item “Noongar Boodja Trust” under “Details of Administered Transactions”. Could the minister provide some advice on when all the lands that are within that agreement will be settled? I will provide some context to help sharpen my question. Many of our local governments are keen to develop land. They are waiting on the finalisation of details with the traditional owners. It is part of the settlement, but it has not been finalised and it is proving challenging for them to be able to develop land. That seems to be consistent feedback.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Ms Hunt to respond.

Ms F. Hunt: With respect to the member’s question on the trust, Central Services Corporation and the six regional corporations were recently established and the schedule and milestones of the agreement are being actively worked through at the moment. We are currently working with Central Services Corporation and in support of the regional corps that have recently been appointing CEOs and their various committees to their respective roles. The transfer of land will occur as a consequence of that. That is something that is being worked through and is a consequence of the time taken to appoint the regional corporations to their roles and obviously to transition to Central Services Corporation.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is there any idea of timing? Are we talking in the next financial year? I can imagine that there is some keen interest in some of the more lucrative parts of the coastal communities that will necessarily create opportunities for those groups. It typically tends to be some of the smaller communities in my electorate and maybe the electorates of the members for Moore and Roe that fall to the bottom of the list, but for those little communities, they are important. That does seem to be an inhibitor to being able to progress. A time line or an indication of when that will be settled would be much appreciated.

Dr A.D. BUTI: All I can say at this stage is that they are all under active processes and negotiations, and transfers and settlements will take place as soon as possible. Because it is an agreement and structures have to be put in place, I cannot tell the member that on this particular day there will be finality of the transfer of the land. It is an ongoing process and we are trying to achieve it as soon as possible.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Does the department have KPIs on when it would like to see these things resolved? Is it working to a time line or a preferred time line, or is it open-ended?

The CHAIR: Minister, would you like to put it on notice?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will make two points. The first is to ask the member to put the question on notice for further clarification. The second is that we are actively working on it and trying to resolve these issues as quickly as possible.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I have only one more question on this and then maybe we will move to the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage.

The CHAIR: The member for Central Wheatbelt with the final question.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 62 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the significant issues impacting the agency. The first paragraph refers to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. I noted the minister’s comments on Closing the Gap at the *Business News* event last Friday. I thought I heard him say that some of those priorities might need to be revisited. I understand that the government will start to do that work in 2023. Could the minister confirm that work has commenced on the state’s Closing the Gap jurisdictional information plan update, noting that it is due to be updated this year? Maybe the minister could answer that question first, as I have another one.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Ms Hunt to respond.

Ms F. Hunt: Yes, work is well underway for the WA update to the Closing the Gap implementation plan for the state.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Would the minister like to expand on his comment that some of the priority areas on which the government is focusing need to be revisited?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I formed that view not long after coming into this role, but this has to be agreed on a national stage. I am not in a position to say at the moment whether that prioritisation will take place in the sense of focusing on five, six or whatever number it may be, but I am very keen for that to happen. Because there has been no settlement on that, I am really not in a position to elaborate any further.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Would the minister agree that outcome 11, which relates to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and their representation in the criminal justice system, needs to be elevated?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I would say that every single one is important, but some are more important than others. It is something that we are prioritising. As I said, I am not going to pick each one today because they are all very important. Over time, with my colleague on the national stage, we will come up with the priorities.

The CHAIR: Minister, would you like a comfort break before move on to the next division?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I do not think we will have time for that, so we had better move on.

The appropriation was recommended.

[12.10 pm]

Division 43: Planning, Lands and Heritage — Services 3 and 4, Aboriginal Affairs, \$50 670 000 —

Ms C.M. Collins, Chair.

Dr A.D. Buti, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs.

Mr A. Kannis, Director General.

Mr V. Davies, Assistant Director General of Heritage and Property Services.

Mr M. Hanrahan, Chief Financial Officer.

Mr M. Darcy, Assistant Director General, Land Use Management.

Mr D. Corr, Executive Director, Land Use Management.

Mr S. Hayden, Special Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: The estimates committees will be reported by Hansard and the daily proof will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point. Consideration is restricted to items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must relate to a page number, item or amount related to the current division, and members should preface their questions with those details. Some divisions are the responsibility of more than one minister. Ministers shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 2 June 2023. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

The member for Central Wheatbelt.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2021 under the heading “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency” on page 714. Can the minister advise how many new staff the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage will employ to support the implementation of the local Aboriginal cultural heritage services and the delivery of the act?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The government has already funded 31 FTEs under the current act. Obviously, they will still be in place, and then 25 FTEs have been funded for heritage officers and policy and compliance officers.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: So 25 new employees —

Dr A.D. BUTI: And also 10 regional staff.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: That is 25 FTE plus the 10 regional staff —

Dr A.D. BUTI: No, it is 31 plus 25. They will still be involved.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I am talking about the new ones.

Dr A.D. BUTI: There are 25 new FTEs and 10 regional FTEs.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Can the minister advise where the regional officers will be located?

Dr A.D. BUTI: They will be located in Broome, Karratha, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie and Albany.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Sorry, did the minister say Bunbury?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I said Albany.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Will the new employees, both the 25 and the 10 regional employees, be in place by 1 July?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Five of them will be.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Will that be five out of the 35 new employees?

Dr A.D. BUTI: No, it will be five of the regional employees.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Sorry. My question was: will the new employees, both the 25 and the 10 regional employees, be in place by 1 July?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes, they will be. Those additional ones will be, but out of the 10 new regional staff, five will be in place. All the others will be in place.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Will 25 new FTEs be in place and will five of the 10 regional FTEs be in place by 1 July?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to the same paragraph as previously; I will not waste time. I refer to the regulations and guidelines for the act, which were released on 6 April. Have any of the documents that were published on 6 April been changed or altered since they were uploaded?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Not as far as I am aware, no. They have been gazetted now.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I am talking about between when they were published on 6 April —

Dr A.D. BUTI: As I said, as far as I am aware, I am advised, no. But I am also letting the member know that they have been gazetted.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to the same heading and the regulations and guidelines again. We spoke about the education sessions last week. Does the minister have an update on where they will be held?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I do. As I said, I apologise; there is no excuse for the comment I made earlier. I said it because I was very disappointed with the member, who I thought was a person I could talk to in a free and frank manner. I spoke to the member after question time and told her that we were trying our best to get one in the wheatbelt. The member never relayed that in any of her interviews with the media afterwards, and I think that was really bad faith. I went to the member in good faith to let her know as soon as I was aware that it would be possible, but the member did not have the honesty and respect to let the media know that because it did not go with the narrative. That is why I was very disappointed by the member's behaviour. I did not think that would happen.

In regard to that, there will be a new session in the wheatbelt in Merredin. Do we have a date for that? We are still trying to work out the date, but there will be one in Merredin.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I thank the minister. I take it that the education session will be before 1 July.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes, it will be before 1 July.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Thank you, minister. Is there a reason that the minister was reluctant to provide an education session in the wheatbelt, given the landowners and the local governments out there?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I was not reluctant. The member asked me what they were and I told her what they were at that stage.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Okay. I can rephrase it.

Dr A.D. BUTI: We are not going to get into —

The CHAIR: Members!

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I am asking whether there is a reason that it was not on the list.

Dr A.D. BUTI: At that stage, it was the view that because of the time period, the sessions were determined on where we would have the greatest numbers, and at that time, that was the advice I had. After the member asked me that question, I talked to my advisers and the department, and that is why I think I got back to the member within an hour and told her, but, as I said, the member did not have the honesty to relay that in her media interviews afterwards or in her social media. I hope that after this she will go on to social media and provide that information. It would be even better if the member said that I provided it to her last week.

[12.20 pm]

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is the minister finding it difficult to find time to schedule these sessions because this legislation has been unnecessarily rushed through by this government? I note that the regulations and guidelines were released nearly two months after they had been promised and the legislation in particular was rushed through the house. The minister is under a deadline that I understand has come from the Premier. This is an incredibly important piece of legislation that people want to get right. Why does the minister not give himself more time?

The CHAIR: Member, can you please refer that back to the line item?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: It is absolutely under the line item, "ICT Projects — *Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2021: Implementation*".

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is not.

The CHAIR: Minister, we will finish this one in a moment.

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is being a bit loose, but I am prepared to answer it. I can correct the record. The Premier has given no instructions at all. It is actually my determination that it be 1 July, so I will correct the record there. The member should not make up things for which she has no evidence. The Premier has not once given me any direction about the date. I imposed this date myself and I will tell the member why I imposed it. It is because the 1972 act is defective and it needs to be updated and I want this new act in place as soon as possible.

As the member would also know, although she was not the shadow minister last year, the co-design process of the regulations and guidelines went through an extensive consultation process, including in the wheatbelt, over three different phases. There has never been —

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I just find it surprising that there were no education sessions.

The CHAIR: Member, the minister is speaking.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I cannot recall another regulatory system that has gone through consultation or a co-design process such as this. There has been extensive consultation. There is now an extensive education program. As I have said, regulations can be changed and this will be reviewed after a year. We do not know how the system will operate. We need to get the system up and operating so that we can see how it works, and then if changes need to be made, they will be done. Under the current system, as minister, I am signing off on consenting to damage of Aboriginal cultural heritage. I know that the member respects Aboriginal cultural heritage. I do not feel easy as a minister, and neither did the many ministers before me, that is being done under a regulatory system whereby the Aboriginal cultural owners are not consulted. Under the current legislation, the minister can sign off—although we made it a practice that we do not—on a section 18 without consulting Aboriginal people. I know that the member would not agree with that system. That is why it is imperative that this legislation be put in place. It is not being rushed. The act came in at the end of 2021. The co-design and consultation process on the regulations and guidelines has been going on for a year, an extensive education program is taking place and the regulations will be reviewed after a year.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to the minister's comments about the extent of consultation and the co-design process. I have had extensive conversations with local government, farmers and others about this new act and its regulations. I appreciate that the regulations are relatively new, but a great majority of those local governments have no idea of the detail of this act or how it will affect their operations. As the minister knows, local government is likely to be a significant gatekeeper in this process. Local government will not be able to give approval for various building activities and others unless it has some proof or certainty that this act is being complied with. That will join a tick box, if you like, of other things —

Dr A.D. BUTI: Can the member ask a question, please?

The CHAIR: Member, please get to the question.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am just providing some background to the question. What effort is the department making to fully inform local government of its obligations under this act and also the liabilities that it could incur if it does not comply with the act?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It would be interesting to know how many of those local governments that the member said have come to him have actually approached the department. The act has been in place since the end of 2021. The Western Australian Local Government Association has consulted with the department at least 16 times. There have been two zonal meetings and three webinar meetings and there will be another online consultation with WALGA that all councils in Western Australia can hook into or attend in person. There has been extensive opportunity for consultation. We cannot be held responsible if local governments do not approach the department or do not come to these meetings. Sixteen meetings have already taken place, and, as I said, further ones are yet to take place.

With regard to the act, we held 75 workshops and received 223 submissions. Extensive consultation was held with local government during phase 2 and 3 of the co-design workshops. We even went to small places in the wheatbelt and in the member for Roe's electorate. We went to Katanning and only eight people appeared. There are various reasons for that, but we still held that meeting. In Northam, 23 people attended and in Moora, nine attended. Those meetings still took place. If people do not come, we cannot be held responsible for that. There has been a significant opportunity for people to obtain knowledge about the act and its impact, and now about the regulations.

Ms M.J. HAMMAT: I have a further question that the minister might have already partly answered. Can the minister outline all the consultation that has occurred on the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Thank you, member. Some of this has already been asked about, but when it comes to this issue of people not knowing, we can only provide the information. If people do not come to the meetings—the member would know, being a farmer, that if the horse does not come to the water trough, one can only do so much.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: They are very busy at certain times of the year.

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is right; they are, but a lot of other people are busy, too. There has been more than one opportunity to attend. The state government has completed a 12-month co-design process that included three rounds of widespread

community and stakeholder engagement and 94 workshops across 36 locations around the state that resulted in 223 submissions. The process informed the development of key regulations and guidelines that support the implementation of the new laws. These documents released in early April include details about due diligence and consultation requirements, local Aboriginal cultural heritage services, fee structures and tiers of ground disturbing activities. We are also continuing to work to facilitate Aboriginal organisations to determine their capability to be designators—LACHs et cetera.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Just to enlighten the minister, I heard from farmers in Lake Grace yesterday who had no idea about what is going on. I hear what the minister just said about consultation. If those farmers are not clear on things by 2 July and they carry out a tier 2 activity—dig in a strainer post for a fence or whatever—will they be prosecuted? Is there some sort of leeway that the minister will give —

Dr A.D. BUTI: As the good local member that the member is, I would advise him to tell his constituents to contact the department to find out. It is like anything else: when people break the law, ignorance is no excuse. The member knows about this act because he is a member of Parliament and he has been here, so he also has the responsibility to tell them to contact the department.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: There is a lack of clarity on what is a tier 1 and tier 2 activity. If these farmers use their air seeder or a deep ripper to do a job, which one is a tier 1 activity and which one is a tier 2 activity? Some of the consultation has not provided that information.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am not really sure where we are in the budget papers. The guidelines of the levels have been published. I would ask those farmers to look at that and if they are in doubt to contact the department. I am sure that farmers contact various departments all the time over other issues. I do not see why this should be any different. We should realise that farmers and others have other regulations they have to adhere to, like local government regulations, environmental regulations et cetera. Why should this be necessarily any different?

[12.30 pm]

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 174 and the heading “Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2021” under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”. Can the minister advise how many applications have been received from groups to become local Aboriginal cultural heritage services?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I can. Let me explain. Someone can make an application to seek an \$80 000 grant to help prepare the application to go further. Once they become a LACH, they receive an additional \$200 000 and then annual funding of \$300 000. There have been nine applications for the readiness grant, which is \$80 000, eight have been approved, three are approved subject to conditions, one has been declined, two require further information before assessment can be completed and four grant agreements have been issued. I will explain it now, if the member might ask a subsequent question. If there is no LACH, it is not the end of the story. If there is no LACH for a particular area, it goes to the native title holders. That is the beauty of this new act, that it aligns with the Native Title Act, which is so important. If no LACH is in place—there will be more LACHs over time—proponents can just go to the native title holders or owners for that area. If that cannot be determined, they can go to the native title representative body. That is how the process will work.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Or the knowledge holders.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is there a list of those that have been approved? Where would we find them, rather than having every farmer in Western Australia calling our office, which I think is about to happen?

Dr A.D. BUTI: That will be published, but it has not been published yet.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Where will it be published?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I presume on the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage website.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The minister mentioned there will be LACHs after 1 July. What happens if industries or individuals have used that alternative pathway in the interim and a LACH is approved? Will that change what that proponent needs to do if their agreement with whatever was there at the time of their agreement was perpetual?

Dr A.D. BUTI: No. It is with whom the agreement is with at that time.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: A new LACH cannot come in over the top of that and say that they do not agree or they have missed something?

Dr A.D. BUTI: No. The LACH are the native title holders. The LACH is just a new description that we are providing, with additional funding. The LACH are native title holders. They are going to be the same people. One avenue will be the native title holders, and another will be under a different name, which is a LACH, with additional funding.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: With respect, there are some challenges even within native title holder groups, for instance, in the goldfields, which has now been settled; that has been challenging over time. I guess the clarity for the proponent is that they will have to go down a pathway. They want certainty for their project or for what they have agreed to. We want to make sure that we are not damaging cultural heritage.

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is exactly right. If there is any lack of clarity or uncertainty about who the proponent should be negotiating with, the department or the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Council will provide clear instructions who they should be.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Again, under the same heading, I am referring to the ACH knowledge platform, which I understand is the name given to the information technology system for lodgement of all those tier 2 and tier 3 management plans. Can the minister advise what has been invested in the creation of this system? Is it a brand new system?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will pass to Mr Davies.

Mr V. Davies: The figure invested in the ICT system was in the 2022–23 financial year. It was \$3.9 million.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is that reflected in the budget? Did I miss that? My apologies; I did look.

Mr V. Davies: It is in year 2022–23. The expenditure was \$3.83 million.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Has the creation of the system been outsourced? Has this been done by an external contractor or has it been developed in-house?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Mr Davies.

Mr V. Davies: We have obviously outsourced the build of that system. There are a couple of vendors that are charged with creating a new system. They are working with our own internal ICT guides, because a lot has to join up.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Obviously, it is a new system. Has training commenced for those in the department who will be managing the system in readiness for 1 July?

Mr V. Davies: Yes. Training has commenced. We have been doing train-the-trainer sessions. Obviously, key users of the system have been trained up and are continuing to be trained. Their job as superusers is to then train their staff on how to use it. A series of guidance materials have been provided and developed with the system. Once that has occurred, we then have sessions planned whereby we will teach known stakeholders. There will be an awareness program of what the system looks like and then there will be a series of materials, both video as well as written, on how to operate and navigate through the system as well.

Dr A.D. BUTI: With regard to the IT allocation, it is on page 722 under “Completed Works”.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is the build complete? Has the system been completed? I just do not know any IT system that works without gremlins first go. Will there be an opportunity for it to be user tested or stress tested prior to 1 July, when we would imagine submissions would be coming thick and fast with new operators and new systems?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It will be completed as of 1 July to do its role in the new regime. But of course, as we progress, there will be new updates and further work because, as the member knows, technology changes from day to day. It will be operating as of 1 July.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: There will be a user interface for those making submissions. Has the platform been designed for people who are in low-bandwidth areas? Typically, we would find exploration and landowners in regional and remote areas. Regardless of investments in telecommunications over the years, there are still some very patchy areas. We expect that they will need to use that platform in low-bandwidth areas. Has that been accommodated with the build?

Dr A.D. BUTI: From my understanding, and Mr Davies might want to add to this, it will be built so that everyone in the state will be able to utilise it.

Mr V. Davies: That is correct.

Mr G. BAKER: I refer to page 716 of the budget. Could the minister please provide an update on the status of the divestment of the Aboriginal Lands Trust estate?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I thank the member for this question. In 2017, the McGowan government made an election commitment to divest the Aboriginal Lands Trust estate. We believe that increasing direct Aboriginal control of land will help strengthen communities, foster economic activity and securely improve outcomes for Aboriginal people in WA. Land divestment is a very complex process that must be engagement-led if it is to succeed, so it was very important that we approached the divestment of the Aboriginal Lands Trust estate in a methodical manner. It was thought that we could do this over two terms, but that has proven to be quite difficult; however, we do have some runs on the board. As of May this year, the Aboriginal Lands Trust and the minister approved 72 properties for divestment, and 23 properties have been transferred into the ownership of or management by Aboriginal entities, leaving 288 properties remaining in the estate. Of the initial \$5.841 million, the state government has committed \$900 000 in 2022–23 and 2023–24 to progress the divestment of further properties. We continue to work closely with stakeholders throughout this process. The department is also progressing targeted amendments to the Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority Act 1972 to remove legislative barriers and maximise opportunities for divestments. We hope to bring a bill to amend that act to Parliament towards the end of this year or early next year.

[12.40 pm]

Dr D.J. HONEY: Were those lands divested to those groups as a freehold title, or are they still under a common title?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It varies, member.

Dr D.J. HONEY: In relation to the land the government still holds, if one goes to those remote communities, typically the ALT land is the most dysfunctional land. An ALT area in Carnarvon has no rubbish collection. It appears that there is no road maintenance or management of those sites. I understood that the management of those sites fell within the minister's department. Is there a program to maintain those sites? It is not apparent when one visits them.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am not sure how that relates to the divestment of Aboriginal lands.

Dr D.J. HONEY: It relates to the lands that the government maintains.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The member is talking about essential services or community service delivery. That is not within my purview.

Dr D.J. HONEY: They do not fall within the shire either; that is the trouble. They used to fall under the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, but it appears that they do not fall under anything now.

Dr A.D. BUTI: We are of the view that if we can divest to an appropriate Aboriginal group that has that linkage to the land, it will increase economic activity. I think the member would agree that part of the way to close the gap is to provide economic —

Dr D.J. HONEY: My concern is that if the land is not freehold or subdividable, it ends up dysfunctional. But that is okay.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Minister, I refer to page 714, new initiatives, and the Aboriginal heritage inquiry system run by Data WA. My understanding is that when mapping for heritage locations, there is an error factor of up to four kilometres. Will there be a more accurate mapping system so that farmers or local community people can accurately identify areas of Indigenous importance?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will hand over to Mr Davies.

Mr V. Davies: As part of the new acknowledge system, we are building a new database for Aboriginal cultural heritage. The existing data on the Aboriginal register of heritage sites is being transferred to that new database so that we can better manage it. The issue of making that data as correct as we possibly can is an ongoing activity. There are 14 000-odd registered heritage sites and about the same number of lodged places that have not been assessed under the 1972 act. All those sites will be transferred. If there are any errors on that data or if people think there are errors on that data, they need to contact the department to make sure. What that data will show is that there is Aboriginal cultural heritage. Some data is very accurate. There is some historic stuff that we have not had a chance to assess at this point. But the data shows, as a first port of call, that there is heritage in that area, so if there is any doubt, then proponents, landowners and land users should contact the department to try to get the best understanding of what that heritage is in that particular area.

Dr A.D. BUTI: There seems to be a misapprehension here that this is such a significantly different system that we have not had to protect Aboriginal cultural heritage until now. Under the current system, even though it has a lot of defects because of the fact one can get a section 18 decision legally without the consent of the Aboriginal group, people still are not allowed to damage Aboriginal cultural heritage. This system will actually provide much better information on that. There are exemption categories and there is a tier 1 category and permits and so forth. We need to be careful and not think that this system will develop all this new Aboriginal heritage; it will not. The system is there now and we have to protect Aboriginal heritage right now. This system will ensure Aboriginal people are at the centre of any management plan that still allows for damaged Aboriginal heritage. If someone has already been engaging in an activity that they are still engaging in—if it is a like-for-like activity for which they have permission—that continues.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I hear what the minister is saying, but at the moment the system has an error factor of four kilometres. If I want to go to dig a dam, it is very challenging to get an accurate location. It is also very challenging in that it can take up to 10, 12 or 14 weeks to get responses.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Do a survey!

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It is just not workable. I am worried about the practicalities. If a farmer wants to put in a fence, dig a dam or whatever, they could be looking at waiting 26 weeks or any length of time to actually get some activity happening. That is what I am worried about.

Dr A.D. BUTI: People should be doing due diligence now. I would hope that people are doing due diligence now and that they would also be mindful to not damage Aboriginal cultural heritage, as they would not want to damage any cultural heritage. Therefore, I do not see what the difference is in that respect.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I agree. We are all on the same level, except I just wonder whether the minister believes that that is the common practice within, particularly, the agricultural sector. It is a well-known practice within the mining

and exploration industry, but has it been identified as a risk because the government is transitioning, and are there appropriate staff, local Aboriginal cultural heritage services and heritage surveyors available? If the minister's advice to farmers is to go and do a heritage survey of their entire property and every farmer says that they now need to go and do that as part of their cost of doing business, is there a capacity for that to be done? Will the department be staffed appropriately to make sure that we do not see an enormous backlog? That is the risk. The minister is talking about what should be happening and what might happen from 1 July, given the changes.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Additional staff are being put on. Some of the activities will be exempt. The activities for which a person would need a management plan are in the regulations. If a person is doing a like-for-like activity, it will be under the same situation that they have now. If someone has any doubts, just contact the department.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The minister might need a few more than the 25 additional staff, at least at the outset.

Dr A.D. BUTI: We will be ready.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Under the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act implementation, can the minister advise how the system will be paid for? I understand it is cost recovery. Was that canvassed during the minister's consultations with ministry stakeholders?

[12.50 pm]

Dr A.D. BUTI: It was made quite clear that we would have a cost-recovery model. That has been discussed in numerous conversations. No, the actual model was developed as a budget measure to be announced during the budget process.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Who was engaged to develop it, and how long did they have to provide advice to the government on this?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It was developed by Treasury and the department, but there was consultation in developing various models, and various models were looked at. Particularly for many of the people whom the member for Vasse and the member for Roe represent, this system is far better than some of the suggestions because, obviously, the amount of revenue generated will determine, largely, the amount they pay. A mining company with global revenue of over \$5 billion will pay much more than a farmer in Katanning, unless the farmer has a revenue over \$5 billion.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: It is taken on businesses' global revenue?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes, of the parent company.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: How will government departments be charged? I am thinking of the Rottneest Island Authority, which has a small budget but a significantly complex project.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Governments will be charged. The director general of the department has the ability to exempt certain fees et cetera, in certain cases.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I have a further question.

The CHAIR: Would you like to continue with these questions, given the time?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Yes.

Dr A.D. BUTI: We have to make sure we leave enough room to pass the next division.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: In a moment, minister! How much of the appropriation for the cost recovery that will bring the funding will be set aside for managing the department's expenses, and how much will go to the local Aboriginal cultural heritage services and others?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will maybe ask the director general to elaborate, if need be, but the breakdown is that \$12 million of that will be for the local Aboriginal cultural heritage services funding; \$0.4 million for the council cost; \$6.6 million for operational staff costs; \$2.2 million for regional resourcing; \$1.4 million for other costs; and \$5.3 million for department overhead costs, including depreciation for this year, 2023–24.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I had some advice from some industry groups, and they commented that they only found out about the cost-recovery modelling a week before it was announced. That is quite a significant impost for these businesses.

Dr A.D. BUTI: It was a budget decision.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: There was limited consultation with industry on the actual funding model. Was it a surprise?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It was a budget decision.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I have just one further question about the same dot point under the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act, and then we are good to go. Are any further guidelines being developed by the department that have not been published?

Dr A.D. BUTI: There are. The ones that have been published have been published. Some further work is still being done on the survey guidelines.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: When can we expect to see those published?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It will be available before 1 July.

The appropriation was recommended.

Division 36: Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries — Citizenship and Multicultural Interests \$89 492 000 —

Ms C.M. Collins, Chair.

Dr A.D. Buti, Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Interests.

Ms L. Chopping, Director General.

Mr J. Jegasothy, Executive Director, Office of Multicultural Interests.

Ms E. Gauntlett, Deputy Director General, Management and Coordination.

Ms L. Kalasopatan, Executive Director, Finance.

Mr S. Padshah, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: The estimates committees will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point. Consideration is restricted to items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must relate to a page number, item or amount related to the current division, and members should preface their questions with these details. Some divisions are the responsibility of more than one minister. Ministers shall only be examined in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 2 June 2023. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

I give the call to the member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I seek a bit of clarity. Page 529 and page 549 list multicultural community grants, but we seem to have differing amounts there. I am wondering whether the minister can clarify that. On page 529, we have \$250 000 for each out year, and on page 429, in the other section, we have \$1.31 million for each out year. Can the minister clarify what is going on there?

Dr A.D. BUTI: One is the spending change, and one is the total amount. Obviously, the larger one is the total amount, and the other one is the spending change.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thank you. I refer to page 535 and the percentage of stakeholders who report that the Office of Multicultural Interests had a positive impact on the promotion and support of multiculturalism. That has increased from 80 per cent to 90 per cent in the following year, 2022–23, and then to 90 per cent in 2023–24. How are those stakeholders selected, and how much is spent undertaking the research to arrive at that annual rating?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Is the member asking how much the surveys are costing?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: How much do they cost and how are the people selected to undertake the research?

Dr A.D. BUTI: About 1 900 people were surveyed, and it cost \$22 946.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I will ask one final question.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Quickly.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: On page 549, the multicultural community grants are obviously the same amount of money each year. Is the number of community groups and multicultural groups that the grants are being applied to expanding? Are more groups getting less money or is it the same number of groups getting about the same amount of money?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The groups that are allocated the grant each year vary. They are not given a lesser amount when they get the grants. A wide variety of groups apply for it, there is a process and then the grants are delivered but they are not necessarily given a lesser amount when they get the grant.

The appropriation was recommended.

Meeting suspended from 1.00 to 2.00 pm

Western Australian Meat Industry Authority —

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Mr D.T. Punch, Minister for Regional Development representing the Minister for Agriculture and Food.

Ms I. Loo, Acting Chief Executive Officer.

Mr T. Palmer, Chief of Staff, Minister for Regional Development.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This hearing is for an off-budget authority. The estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. Questions must relate to the operations and budget of the off-budget authority. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point.

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 2 June 2023. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system.

I give the call to member for Central Wheatbelt.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Could the minister provide us with a little bit of detail around the completed works and the program going forward? It is a very consistent amount of \$450 000 across the forward estimates. What does the minister anticipate those works will look like across the forward estimates?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: In 2023–24, there will be an allocation for scanning equipment for sheep and goat electronic identification in the order of \$150 000 to \$250 000, depending on the outcome of the procurement process, and additional funding of \$100 000 to replace a feeding tractor, \$25 000 to replace dongas, an estimated \$50 000 for safety equipment, an estimated \$25 000 for a hot-water pressure washer, and any available additional funds will be used for additional CCTV coverage and front gate remote connections.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Can the minister confirm that there is CCTV out there currently?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I will defer to the acting CEO.

Ms I. Loo: Yes.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is the security of the site adequate given the attention that I am sure facilities like this attract from animal activists? Can the minister advise whether there have been any incursions or incidents?

Ms I. Loo: We have a plan for if animal activists come onto the site. The CCTV is meant to extend our current coverage. Right now, we have front gates that are closed on most days except for sale days and days when stock is delivered on site. I believe at the moment the security on site is adequate, but we can always enhance it, and, like the minister said, if there is sufficient funding under that \$450 000, we will expand our CCTV coverage on site.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: For clarification, was the \$450 000 for all those programs that the minister just referred to one lot of \$450 000 or is that across the forward estimates?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: It is one year's funding. The initial amount in relation to scanning equipment is dependent on the outcome of a procurement process and funding from the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, so there may be an additional source of funding to contribute to that.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Further, I understand that the electronic ID system for somewhere like the Katanning Regional Sheep Saleyards will cost about \$1 million. Obviously, this allocation is nowhere near that. If, say, \$1 million is required for Muchea, will it come out of the \$22.2 million allocated for the electronic ID system?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I think the member is referring to a line item in the Agriculture budget; this allocation is specific to equipment at this site.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: On the Muchea saleyards, given the federal government's forthcoming policy on banning live export, and the state government's lack of support for the industry as well, have we seen an increase or decrease in the numbers going through the Muchea Livestock Centre?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Which line item is the member referring to?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to the asset investment program and the use of plant and equipment when there is a need to put either more or fewer sheep through, and the running of the Muchea Livestock Centre.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I think that is a long bow to link the federal government's decisions on exports to the asset and equipment replacement program that exists, given that I have outlined the items that will be purchased. There will be a requirement for saleyards even with the local market.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Pursuant to this line item, asset investment program, obviously we are going to see some issues with the live export trade that will have implications. As I have pointed out previously, the government is not

supporting the live export sector, and, at the same time, we are seeing the sheep flock diminish, so this equipment at the Muehea Livestock Centre will not be used. Does the minister have concerns about capital investment for an electronic ID system that will not be used once this ban comes into play?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I think the member is talking about hypotheticals. No changes have been made at this point. The federal government has given an indication of its position and it is pursuing that. The state has made its position clear. There are no implications from those decisions that I can see in relation to this line item. There will still be a meat industry in Western Australia under any changed rules that the federal government may impose.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have a final question: is there much interaction between the Katanning saleyards and the Muehea Livestock Centre with plant and equipment and so forth in relation to this line item?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Yes.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: When, say, the Katanning saleyards looks to upgrade its equipment, would it be overseen by WAMIA or would it be a Shire of Katanning–Katanning saleyards operation or would it be a joint arrangement with WAMIA?

[2.10 pm]

Mr D.T. PUNCH: There is no control or authority in relation to equipment purchases at the Katanning centre. There is regular discussion about best practice, ideas and shared learnings.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 255, budget paper No 2, volume 1, and to budget paper No 3, “Asset Investment Program”, specifically the line item “Jobs and Economic Development”. There is \$500 000 across the forward estimates in budget paper No 3, but it is \$450 000 across the forward estimates in budget paper No 2. Can the minister explain why there is a difference?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Is budget paper No 3 part of this division; can I clarify that?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: It relates to this industry.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I seek clarification from the chair.

The CHAIR: That is a good question. What page is it?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: It is page 292, budget paper No 3, “Asset Investment Program”. Under the heading “Jobs and Economic Development” is the line item “Western Australian Meat Industry Authority”.

The CHAIR: Sorry, minister; what was your question?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Is budget paper No 3 part of this division?

The CHAIR: Yes, it is.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: In answer to the question, it is a rounding up of 0.45 to 0.5.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is that normal practice? Why would it not be accurately reflected in the budget papers? It might be a rounding error to a government with a massive surplus, but it is still a lot of money. Is that normal practice?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: That is the advice I have received.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Okay. It will be interesting to see what other rounding errors are in the budget papers as we proceed.

The CHAIR: That complete the examination of the Western Australian Meat Industry Authority.

Forest Products Commission —

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Mr D.T. Punch, Minister for Regional Development representing the Minister for Forestry.

Mr S. West, General Manager.

Mr A. Lyon, Director, Business Services.

Mr T. de Nobrega, Director of Finance.

Mr T. Palmer, Chief of Staff, Minister for Regional Development.

Ms D. Plummer, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: The estimates committees will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. Questions must relate to the operations and budget of the off-budget authority. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point.

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 2 June 2023. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

I give the call to the member for Central Wheatbelt.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 284, budget paper No 2, volume 1, “Explanation of Significant Movements” and note 1, which states —

Anticipated operating loss in the 2023–24 Budget Target is higher due to a combination of sales ceasing on native forest products from 1 January 2024, offset by reduced harvesting and haulage costs, and fixed costs for anticipated work for ecological thinning for forest health.

My question is in three parts. First, is it the case that native forest product sales have already declined due to the exit of Parkside Timber and Whiteland Milling and the Forest Products Commission’s inability to supply its base contractor volumes?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The answer to that is yes.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Given that the answer is yes, is it likely that the anticipated operating loss in 2023–24 will be greater than what is listed in the budget papers?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: It is very difficult to predict because there is uncertainty about what the sales will be between now and the end of the year. There is some uncertainty about what the final figure will be.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Does the minister anticipate and estimate—it is the estimates committee—that it will be greater than what is in the budget papers, given his answer to the first part of the question? Is it likely to be greater?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I will ask Mr West to provide more detail.

Mr S. West: It is difficult; I apologise, but there is no answer because as we lose revenue from sales, we do not have the corresponding costs to deliver the products. I cannot predict what will drop quicker and in what timing; it is just uncertain.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Referring to note 1, can the minister explain the fixed costs for ecological thinning?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I will defer to Mr Andy Lyon and ask him to provide a response.

Mr A. Lyon: The fixed costs would be for the contract management for ecological thinning activities that will be occurring.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Note 2 on the same page refers to the estimated actual reflecting reduced plantation thinning due to the low availability of harvest and haulage contractors. Can the minister explain why there is low availability? Essentially, I want to know what caused it.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I will ask Mr Lyon to respond to that question.

[2.20 pm]

Mr A. Lyon: A multitude of factors are affecting the harvest and the whole capacity at the moment. One of the main ones is the low unemployment rate; it is very difficult to get people into the industry. We are having issues with bringing people into the industry, training them up and then them getting jobs elsewhere, but we are not the only industry having this problem.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is the FPC undertaking specific initiatives with industry to try to rectify that, given that this is a significant risk for the business?

Mr A. Lyon: Yes, we have a national campaign—actually, it is international as it includes New Zealand as well—looking for harvest contractors, personnel and equipment that would be willing to come to WA and operate here. We actually have one company that is working in WA at the moment that came from Queensland.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: When did that effort begin? When was it identified as an issue and when did that begin?

Mr A. Lyon: That effort is ongoing at the moment. Off the top of my head, the national and international campaign started a couple of months ago. It is ongoing; there are still adverts out there at the moment.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: This may have been said earlier and I may have missed it: has there been success in attracting new haulage contractors into Western Australia as a result of these efforts or is it too early to say?

Mr A. Lyon: It has been successful in stimulating leads for us to talk to. The campaign that we are talking about at the moment has not itself brought anybody in. The people we brought in from Queensland was as a result of an effort from not just the FPC but also industry, and that stimulated us to go wider with a campaign to see whether we could attract more capacity.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: How much is the FPC setting aside for these campaigns? Are they internally funded?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I am advised that the campaigns are funded from internal sources.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Can the minister advise how much has been set aside for the campaign and how long it will run for?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I am advised that there is not a set amount for the campaigns; they are funded on an as-needed basis and they are ongoing.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Where would we see that reflected in the budget in terms of campaign or communications costs?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I will ask Mr Lyon to comment.

Mr A. Lyon: At the moment, it has been a very minimal cost—it has been only the cost to advertise in the newspaper and electronic media. The cost so far has actually been below any expenditure limits. It is a national campaign but it is still just a matter of a few thousand to get the adverts out.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Given the challenge that is facing the industry in being able to manage this, is it considered that there needs to be increased expenditure on these campaigns?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: This is a very fluid environment with the labour pressures that we have in Western Australia and nationally. I have every faith that the Forest Products Commission can make judgements about when and how it needs to advertise to support the campaigns or contractors that it needs.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 281 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and to the budget item “Revenue to General Government Sector” and the line item below, “Dividends”. Paragraph (a) states —

In determining the dividend payment to general government, Net Profit After Tax may be adjusted based on other factors as permitted by relevant legislation.

Can the minister explain the projected increase in dividend payments post-2023–24?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Dividends are paid based on 75 per cent net profit after tax. The FPC will not pay dividends in 2022–23 and 2023–24 due to a lack of net profit after tax, reflecting the decrease in revenue from native forest offsetting any surplus from plantation and sandalwood operations. The FPC will revise the out year forecast in the 2024–25 budget process based on a finalised forest management plan 2024–2033. We are in a period in which we are leading up to the forest management plan, and that plan will have a material impact.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: My next question is: what are those factors going to be? Is the changeover from the native timber scenario et cetera the main reason that those dividends will be reducing?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The government has signalled its policy intent. The forest management plan is due shortly, and that will signal what the operating environment will be in the out years.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to the table on page 281 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and specifically to “Revenue from Operations” under “Government Trading Enterprise Information”. Could the minister advise what portion of the FPC’s revenue comes from timber taken from Alcoa’s mining operations and whether there are any risks to this revenue across the forward estimates?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I will ask Mr Lyon to respond.

Mr A. Lyon: The native forest operations and the Alcoa take is not split up in the FPC budgets like that. We can trace operations, but we do not separate out revenue from a sawlog. When sawlogs are sold, they are not treated differently because of where they come from.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Wouldn’t that quantity be known under the agreement with Alcoa and, therefore, you would be able to trace the revenue that comes through the FPC? I just need an explanation. Sorry; I realise that I am a former forestry minister, but it has been a little while. I do not understand how you cannot trace or have an understanding about where your revenue is coming from.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Although a quantity might be extracted from a particular location, the value of that will not be realised until logs are sold. Logs are sold as a complete group of logs rather than from a specific location.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The second part of the question was whether, from that perspective, there is any anticipated risks in terms of the Alcoa component of that. Does the FPC anticipate any changes in what is coming from the Alcoa operations?

[2.30 pm]

Mr D.T. PUNCH: There is no identified risk at this point.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 285, paragraph 3 under “Income Statement”. It states that the current fixed costs are included to reflect the capacity required to undertake future ecological thinning work. I think the question has already been answered around what the fixed costs relate to. That is the contract management. Perhaps the minister could clarify that for me. If that is not correct, please provide an itemised account of the current fixed costs that are reflected there. The second part of the question is: what quantum of future ecological thinning work was assumed in the 2023–24 financial year to determine those fixed costs?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The extent of the ecological thinning will be determined through the forest management plan, but I will ask Mr Lyon to give the member the detail for the first part of her question.

Mr A. Lyon: The fixed costs that are assumed here are actually just the fixed costs that we currently have. As we are waiting on the forest management plan to see what will be done in the future, the fixed costs carried forward are just current fixed costs for contractor management capability.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Sorry, I missed the last part of the response about what the fixed costs relate to.

Mr A. Lyon: It is the contractor management of harvesting activities. The current capacity at the moment is carried on in fixed costs until the new forest management plan comes out, and then it will be allocated against whatever is in the new forest management plan.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Will the preparation work—the environmental planning and assessment reports—for that ecological thinning be undertaken by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions or Forest Products Commission?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I have to refer that to DBCA until the plan comes out. We do not have the plan at this stage.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: That is fine. That is all I was after.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 282 and the significant issues impacting the government trading enterprise. Paragraph 4 is about plantations. The softwood plantation expansion program will not produce any revenue streams over the forward estimates period. How long will it take to produce revenue? What is the expected revenue, based on current pricing?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The first commercial harvest is not expected until about year 10. It is very difficult to estimate what the value of that timber will be at year 10.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: As part of this softwood expansion program, how many hectares will be required in total to satisfy the government's budget?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I will ask Mr Lyon to answer the question.

Mr A. Lyon: That is almost impossible to answer. Whether through the purchase of land, sharefarming agreements or leveraging that funding, we will be getting as many hectares and additional plantations for the future industry as possible.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: How much land has been purchased so far under this program and at what cost?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: It is approximately 3 500 hectares.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What is the cost?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: It is estimated at \$33 million.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: How many seedlings were planted under this program in 2022–23 and how many are expected to be planted in 2023–24?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I am very pleased to advise that 3.3 million seedlings were planted in June, July and August. An estimated 4.5 million seedlings are expected to be planted next year.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Has the minister given any thought to biosecurity in softwood plantations? We are getting feedback about wild pigs and other biosecurity issues. Does FPC have a plan in place to deal with those issues?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I will ask Mr Lyon to comment.

Mr A. Lyon: I cannot comment directly on wild pigs, but we do have a biosecurity plan. The FPC works with other agencies, including the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development and DBCA, which are the land managers for most of the land that we have. We work with them to deal with any feral pests, including wild pigs in plantations.

The CHAIR: Member for Roe, I have a little bit of guidance. You are straying away from the budget paper questions. You are being indulged at the moment.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: In my defence, my questions are about management of the plantations.

The CHAIR: Yes, keep going. It is all right until there is a problem.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I will wrap it up. Does the Minister for Regional Development have any concerns, such as the farmers of Darkan have, that good-quality farmland is being used to put these plantations in place?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Can I ask which line item is being referred to?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That is paragraph 4, "Plantations".

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I am still not sure of the connection.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The connection is that 3 500 hectares have been purchased. I am asking whether the minister is concerned about the loss of good-quality farmland.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: No.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is the minister not at all concerned that we are losing good-quality farmland in WA?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: No, because I am advised that the purchased land is a mix of land; some of it is former plantation timberland and some of it is farmland. Some former plantation timberland is being reverted to farmland. At the end of the day, the net equation might be a zero-sum game in terms of the impact on available farmland. I think the member for Roe needs to wait until the end of the process to form a view on that.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Once this farmland is taken over by the plantations, we will see the diminution of our regional communities. Does the Minister for Regional Development have any concerns about that?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Chair, this is not the regional development item.

The CHAIR: Yes. It is not the right area for that question, member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I might have to move on to the next division, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development.

[2.40 pm]

Ms J.L. HANNS: I refer to paragraph (c) on page 281 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. Can the minister outline how the farm forestry program operates and who can apply for the program?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Yes, I can. I thank the member for Collie–Preston. The farm forestry assist program supplies seedlings to farmers and landholders to plant pine trees on their land, up to a maximum of 50 hectares. The program runs each year ahead of the planting season. The Forest Products Commission received six applications for support under the farm forestry assist program in 2023. Through the program, the FPC now provides successful applicants with pine seedlings free of charge for up to 50 hectares. The landholder has full possession of and all rights to the trees as they grow, and the timber from these trees has the capacity to help support WA’s softwood industry, producing a valuable resource for the WA housing construction sector. The program helps landholders diversify their properties and continue any farming or other activities while at the same time growing pine that will provide an income into the future.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to the tenth paragraph on page 285 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, under the heading “Statement of Cashflows”. Why was the government required to pay the FPC \$11 million in an equity contribution to offset the reduction in native forest receipts? I think I heard someone say earlier that there would be a corresponding reduction in harvest and haulage costs. Why, therefore, does the FPC need an equity injection from government to carry on?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: An equity injection is required to maintain the liquidity of the FPC in 2022–23. The FPC is expecting to carry forward any contribution underspend through the budget estimates period. To address the forecast operating deficit in native forestry and facilitate the transition to new native forest management regimes, the McGowan government provided a cash injection of \$11 million in 2022–23. That forecast operating deficit in native forestry is mainly due to a couple of items. No sales revenues or related harvesting and haulage costs are being reflected from 1 January 2024 to 30 June 24, as no contracts have been established under the new forest management plan, due to the policy changes regarding native forests. The current fixed costs are included to maintain some capacity that may be required to undertake future ecological thinning work. The equity injection will cover the reduced revenues and current fixed costs generated from native forest activities.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Can the minister confirm that the \$11 million is in addition to the \$14 million that was provided in 2021–22, or am I reading the budget papers incorrectly? Sorry, it is not the same paragraph; it is the equity contribution in the table on page 281. It looks like the actual spend in 2021–22 was \$14.2 million, and there is an allocation of \$11 million in 2022–23. Am I reading that right? I am not sure. I am happy to be corrected.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I ask Mr Lyon to provide the detail on that.

Mr A. Lyon: Yes, it is in addition to the \$11 million.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is that \$25.3 million from the consolidated revenue, or the central government, that has contributed to the FPC as a result of the decision to end the logging of native forests already, just to keep the FPC liquid?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I will again ask Mr Lyon to give the detail on that.

Mr A. Lyon: Sorry, can the member repeat the question? I forgot part of it.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is that \$25.3 million a direct result of the government’s decision to end logging in native forests? Has the government been required to put \$14 million plus \$11 million into the FPC to keep it liquid as a result of that policy decision?

Mr A. Lyon: That is a difficult question to answer. It would have had some effect, but native forestry was loss making before the announcement and after the announcement, so the money has been used to offset the losses in native forestry.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Have there been equity injections of this nature in previous budget years? When was the first one made?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The answer is no. But in saying that the answer is no, as Mr Lyon pointed out, that equity loss is a function of many things, including changes in the forestry demand. We have been through a COVID period, as the member knows, and that would have had an impact on demand and operations.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is that funding in addition to the Just Transition package that the government is negotiating? Is that not linked?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The Just Transition package is being managed by the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: That is in addition to this funding and this is just in the FPC's budget. Okay.

I refer to page 286 and am looking at the number of FTE. Can the minister advise why the number of FTE will increase by 19 between 2022–23 and 2023–24?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Can I just clarify whether the member is referring to paragraph (c)? Is that the reference?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Yes.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: That reflects the plantation expansion program.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Can the minister clarify whether all those employees are related to the softwood plantation expansion?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I am advised that not all of them relate to the softwood plantation. The commission is carrying vacancies, so there may well be some supernumerary items in there. The advice I have been given is that it is principally associated with the softwood plantation expansion.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I want to quickly go back to the softwood plantation expansion that the member for Roe talked about. I refer to the \$41 million drawdown from the softwood plantation expansion fund on page 278. Has any of that money been spent on anything other than land acquisition and planting, such as the administration of the fund, the purchase of bush fire equipment and things like that? Is that included in that amount?

[2.50 pm]

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I will ask Mr Lyon to comment.

Mr A. Lyon: The drawdown has been for land purchases for establishment costs, and some drawdown has been used for some staff time to manage the project.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Can the minister elaborate on how much of the \$41 million has been spent on the staffing component, given that we have just discussed the \$23 million equity injection that has been made?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I am advised that it is a negligible amount of less than one FTE.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Has any of the drawdown been spent on replanting areas in the estate that have been impacted by bushfires?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: No, it has not been.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the minister provide an assurance to the building industry about plantation timber supply in the years to come? Plantations supply about 70 per cent of the pine products used in the state's housing. Given that it will be 10 years before those plantation timbers come online, can the minister provide an assurance to the building industry that those products will be provided in the meantime?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Which line item is the member referring to?

The CHAIR: It is a bit of a stretch there, member for Roe. You did drag it back when you mentioned the 10-year time frame for the plantations.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 284 and "Explanation of Significant Movements", specifically the second item. I also refer to item 1.1 under "Asset Investment Program", which is about the softwood expansion program. Can the minister guarantee that the state's building supply of pine products will be supplied by the Forest Products Commission?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I guess it is the only port in a storm when the member is trying to do a little bit of fishing, which is what this sounds like.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I would not do that, minister!

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Of course, if the previous government had undertaken softwood plantation work in 2012, we would be in a much better position today with commercially harvestable pine timber. This is yet another fix-up

that we are having to do because of inaction by the previous government. We have taken action. We have a 10-year period before the first commercial harvest. My understanding is that the Forest Products Commission will do everything it possibly can to keep industry supplied. We are in this position today because the previous government refused to undertake pine plantings in 2012 or even later, perhaps.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Just a further question —

The CHAIR: Are you sure?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I was only elected in 2017, so I am living in the here and now.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I wonder who the minister was then.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I recall the previous forestry minister Hon Dave Kelly saying that the timber harvested from plantation supplies about 70 per cent of the pine products used in the state's housing and construction market. Can the minister assure the building industry that the FPC will be able to continue to supply those products?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I am delighted that we have such a strong economy that reflects the very good budget management of this government. The work that is being undertaken, the demand levels that we are seeing, is a reflection of that economy. I am very positive that the FPC will do everything it possibly can to meet the supply requirements of the construction sector.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: This is my last question. I refer to page 282 of budget paper No 1. The third item under "Native Forest" refers to the new forest management plan that will commence on 1 January. I note that the government made a pre-budget announcement of \$36 million and an additional 50 FTEs, which will go to Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions and FPC to assist with implementation of the new forest management plan. How much of that funding will be directed to the FPC?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I am advised that \$24 million will go to the FPC to implement the forest management plan.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is the \$24 million in addition to the FTEs or is it \$24 million and the FTEs?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I will get Mr Lyon to provide the detail.

Mr A. Lyon: The 50 FTEs that the member referred to are all for DBCA, not for FPC.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is it correct that there are no additional FTEs, but that \$24 million is coming to FPC to assist in the development of the forest management plan?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: It is not for the purpose of the forest management plan. It is for the provision of ecological thinning, which will be an outcome of the forest management plan.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Sorry, I must have misread the minister's announcement. So it is not to do with the development of the FMP, but its implementation. My apologies. Thank you; I am happy to be corrected.

The CHAIR: That completes the examination of the Forest Products Commission.

[3.00 pm]

Division 15: Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development — Services 1 to 7, Regional Development; Agriculture and Food; Fisheries \$332 734 000 —

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Mr D.T. Punch, Minister for Regional Development; Fisheries; representing Minister for Agriculture and Food.

Ms H. Brayford, Director General.

Mr P. Isaachsen, Deputy Director General, Industry and Economic Development.

Ms M. Carbon, Deputy Director General, Sustainability and Biosecurity.

Ms C. McConnell, Deputy Director General, Primary Industries Development.

Ms L. Williamson, Chief Financial Officer.

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

Mr P. Gregson, Manager, Funds Management.

Mr C. Berger, Chief Executive Officer, Kimberley Development Commission.

Ms M. Teede, Chief Executive Officer, South West Development Commission.

Ms N. Monks, Chief Executive Officer, Great Southern Development Commission.

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

Mr M. Keogh, Chief of Staff, Minister for Agriculture and Food.

Mr T. Palmer, Chief of Staff, Minister for Regional Development.

Mr A. Skinner, Senior Policy Adviser, Minister for Regional Development.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: The estimates committees will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point. Consideration is restricted to items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must relate to a page number, item or amount related to the current division, and members should preface their questions with these details. Some divisions are the responsibility of more than one minister. Ministers shall only be examined in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 2 June 2023. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

Ms M. BEARD: My question relates to page 222 of budget paper No 2. Under details of controlled grants and subsidies is an amount listed for the Carnarvon One Mile jetty of \$4.5 million. Can the minister explain what has already been delivered under the \$3.2 million for 2022–23? What stage will the \$4.5 million that is allocated for this financial year take the project to?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: State funding of \$4.5 million, which was \$1.3 million in 2021–22 and \$3.2 million in 2022–23, was provided to the Gascoyne Development Commission for the restoration of 450 metres of the Carnarvon One Mile jetty. That project is yet to commence, and the commitment of \$4.5 million was based on a very early estimate of construction-only costs. The GDC has negotiated a joint delivery model with the Department of Transport, which will undertake the refurbishment of the jetty to a length still to be determined, as the original sum was insufficient to deliver the whole project. Funding will be reallocated to the Department of Transport post-budget, and the GDC is working with the Carnarvon Heritage Group, which has the jetty licence in perpetuity, to undertake works around the heritage precinct to ensure that the area is revitalised in anticipation of increased visitor numbers once the project is complete. It will be a great project for Carnarvon.

Ms M. BEARD: The funding will be shifted back to the Department of Transport, and it will work with the heritage committee. Is that the understanding?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Thank you, member. Yes, that is correct. The Department of Transport has the skills and expertise to undertake those work, so it will undertake that project.

Ms M. BEARD: I refer to page 222, the line item for “Carnarvon Flood Mitigation Works—Stage Two”. I wonder whether the minister could give some indication of the works that were undertaken for the \$2.325 million last year. I notice there is no allocation for this year. I wonder whether he has an explanation of whether further works are to be undertaken and where the funding might come from if mitigation works were needed following other disasters.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Royalties for regions funding of \$2.828 million was approved for the construction of four levees to protect the town, the horticultural district and surrounds from repeated severe flooding and to ensure the economic future of the town. Ongoing negotiations regarding levee ownership are in the process of being resolved, and that will enable contracts for urgent remediation works to be delivered. The \$2.325 million was carried over from 2021–22 into 2022–23 as part of the bilateral budget process.

Ms M. BEARD: If there was another flood—let us hope there is not—is there any funding anywhere else for remedial work if that needed to happen?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I will ask Mr Isaachsen to provide a response.

Mr P. Isaachsen: The funding that is listed in the details of controlled grants and subsidies is some funding that was used by Water Corporation to undertake the remedial works. At this stage, that is the only funding that is committed to the Carnarvon levees.

Ms M. BEARD: I refer to page 209, budget paper No 2, and the west coast demersal scalefish recovery plan and recovery support package. I wonder what will be delivered against that \$5.435 million package. Could we have any supplementary information on a breakdown of programs or what that program might provide?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The \$5.47 million is for enhanced monitoring, research and digital recording technology, with a focus on the recreational sector. It was something that Recfishwest and the Western Australian Fishing Industry Council were seeking. There was general agreement throughout the fishing sector that that would be a very good thing to do, so we are doing it.

Ms M. BEARD: What number of FTE or headcount would be attributed to that program?

[3.10 pm]

Mr D.T. PUNCH: There are a total of seven FTE across the \$1 million package, which would be attributed across various components of the package.

Ms M. BEARD: Will there be a reprioritisation of where Fisheries staff will be located? I will give some basis to my question. With the changes north of Kalbarri and Shark Bay, that area has seen a significant increase in the number of boats and people fishing. Will there be a reprioritisation of the number of Fisheries staff allocated to those areas to cater for that increase?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The allocation of resources by the department is based on risk assessment. My understanding is that there has been a full complement of staff in those areas north of Carnarvon and there is a new boat in that area. I will ask Mr Mezzatesta to give the member some more detail.

Mr B. Mezzatesta: In terms of FTEs specifically in the midwest and Gascoyne, we are currently recruiting for an education officer position that will supplement the officers. Obviously, we currently have compliance officers up there, and we expect that that should be sufficient when we consider the totality of resources we have in the midwest and Gascoyne.

Ms M. BEARD: Just to get it clear, are the Fisheries FTEs on the ground who check who is catching what fish a different set of FTEs to the people who are monitoring the programs in place, or is the same group of people doing it across the board?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Mr Mezzatesta.

Mr B. Mezzatesta: If I explain a little of how the organisation is structured, that might assist. The compliance area, which is my area of responsibility, has uniformed officers who provide enforcement and education services. They are not always out trying to infringe people or prosecute people. They provide an education service. We are supplementing that resource with the additional education officer. Their focus will be very much on education and making sure that people are aware of the rules that are in place and why they are in place, and will assist them to comply. The research and monitoring activity related to fish stocks is handled by a separate group, and I imagine resources in that separate group will focus specifically on the west coast demersal issue.

Ms M. BEARD: I refer to paragraph 2.3 on page 218. The amount of \$13.6 million is held as a provision for future royalties for regions projects. Have the projects that the future funds will be allocated to been identified, and will they be covered with the same FTEs? What is the process to allocate the funds? Is it through the Expenditure Review Committee or is it a new policy proposal or decision of the department and the Minister for Regional Development about what projects and how that happens?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: It is simply a provision for future royalties for regions projects.

Ms M. BEARD: I refer to page 219 of budget paper No 2 volume 1. Under “Works in Progress” is the line item “Wild Dog Action Plan”. I note that there is \$1 million each year going forward. Is this for on-the-ground support and resourcing? After the significant investment and focus on wild dog management, I wonder whether there is a risk that the \$1 million allocation and the gains that we have made could be lost.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I will ask Ms Carbon to respond to that.

Ms M. Carbon: This funding is for the currently agreed wild dog action plan. Next year, in 2024, the department will start working on a proposal for the next iteration of the wild dog action plan for consideration by government, which will be designed to ensure that we do not, as the member said, lose any of the gains we have lost through that program to date. That wild dog action plan funds a number of initiatives such as maintenance and upgrade of the state barrier fence. It provides some funding towards the Esperance extension of the state barrier fence. It also funds wild dog neutering programs in regional and remote communities and it funds research and development as well. It does a number of things. As I said, we will need to start considering the next iteration of that plan to ensure that that work continues. Those plans are generally approved for a four-year term.

Ms M. BEARD: Recognised biosecurity groups strategically target pests when they access government managed land, which I understand involves the joint management authority due to native title. I understand that has not been negotiated beyond six months. Seeing as future baiting activities are still being negotiated, how will that investment in the state barrier fence work within the short time period that they have?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I will ask Ms Carbon to respond.

Ms M. Carbon: Assuming I understood the member’s question correctly, there is funding under the wild dog action plan that goes to recognised biosecurity groups, specifically to employ licensed pest management technicians to undertake wild dog control on government managed land. That is agreed for the life of the current program—that is, the wild dog action plan.

Ms M. BEARD: I just want to clarify the life of that plan. Is that six months or will that be extended? I understood there was a six-month memorandum of understanding, unless that is not correct.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The plan currently ends in 2025.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to page 219, which has the headings “Works in Progress”, “Completed Works” and “New Works”, and then the bottom section, “Funded By” has the line item “Provision for Future Royalties for

Regions Projects”. Can the minister explain the background of that particular fund? Is that just allocated royalties for regions that has now found a home, or is it a provision that Treasury has set aside for the department? How does that operate?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: That is an administrative account. It is an allocation for future projects, as has mainly been the practice throughout the history of royalties for regions, I think.

Mr R.S. LOVE: It was just a question, minister; there was nothing loaded in it.

I refer to page 209, and under “Spending Changes” and “Ongoing Initiatives” is the line item “Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007—Declared Pest Control Activities”. There is \$1.64 million for this year and similar sorts of expenditures into the future. Can the minister explain whether this money is going to the recognised biosecurity groups, or is it going to another place? If the minister can answer that, I might ask a few follow-up questions about it.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: It is going to the recognised biosecurity groups.

Mr R.S. LOVE: In terms of the pest control activities of the RBGs, is the minister aware that there have been some issues in those groups gaining access to crown land, meaning they cannot carry out activities on certain crown land now? Some of my RBGs have reported to me that they can no longer go onto the pastoral estate or reserves et cetera. Is the minister aware of that? Has there been any discussion about how to control the animals?

[3.20 pm]

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I will defer to Ms Carbon.

Ms M. Carbon: The department is certainly aware that there have been some challenges for some recognised biosecurity groups in recent months in gaining access to some land to undertake pest control and wild dog control in particular. By and large, this is related to crown land that is under the management of the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions but has been transferred to native title. Therefore, there is a requirement for the RBGs plus any other local group that wishes to undertake activity on that land to work with the traditional landowners to ensure that any work undertaken will meet their needs. As I understand it, a number of RBG’s are currently working through the process of accessing that land to undertake pest control.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Are they working through those issues because of a fundamental disagreement about the nature of the wild dog and whether those groups that are now in control of that land actually wish to carry out a reduction in the numbers of the wild dogs because of a difference of culture?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: This signals the reality that people have to talk with the traditional owners about the uses on land. Those conversations are in progress, and people on both sides are learning how to negotiate in good faith and achieve outcomes. Therefore, the question of what the expectations are on that land really has to be referred to the traditional owners.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I am sorry. I could not quite hear the minister’s comment at the end.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Working through the uses of the land is a conversation to be had with the traditional owners.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Is it the place of the individual biosecurity groups to have that conversation, or is it the place of the department to have that conversation across the whole of the state?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I will ask Ms Carbon to respond to that.

Ms M. Carbon: As with any activity that is undertaken on land with common management, multiple players are involved. The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development certainly plays a role in the broader discussion around pest management needs and how to best manage the impact of pests like wild dogs on agricultural activities. The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions is also involved in those conversations as it transitions land tenure over to Indigenous groups. The department is certainly talking about access more broadly with the groups, the individual recognised biosecurity groups and any other community groups that undertake pest control, because there are multiple other groups, such as natural resource management groups, that undertake pest control work and they need to engage in discussions with landholders.

Mr R.S. LOVE: When the land passes to the Aboriginal group relevant to the area, do the responsibilities under the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act bind them as well as other groups or are they exempt from the provisions of the BAM act?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I am advised that the answer is yes. As a landholder, they would be bound by it.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 219 and works in progress, Katanning research facility and, in the completed works just a few lines down, Katanning sheep transition. Can someone explain to me whether those are two different projects? Is one the climate change facility and the other one DPIRD? Can someone run through the line-up there for me?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I will ask Ms McConnell to address that question.

Ms C. McConnell: Katanning research station has been set up as a carbon-neutral station. That is the program that we have in play. We have also previously been looking at improving our sheep feed facilities and getting a better understanding of transitioning sheep into new climates and how that might operate. The new funding is around some of the methane recording. We are looking at trying to record the amount of methane coming out of sheep so we can look at the impact of different feed types and how that may change with the methane production as well as the different genetics that go with the different strains of sheep. Therefore, yes, it is a continuation of that expenditure.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Will those projects be wrapped up basically by the end of this calendar year, as in the extra funding required?

Ms C. McConnell: For the current projects, yes, but then, depending on where the research goes, there may be ongoing projects.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Have we had any initial results from the methane measuring and the like, which the previous minister was very interested in?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Ms McConnell.

Ms C. McConnell: From the methane, not yet. The units are very new, so we are just starting in that space, and tracking that will take several years. I cannot report anything to the member today, but it is in progress.

Mr R.S. LOVE: On page 222 there is a list of controlled grants and subsidies and half a dozen up from the bottom is funding for the Royal Agricultural Society of Western Australia. I assume that was funding towards the admissions or some sort of help for people to attend the show. Was any assistance asked for and not granted? I note that there are no further allocations under this line item.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: There was \$4 million approved to support the staging of the 2021 and 2022 royal shows. The initial grant payment of \$2 million was paid in 2021–22, with the remaining \$2 million to be paid in 2022–23. Further assistance is under consideration.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Had there been any discussions around the possibility of further funding for the show or was that never contemplated?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I am advised that yes, there have been further discussions.

Mr R.S. LOVE: But not successful ones?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: This is still under consideration. That is the process of discussion. One discusses an outcome and arrives at a conclusion. There is no conclusion yet.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 209 and the implementation of the sheep and goat electronic identification program. As I did not make any progress during the Western Australian Meat Industry Authority hearing, I would like to further develop that questioning now. What did the \$3.4 million listed for last year achieve?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I am advised that was for pilot work and testing, but I will ask Ms Brayford to give the member some more detail.

[3.30 pm]

Ms H. Brayford: I can confirm that the \$3.4 million was initial funding to support some pilot work and testing for the implementation of the electronic tagging of sheep and goats across Western Australia. It is part of the need for traceability in the event of an emergency disease outbreak such as foot-and-mouth disease, which none of us wants but we need to prepare for. The initial funding was around getting some initial testing of tags and some work on infrastructure to support those tags. Dr Carbon may have something to add if I have missed anything, but that is what the initial \$3.4 million was for.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: As I stated previously, given my concern about the government's position on live export and that it has basically overseen the demise of the merino sheep industry in Western Australia due to a lack of support, does the minister expect that the government will get value for money for this \$22.2 million in funding? The critical mass of the merino sheep flock is somewhere between 13 million and 14 million, but numbers are dropping rapidly due to federal Labor government decisions, as we know. Is the minister concerned that the government will not get a return on its investment of \$22.2 million?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I love long questions. They take up a lot of time. The first part of the member's question remains a hypothetical, and I have already mentioned that.

The answer to the second part of the member's question is: this state budget is value for money. We have delivered a fantastic budget for Western Australia. We have continued to deliver a surplus that we are reinvesting into Western Australia. We are reducing state debt and creating a great economic climate for the agricultural sector and other sectors. Therefore, yes, I believe it is value for money. The member described hypothetical scenarios that have not occurred yet.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Would the minister describe the demise of the WA merino sheep flock as creating a great economic climate for agriculture in WA?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I am advised that there has not been a demise of the merino sheep flock.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I can assure the minister that given recent developments and lack of support from his government, there has been a demise in the number of sheep being mated and carried due to the fact farmers are putting in more crops. That is my perspective.

A further question is: will there be an opportunity for the likes of the Muchea Livestock Centre and the Katanning Regional Sheep Saleyards to apply for grants to implement the infrastructure required for the electronic ID system because I understand it will be about \$1 million-plus for each saleyard?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I am advised that there will be an opportunity for them to apply for grants.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: When will that opportunity arise? Will it be very shortly?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I will ask Dr Carbon to respond.

Ms M. Carbon: Under the current program in delivery—that is, the \$3.4 million program for this financial year—there is a process in place looking at providing grants for the supply chain to start to retrofit critical infrastructure. The focus at this point is on fitting infrastructure that will help us to test the supply chain so that when we launch into the next part of the program—that is, the full three-year program—we would have already done some testing and will be better able to target that program. The details of the program, including the tag incentive payment program to ensure the cost of tags is lowered for producers and another supply chain grant program to allow us to retrofit and test infrastructure as well as some portable scanning equipment, will be developed in consultation with our sheep and goat advisory committee to ensure that industry views are included.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: If I were in the shoes of the average sheep producer, I would expect that there would be funding to subsidise the actual sheep tags, and perhaps some detail can be provided on that. Will there be any funding for sheep producers for other infrastructure such as reading or drafting equipment or the like?

Ms M. Carbon: Certainly, for the tags themselves, there is the tag incentive payment scheme. The current pilot program of that is discounting the cost of registered National Livestock Identification System electronic ID tags by 75¢ per tag. That is already underway as a pilot. Once that pilot has finished, it will be assessed and the new tag incentive payment scheme will be rolled out. For things like scanning infrastructure, yes, some funding has been set aside for that. It is the portable equipment grants that I referred to for scanning infrastructure. Details on how many of those will be covered under that program and where that will be targeted are still being developed in terms of planning for that new program.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I return to the director general's earlier comment on the \$3.4 million and FMD and lumpy skin disease and the like. We have not heard much lately about FMD and the status, or the situation, in Bali. What is the minister's status update on that?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I will ask Dr Carbon to provide an update for the member.

Ms M. Carbon: Both foot-and-mouth disease and lumpy skin disease are still present in Indonesia. It is expected that Indonesia will declare those diseases endemic, which means it will not be eradicating those diseases but, instead, will be undertaking ongoing containment and management. The threat to Western Australia of those diseases plus multiple other emergency animal diseases nationally remains heightened. As a result, the department is prioritising preparedness work for a potential outbreak of those diseases. One of the elements that we are focusing on is traceability and identification, and the sheep and goat electronic ID program is a key part of delivering that.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to page 222 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the details of controlled grants and subsidies. I am looking at the second-last line item, "Grower Group Alliance". I note that there has been support for the Grower Group Alliance for a number of years, but it appears that there is nothing in the forward estimates beyond 2025. Has a decision been made to not fund the Grower Group Alliance going forward or have there yet to be discussions? What is the department's intention in its support for the Grower Group Alliance after 2025?

[3.40 pm]

Mr D.T. PUNCH: That should not be interpreted as not funding the group. It is a matter of ongoing negotiations, as I am advised.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 209 and the line item "Marine Parks Compliant Services". There is funding for 2022–23 and similar funding for 2023–24, but there is nothing in the forward estimates. Can the minister provide an explanation for this considering the increasing number of marine parks that appear to be a part of this government's mantra?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: That item refers to the contract between the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development and Parks Australia for the supply of fisheries-compliant services within the commonwealth's Australian Marine Parks network in Western Australia. An increase in DPIRD's expenditure limit of \$484 000 in 2022–23 and \$489 000 in 2023–24 was approved during the 2022–23 midyear review process to reflect the increase of four dedicated FTEs to service that agreement. It relates to commonwealth waters.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to page 219 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and the line item “Geraldton Marine Finfish Nursery Facility”. As we know, that project is not going ahead. Can the minister provide some details about why this project fell over? What is the reason for the withdrawal of the proponent?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: As I indicated in previous discussions about the Geraldton kingfish nursery, that project will proceed when there is an agreed offtake agreement with a kingfish producer. Negotiations were in place with Huon, which was interested in undertaking large-scale yellowtail kingfish development in the Geraldton area. The discussions with Huon have indicated that it will be moving down the pathway, subject to final due diligence, of a pilot program for yellowtail kingfish in relatively small quantities, and those small quantities can be adequately serviced by our Fremantle Marine Fish Hatchery. The intent is to continue to support Huon over the next three to four years until it reaches the point at which it makes the determination to go large scale. I anticipate that a decision to go large-scale will take a number of years to implement. This will be an ongoing process with Huon in terms of a partnership and looking at what its needs are, and how and in what manner the government may assist.

In relation to the work we are currently doing with Huon, there is a \$600 000 commitment to address the parasite liver fluke, which has been a key consideration in its business modelling for yellowtail kingfish. We will continue to work on those issues and other parasite issues with Huon to arrive at a position at which it feels confident to undertake the initial trials. As I said, we will support those trials through our existing nursery operations in Fremantle. At some point in the future, a finfish nursery in Geraldton may well be revisited if that is the demand requirements that the state and Huon come to an agreement on based on a large-scale project. At this point, there is no large-scale project in sight; it is simply small-scale trials, and they can be serviced adequately from our existing infrastructure.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Does Huon still have residual rights to ground at the Abrolhos Islands?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Yes, it does.

Mr R.S. LOVE: So, it has not walked away from the proposed area and that area has not been available to any other proponent.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: No, it has not. I am delighted to advise the member that I spent this morning talking with the CEO of Huon about its plans and what opportunities exist. It has been a difficult process. Of course, Huon changed hands just over a year ago after protracted negotiations, and there were COVID impacts. Therefore, in terms of its business planning, it had to attend to significant issues in its business. The CEO of Huon advises me that it has undertaken market due diligence and investigated management options for the various parasites. It is at a point at which it is feeling more confident about proceeding with a pilot program, which will include operations on the lease areas at the Abrolhos.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Is there capacity for another operator to establish in that area?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: No, there is not. That area is allocated to Huon, and Huon is the most promising prospect at this point. We have not been approached by any other proponents about the area.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Can the minister advise whether there is an end date to the time when Huon will retain the right to the area?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I have not committed to an end date in committing to action; it is an ongoing process that is being done in good faith. We are working together to achieve an outcome in which we can have a trial yellowtail kingfish operation at the Abrolhos.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Given that area is committed to Huon, will the Abrolhos Islands feature in the government’s yet to be developed aquaculture plan, which is also a part of this budget?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I do not think it is a yet to be developed aquaculture plan. We are working on a number of fronts across three aquaculture zones. I am very pleased with the work that this government is doing in the aquaculture space. It is a very difficult industry to establish; it has very high up-front capital costs and there is a long period in generating a return on the investment. But we are continuing to work with a number of proponents right around the state, and we have committed to supporting the industry in this budget.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to page 219, works in progress, and page 218, asset investment program. I note there is a significant investment of \$64.2 million for the Pilbara hydrogen hub. What I do not see in the list of intended capital investments across the forward estimates is any investment in the Oakajee hub. My understanding—it was announced a couple of years ago—is that Oakajee was going to be the prime location in the state for hydrogen exports. Is there a plan to invest in an equivalent hub at Oakajee?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The Oakajee project is being managed by the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation so the member would need to refer those questions to JTISI.

Dr D.J. HONEY: The Pilbara one is in the budget, but not Oakajee.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Yes.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 219, COVID-19 response, and specifically the line item “Hillarys Facilities Upgrade”. Given that we are discussing regional development and agriculture, what was the Hillarys facilities upgrade?

[3.50 pm]

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The upgrade of DPIRD facilities in Hillarys is to enable the production of tropical and local species of rock oysters and scallops to stimulate investment, support industry growth and create additional jobs as part of our ongoing commitment to our aquaculture plan.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Very good, minister. As part of the government's commitment to aquaculture, is there any further funding in the out years? I cannot see anything there.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: That upgrade project has been completed; that is why there would not be anything reflected in the out years for the upgrade.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I will ask a new question if I can.

The CHAIR: You certainly can.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 209 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. About two-thirds of the way down the spending changes table is the item "Mira Mar Landslide—Phase Three". The estimated actual figure for 2022–23 is \$749 000. Then in budget paper No 3, under "Royalties for Regions Expenditure", we have \$500 000 in 2022–23 and \$200 000 in 2023–24. According to my calculations, only \$200 000 is allocated in this budget year. Can the minister explain the interplay of all these various figures and what they provide?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I am delighted to have at long last received a question from the member for Roe on Mira Mar. I have been waiting with bated breath each question time and the question has not come! I refer once again to that article, I think in the *Albany Advertiser*, in which the member said: "I will fight for Mira Mar. I'll be asking questions in question time and estimates." The member will be very pleased to be able to advise people down there that here we are in estimates and at long last the question has come.

This is a very serious issue for the people who have lost homes and those who are still living in that area. I acknowledge the work of the Great Southern Development Commission and its CEO in getting to a position in which we can understand the remediation requirements for that landslip so that we can try to stabilise the land and work with affected landowners. I have been delighted with the contribution that the local member, Rebecca Stephens, has made as well. The member for Albany has been talking with residents and trying to get a very clear picture about the options as they see them and the pathway forward.

The funding that has been allocated has been to arrive at a situation in which we can, first, understand what the stabilisation requirements are; and, secondly, undertake small-scale works with the approval of landholders to try to minimise impacts as the slip continues to move slowly forward. Additional work is now happening to quantify the costs associated with the option to stabilise and provide drainage systems in that landslip. Further discussions have taken place with the owners on the report received on that matter to determine their views going forward. That information will come to me shortly and the government will then make a decision about the pathway forward.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I would also like to compliment the CEO of the Great Southern Development Commission on the interaction with those landholders, because there has not been a great deal from other areas. Some communication is very important, so I want to recognise the CEO of the development commission, who is here today.

The repair work that is going to happen shortly, as the minister implied, could be jeopardised by rain at any time. We saw the 234-page report, I think it was, that detailed some drainage works et cetera. Can the minister detail if and when that is going to happen to alleviate further slide from encroaching into the backyards of the people at the bottom of the slope?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I have authorised the use of some of those existing funds to undertake any small-scale works that can be done without risking further slippage. It is an unstable area, so we have to be very careful with what is undertaken. Those works can take place only with the approval of the landowners. It is not state government land, it is not public land, it is privately owned land. We recognise that there is a public interest in trying to address a reduction in the immediate risk until we get to a point at which we can quantify exactly what is required, what the costs will be and what the various parties' obligations or commitments might be, recognising that this land is in private ownership. We are committed to working through a solution. We have worked and talked with the landholders. We will do what we can to get to a point at which we will have something concrete to put on the table and discuss as a pathway going forward with the Albany city council and landholders, given the multiple stakeholder interests. It is a complicated issue. The issue around the instability of that landslip is not lost on me, the government or local stakeholders. We will continue to work to arrive at a solution or a pathway forward as soon as we possibly can.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Firstly, my understanding is that the landholders have given permission, because they want that repair or remediation work to be done as soon as possible, given that winter is approaching. As the minister knows, there is a lot of clay on that slope, which makes it very difficult for machinery and the like. I can only impress on the minister the sense of urgency that is required to do those remediation works. As I said, as far as I am aware, the permission of landholders has already been granted. Is there a real push from the GSDC or the department to get that work done over the next few days or week or two?

[Mrs L.A. Munday took the chair.]

Mr D.T. PUNCH: As I said, it is a very unstable landform. The GSDC and the local member are working diligently with the landholders. We will do what we need to do and what we have agreement to do in regard to any small-scale immediate works that will help to stabilise the slip. Ultimately, the works to permanently stabilise the slip will be very, very significant and there will be some risk associated with them. There needs to be a full understanding of the costs and the risks, and how those works might be carried out by a civil contractor. We will then be in a position to move forward in terms of how we implement that.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: We have broken through the two-year barrier. We have had the homes of two landholders demolished. Three other households live at the bottom of the slope and they are basically concerned that the clay is coming into their backyards. How much longer does the minister anticipate that they will wait before a compensation package might appear?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I think it is really poor form to make a political issue of these circumstances. People have been working solidly to arrive at a position. We have not looked at who is at fault in relation to this. The studies that have taken place have been no-fault studies. Everybody is committed to finding a pathway forward that best fits the needs of those landholders and arrives at a situation in which that landform is stabilised. The City of Albany has an interest and the landholders have an interest. The state government has stepped in to provide support to find a pathway forward. That is the work that we will do. It is not work that can be completed overnight. Significant work has been done on measuring the distribution of groundwater over variations such as the seasonality of the year. It is not something that we can just rush into and make a decision on and hope that it is the right decision. Whatever happens in that area is very significant for the landholders who are directly affected, and the fact that it is a moving landslip has implications for other landholders in the area. Everybody is committed to finding a pathway forward. I think the report that has been released is a very significant piece of work and helps to educate us about what the remediation requirements might be. As I have indicated, we are working diligently to get to the next stage of where to go from here.

[4.00 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The minister alluded to the actual cause of the landslip. Many other blocks in Albany have a steeper landscape. My suggestion would be that the Water Corporation could be a potential cause because the fact is that there was a Water Corp pipe at the top of the hill that was cut off and the Water Corp walked away.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: On a point of order, the member is going into a subjective assessment about who might be responsible and who might be the person who would take it on.

The CHAIR: Minister, you can choose not to answer the question.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: In response to that, I am not making a subjective response. I have photos of Water Corp PVC pipes from 1989 that were used at that location. I am saying that there is a potential cause. Two landholders had their houses wiped out. They have been demolished. It is now two years down the track. Will we be waiting for another two years? Can the minister give these landholders some sort of time frame?

The CHAIR: Member for Roe, I think we need to address the budget in terms of a line item. If you could address your question to a line item.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 209, the line item “Mira Mar Landslide—Phase Three” and the allocation of \$749 000. The compensation issue needs to be addressed. I am curious about what compensation plans the Minister for Regional Development or, if it was the Water Corporation, the Minister for Water, has for these landholders.

The CHAIR: Minister, do you have anything to add?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I hope the member never gets into government. It is an appalling line of questioning. Attributing fault without any evidence whatsoever is particularly poor. The development commission and the local member have worked with the local landholders on the issues that need to be addressed to find a pathway forward. I have said to the member in this chamber that we will continue to work expeditiously with those landholders and with the City of Albany to find the pathway forward, and we will continue to do that. It does the member no good to come in here and act outraged that it has been two years with no action when in fact there has been. The member has sat in the other place and not asked me a single question on this issue since I have been the minister. I think it is an appalling line of questioning and I do not intend to answer any further questions on it. I have given the member my answer.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I am looking at the details of controlled grants and subsidies table on page 223. Near the end of that table is the line item “University of Western Australia Wave Energy Research Centre”, which received \$500 000 last year and will receive \$250 000 this year. Can the minister outline what that has delivered for the taxpayers of Western Australia?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: It is an investment in the future. That is what it is delivering. It is a research project that is actively examining a wave climate zone and the opportunities for generating energy from waves. I was very pleased to visit

the centre recently and look at the modelling and the education work it does with local school groups and community organisations and the proposal it has to develop a pilot site that can be scaled up. The project is a collaboration between the University of Western Australia, Marine Energy Research Australia and the Blue Economy Cooperative Research Centre. It aims to confirm the suitability of King George Sound as a test site in Albany for wave energy devices by deploying a reduced scale wave attenuator, known as a moored multimodal multibody, or M4 for short. It aims to progress the assessment of Albany as the first commercial ocean wave energy market demonstration site in the Southern Hemisphere. I would recommend that the member visit the site. It is a very interesting location and is part of global research into the potential use of wave energy. The modelling that has been done and the scale models that have been produced look very interesting.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Has the department sought any further funding for wave energy studies or projects in Albany?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: No additional funding has been requested. That work is ongoing and it is funded for this period for a particular purpose, but it is a research project.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Will there be a report from the department that will outline the benefits that Western Australia has received from the nearly six years of expenditure on wave energy in Albany?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I am very sure that the universities will provide a research report at the end of their research. That is normally what universities do.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Will the department be seeking such a report?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The department would receive that research report from the researchers. The researchers are undertaking the research, and they will report on the research. We would report on the outcomes of that research, which will mean receiving the report and looking at opportunities to further contribute to our net zero target.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to the line items “Climate Action Fund—Climate Adaptation” and “Watersmart Farms—Phase Two—Industry Growth” on page 208. Can the minister detail what is involved with or what is planned for that future expenditure?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I would like to ask Ms McConnell to respond to that.

Ms C. McConnell: As the member would be aware, phase 1 was very much an investigation into desalination technology and whether there is an opportunity to use reverse osmosis processes to firm up water supplies for regional areas that lack water. That investigation will extend to a pilot program across a number of regional areas where businesses are saying that this is a critical requirement for them from a water point of view. It is taking it from a test to pilot-scale installations. It will also try to roll out some of the guidance that business managers on the ground will need to put that technology on their property, such as farms and local businesses. It will provide guidance on which sites and what type of technology to choose. There is a variety of reverse osmosis machines out there. That will give both farmers and our small business owners who want to use that process more confidence in investing in it. That is the premise of phase 2.

[4.10 pm]

Dr D.J. HONEY: Will any assistance be given to farmers to purchase that technology? Will any subsidy be provided to assist farmers to droughtproof their property through the installation of reverse osmosis equipment?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I defer to Ms McConnell.

Ms C. McConnell: At this stage, we are investigating how that adoption will roll out before we make a decision about whether there will be grants to support the best adoption.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Where is that test work being carried out?

Ms C. McConnell: There are a number of sites in the wheatbelt and one close to York. They have happened through the great southern and the wheatbelt predominantly.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 219 of budget paper No 2 and the line item about three quarters of the way down, “New Works”, specifically truck wash down facilities. Given our biosecurity arrangements with foot-and-mouth disease and lumpy skin disease, can we have an update on the progress and location of these truck wash down facilities?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: There will be one proposed wash down facility in the north and one in the south of the state to address those emerging threats of foot-and-mouth disease and lumpy skin disease. The assessments on options are continuing, having regard to biosecurity needs and industry activity.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Sorry, can the minister provide the locations again?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: One will be in the north and one will be in the south of the state, but the assessment is still taking place. Precise locations will be determined based on biosecurity needs and industry activity.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: My understanding is that the industry has been calling for four wash down facilities and at this stage we will potentially have two—one in the north and one in the south. Is that the closest we can come to any information on the locations?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I am going to ask for Ms Carbon to address in more detail the biosecurity assessments and needs and that might help to arrive at a clearer answer for the member.

Ms M. Carbon: From a biosecurity perspective, it is important to make the point that the truck wash down facilities that we are looking at are not primarily around a biosecurity response or managing biosecurity risk. They play a part in that, but they are more around industry resilience and recovery in the event of a biosecurity emergency. It is around assisting producers to access processing facilities for livestock—where they can move them, for example, for slaughter and processing to sell them to a meat market. They are the sorts of considerations that we need to take into account. We are looking at the highest risk industries and where in the supply chain we can best provide that resilience and risk mitigation by contributing to a wash down facility.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I am still on truck wash down facilities and refer to page 220. I note under the statement of financial position that the fifth item, at the end, talks about truck wash down facilities for \$1.2 million, which has been deferred. Is that part of the program that we have just been talking about or is that a future facility? Is another facility planned that will use that \$1.2 million?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I am advised it is the same program.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I return to page 209 and the continuation of the table “Spending Changes” from the previous page, specifically the line item “Severe Tropical Cyclone Seroja—Assistance Package”. An amount of \$23 974 000 has been provided for 2022–23 and \$2 195 000 for this budget period, with both figures in brackets. Can the minister enlighten me as to what those figures represent?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: It is essentially due to a low uptake of the grants program, but I will ask Mr Isaachsen to give the Leader of the Opposition more detail.

Mr P. Isaachsen: The primary producer recovery grant was originally estimated at \$26.4 million for 2022–23. As the minister just highlighted, due to a low uptake of grants, the forecast was reduced to \$4.7 million over 2022–23 and 2023–24, so those numbers in brackets are, rather, a reduction to \$4.7 million. That low uptake comes despite the state government’s decision in October last year to extend the time frame for the recovery grant program by 12 months to 30 June this year for applications and to 30 June next year to complete the eligible works. As at the close of business at the end of the last month, we had paid \$465 000 under category B to 29 primary producers and \$2 254 000 under category C to 111 primary producers.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Given that such a forecast was achieved in terms of grants, has the department undertaken any sort of review of the appropriateness of the criteria and the methodology? Has it had discussions with other government agencies, such as the Department of the Premier and Cabinet or the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, around the need to perhaps modify those criteria into the future?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I am advised that it was not a criteria issue; it was simply the level of demand and the fact that private insurance covered a lot of the losses. I am not sure that any further detail can be provided to the member. Does the member have anything more specific to add?

Mr R.S. LOVE: Is the answer: no, there is not going to be a review of the process and the appropriateness of the offer made for support in that area?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: There is no evidence that the criteria were inappropriate for those grant schemes, but I will ask Mr Isaachsen whether there is any additional information.

Mr P. Isaachsen: I will add to the minister’s comments. This funding comes through the disaster recovery funding arrangements. They are national arrangements and the categories and the criteria are set on a national basis. Any changes would need to be worked through the federal jurisdictional process.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I am well aware of the process, but these things cannot be formed in a vacuum. In the face of what was then the largest allocation we have had for total funding—over \$100 million in total, all this government’s responsibility—it would seem that some lessons need to be learnt by the authorities. I would have thought that a discussion arising from this government’s now learnt experience through this event would be valuable in reshaping or reforming some of those criteria into the future. Will any review be undertaken of the department’s actions and the appropriateness of that criteria?

[4.20 pm]

Mr D.T. PUNCH: As Mr Isaachsen has explained, these are national guidelines. There is always a review of recovery processes in any disaster situation to see whether lessons can be learnt and how things can be improved. In this instance, the general expectation is that where there is private insurance, private insurance will cover losses. I think it is a credit to both governments that the combined governments made available funds that could be tapped into so that funding was not a constraint, but private insurance has picked this up, and I have received no indication that there is a problem with the guidelines.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I turn to the details of controlled grants and subsidies on page 223, and the rural, regional and remote network. This is not a trick question. I just want to understand because there are a couple of different figures

here. It goes from \$150 000 last year to \$350 000 this year and \$200 000 next year. It is then \$150 000 for the year after. My question is really in two parts. Can the minister explain the variations up and down in the program? It is explained as a spending change on page 209, but that does not actually explain why there are different amounts in every year.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The variation is essentially related to a number of initiatives with timing differences across those estimates. That is why there is a variation in the amount of funds, but I will ask Mr Isaachsen whether he would like to give any detail.

Mr P. Isaachsen: The arrangement we have come to with the RRR network is for it to slowly reduce its reliance on state government funding. The expectation is that it will seek to increase its other sources of income, so we have tapered down the government funding over time. As a result, we have also reduced our expectations of it over time because we are working on the premise that it will find other sources of income and can choose to do what it likes with that.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am looking at page 218, paragraph 2.6, and \$7.4 million for a 20-metre vessel to safely service the Buccaneer Archipelago and the north Kimberley coast. Has planning commenced for a similar vessel and resources for compliance for the proposed 1 000 kilometres of the south coast marine park?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: No.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Given the proposed south coast marine park has 1 000 kilometres of coast, does the minister see the potential for planning for a similar vessel?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Once we have a plan, we will look at the resourcing implications, but we do not have a plan at this point.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The minister or certain departments are in the throes of consulting at the moment, and the minister will be implementing the south coast marine park regardless of what any members of the public or whoever thinks. Surely, the minister must have some forward planning for a vessel for that 1 000-kilometre stretch of coastline.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: We have existing resources at Esperance. The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions is leading the development of the marine park. In the near future, there will be a public comment period based on plans that the department will publish. Once that public comment period has closed, the government will make decisions about the marine park and its boundaries, and that will predicate a plan for any additional supports, services or alterations in the work that DPIRD does in that area.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is it true that the minister's department is having trouble with DBCA in relation to the purported consultation that is going on at the moment?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Once again, I think the member is responding to just rumour. The two departments are departments of government; they work together. DBCA receives Department of Fisheries advice. That has been through the community reference committee process. There are differences of views in the CRC process, but that will culminate in a set of plans that will go out for further public comment for three months, as I understand it. The government will receive that public comment, and that will lead to further decisions from government.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is the minister comfortable that the public in Esperance and other locations along the south coast have had their thoughts taken on board through this consultation process? Is he confident that the process has been transparent and useful to the public down that way?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I am finding difficulty relating that to a line item in the budget and the financial statements of government because the member is asking for an opinion, once again. The DBCA is the lead agency for the development of marine parks. Minister Whitby is responsible for consultation, so if the member has questions about the consultation process and community engagement, I suggest he directs them to the appropriate budgetary process.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to budget paper No 2, division 15, part 4, pages 208 and 209. This is again a question of omission. The minister would know that Busselton Margaret River Airport now has interstate flights coming into it, and the council believes that the airport still requires significant upgrades. Obviously, regional tourism is a very important part of regional development, but I cannot see anything in this budget or in the forward estimates. In fact, I have done a search of the entire budget, lest the minister refer me to another minister. There is nothing in the entire budget about any funding in the forward estimates now or in the Busselton airport forward estimates. I wonder whether the minister has any plans to consider that matter and have further discussions with the council?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Can the member point me to the line item he is referring to?

Dr D.J. HONEY: It is the spending changes table, which has no reference at all to Busselton airport. I wonder whether that is a deliberate omission or whether the minister, in fact, intends to spend money at that airport.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Busselton airport is not reflected in spending changes, so it is not a line item. If the member wants to ask me a question in question time about Busselton airport, I would be delighted to answer it.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I would have the member for Vasse fighting me!

Mr R.S. LOVE: Budget paper No 3 has the royalties for regions expenditure outline in the *Economic and fiscal outlook*.

The CHAIR: Sorry—which page?

Mr R.S. LOVE: I was about to say on page 215. The Western Australian agricultural supply chain improvements program has three years of funding for a total of \$18 million. Is the minister currently in discussions with the Department of Transport around stage 1 of this program? Have there been any further discussions about future funding through royalties for regions for what is known as the ASCI program?

[4.30 pm]

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The agricultural supply chain improvements program provides investment in freight infrastructure to optimise supply chain efficiencies, improve road safety and community amenity, and move greater volumes of grain by rail. I note that a previous government privatised our rail system. It does this by seeking to lower freight costs and improve supply chain capacity from farm gate to port. That can leverage investment in freight infrastructure, aimed to service other regional commodities, which can underpin the viability of rail freight services. The project is linked to the grain freight upgrades project and work is progressing for the 11 rail sidings, with funding agreements either signed or in negotiation. Early planning and designs are underway. I will ask Mr Isaachsen if he would like to provide any detail in relation to the member's question.

Mr P. Isaachsen: I have nothing further to add.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: There is nothing further to add.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Paragraph 8 on page 210 of budget paper No 2, volume 1 refers to fit-for-purpose modern legislation in relation to the Animal Welfare Act, Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act et cetera. Does the minister have time lines for industry engagement and consultation?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Can I clarify which specific act the member was referring to? Was it the Animal Welfare Act?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The Animal Welfare Act, the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007, and the Aquatic Resources Act is also mentioned.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The member is specifically asking about Animal Welfare Act and the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That is right. What are the time lines for legislation industry engagement et cetera?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: In relation to the Animal Welfare Act, we are delivering on the outcomes and recommendations of the review and expect to introduce a bill to Parliament later in 2023. The review of the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act is well progressed and is focusing on ensuring WA can respond to the ever increasing pressures on our biosecurity system and maintain access to domestic and international markets.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Will there be consultation throughout the year prior to the legislation being presented?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I will ask Ms Brayford to respond.

Ms H. Brayford: Yes, there will be consultation as the matters progress, particularly for the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act. A review is underway as we speak. A series of public consultation is being undertaken, and further is happening pretty soon, I think. We will seek broad comment on some of the independent panel's considerations around that act, which will then go to the Minister for Agriculture and Food for consideration and for the government response, which will be later this year.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to budget paper No 2, page 209, under "New Initiatives" and the line item "Green Steel—Collie Electric Arc Furnace Steel Mill" for one-and-a-bit million dollars. Could the minister please provide information about what is proposed for the expenditure?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Can I ask the member to repeat the essence of his question?

Dr D.J. HONEY: On page 209 in the table is the line item "Green Steel—Collie Electric Arc Furnace Steel Mill". What is proposed for the expenditure proposed this year? I could not find that in continuing matters, so I assume it is a recent initiative.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: That is an allocation from the Collie industry attraction and development fund for the Collie electric arc furnace steel mill bankable feasibility study. Green Steel WA is planning to develop the electric arc furnace steel mini mill in Collie, and it will process local scrap steel to produce reinforcing bars for local consumption and export. It has completed a pre-feasibility study, which the company believes indicates a strong value case for the project, to take the proposal to full bankability.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Is the government anticipating that it will provide any further capital for that project or is this the end of the government's involvement in terms of the feasibility study?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: This is a feasibility study leading to a bankable outcome. Proponents are always welcome to talk to government about whatever form of support they might need, whether it is infrastructure, regulatory or financial. Depending on the outcomes of that feasibility study, I am sure that Green Steel WA will be talking with government.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to paragraph 9 on page 210, about commercial, recreational and charter fishing. It states —
The Department continues to undertake monitoring, assessment, management and compliance activities to ensure the long-term sustainability ...

What packages does the government have available, or will be making available, to compensate those affected by the demersal changes?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: As I have previously indicated, there is a \$10 million package for the demersal scale fish adjustment program to respond to that. That incorporates a range of actions for education and compliance matters in relation to voluntary fishing adjustment schemes and assistance for charter boat operators.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The minister mentioned charter boat operators. What direct assistance or thought is about enabling them to continue on in their business? One of my operators has told me that he will have to drop from 100 charters per annum to 20 because of the changes that have been imposed, which will obviously make his business completely unviable. What is the thought of revisiting the situation for charter operators in terms of a dedicated part of the quota or some sort of an understanding of what this actually means? It is, I think, 52 operators up and down the coast who will be dramatically affected by these changes.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The west coast demersal issue is a very challenging situation because it is a fish in recovery. Significant businesses have established themselves on the back of a fish that is in recovery. When I say it is in recovery, it does not mean to say that it is necessarily recovering. It actually needs management action to ensure its future sustainability, which is a primary obligation I have under the act. The changes that were brought into place were to ensure that there would be sufficient fish for future generations. I acknowledge up front that that was a very tough decision and it has very significant impacts on the commercial sector and the broader business sector, including charters and tackle shops and the like, that has developed on the back of a very popular fish. I acknowledge that.

[4.40 pm]

The benchmark reduction tonnage of 50 per cent was recommended to me by industry and was consistent with the harvest strategy. A component within the adjustment package proposes a total tonnage of 20 tonnes for the charter boat industry, and that proposal, based on consultation with the charter boat sector, is to move to a tag system allocation based on the charter boat's prior history. Therefore, the more a business has been dependent and reliant on and has utilised the demersal resource, the greater access it will get to fishing tags. We recognise that the tag amounts are far less than those charter boat operators would like, but it is consistent with trying to achieve the best outcome to ensure the sustainability of the fish into the future.

There is a \$500 000 diversification scheme, which aims to provide grants to charter fishing licence holders and to help diversify marine tourism experiences. That package has just gone out to the charter operators. There is \$226 000 dedicated to the charter sector management reform program, which includes the implementation of a charter quota tag system.

We recognise that some operators will decide to move out of demersal, and if they have received tags based on their catch history, we will enable them to trade those tags and perhaps concentrate more on the charter boat sector. However, that is a decision for industry. I also note that a number of operators have moved out of the demersal area and into other areas and others have diversified and are making use of the pelagic opportunities associated with the voluntary fishing adjustment scheme.

I recognise that it is a very difficult situation for those operators, but we have the \$10 million package and we have divided that as reasonably as we can to achieve a number of outcomes for the adjustment to the new allocations.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Is there provision in the funding for the buyback of professional licences? Has that occurred, or is that envisaged? Where is that sitting in terms of a discussion point?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: No, it is not envisaged for charter boat operators. There is a voluntary fishing adjustment scheme for the commercial sector to enable it to achieve its reductions. We have put in place an arrangement for industry diversification to look at the pelagic opportunities for the charter boat sector.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Have any professional licences, at this point, been sold off?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Sorry, is the member referring to the voluntary fishing adjustment scheme or the charter boat scheme?

Mr R.S. LOVE: I am talking about professional licences. Have any holders of those, at this point, considered a buyback?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: That scheme has not opened yet. It is in the process of being finalised, and then we will seek expressions of interest on a voluntary basis.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to page 209 and the spending changes table, and the line item "Ex-Tropical Cyclone Ellie—Freight Assistance Package". There is obviously a reduction this year. Will that freight assistance package continue now that the level crossings are in place?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The answer to that is yes, it will continue. Further works for major roads access will not be completed until next year, so we anticipate that there will still be a requirement for that freight subsidy.

Dr D.J. HONEY: How many applications for freight subsidies were refused? Perhaps the minister can provide just a rough proportion; I do not need exact numbers.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: To date, three were declined or withdrawn out of 138 applications.

Dr D.J. HONEY: The minister said that the freight assistance package will continue into next year. It is likely that the bridge will take at least two years or more to build. Should there be funding in the forward estimates for further assistance?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: There is an allocation for that. To date, the total funds are probably less than we predicted would be taken up because we have found that people are accessing freight options. There may be some backlog in freight applications, but at this stage I am confident that that freight subsidy is meeting the needs of the Kimberley and the East Kimberley in particular. We will continue to keep it under consideration. The aim is to support those people through a very, very difficult time.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 223 and the regional telecommunications project continuation about halfway down the page. What is the breakdown for this project? I do not know whether the minister has driven the Albany Highway, especially between Armadale right through to Albany, but there are consistent areas of 30 or 40 kilometres with barely any coverage for mobile phones. Apart from providing a breakdown, does the Minister for Regional Development have something in line to improve the coverage for this important highway?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Is the member's question specifically about Albany Highway, because there are many locations?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I will start with the breakdown, if you like, and I will follow on to Albany Highway after that.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The regional mobile communications project provided \$40 million to complete 113 new mobile stations, and that is 100 per cent complete. The regional telecommunications project has provided \$85 million to fund 402 new and improved base stations, and that is 63 per cent complete. The state agricultural telecommunication infrastructure fund has committed \$19 million to deliver fixed wireless cover to more than half of the grain belt, and that is more than 51 per cent complete. The WA digital connectivity program committed \$11 million to the commonwealth regional connectivity program round 2 and is nine per cent complete.

If the member wants a list of all the projects, and there is a very long list, I have it. If the member wants to write to me about specific concerns along Albany Highway, I will ask the department to provide feedback on that.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thank you. I would like to ask specifically about Albany Highway, given we have had several accidents there recently and there are a substantial number of areas without mobile coverage.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Ultimately, we are talking about what is a commonwealth responsibility for mobile phone coverage. I suggest that the member writes to me as a local member expressing his concern about particular locations and then I can request that the department provides advice to the member on that. We can take up those matters with the commonwealth as well.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Okay. I will take that on board. As it stands at the moment, are there any areas on the Albany Highway that the government is looking at that are part of the current forward projections?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I think the best thing the member can do is write to me expressing where the points of concern are. There are grant rounds open at the moment, and we can provide some advice back on the appropriate bodies that can apply for funding.

[4.50 pm]

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to page 208 of budget paper No 2 and the election commitments listed under "Spending Changes". There is an increase of \$200 000 this year for the Augusta childcare centre. Can the minister update us on the state of that centre, the likely completion date and the final cost?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I am delighted that the member has asked me this question. I want to acknowledge the member for Warren–Blackwood's incredible advocacy for the community of Augusta. Initially, she helped to formulate the original election commitment of \$100 000. When it became clear that the centre was not going to proceed because of other issues, she advocated strongly for it. I was able to join Minister Winton in Augusta to announce that a state-owned building has been secured for the purpose of establishing the childcare centre and a further \$200 000 has been allocated in the current budget towards transforming the vacant state-owned building into a fit-for-purpose facility. It is a long sought after day care service. I also want to acknowledge the board and the staff of the South West Development Commission for providing an additional \$50 000. Again, I think it is a very good investment in the Augusta community. The total in funding and financial assistance provided to the Augusta and Districts Community Childcare service is \$350 000. That project highlights the investment we are making to support safe, strong and fair communities for people no matter where they live. When we went down to the community to make those announcements, people were incredibly appreciative. As the member would know, when communities get a leg-up like that, they are very appreciative. I think the centre will make a world of difference to families in the Augusta area.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Following up on that question, the lack of adequate child care is probably the single greatest constraint on workforce participation across the state. Is there a broader program of funding for improving regional childcare facilities?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Which line item is the member referring to?

Dr D.J. HONEY: It was a further question. I was referring to the line item and asking whether the government is expanding that program to other areas, or is it just a single example?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: That was a specific election commitment. If the member wants to inquire more broadly about child care and the work the state is doing, particularly with the new federal government, I suggest the question is referred to the appropriate division.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 218 and paragraph 2.7 on the wild dog action plan and subparagraph 2.7.1 on \$3.8 million for the extension of the state barrier fence. When I was first elected in 2017, I think this was budgeted for the following year, and we are still grinding away. Can the minister give us an update on where we are at with that extension?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I thank the member. We were both in the class of 2017! I will defer this question to Dr Carbon.

Ms M. Carbon: The line item referred to is around the maintenance and replacement of the state barrier fence, which is being done under the wild dog action plan. That is around replacing very aged sections of the fence with appropriate wild dog fencing that includes a lap wire. That work is well progressed. I have notes here, but, from memory, around 300 kilometres have already been replaced and work on about 200 kilometres remains to be done. Once that final section is upgraded, it will mean that the entire state barrier fence is wild dog standard for the first time.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I understand that there are further native title issues with the land that the fence will go on. Can the minister update me on that at all?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Dr Carbon.

Ms M. Carbon: Yes. I think the member is referring to the Esperance extension of the state barrier fence, which is a separate project. The planned extension to the state barrier fence covers a number of different land tenures that are in a mosaic. Some of that land requires the negotiation of Indigenous land use agreements. Last year, the first of those agreements was registered and construction work is now underway on those sections of the fence. The remaining section is called section 3. It requires an Indigenous land use agreement, which the department is currently negotiating, but those negotiations are in the early stages.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What is the prediction on those negotiations being completed to enable the completion of the fence?

Ms M. Carbon: As I said, those negotiations are quite early on. It is not possible at this stage to predict how they will go. However, I can say that the department is looking at all options for construction of the fence sections. Those options include a potential realignment to avoid the need to build on crown land. I would say that any environmental, heritage and Environmental Protection Authority approvals, for example, will still be required no matter where that fence alignment sits and all those options require significant time to be developed.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Therefore, we could have a situation in which the last section will need to be diverted onto landholders and it will be held up by the new Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act that we were talking to the minister about this morning. Is it a tier 1 or tier 2 activity that will require permission from the local Aboriginal cultural heritage group et cetera? We may end up moving from the frying pan into the fire.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I will ask Dr Carbon to respond.

Ms M. Carbon: There are two elements that the member referred to. One is the need for an Indigenous land use agreement when that fence alignment is on native title land. Irrespective of that, the member is correct that there will need to be negotiations and agreements with First Nations people in the area even if that fence is built on other land tenure. Yes, we will have to be cognisant of, and meet the requirements of, the new act when it comes in.

[5.00 pm]

Dr D.J. HONEY: With the ILUA already settled in relation to that fence, was that purely a settlement around the route the fence was taking or did it include payment of compensation as part of building that fence?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Dr Carbon.

Ms M. Carbon: I do not have the details of that with me, but I can confirm that it also included an agreement for tender for that work. One of the main aims of the Esperance extension project is to contribute to Aboriginal engagement and work in the area, so that group have tendered and are now undertaking that clearing and construction work.

The CHAIR: The minister and his adviser are requesting a 10-minute break. Are there going to be further questions?

Dr D.J. HONEY: I have one more question. I am sure the minister will enjoy it! I refer to my favourite page and the spending changes and the future drought fund program extension about two-thirds down page 209. There is \$15.6 million this coming financial year, and then it trails off. Could the minister please explain the scope of that work?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The commonwealth future drought fund is a \$5 billion investment fund, with \$100 million each year allocated to drought-resilience programs designed to provide secure, continuous funding for drought-resilient initiatives to help Australian farms and communities prepare for the impacts of drought. Notional allocations of \$1.33 million to the regional drought resilience planning program and \$2.26 million to the farm business resilience program respectively were made to Western Australia based on the value of agricultural commodities produced, the number of farm businesses and the number of people employed in the sector in WA. Following the 2022 federal election, the new Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Hon Murray Watt, confirmed that total commonwealth funding for the extension of programs of \$10.096 million from 2022–23 to 2023–24 was approved. A total appropriation of \$10.096 million was also approved, representing the state’s contribution to the program.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Will that money be expended mostly on farms or will it be divided between farms and, for example, town dams and similar projects?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I will ask Ms McConnell to respond.

Ms C. McConnell: At the moment those discussions are still ongoing about where it will be spent, but we are looking at extending some of those regional drought-resilience plans to other regions. Farm business resilience training is in some other sectors, not just the farming sector. It might be aquaculture or agriculture, as well as pastoralists, and some consideration around some of the Aboriginal farming opportunities in more traditional areas, such as cut flowers, native sandalwood et cetera. They have not been finalised and there will need to be discussion with the commonwealth.

The CHAIR: Would we like to take a 10-minute break, unless there are any further questions?

Mr R.S. LOVE: Can we come back to the development commissions?

The CHAIR: Yes. We will take a 10-minute break and suspend until 5.15 pm.

Meeting suspended from 5.04 to 5.13 pm

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to page 210, budget paper No 2, volume 1, “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”, specifically paragraph 11, which states —

Flooding in the Fitzroy Valley caused by ex-Tropical Cyclone Ellie has had major social, environmental, and economic consequences for the Kimberley. The Department and the Kimberley Development Commission have a key role in supporting the region’s economic recovery, including the recovery of its primary industries.

I want to get an understanding of what work the department but, more especially, the Kimberley Development Commission, has been doing during this period and what role the Kimberley Development Commission sees itself having as part of the recovery process.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I acknowledge the work of the Kimberley Development Commission in assisting me with a very early visit post the flooding to meet with small businesses in the East Kimberley area and hear firsthand what impact the flood was likely to have on the tourism sector and freight issues. I was very pleased that it has been able to assist in providing advice on the quantities of freight that move through the East Kimberley area, the likely indicative costs of freight movement and the implications of formulating a freight assistance package, which it did. That freight assistance package was launched in February 2023 and backdated to 1 January and was jointly funded through the commonwealth–state Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements. The department is administering that package on behalf of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and DRFA WA. The development commission continues to provide advice to the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation, the Small Business Development Corporation and others supporting the recovery of tourism and business in the area and, importantly, make use of its widespread connections across industry to engage with industry and small business to develop local solutions and local ideas and put them into the recovery structure.

Mr R.S. LOVE: What role does the Kimberley Development Commission play in feeding into the planning for the recovery beyond the immediate response? What might it identify as priorities for the region to recover, not just from the point of view of Fitzroy Crossing and the damage to roads et cetera, but also to ensure that the economy is able to get back on its feet and use whatever resources the state and commonwealth governments are going to spend to make sure there is good understanding of the local conditions by groups that are going in to provide some of those resources?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The commission provides a range of supports—information, advocacy, data, data analysis—that feed into the recovery process, which is coordinated by Robert Cossart, another development commission CEO. That informs the work of all those other agencies that have primary responsibility, whether it is DJTSI, Tourism WA

within JTSI, the Department of Transport and a number of other agencies. In terms of the recovery ecosystem, particularly of the economic ecosystem, DPIRD and KDC work closely to identify and address the issues. The principal issues to date have been in freight subsidies and tourism. I was up there last weekend and talked to a number of people, including Aboriginal organisations. They were very appreciative of the work of the development commission and the state government in moving quickly to address those immediate needs, particularly around freight.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Does the development commission in the Kimberley have an ongoing role in tourism development or is that left entirely to other agencies?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Regional development commissions per se, including the Kimberley Development Commission, have a whole-of-government responsibility. Regional development is not confined to a particular topic; it has an interest in all sectors, whether it is tourism, agriculture or whatever. It works in partnership with relevant agencies to achieve outcomes locally for the region.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Is there a formal process of consultation or engagement between local governments in the Kimberley and the Kimberley Development Commission and has that been stepped up as a result of the recent flooding?

[5.20 pm]

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Development commissions talk frequently with local governments, and the Kimberley Development Commission is no exception. Again, I met with the local government in the East Kimberley when I was there and I will be going up to the West Kimberley this week. There is a very close relationship between the KDC and the Shire of Wyndham–East Kimberley.

Mr R.S. LOVE: In the face of the needs of the Kimberley at the moment, is the development commission being provided with extra resources to enable it to carry out its role or does it have to undertake those duties at the expense of other functions that it might otherwise undertake?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The state government has resourced the recovery program quite significantly. The KDC certainly has not requested additional resources from me. It has been able to work with the information and networks that it has to advise government and influence the shape and nature of the recovery program. Advocating for their region is what development commissions do, member; they are very good at it.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The development commission does not employ staff; is that correct? It has only the CEO, who is a statutory officer of the commission. Is it correct that the rest of the staff are provided by the minister's department?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: With the exception of the CEO, staff are assigned by DPIRD to the development commissions. That enables the administration and back-office functions for those staff to be managed in a much more efficient way. However, those staff report on a day-to-day basis to the CEO of the development commission, and the CEO reports to the board.

Mr R.S. LOVE: How many dedicated FTE are at the disposal of the Kimberley Development Commission, and how many were there before the current situation?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: There are 12 now and there were 12 then.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Okay. Are all those staff based in the region?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: They are based in the Kimberley region.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Where are they based in the region?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: There are staff in Broome and Kununurra.

Mr R.S. LOVE: How many are in Broome and how are many in Kununurra?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: There are two vacancies. Three positions are occupied in Broome and seven in Kununurra.

Mr R.S. LOVE: How long have there been unfilled vacancies in the development commission?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: There have been two vacancies since January 2023.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Did those vacancies occur before, during or after tropical cyclone Ellie?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I fail to see the relevance of that question. Vacancies are vacancies. The commission is doing everything it possibly can to fill those vacancies.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Given the extra workload of the commission at the moment, is the government offering any other support to the development commission to make up for that two FTE shortfall?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Yes. The commission has the support of the department, which is there to support development commissions in their day-to-day operations.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Does the commission have some sort of budget for its own use or to use at its discretion to run day-to-day activities and formulate plans for travel and other associated needs that it might face?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Can the Leader of the Opposition refer me to the line item that he is referring to?

Mr R.S. LOVE: I am referring to the significant issues impacting the department and the consequences of what we are talking about here—that is, the Kimberley Development Commission having a role in supporting the region’s economic recovery. It is a significant issue that the government has identified, and I am quizzing what resources the commission actually has to carry out those functions.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Is the member referring to item 11?

Mr R.S. LOVE: Yes, item 11 under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The Kimberley Development Commission has two budgets; one is for use by the CEO and the board, and the other is the operating budget for the commission that is managed by DPIRD on the commission’s behalf and which the commission accesses.

The CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition?

Mr R.S. LOVE: I thought there was some more advice coming from behind the minister, but there is not. I will continue in this vein around the Kimberley response. The minister said that the development commission is supporting the region’s economic recovery. Has some thought been given to the need for a region-wide economic plan for the Kimberley? Does such a plan exist; and, if not, is it something that the department envisions it might undertake? I note that in previous times there have been things like blueprints et cetera. Acknowledging the situation that the Kimberley has been in, what level of strategic planning or forward thinking is the department and/or the Kimberley Development Commission involved in to move forward from here in a planned way?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The Kimberley Development Commission does have a draft strategic plan. I am in discussions with the Kimberley Development Commission about updating that strategic plan to reflect the objectives that I have as an incoming minister and to match those to local needs identified by the board.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Does the strategic plan relate to the organisation or to the development of the region?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: It relates to the development of the region—the objectives that the government has for that region.

Mr R.S. LOVE: When was that plan last updated?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The last draft strategy was publicly released in 2021.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Given recent events, does the minister envisage that that plan will be revisited any time soon?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: As I said, the plan is currently in draft format. I have been in discussions with the development commission about updating the objectives in that plan to reflect local needs and my objectives as an incoming minister.

Mr R.S. LOVE: In regard to the future work of the development commission, will it need to submit to you, as minister, some sort of forward plan for its activities or will that largely be decided by the board and the CEO?

[5.30 pm]

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The development commission does that through the board. I have a view—I have always had this view—that development commissions are at the front end of regional development. It starts locally with a local understanding of the issues and the identification by the board about which critical issues are necessary to take the region forward. That comes up through the department to me and I review that. That is the process that is currently underway.

Mr R.S. LOVE: In regard to the development commissions interacting with government, the minister’s department and other development commissions, what is the current structure for the reporting of the development commissions? Do they report to the minister directly, and only to the minister, or do they report to other bodies with which they are now integrated?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The CEO reports to the board of the development commission and the board of the development commission reports directly to me. There is no change in that process. The department is there to support the development commissions in their work and to coordinate the statewide programs and projects of major significance at the state level. The essence of regional development is at the local level, and that is the role of the development commissions and the boards.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Given the situation in the Kimberley and the rather late nature of some of the planning that would have had to go into the recovery process for the Kimberley, has any money been set aside under royalties for regions specifically for the Kimberley in a recovery sense?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: There is money in the budget from royalties for regions. We do not have the model that the previous government adopted, which was handing buckets of money across to the development commissions. We have a budgetary process in place and the discipline associated with that. Was the member’s question about the flooding?

Mr R.S. LOVE: Yes.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The freight assistance package is \$42 million through royalties for regions; the temporary accommodation package is \$33 million through royalties for regions; the clean-up programs will receive \$30 million; the industry and community development programs, which put people on the ground to help support local community recovery hubs, will receive \$9.238 million; and there is \$80 million for the emergency road recovery work. Those measures involve a number of agencies. This is a whole-of-government effort. The Kimberley Development Commission is a significant contributor in the economic recovery and it works in partnership with the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development and also with the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Given the demographics of the Kimberley, does the development commission have a dedicated officer or officers who deal directly with the remote communities in the Kimberley region?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: We cannot avoid that in the Kimberley. All the staff have a remit to work with remote communities, to varying extents and in various locations. I was in Warmun on the weekend and was very impressed with the staff member who knew all the community members very well, knew the issues and was able to step me through the important considerations of the Warmun community with the community.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I note that the minister was at the Warmun aged-care facility, which we both know was built several years ago. Can the minister relay to us what the plans are and what the minister has in mind for that facility?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I think that was built in the time of the previous government.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That is my understanding.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: It did not have any federal funding associated with it. I met with members of the community and talked with them about their aspirations for the future of that building. We have also allocated some funding towards securing the building by putting a fence right around it to help make it more secure. The community is looking at options to replace the broken glass and for a general site clean-up. There is an engagement process with the community while it looks at what the options are for the best use of that building into the future, given that it is not compliant with contemporary aged-care standards. It is very unlikely to ever be used for aged-care purposes. There may well be other avenues to pursue in addressing the needs of older people in that community so that they do not necessarily have to relocate to Kununurra. That building is a considerable and very large asset. It is unfortunate that it has not been able to be used, but I think the community has some good ideas and we will work in whatever way we can to help the community achieve those outcomes.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Following on from the Leader of the Opposition's questions, are the Regional Development Council and the Western Australian Regional Development Trust fully operational, as they were prior to Labor forming government in 2017? Is the structure very similar?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: As I recall from my last years of experience on the development commission, the structure was that the Regional Development Council saw itself as the director and controller of the commissions under the guidance of the then chair. That is not the case now. The Regional Development Council is a forum for sharing information and understanding the important issues affecting each commission and how they aggregate important issues for regional Western Australians and the contribution that regional Western Australia makes to Western Australia. It is an opportunity to learn, to critically review and to share information. I am very pleased that the Regional Development Council has reinvented the CEOs to participate in those meetings. The member might recall that under the previous government that was no longer acceptable. We have changed that. In my view, that is excellent because it brings forward the experience and expertise of the board chairs who represent a wide variety of interests with the experience and operational expertise of the CEOs so that we get much better quality advice around the table of that forum.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is it similar for the Western Australian Regional Development Trust?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Yes. Under the act, the regional development trust has primary responsibility to report on the expenditure of royalties for regions funding and any other matters that I refer to it. I recently appointed Mr David Caddy as chair. I think Mr David Caddy as chair of the Western Australian Planning Commission will bring enormous expertise to the trust in terms of understanding the broad landscape within which royalties for regions and regional development operates.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to the structure of general government on page 240 of the *Economic and fiscal outlook*. All the development commissions are listed there, including the Kimberley Development Commission, which we have just been talking about, and the Great Southern Development Commission, the South West Development Commission and so on.

The CHAIR: Could the member clarify where we are?

Mr R.S. LOVE: It is on page 240 of budget paper No 3, the *Economic and fiscal outlook*. It is a list of organisations that comprise the general government sector, which, of course, is funded by the budget. In the context of the minister having just provided advice on the position of the Kimberley Development Commission's full-time staff et cetera, would the minister be willing to provide, even by way of supplementary information, a list of the full-time equivalent persons who are devoted to each of the development commissions, including whether any vacancies exist at the moment?

[5.40 pm]

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Can I clarify which line item the member is referring to?

Mr R.S. LOVE: I am referring to the list of general government agencies on page 240 of the *Economic and fiscal outlook*.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Can I clarify with the chair if that reference is within the scope of this division?

The CHAIR: Can the Leader of the Opposition give us anything more specific?

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to page 214 of budget paper No 2 and service area 2, “Corporate and Business Development Services Provided by the Department to Support Regional Development Commissions”. We could use that line item if you like to achieve the same outcome, and it is probably more specific. The table shows that there are 124 employees or full-time equivalents. Is that referring to the persons within the department who are devoted to those nine regional development commissions; and, if so, can the minister provide—if not now, by way of supplementary information—a list of the full-time equivalents for each of the development commissions, including any vacant positions?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I am advised that the information on staffing numbers is in the annual reports of the development commissions.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Do they outline the current situation?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The figures in the latest annual report would be as of the date of the annual report. People always get promoted, leave or relocate to another development commission, but as of those dates of the annual reports, that would be the number. That is the most expedient way to get that information.

Mr R.S. LOVE: In terms of this service provision area, do each of the development commissions have an up-to-date strategic plan or are they all dated at the time of the turn of government?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: One of the great initiatives within the development commissions is that CEOs have come together to form the Western Australia Regional Development Alliance. They have been progressively looking at the issues of strategy for the regional development portfolio and for their development commissions. In answer to the member’s question, the current strategic plan of each of the development commissions would be at varying levels of development.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I will have to accept that I am not going to get much more information.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer again to page 209 and the Mira Mar landslide. While the CEO of the Great Southern Development Commission is available, would she be able to explain to us, through the minister, what interaction the commission has had with the landholders, both those that had buildings that were demolished and the three current landholders?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Numerous meetings, telephone calls and emails have been exchanged. There has been quite extensive engagement. I do not think it is reasonable to try to detail every single one of those, but there has been ongoing engagement right through the process.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Considering that we cannot locate any further funding in the budget for the victims of the landslide, does the minister foresee that the commission and the minister will come forward to those landholders with a compensation package and that they will have ongoing communication with them on a monthly or bi-monthly basis? Considering it has been two years since the landslide and there is nothing in the budget for next year, are we looking at waiting for that for four years?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Member, I have already answered this question and issues of compensation imply fault. At the moment the development commission and the local member for Albany have been talking with all the stakeholders on the basis of the outcome of a piece of work that details what needs to happen to stabilise that land area and what its potential future uses are. That advice to me is being formulated now and government will make decisions in response to that advice once it has had an opportunity to consider it.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Given that there is nothing in the budget and that those properties are potentially worth \$1.5 million to \$2 million and above, does the minister foresee an ex gratia payment being made? I can see no avenue in the budget to compensate those owners. We are talking about \$10 million to \$15 million for those five properties.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The report was received after the budget process. From the government’s point of view, it receives advice based on that report and on the engagement with the landholders, the City of Albany and any other relevant stakeholder. That advice will come to government and government will consider that advice and make decisions accordingly, as it does with many other matters.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does the minister see a time frame by which those landholders could hopefully expect something, given that the minor repair job is potentially being done in the next few weeks? I assume that next summer, some sort of major repair work will be done on retaining walls et cetera. Is there any light on the horizon for those landholders?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The member is correct in that any works to stabilise that area on a long-term basis will have to occur during a dry spell. Summer periods provide an opportunity to engage with those works. As I have said to the member, the advice is yet to come to government. Once that advice is received, it will be considered by government. I am awaiting that advice. I understand that the commission talked very recently with people, as has the local member, and I am expecting that advice. Once I receive that advice, it will be considered within government.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I think I have just about moved off the development commissions. I refer to page 223 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the line item “Regional Centres Development Plan: Stage Two”. This plan will be terminated at the end of this year with no further allocations. Can the minister explain what that plan was about and its outcomes?

[5.50 pm]

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I am advised that those funds from the old regional centres development plans were not spent over successive financial years, so the funding was repurposed for the biosecurity communications campaign and truck wash-down facilities.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Going back to the development commission discussion we had earlier and referring to the Collie Futures fund and other various Collie projects listed on page 222, can the minister explain to us the interaction between the South West Development Commission, the minister’s department and the other arms of government on some of the plans and changes for Collie? What interactions has the development commission had?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I thank the member for the question. It is really heartening to get feedback nationally on the government’s just transition program for Collie and the work undertaken there. I acknowledge the member for Collie—Preston, who is in the room today and has been doing a terrific job helping her community adjust to and build a new future with the end of coal-based power generation. It has been a very comprehensive approach, and the South West Development Commission plays an important role in helping to support that process. There are a number of industry attraction funds, at both the small business and the major business ends. The South West Development Commission provides support, governance and administration support for the Collie industry attraction and development fund. Every now and then, the acronyms escape me! It also played a major role in developing the economic plan that has helped to guide the development of these programs for Collie’s transition.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Was the South West Development Commission specifically allocated staff or resources to enable it to participate in that arrangement?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Four staff were appointed to assist with that transition.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Are those four staff continuing as the transition continues or were they involved in the initial planning? What did their positions entail?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Those positions are funded through to 2026.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Are they doing planning and some level of implementation?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Yes, there is a great deal of implementation, as well as planning and looking at industry opportunities. It is a major transition program. The feedback I am getting from the Collie community is very positive about that transition program. It is a time of uncertainty for the future, and it is the first time anything has been undertaken nationally on this scale. Again, I commend the local member, who has been working diligently with her community to make sure that the transition program best meets the needs of the people of Collie moving into the future. It is a great town. The member should go to visit and see the mural on the dam, which is incredible and something to behold. I was there with the Premier, and we opened up the walkway across the dam wall. That was terrific and has long been called for. We walked through the town of Collie itself, which has murals and a sense of purpose. Some great small businesses are being supported. It is outstanding work. The member asked me about the work of the development commissions. There is a development commission working hand in hand with central government and local members to achieve great outcomes for the community.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I have a different question that refers to page 214 of the *Budget statements*, and corporate and business development services provided by the department to support regional development commissions and the FTEs involved. Does the South West Development Commission have a particular focus on tourism, given the importance of tourism in the south west? If so, how many officers are devoted to that effort?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The staff assigned to the development commission work across a whole range of activities and portfolios. Some are geographically or locally focused, and others might have a particular speciality in an area. I seek some clarification.

Tourism WA has placed a position in the development commission to help support tourism. I take this opportunity to acknowledge someone who is very well loved and passed away a couple of years ago—Mark Exeter, who did terrific things in the tourism sector during his time with the development commission. I put on record my appreciation for Mark’s contribution. The development commission also provides additional resources to support the tourism agenda, and it is a very significant industry sector for the south west.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Is the South West Development Commission one of the development commissions with a more up-to-date strategic plan and does it involve tourism?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Yes.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: They needed to replace the one with the previous CEO.

Mr R.S. LOVE: They have one with more energy now.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The previous CEO was a very good CEO. He used to sit in this chamber providing excellent advice to his minister. Mind you, I still remember a commitment from Hon Brendon Grylls and Hon Mick Murray that the day Lake Kepwari opened, they were going to jump in there in their budgie smugglers and have a swim, and they never have done. Shame on them!

Mr R.S. LOVE: There is always hope. This is probably the last question from me. Does the strategy that has been advanced for tourism have expansion plans for the Busselton Margaret River Airport?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: This is like a circling shark question. It reminds me of the member for North West Central at a previous estimates hearing. As I said, the Busselton airport is something that I am very happy to answer questions about in question time. It is not a line item in this budget, but the development commission is in ongoing discussions with the City of Busselton about how that airport is functioning and its future opportunities. Having written the business case jointly with my colleagues at the time, and persuaded the then government that it should invest in it, I think it has been a good investment and has a great future.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Before we go, I thank all the people who have travelled from far to come today. Thank you.

The appropriation was recommended.

Meeting suspended from 5.58 to 7.00 pm

Division 14: Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation — Services 1 to 7, International Education, \$8 901 000 —

Ms M.M. Quirk, Chair.

Mr D.A. Templeman, Minister for International Education.

Mrs R. Brown, Director General.

Ms S. Spencer, Deputy Director General, Strategy and International Education.

Mr A. King, Executive Director, Strategic Policy.

Mr R. Sansalone, Chief Financial Officer.

Mr B. Jolly, Executive Director, Service Delivery.

Ms R. Lee, Executive Director, Strategy and Policy.

Ms L. Rodgers, Director General, Department of Education.

Ms J. Healy, Executive Director, School Curriculum and Standards Authority.

Mr R. Perera, Associate Director, International Education.

Ms K. Ho, Director General, Department of Training and Workforce Development.

Ms T. Widdicombe, Chief of Staff, Minister for International Education.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: The estimates committees will be reported by Hansard and the daily proof will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. I will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point. Consideration is restricted to items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must relate to a page number, item or amount related to the current division, and members should preface their questions with those details. Some divisions are the responsibility of more than one minister. Ministers shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information he agrees to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 2 June 2023. If the minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

I give the call to the member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 190 of volume 1 of budget paper No 2 and the ongoing initiatives and, obviously, the international education line item. The funding declines from \$8.9 million to \$3.4 million and then to \$411 000 and \$415 000. Can the minister enlighten us of the situation there? What is the cause of that?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The member is referring to the line item and a change in the dollar figures.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That is right—the spending changes.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: As the member will probably be aware, in the 2022–23 state budget, there was additional funding of \$41.2 million for international education initiatives, including a range of measures. In this year's budget, an additional \$13.1 million investment in international education has been provided, with a total of \$20.3 million in 2023–24. The first budget saw a record amount of money allocated to international education through a suite of programs and measures. I can give the member the details of those. The additional money that has been provided in this budget will allow a range of student support programs to continue, as well as the continuation of marketing activities and global showcases of in-market activity.

The line item shows a boost for 2023–24 that is effectively for a range of measures, including student marketing campaigns, the English language intensive course for overseas students incentive scheme, temporary staff grant programs and some further student accommodation subsidy support. All in all, these measures have been ultimately cumulative because of the investment in the first budget, which saw a record amount allocated to the international education budget and sector. We will continue that work in marketing and we will continue that work to support inbound students coming to Western Australia to study.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The minister referred to previous announcements and so forth. I note that on 23 May 2022, he welcomed skilled migrants and international students to study, live and work in WA, and 194 occupations have been added to the graduate occupation list, which means that overseas students can gain a visa through the student pathway. Can the minister enlighten us about how many extra students came in through that particular pathway? I think it was also part of the \$185 million Reconnect WA program.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am happy to answer the question. The Reconnect WA program has been particularly successful and has been focused on making sure that we are working in the market to attract and reconnect students in our key countries of market back to Western Australia in the post-COVID pandemic period. I remind the member that semester 1 in 2022 was impacted by the later border reopening. Allocations allowed us to continue to work in the market and the vast increase in numbers ultimately took place in semester 2 in 2022. The indications from our key stakeholders, including universities, has been that student numbers have increased dramatically post the COVID pandemic; good numbers have come back since the COVID situation. In fact, as of 12 May 2023, year to date, visa holder arrivals to Western Australia have totalled some 17 720, and this is slightly higher than in the same period as at February 2019. We can see that this is already slightly over the pre-COVID numbers that we experienced in 2019. That is very promising. Of course, the allocations in this budget are building on the Reconnect WA initiatives so that we can continue to be active in the market throughout the target countries that we are working within.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The minister referred to the COVID announcement of what was going to be the opening date of, I think, 5 February 2022, and the Premier's disastrous public relations exercise. Does he have any numbers of students who were lost through that particular announcement and does he feel that he has now recovered those who were left stranded in Hong Kong or Europe?

[7.10 pm]

The CHAIR: Okay, we have a couple of questions there, member, so just let the minister answer them and then you can have a further question.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Of course, I do not accept the premise that keeping Western Australians safe and ensuring that businesses continued to operate under the COVID threat is a failure. It is in fact a huge success and, as has been highlighted on numerous occasions, it is one of the key reasons that Western Australia's economy, and the growth in sectors such as international education, has been so successful. The premise of the member's question, his preamble, is totally incorrect and I reject it outright. I need to highlight that the impacts of measures taken have seen a remarkable recovery in numbers. It is remarkable and tremendous. I applaud our universities, training institutions and international student agencies in Western Australia for the work they did in responding rapidly. That is why we have seen successful growth in numbers and the success of our record amount of investment in international education. If we compare the investment by the McGowan government in international education with the investment when the member's party was in coalition with the Liberal Party, the difference is stark. We have unashamedly focused on international education as a key element of our diversified economy, which is demonstrated by our investment—\$41.5 million in the first budget and the additional ongoing moneys that we have allocated in this budget—and the results speak for themselves. It is a stark contrast with when the member was in power.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Although the minister says the results speak volumes, in actual fact Western Australia has only 5.8 per cent of the market, which is the lowest of all mainland states. Would it not be right to say that we have not recovered from that dramatic announcement of the Premier?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: All the trends are showing outstanding outcomes. I am sure the member does, but he should speak to our vice-chancellors. I had a meeting with our vice-chancellors only last Wednesday morning and they again highlighted the remarkable interest of international students in course enrolments. The vice-chancellor

of Curtin University highlighted the record number of student enrolments there. These are very positive measures and outcomes, and it demonstrates the importance of the investment made by the McGowan government in international education. It also demonstrates the way that the department, StudyPerth and other key members of the sector are working very closely together to maximise the benefits, ultimately, for Western Australia. We know that a vast majority of international students take up part-time and casual work, which of course has supported our burgeoning and important hospitality industry, hotels, restaurants and other important employment areas. This has been a remarkable success. We will keep working very hard to continue that success and growth and of course invest in the pipeline of students, making sure that we are in-market. We have very effective trade commissioners in place, particularly, of course, in the international students' sphere in the gulf, and they are working very hard to represent Western Australia's interests in the international student market in those countries.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Have we seen the percentage of students from India return to pre-COVID levels?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The major proportion of international students continue to come from India, but we are seeing growth in a number of other markets, including countries in South America. India represents approximately 20 per cent of our student numbers in Western Australia. It is followed by China, with 11 per cent, and Bhutan, with some seven per cent. A number of other countries make up the top 10. That is the reason we continue to work hard in-market to make sure that we not only build those numbers, but also make them sustainable and build a pipeline going forward.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Is the minister aware of the percentage of Indian students before the COVID pandemic?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am happy to ask the executive officer.

Ms S. Spencer: At its highest point it was 20 per cent; so, it is very close to what it was, pre-pandemic.

Dr D.J. HONEY: What are the estimates of the cost-benefit analysis of the investment that is being made by the government in relation to international students coming into the state?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am sure the member would be aware that increasing the number of international students delivers a range of outcomes. International students pay fees to study in Western Australia, so there is a direct payment benefit to training institutions, be they universities, TAFE colleges or our international students who study in primary and secondary schools. The fees that come from those students is significant. Mature adults also bring economic benefits in terms of their contribution to business activity in Western Australia as consumers. Then, of course, are those who work in various industries, and a vast number of them do work and bring economic benefits as employees. In terms of direct cost-benefit analysis, I am not aware of any recent work on that, but one of the directors may correct me; and, if not, it is an interesting question.

Ms S. Spencer: One area I will highlight is that during the Reconnect WA campaign, considerable effort was spent on marketing our international education offering globally. Under the "Western Australia—It's like no other" overarching campaign, we delivered a range of media across our target markets. We know that our media reached over 624 million people, and we know they were a large percentage of decision-making parents as well as students. Our website had over 3.96 million clicks and the videos, which we put together for our target markets, received over 640 million views online. We know that the additional funding we were able to put toward global awareness campaigns definitely netted a result and, as the minister noted, we are seeing that in enrolment numbers at the moment.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I can add that a lot of parents and families choose to come and visit their loved ones, who might be studying in Western Australia. There are those visitation benefits as well. The in-market efforts through both the trade delegations and ministerial visits are focused on selling Western Australia. A key component of that is indeed the international education sector and the benefits of having your son or daughter enrol in an institution in Western Australia, receive a high-quality education and live in one of the safest places on earth.

[7.20 pm]

The CHAIR: Are we moving on?

Dr D.J. HONEY: I have a further question.

The CHAIR: Gee, I thought it was exhausted. One more?

Dr D.J. HONEY: Yes. It was thorough!

I am aware that there are many potential benefits from the international education effort. Has any cost-benefit analysis or benefit-to-cost analysis been carried out for that program?

The CHAIR: You have already asked that question, member.

Dr D.J. HONEY: No. I asked what the number was. I asked whether the government has carried out any analysis and the minister could not give me a number.

The CHAIR: I think the member received the answer from the deputy director general. Anyway, minister, go ahead.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I could talk on this for some time.

The CHAIR: Yes. It serves you right.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Member, it is extremely significant. As the member is aware, international education, more broadly, is playing an even greater role across Australia in its significance to the economy. We might not measure it like we do iron ore in tonnage and price per tonne, and nor should we because these are human beings. One of the things that I have always been focused on is making sure that international education and international students are seen as important partners of Western Australia's economy. It is also of great benefit to Western Australians that we have students from all around the world studying here and engaged in the local community. That is a great benefit to Western Australians more broadly, too, because I think it is wonderful that our Western Australian students have the opportunity to study alongside people from all around the world. We cannot necessarily put a price on that aspect.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: That was a very thorough answer, minister. Surely when the minister is making the case for additional funding for marketing campaigns and the like to increase the sector, having a cost-benefit analysis will actually assist, particularly Treasury. Treasury is particularly keen on understanding the financials.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I suppose the point I am making is that there are a range of direct economic benefits, and I have highlighted the fact that those students pay fees. We could do a back-of-the-postcard calculation to average the fees that an international student pays times the number, but their contribution is more than that. There are a whole range of other factors, some that are attributable to a formula and others that I think are also important—for example, our relationships with our dear neighbours. It is good for Western Australia if Bhutanese students have a high-quality experience in WA. I will ask the director general to make further comments. She may help add to that.

Mrs R. Brown: Thank you, minister. The state government's overall economic development framework, Diversify WA, highlights a number of target industries to diversify the state's economy of which international education is a high priority. As part of the reporting for that framework, data is drawn to demonstrate progress in both growing the sector and its contribution to the economy. As the minister has outlined, international students contribute to the community more generally and as trade efforts. As part of that reporting, there is a demonstration of the growth of the sector and the contribution to the overall economy.

There was a question about the cost-benefit analysis of various initiatives. As the deputy director general pointed out, she has key targets as part of the campaign and in tracking the evaluation of our grant programs. Cumulatively, the agency is then measured as part of its key effectiveness indicators, particularly around Western Australia's share of Australia's international student enrolments in which the 2022-23 estimated actual has shown growth and a projected growth into 2023-24.

Dr D.J. HONEY: The director general indicated that there was in fact a measurement of the benefits to the community outside the tangible benefits. She said there was a measure of the economic benefit to the community and that that was reported. Where is that reported?

Mrs R. Brown: I am happy to clarify. It is in the contribution to the diversification of the Western Australian economy. This ensures that the diversification and contributions are measured in terms of the growth of international education as a target industry by the state government.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have a new question.

The CHAIR: That is good—11!

Dr D.J. HONEY: Do you not care about it?

The CHAIR: No, members. We have a lot to get through. Members have asked 11 questions to the extent that they are flogging a dead horse, so I will move on.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The minister is giving very copious answers!

I refer to page 192, paragraph 7.1 and supporting the international education sector. It refers to the additional spending for dedicated marketing campaign activities. Can the minister enlighten us on how much he has spent on those various marketing activities?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: As the member is aware, a range of marketing initiatives have been delivered, including through the recovery program. The initiatives include additional spending for dedicated marketing campaign activities. We also support familiarisations of inbound visitation. Some of these families might be for agents; some might be for ministers from particular market countries. They may be delegations. They may be clusters of agents. They may be collaborative initiatives established through memorandums of understanding with institutions. Those are some of the family programs.

The CHAIR: Minister, I think the member might have wanted to know the quantum; is that correct, member for Roe?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That is correct.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am happy to outline the student accommodation subsidy. Does the member want dollar figures?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That is my next question. Just on the marketing side, we have had any number of press releases and media statements on 23 May, 14 September, 7 December, 8 March and 16 April. What I would like quantified is: how much has the government actually spent on marketing since that early 2022 arrangement when the international students were stopped from coming in?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: In the 2022–23 budget, the amount for the student marketing campaign was \$5.8 million. That was over two years. The allocation for this budget is \$3 million in 2023–24 and \$3 million projected for 2024–25. As I said, those campaigns include a range of initiatives to target, attract and ultimately assist students to come to Western Australia. The accommodation subsidy was \$3.75 million in the last budget and it is \$4 million in this budget. That subsidy supports inbound students with accommodation. I think it is \$1 500 per student. We have a Reconnect WA welcome desk at the airport so that when students land in Perth, they can get immediate support. Some grant programs are associated with temporary staffing. There is a range of measures all focused on supporting students when they arrive with accommodation and getting used to the particular place where they might be studying and supporting them during that early period.

[7.30 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the minister outline how many students have taken up the \$1 500 grant in the program that he mentioned?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes, I think we do have that information. I will give the member the exact figures. In round 1, there were 2 081 applications and 1 824 students were eligible. Obviously, they are assessed against the criteria to make sure that they are eligible. That resulted in \$2.736 million being paid out. This round was impacted by the delay in opening the border, which the member referred to in one of his previous questions. In round 2, there were 3 710 applications and 2 818 students were eligible. They were paid a total of \$4.227 million. Round 2 was impacted by some visa processing delays that were experienced across Australia. I assume the member is aware that there were some issues with visa delays mainly because of resourcing pressures on the office that issues visas. The latest figures for round 3, as at 22 May, are 257 eligible students, totalling \$385 500 in funding paid out.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: How many students are currently billeted following the \$50 000 campaign delivered by StudyPerth?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: When the member says “billeted”, I assume he means provided accommodation through the homestay program?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That is right. It is the Australia Homestay Network.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The Homestay Network is an important program. As the member is aware, the number of students in on-campus accommodation is easy to identify, obviously, but the number of students in private rentals is not necessarily something that we can collect data on and give a finite number for because they are private transactions, essentially between students and landlords and/or real estate agents. StudyPerth has advised that since it ran a campaign highlighting the opportunities with homestay late last year, over 150 home owners have registered with the Homestay Network. This does not reflect home owners applying to other hosting services or home owners with existing registrations with hosting services; it is new registrations.

Homestay is something I would encourage members of Parliament to promote. It is an option for some students, but not all students wish to seek a homestay. It works well for some students. As the member would be aware, there is a sliding scale payment system for those who take in students, be it in a spare room, a granny flat or whatever the arrangement might be. I think it is perhaps a live option for a number of Western Australian families to consider if they have a spare room and they are willing to host an international student. It is really more a lodging opportunity. The homestay, or the home lodging as I keep referring to it, option is one that we need to continue to focus on. I know StudyPerth has re-looked at its most recent campaign and hopes to target that even further. As I say, it is an option for a number of students for their accommodation needs.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I recall that the minister recently announced a campaign about TAFE International students going to the regions. Can the minister let us know how that is going?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes. This is a support program that was announced, from memory, earlier this year. I launched the program in Geraldton. It is a program that we want to grow. Obviously, there are opportunities for regional areas to benefit from having international students enrol particularly in the TAFE sector. The strategy that commenced in January 2023 includes a \$5 000 student bursary and student employment and accommodation support. It is focused on assisting international students to train in regional Western Australia. We targeted six locations—Broome, Geraldton, Northam, Kalgoorlie, Bunbury and Albany. These are only small numbers but to date, as of semester 1 this year, 20 international students have been awarded bursaries under this strategy. Most of them are studying in Bunbury and Geraldton, and then there are a couple in Kalgoorlie and Broome. It is an area in which I would like to see further work done because, as we know, a number of regional centres have labour shortages in hospitality and tourism, and international students provide a wonderful opportunity for those businesses.

[7.40 pm]

The CHAIR: Minister, can I just stop you there because that is in fact division 25 and we are still on division 14, as I understand it.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: There we are; how naughty of you! But it is a good program and we will keep working on it.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am glad the minister has gone down the path of TAFE. Can the minister explain the detail of the TAFE program for attracting —

The CHAIR: Member, did you just hear me?

Dr D.J. HONEY: It is within the line item of international education and the attraction of students.

The CHAIR: TAFE is further on in division 25.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am happy to ask it there.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 202 and the line item “International Engagement, Trade and Investment”, specifically “International Education”. How much funding has been handed out to state government agents in recognition of successful enrolments at Western Australian education providers as a result of the \$10 million agent incentive scheme?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: In the first round of the international education agent incentive scheme, \$636 000 was paid to 28 providers. In round 2, the total amount expected to be paid is \$7 137 500 to 36 providers. In round 3, which is open at the moment and closes 30 June this year, 53 providers have been approved to participate in the program. The final figure for those will be available post that date, I assume.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The allocation for international education in 2023–24 is \$11.2 million and it drops back in the out years to \$1.65 million. Is that due to the \$10 million program disappearing after this budget year or is there another reason for the drop-off?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The initial allocation in previous budgets focused on building a pipeline. We have an allocation of \$3 million for the agent incentive scheme—I think that is the correct figure—in 2023–24 and others dollars are allocated for building that student pipeline. Obviously, we are seeking to build on the initial work that was achieved through allocations in previous budgets. We will continue to monitor the effectiveness of the agent incentive package.

The appropriation was recommended.

Division 24: Education — International Education, \$ 4 626 000 —

Ms M.M. Quirk, Chair.

Mr D.A. Templeman, Minister for International Education.

Ms L. Rodgers, Director General, Department of Education.

Ms S. Spencer, Deputy Director General, Strategy and International Education.

Mr A. King, Executive Director, Strategic Policy.

Mr R. Sansalone, Chief Financial Officer.

Ms R. Robb, Director, International Education.

Ms J. Healy, Executive Director, School Curriculum and Standards Authority.

Mr R. Perera, Associate Director, International Education.

Mr B. Jolly, Executive Director, Service Delivery.

Ms R. Lee, Executive Director, Strategy and Policy.

Ms T. Widdicombe, Chief of Staff, Minister for International Education.

Mrs R. Brown, Director General, Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation.

Ms K. Ho, Director General, Department of Training and Workforce Development.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: I give the call to the member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I turn to page 354, note 2, which states —

The increase in income in the 2023–24 Budget Target relative to the 2022–23 Budget is due to the continued expansion of the International Education Program.

Can the minister provide details about the Department of Education and the expansion of the international education program?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I thank the member for the question. The School Curriculum and Standards Authority is undertaking a phased expansion of its international education program. As the member would be aware, the authority supports overseas schools implementing Western Australian kindergarten to year 12 curriculum programs. Under the international education program, the curriculum has been implemented in a number of countries, including Bangladesh, China, Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mauritius, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam. Obviously, the work of the department in its international education program continues to be done in a measured way. Schools in India, Indonesia, Lithuania, Malaysia and Turkey have been approved to commence in the 2023–24 financial year. Strategies have been implemented to pursue an expansion of the program in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Pakistan and Turkey. The authority is undertaking foreign board recognition processes and working with SCSA associates to grow its international education program. The Western Australian curriculum has a very good reputation in the market countries in which it is working.

We recognise that we need to establish firm grounding in both the markets that we have and those in which we seek to expand. It is an important part of the work of our trade commission teams in market. It is also an important area for our international education program participants to be actively engaged in. I know that our department has regular engagements in market in all these countries throughout the year. New schools and new relationships are established and we continue to get increased interest in our highly regarded Western Australian curriculum. It is one of the reasons why international education has been a part of the narrative and engagement for ministerial delegations. All ministers who have been in market have been charged with representing and conversing about the international education program. It is an exciting area.

One thing that I find remarkable about some of the countries that we have been working with is that they literally have thousands and thousands of schools and we be might be working in only one or two of them or a cluster. We will continue to work diligently. It is a very important part of the international education program more broadly for Western Australia.

[7.50 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I assume that the Department of Education does not have a marketing role as such and that it is more about the curriculum side of it, as the minister mentioned. I remember at one stage visiting a school in China that basically had all its ATAR students tied into Perth schools. Has there been an increase in that or has that stayed at the same level?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am happy to allow the director general or one of the appropriate staff members to respond to that question. I will ask our representative from the School Curriculum and Standards Authority.

Ms J. Healy: Our offshore international schools where we have students enrolled in ATAR courses are well supported by SCSA. They undertake exactly the same programs, moderation processes and ATAR course examinations as our local students here. They are supported. They are taught on site in their country and officers from the authority visit once or twice a year to ensure that their assessments are in accordance with and comparable to those of local students who are undertaking those ATAR courses.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is there a rough figure on the number of schools and students that SCSA is providing support to?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am sure we have a figure. The reach that we have in various countries is impressive. Once a school like Sunshine Grammar in Bangladesh is well and truly underway, it then draws the attention of other schools within the precinct or country. The need to make sure that our entry into a country is successful helps build further success going forward. In terms of enrolments, I can highlight that over 3 000 students are currently enrolled at some 24 schools. They range from the Beijing Aidi School, which has a Western Australian Certificate of Education program and nearly 180 students in years 11 and 12, through to Saigon International College, with nearly 130 students in years 11 and 12. One Sunway College in Malaysia has 40 year 12s enrolled, while a second Sunway College in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia has 382 students enrolled. There are various schools with smaller cohorts, but these numbers continue to build. As interest in our curriculum and the quality of our curriculum increases, there will be further collaborations in these markets and the number is expected to increase.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thanks, minister. I have just one final further question on that division. I know the director general had quite a bit of interaction with boarding schools, obviously with the COVID arrangements and the like. How did that pan out with international students once the borders were open? Did the Department of Education have a lot of interaction with boarding schools, whether in the public or private systems?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: A lot of those students have traditionally been within the homestay market. A number of them are very young so they are with family or close relatives who live here. In those cases, homestay is the primary means of accommodation for those students. My understanding is that many of them remained here during COVID. In terms of boarding in the independent system, I can ask the director general to make a general comment on that.

Ms L. Rodgers: We were involved with the boarding school rules, if you like. We worked closely with the Chief Health Officer, and the public education system worked in collaboration with the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia and the Catholic system to make sure that provisions were in place for students who boarded. I do not have on hand the number of international students who were in the independent sector, but we endeavoured to put in place the same conditions, as determined by the Chief Health Officer, across all our boarding facilities.

Dr D.J. HONEY: What is the estimated cost of supporting the international education program in terms of the curriculum being exported to overseas schools?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The director general will be able to find a budget line figure for me to highlight that. I refer the member to page 354 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and to “Support to the School Curriculum and Standards Authority”. This is just for SCSA. The line items under that heading give the total cost of service and then the total less income derived. Note 2 under “Explanation of Significant Movements” states —

The increase in income in the 2023–24 Budget Target relative to the 2022–23 Budget is due to the continued expansion of the International Education Program.

There is also, of course, Canning College, which is an institution that takes only international students. We might be able to find a line figure for Canning College. I have referred to the SCSA figures and we will try to find a figure in the budget that might identify Canning College.

Dr D.J. HONEY: That was not the question I asked. The question I asked was about the cost of providing this curriculum service to students or schools overseas. Is there an estimate of that cost? There is an income. I take it from note 2 that the income is mostly associated with being able to sell that program to other schools. I am interested in what it costs the Department of Education to do that.

[8.00 pm]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am advised that it is \$1.485 million, but I do not want to —

Dr D.J. HONEY: It is somewhere around \$2 million.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am advised that the figure is around \$1.5 million.

The appropriation was recommended.

Division 25: Training and Workforce Development — International Education, \$29 267 000 —

Ms M.M. Quirk, Chair.

Mr D.A. Templeman, Minister for International Education.

Mrs R. Brown, Director General, Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation.

Ms K. Ho, Director General, Department of Training and Workforce Development.

Ms L. Rodgers, Director General, Department of Education.

Ms S. Spencer, Deputy Director General, Strategy and International Education.

Mr A. King, Executive Director, Strategic Policy.

Mr R. Sansalone, Chief Financial Officer.

Mr B. Jolly, Executive Director, Service Delivery.

Ms J. Healy, Executive Director, School Curriculum and Standards Authority.

Mr R. Perera, Associate Director, International Education.

Ms R. Lee, Executive Director, Strategy and Policy.

Ms T. Widdicombe, Chief of Staff, Minister for International Education.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: The estimates committees will be reported by Hansard and the daily proof will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point. Consideration is restricted to items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must relate to a page number, item or amount related to the current division, and members should preface their questions with those details. Some divisions are the responsibility of more than one minister. Ministers shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 2 June 2023. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

I give the call to the member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to line item 6 on page 373 headed “Recruitment and Management of International Students”. I note that for the budget estimate for 2023–24 we are talking about \$29.2 million. It increases to \$31.9 million, \$35.9 million and \$37.5 million in the forward estimates. Can the minister explain why this figure increases so dramatically over the forward estimates?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I might ask the director general to make an initial comment.

Ms K. Ho: The increase in the forward estimates represents the growth in international student numbers as the sector recovers, so it represents the delivery of international education to a growing number of students.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is there any way to quantify the projections of the number of students who tie in to those figures?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Do we have some figures now that will perhaps give some indications of where the growth patterns are? International student enrolments at TAFE colleges over a period has seen a recovery in the last budget. This budget shows a recovery of 1 650 students enrolled at TAFE colleges currently. That is projected to grow in the next financial year to 1 820, 2 000 in the following year and then incrementally up. We expect to reach our pre-COVID level by around 2025, and it is expected that the numbers will continue to grow from there.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thank you, minister and director general. How many of those students will go to regional colleges?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: We might have some figures, or an indication, that I can give the member. This relates to a previous question when I began to outline the number of students who had received bursaries in the first semester. They are small numbers, initially. In semester 1, Bunbury currently has 10 students enrolled, Geraldton has six—I met all of them at Geraldton in January, from memory—Kalgoorlie has three and Broome has one. This is an area we wish to grow. A two-year pilot strategy was commenced in January this year. We are seeking to increase that number to around 2 000 over the next two years.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thank you, minister. Does this present challenges to both our regional and metropolitan TAFE colleges with regard to the shortages of staff with appropriate language skills or who have issues with English as a second language? Is there a shortage of lecturers at the moment out in the regions who can deal with these particular international students?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: My experience of the Geraldton cohort was that their command of English was outstanding, from memory. Some of the student cohort that is coming through and that we want to continue to build may have English as a second language strengths, although not as strong as others. Ultimately, the TAFE lecturers, in my experience, are very capable of responding to those needs. The director general might make a further comment on what might be considered if there are particular challenges. One of the really important things to note is that for a lot of our international students, English is a language they are learning, and learning rapidly. In many countries, it is the second language of that country, so they are usually already immersed in English.

I will ask the director general if she wants to make some additional comments.

Ms K. Ho: Often when the students present with English language needs, they will do the English Language Intensive Course for Overseas Students beforehand to bring them up to a standard in which they can engage in and successfully complete the course. The courses that are being offered through the regional TAFE International Western Australia strategy have been particularly selected because the colleges have the capacity to deliver those courses. They are also targeting skills shortage areas so that those students can contribute to the local workforce.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thank you. I have one more question before I hand over to the member for Cottesloe. What are the top three courses through TAFE that our international students actually apply for?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Is that in regional areas or in the metropolitan area?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Both.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I recall that in Geraldton the courses included aged care, hospitality and tourism, and aquaculture. I remember very vividly a young woman highlighting —

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Did the minister go down there to freshen up his crayfish supply?

[8.10 pm]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: If they could have, they would have. In terms of enrolments, the overall top 10 courses for 2023 are: certificate III in commercial cookery, advanced diploma of engineering, certificate III in carpentry, diploma of civil and structural engineering, diploma of nursing, advanced diploma of civil and structural engineering, certificate III in light vehicle mechanical technology, certificate III in early childhood education and care, certificate IV in community services and diploma of hospitality management. Does the member want the application figures for 2023?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Yes.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The top 10 courses in terms of applications are: diploma of nursing, followed by diploma of hospitality management, diploma of early childhood education and care, diploma of community services, diploma of business, certificate III in commercial cookery, certificate III in individual supports—that includes ageing, home and community care—advanced diploma of engineering technology (electrical), diploma of automotive technology and certificate III in carpentry. As the member can see, all those courses are high-demand career pathways.

Dr D.J. HONEY: It has been put to me by a number of people—I know it is not a novel view—that in fact growth in TAFE certificates may be one of the principal areas for growth in international students. What activity is TAFE undertaking in relation to marketing its certificate programs to international students?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: In previous questions we have highlighted that the strategy to grow student numbers in the international sector with regard to TAFE is an important part of TAFE’s work. I can highlight that TAFE International Western Australia continues to work with the various agencies, including the director general’s Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation, to promote the state government recovery initiatives as part of the Reconnect WA package. Regional managers are promoting WA TAFE colleges and government schools to potential students through in-country visits and virtual education exhibitions, agent training sessions, seminars, webinars and student counselling sessions. In a broader context, Western Australia recently hosted the International Consultants for Education and Fairs conference that brought together agents and a range of sector participants from in-market countries at which TAFE had a promotional role.

TIWA recommenced travel in July. In the last six months, its recruitment managers have continued to visit nine countries or regions that include Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, Europe, Thailand, India and Mauritius. These are in-market efforts by TIWA, and 20 regional trips may be required throughout the year to further expand opportunities in African countries as well as countries like Indonesia, the Philippines, Japan and Korea. A number of those are developing countries and there is no doubt that the skills training from a TAFE course offering in Western Australia is very highly sought.

Again, I really want to pay tribute to our TAFE institutions in terms of their quality of training. TAFE is increasing in its reputation internationally and that is why TAFE’s focus will be to continue to grow that pipeline of students. It is an exciting time for TAFE.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Is TAFE looking to partner with overseas institutions to provide those TAFE courses offshore or is the focus purely on bringing students to Western Australia to train at TAFE?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I will let the director general answer that question more specifically. My understanding is that both of those aspects occur currently. Countries like India, Bangladesh and others are particularly looking for vocational courses such as those I have listed. Western Australia has a strong reputation and we are increasingly becoming the place of choice. I will ask the director general to comment further on the member’s question.

Ms K. Ho: I can confirm that TAFE colleges have offshore commercial partnerships with overseas educational institutions. A number of very successful longstanding partnerships are in place. For example, South Metropolitan TAFE has been partnering with the Charles Telfair Campus in Mauritius to deliver accredited Australian vocational education and training qualifications such as the diploma of early childhood education and care and also training its trainers and lecturers in a certificate IV in training and assessment. That is an example of a partnership that was put in place pre COVID. Some of that pipeline of offshore work was disrupted during the COVID pandemic and the colleges are reconnecting and re-engaging with potential offshore partners.

Dr D.J. HONEY: In relation to those programs, what is the cost of delivering or managing those partnerships offshore and what income is received for those services?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am happy for the director general to respond.

Ms K. Ho: All those partnerships have different costs depending on the size, scope and services being provided by the colleges. The colleges operate under a set of ministerial guidelines for those partnerships, which means that they need to have robust business cases and to be covering all costs on a commercial basis.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to page 375 of budget paper No 2 and service 3, “Skilled Migration, Including Overseas Qualification Assessment”. The total cost of service shown has almost tripled in the current year rising from a budget of \$1.98 million to the expected almost \$6 million. Staffing numbers have more than doubled from the previous year when there were nine FTEs —

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Sorry, member. The member is referring to an item that falls within the Minister for Training’s responsibility, not mine.

Dr D.J. HONEY: That is outside the minister’s remit, is it?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes.

The appropriation was recommended.

[8.20 pm]

Division 36: Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries — Services 1 to 3 and 6 to 16, Culture and the Arts; Sport and Recreation, \$639 534 000 —

Ms M.M. Quirk, Chair.

Mr D.A. Templeman, Minister for Culture and the Arts; Sport and Recreation.

Ms L. Chopping, Director General.

Ms E. Gauntlett, Deputy Director General, Management and Coordination.

Ms S. Magadza, Executive Director, Culture and the Arts.

Mr M. Hayes, Executive Director, Sport and Recreation.

Mr C. Klymovich, Executive Director, Infrastructure.

Ms L. Kalasopatan, Executive Director, Finance.

Mr L. Carren, Executive Director, Corporate Services.

Mr C. White, Director, Programs.

Ms T. Widdicombe, Chief of Staff, Minister for Culture and the Arts.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: The estimates committees will be reported by Hansard, and the daily proof will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point. Consideration is restricted to items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must relate to a page number, item or amount related to the current division, and members should preface their questions with these details. Some divisions are the responsibility of more than one minister. Ministers shall only be examined in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 2 June 2023. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

The first question is to the member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 534 of budget paper No 2, service 6, “Sport and Recreation Industry Support”. This is under the service summary, of course. Why is there such a big difference between the 2022–23 budget amount of \$271 million and the estimated actual spend of \$160 million in 2022–23? Can the minister explain the difference of the \$111 million? Why was it not spent?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: As the member is aware, in the 2023–24 budget year, as a result of building and construction industry pressures, there were a number of carryovers of project underspends in line with changes to project delivery milestones. These underspends have primarily been carried forward into the 2023–24 budget. Like other industries, the capacity, if you like, to deliver projects under their initial costs have been impacted by construction and building pressures, so this has caused 2023–24 to be higher relative to 2024–25. Some relevant projects include the Kiernan Park recreation precinct, the Dalyellup multipurpose centre and the additional funding provided for the WACA ground redevelopment, which I know the member and I support very strongly. That is the reason for those changes or variances. The reality is that we wanted to continue to deliver those projects, but we have to deliver them under constrained building and construction industry pressure.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer further along on the same line item. Given this government’s lack of ability to deliver, we have sort of seen a —

The CHAIR: A preamble like that is not appropriate, member. Let us just ask the question with just the facts.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Okay, I was flowing on from the minister’s comments.

We go into \$378 million for 2023–24, which I assume takes into account the WACA and some of the other large projects, and then we see a dramatic drop-off to \$129 million, \$115 million and \$102 million in the out years. Can the minister explain to us the massive drop-off after the 2023–24 budget year?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Of course, I cannot commence my response without correcting the member. We have had and continue to have very high demand, and we are delivering under circumstances that have been faced internationally and nationally. In fact, we are delivering high-quality projects and programs throughout Western Australia. Indeed, in regional Western Australia, in the member’s electorate and in other regional electorates, people have been the beneficiaries of some outstanding projects, be they basketball court additions, hardcourt expansions or programs that have delivered additional sporting facilities throughout the state. I refute the member’s

premise. However, we recognise, as do other parts of the state, that to get the high-quality outcomes that we want and that the community deserves for projects like the East Fremantle redevelopment, for example, additional funding was needed to complete the project. I would hate to tell East Fremantle Football Club and that community that the member does not support its project. If that is what the member is assuming or alluding to, I will go and tell them. I know that the member is a sort of “MetroNat” now, as has been highlighted by the Minister for Planning.

The fact of the matter is this: we have delivered some record election commitments throughout Western Australia. In every electorate, some outstanding election commitments have been delivered. Capital works projects have been completed. We have the football centre in Queens Park, which is almost complete, and additions to the Perth Rectangular Stadium in preparation for the FIFA Women’s World Cup. We have works in every region and in the metropolitan region, and we are very proud of it. We will keep doing it and providing those projects going forward. The Western Australian community will benefit greatly from that. When there has been a challenge to a budget because of cost pressures, that has been responded to with a number of projects by the Treasurer. Those communities are going to benefit into the future because of projects being delivered by a Labor government.

[8.30 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 548 under details of controlled grants and subsidies and the line item “Community Sporting and Recreation Facilities Fund”. Obviously I welcome the minister’s announcement last week, or whenever it was, in relation to the increase of \$7.5 million for those couple of years. My concern is that in the out years we seem to be dropping again back to \$12.2 million and \$11.4 million. Can the minister enlighten me about why we have dropped right back in the CSRFF?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The significant uplift in CSRFF funding is not only welcomed but it is also an outstanding decision to recognise that this fund has been highly successful over a number of years. We will be increasing that fund with an uplift to a total of \$20 million a year over the next two years. I expect that there will be high subscription to that program within the next financial year and probably the following year. Indeed, the government will consider future budgets, but the reality is that the huge uplift will be in place for the next two years. I expect it will be very well contested. I also highlight to the member that we want to streamline the process, because we recognise that we want to make it easier and have a more streamlined process in place to deliver the great outcomes that come from the CSRFF program. The process will see projects up to \$500 000 being streamlined. This means that it will go to a 50/50 funding split from the next round starting on 1 July. I expect greater demand, if you like, from the night lights program. That has been highly successful. I congratulate my predecessor on initiating the night lights program, because in various facilities throughout Western Australia the upgrade or addition of lighting means that community organisations and sporting groups can train for greater lengths of time. Obviously, the extension of use of a facility through lighting means that we can continue to cater for the uplift in participation. A number of codes are seeing huge growth in female participation at a community sport level. Some codes are reporting 20 per cent participation uplifts in the female game—Australian Football League, soccer and other sports. This is a targeted effort to support community sport throughout the state. In terms of future budgets, that will of course be a consideration for the minister responsible and indeed for the Treasurer, ultimately, but CSRFF is very successful and will continue.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The minister referred to a 50/50 contribution or a change of scenario and a streamlining. Can the minister clarify whether that was for projects under \$500 000?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: This is specifically for grants under \$500 000. The application can be for a 50/50 split between local government and state contributions. We are getting reports from a lot of clubs about the capacity to raise the traditional one-third. Quite often it is within that smaller cohort of application. This simplifies it and makes it much easier. Of course, clubs will continue to offer in kind to the project, but we wanted to streamline it.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I welcome that. I think that is a good initiative because, as the minister knows, a tennis club might have a \$300 000 tennis court program or whatever that puts a lot of pressure on the tennis club.

Mr S.N. AUBREY: On the same line item, the minister has already touched on it a bit, but can he expand on how the CSRFF is providing benefits to community and sporting organisations across the state, and also highlight how the CSRFF is improving facilities for women and girls?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: It is a very important question. I think all of us are particularly proud of this government’s focus on making sure that sport, particularly in codes that have traditionally been male dominated, now caters for all abilities and women, girls, boys and men. The program has seen some remarkable projects funded around the state. There are a couple of examples in the member’s electorate where investment in facilities mean that for the first time young women have appropriate change rooms to change in to play AFL, soccer, National Rugby League or whatever it might be. That is to be applauded. We still have further work to do in that, but we certainly have been encouraging local governments and sporting organisations to focus on this. We have, if you like, quarantined money to make sure that projects are delivered in that sphere, and so \$1 million is allocated each round to specifically approve facilities for women in sport. I was pleased to be at Sorrento Football Club only last month or the month before and the new change rooms that cater for both genders are a remarkable commitment by the club and indeed the state government to fund those improvements.

I am sure members are aware that the FIFA Women's World Cup is a great opportunity for the code of soccer to genuinely demonstrate that it is a real challenge to AFL. A lot of parents are looking at soccer as an option for their daughters and sons because of the nature of the code, the skill and of course that we produced probably the world's best female soccer champion in recent history in Sam Kerr. All of that means that the FIFA Women's World Cup is going to be a magnificent opportunity for the code to deliver to the aspirations of girls and young women to play the game. We are matching that by funding facilities so that they are absolutely catered for, for example, in lighting. We are also building the football centre out in Queens Park, as well as upgrading a number of existing facilities.

I want to quickly give members a couple of examples because these are important. CSRFF female-friendly facilities for 2023 include a couple of the following. In Collie, the Railways Football and Sporting Club pavilion redevelopment included new change rooms. Looma had an upgrade of the oval, the change rooms and lighting. I was out in the Shire of Murray the other day with the member for Murray–Wellington, and the Sir Ross McLarty Sports Precinct oval had seen some upgrades. The Shire of Dardanup received funding for the construction of a pavilion—these are all regional, by the way. The City of Bunbury received funding for the construction of a pavilion at Forrest Park oval, and Capel Regional Equestrian Park had a pavilion constructed. This is great news for female participation in the game, and we will keep funding such initiatives.

[8.40 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 549 and the line item “Kidsport” under the details of controlled grants and subsidies. Why is there a significant drop in funding of 50 per cent from this budget year 2023–24 over the forward estimates for this critical funding for families?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The annual budget allocation for KidSport is \$4.624 million. In 2023–24, the budget amount includes a carryover of \$4.5 million. This is due to an underspend in 2021–22 and, of course, that was partly attributed to COVID and a decline in applications for KidSport during that period. It was one of the reasons why, from memory, we doubled the KidSport allocation from \$150 to \$300 per child to try to stimulate a take-up as community sport came out of the COVID impact. We are watching this very carefully because KidSport remains a very important part of the suite of supports for children from families impacted by the issues around cost-of-living and financial security.

The director general reminds me that during the COVID period we thought there might have been a dramatic increase in unemployment, for example, and that more people might find themselves on the Health Care Card or some sort of government support, which would therefore make them eligible for KidSport. That, of course, did not happen because—guess what?—the government handled COVID extremely well. It ensured that businesses continued. It ensured that people remained in jobs, and, indeed, it ensured that they did not lose their jobs in vast numbers like places in other parts of Australia and the world.

We have included a carryover in the budget amount for 2023–24, but I can assure the member that I have asked the department to investigate ways we can look at enhancing the KidSport program to capture a greater number of families and support them in making sure their children play sport and continue to play sport. I also think there is an interesting challenge for some codes. The costs charged by various codes for children to play the game vary, and some of them very markedly. We are doing some work on this. We are seeking further data. We are hoping that sector entities like the Western Australian Institute of Sport can help us drill down into some of the codes that, quite frankly, are expensive. If someone has three children playing a particular code and it costs \$400 or \$500 per child to play that sport compared with another code that might be \$200 per child or even less, that is an issue for those codes more broadly about how junior sport needs to be supported. The Balga Junior Football Club, for example, through its fundraising efforts—it also attracts KidSport funding—works very hard to ensure that any child who signs up to play does play. If it means that the club supports them through additional subsidies so that that child, boy or girl, can run onto the field, then it does it. That is an area that we need to look at. I have asked the department to look at how we can expand the net to include families that we can assist through KidSport going forward, and it is doing that work at the moment.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: As the minister knows, my predecessor, Hon Tuck Waldron, was the initiator of KidSport, which is a very important element of the budget. I have Indigenous families in my electorate, in Tambellup and other places, who want their kids to play sport but have cost-of-living issues and are struggling to fund their kids. When the minister says that he will be monitoring this, will he have a look at potentially going back to where the government was funding \$300 per child or something similar in this environment in which the cost of living is high?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Those issues will be part of the considerations of the work that the department is doing. I am a strong supporter of the KidSport program. We want to look at ways to make sure that it captures a greater number of families. In my electorate, lots of families have more than one child. We want them to play sport, but if the family is on fixed income or a social benefit—the social benefit of sport is huge—or are constrained financially, we have to look at the existing programs and the expansion of the existing programs, and I am absolutely willing to do that. That is what the department is doing at the moment through that work that it has commenced. In the year to date, we have funded nearly \$3 million for the KidSport program—over 1 470 clubs, 20 000 children and around 21 000 vouchers.

I even have a KidSport breakdown for the member for Roe's electorate of over \$53 000. I am sure the member will promote, as I do, the KidSport program so that parents will be well aware of the support that it provides. The member has my assurance that we will keep working very hard.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Was the minister referring to a breakdown by electorate there for that figure that he just quoted?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes. I have some figures for the member's electorate.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is it possible to have those figures supplied by supplementary information?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am happy to take it on notice and give the member updated figures for the seat of Roe. I will do that as supplementary information. I am happy to provide the member for Roe with information about the statistics for KidSport in his electorate.

[Supplementary Information No B1.]

Mr S.N. AUBREY: I refer to page 529 of budget paper No 2 and the line item "Regional Athlete Support Program". Can the minister explain what the regional athlete support program is and outline how many athletes benefit from this program?

[8.50 pm]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The member referred to page 529. The regional athlete support program supports regional athletes who are on a pathway to further opportunities in their chosen sport. We recognise that regionally based athletes do not always get the same opportunities as their city counterparts. They are further away from elite training places and they may not necessarily have the same depth of coaching available to them. Many regional athletes of all ages travel to the metropolitan area or to regional centres to access further training and development.

The regional athlete support program has three key elements. The first element is the regional talent development network. Athletes are identified as having an enhanced talent in a particular code and supported in the further development of their skills within their particular athletic genre. The second element is the athlete travel subsidy scheme. I sign-off on lots of these. It is really interesting to read through the applications because there are some really talented young men and women who aspire to progress on that pathway. I really hope that many of them will ultimately reach the elite pathway, which they have the opportunity to do. The subsidy program supports athletes to attend state and national championships. The subsidy scheme supports them to travel. They are assessed on the criteria. That is the athlete travel subsidy scheme. The third element is the regional education program. That provides face-to-face and online webinar workshops usually through the regional academy structure. There is robust regional academy infrastructure in place in most of the regions. It also assists athletes and their parents to connect with talent centre athletes, coaches and officials so that the athlete is supported holistically. It is a good program. There is an allocation of \$4.9 million in this budget to continue the program.

Under the regional talent program network, a range of associations are supported. It is very successful. I have had the privilege since becoming minister of attending a number of the academies and some of the events in regional areas that acknowledge those athletes. Regional Western Australia has a tremendous reputation in a range of codes and athletic genres. As we move towards the 2032 Olympics, there is absolutely no reason why the 2032 Olympic team will not have some regional Western Australian athletes. I have already met one of them in Collie. Young Gemma is only 15 years old and I reckon she will be a javelin champion very, very soon. I think she won a national title only recently. But regional WA has a number of examples of these athletes and this program strongly supports them.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Minister, I agree that it is a great program but why is there no funding for it whatsoever in the out year 2026–27?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: As the member knows, we continue to assess programs such as this. It is in this coming budget, and future budget processes will assess the effectiveness of the program. That will be a consideration for another budget. I understand that it is a royalties for regions program so it is subject to a cyclical allocation. I think it is a three-year program. But I will fight hard to make sure that it stays, so the member should not worry about that. A lot of athletes in the Peel region have been successful recipients of grants.

Mr M. HUGHES: Can the minister put his cultural hat on? I refer to page 529 and the line item "Connecting to Country". How does Connecting to Country support the preservation of Aboriginal culture and in the process strengthen our diverse cultures across WA?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I thank the member for the question. Was the member referring to page 529 of budget paper No 2?

Mr M. HUGHES: Yes.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The Connecting to Country program has been very successful. It supports WA Aboriginal people and organisations to undertake on-country activities. These activities vary but they are very grassroots oriented and designed to cater for the needs and the aspirations of young Aboriginal people in the community. Since 2017, there have been about 82 Connecting to Country program projects supported. Twelve of them were in the member for Roe's electorate, in Esperance and the goldfields; 20 in the Kimberley; 18 in the Perth metropolitan area;

seven in the midwest; two in the south west; two in the wheatbelt; 16 in the Pilbara; three in the Gascoyne; and two in the great southern. The programs delivered enable young Aboriginal people to continue to recognise Aboriginal cultural leadership and support leadership development in those young people. The program has some great mental health, health and wellbeing outcomes. They include activities such as camps, artists-in-residence working with groups of young people, archiving songlines, dance, bush classrooms, recording oral histories and connections with elders. A whole suite of initiatives are offered. We have committed a further \$500 000 for the years 2023–24 to 2026–27. Of course, as we know, connecting to country is important and develops within young Aboriginal people that genuine connection to their culture. Working closely with local elders in delivering those programs is really important. I think it is a worthwhile program.

The CHAIR: Members, we are still on division 36. We have VenuesWest, Heritage, the Heritage Council of Western Australia, the National Trust and the Western Australian Institute of Sport, so are you persisting with division 36?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The Western Australian Institute of Sport is not happening.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. That is on my list. We will move the division later. Do members have any more questions on division 36?

[9.00 pm]

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to pages 548 and 549 and details of controlled grants and subsidies. How are projects determined? How does the government determine what is included and excluded under controlled grants and subsidies?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Some of those projects are the delivery of specific election commitments. Some of them relate to strategic projects that are in development or on a journey, effectively, in their development and implementation. The director general might want to add something further to clarify the third one, which I forget.

Ms L. Chopping: It would obviously be easier if a line item was specifically identified because we could talk about the background to how that commitment came about. But as the minister said, a number of them are election commitments across all portfolios that we attend to. Some of them are ongoing programs that have been around for quite some time, and some are new initiatives developed through the usual process that government develops new programs, which is as part of the development of a strategy that has undergone significant community consultation and feedback from stakeholders on the way to get there.

Dr D.J. HONEY: The minister would be aware of the substantial criticism of the former Liberal–National government for its choice to support community projects based on electorates.

The CHAIR: Drawing a line and moving forward, what is the question, member?

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am moving to the question. When I look at the table, I see that there is not a single location-specific grant in a non-Labor electorate. All the location-specific grants occur in Labor electorates. Of the six electorates outside of Labor's lower house membership, there is not a single project in Vasse, Cottesloe, Central Wheatbelt, Moore and North West Central.

The CHAIR: Member, do you want to withdraw? It is not compliant with standing orders in terms of questions.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Withdraw what?

The CHAIR: Questions should not contain preambles, opinions or statements of fact unless they are necessary to render the question intelligible. Questions should not contain argument, allegations, interference, imputations, epithets, ironical expressions or hypothetical matters. I think the member's words come under a few of those categories.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am happy to answer the question. It is an interesting line to draw when we consider that many electorates in the state of Western Australia are held by the government. I can assure the member that these programs and projects are delivered having regard to need and strategic deliverables. We do not take into account whether they are in a Labor or Liberal seat; rather, we take into account need. There have been a number of projects, including those with funding from the community sporting and recreation facilities fund, and election commitments that have been delivered in the member's electorate. I opened a project at Cottesloe football oval with the Mayor of the Town of Cottesloe that was funded by this government. It is a very, very nice looking initiative. One of the other things the member would be aware of is that a lot of sport and cultural activities take place in a range of centres to which people travel. It just happens that a lot of our major cultural institutions are in the Perth CBD. We want to encourage people from all electorates to travel to them. We have extensive program deliverables in some of our major cultural institutions and they are for the benefit of all Western Australians. People might travel to regional centres for sport. I refer to Geraldton, where there have been initiatives in basketball and field facilities to cater for activities for people outside the immediate electorate. They also benefit people who travel to play on them. It is not the fault of the Labor government that it holds 53 of the 59 seats of the Legislative Assembly. Local governments within the member's area and Vasse, the two Legislative Assembly seats held by the Liberal Party, are of course not ineligible to apply for CSRFF funding or artist-in-residence programs through our cultural programs. Those sort of programs and projects continue. We will not discriminate, but we will make sure that high-quality activities are promoted throughout the state of Western Australia.

Dr D.J. HONEY: A question.

The CHAIR: Another own goal, no doubt.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I heard what the minister said, but the opposition has 10 per cent of the electorates not held by the Labor Party and zero funding in the forward estimates, so it appears that those seats have been completely ignored by this government.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Various programs are subject to application, like the CSRFF. Let us look at the Gwoonwardu Mia, Gascoyne Aboriginal Heritage and Cultural Centre, which is funded by the state. It was reopened by the McGowan government after it was closed by the former Liberal–National government. That facility is managed by the Western Australian Museum Boola Bardip and funded through royalties for regions. It is now open and funded to continue to provide programs and opportunities for visitors and local Indigenous communities, and there are a number of individuals there. There are a variety of programs through our program delivery that are delivered to all seats in Western Australia. The member’s premise is inaccurate and incorrect.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 534 and the first dot point, “Cultural and Arts Industry Support”. What is funded in 2023–24 that is not funded in the out years? I notice a substantial drop-off in that area.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Some of the programs that support things like Getting the Show Back on the Road and other programs specific to supporting industry and creatives have ceased. Indeed, funding for Getting the Show Back on the Road is no longer required because we were able to get the show back on the road during COVID. The member will see some reflow of forecast underspends within the allocations for the 2023–24 budget year and the out years. There are also commitments to update budget time frames for the Aboriginal cultural centre, for example, which is a major initiative of the state government that will focus on delivering an Aboriginal cultural centre by 2030. In terms of other initiatives, some programs will be completed, such as the event suppliers support program through the alfresco support program. That will no longer continue because we have returned to pre-COVID-19 levels and those supports were specific to the COVID situation. There is an adjustment to the arts lotteries special purpose grant expenditure. This was progressed to recognise an increased funding provision from the Lotteries Commission, which saw a reflow of expenditure in the arts lotteries special purpose account—the 2022–23 estimated actuals increased by \$4.4 million. That is the explanation for some of those changes.

[9.10 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does culture and the arts industry support include funding for Coldplay?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: That is a tourism initiative.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Given the minister’s appearance at the media event in relation to Coldplay —

The CHAIR: None of this is in this particular division, member.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I know that Chris Martin is very concerned that the minister might appear at some later stage, given his efforts. Given the fact that the minister was at the media conference, can he advise whether part of the agreement for Coldplay coming to Perth involves any geo-blocking of customers seeking to purchase tickets in order to give preference to visitors from overseas or members of cabinet?

The CHAIR: That should be directed to the Minister for Tourism. Let us move on.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: There is no line item for this because it is not within my remit. The member needs to ask the Minister for Tourism those sorts of questions.

The CHAIR: Let us move on. The dogs are barking and the caravan is moving on. Anything further on this division?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I think we will move on to the next one.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I thank the advisers from the two portfolio areas who have joined us.

The appropriation was recommended.

Division 37: Western Australian Sports Centre Trust, \$140 939 000 —

Ms M.M. Quirk, Chair.

Mr D.A. Templeman, Minister for Sport and Recreation.

Mr D. Etherton, Chief Executive Officer.

Mr N. Lucas, Chief Financial Officer.

Ms T. Widdicombe, Chief of Staff, Minister for Sport and Recreation.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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I give the call to the member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: At the bottom of page 554, under “Spending Changes”, is the line item “Optus Stadium Maintenance Obligations”. I note that the figure goes from \$4.5 million in the 2023–24 budget up to \$7.8 million and then \$14.5 million. Can the minister enlighten us on what that large increase is all about?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am happy for the chief executive officer to respond.

Mr D. Etherton: Optus Stadium has a design, build, finance and maintain contract. Obviously, the maintenance of a billion-dollar building costs a fair bit of money. That has a consumer price index provision in it. The growth in those numbers is really a response to the CPI provision in the maintenance of that asset. The member will notice that in the final out year, it is actually negative or it goes down slightly. That is because that was already dealt with in the midyear review.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Would the minister or the CEO be able to detail what the maintenance items are? Is there a list? We are talking about \$14 million in the out year. What might those items involve? Is it the seating? Is it external?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The answer to this could be quite lengthy, but I will ask the chief executive officer to respond.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It can be a general summary.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I would have thought that some of them would be pretty expected, but I will ask the CEO to respond.

Mr D. Etherton: Under the DBFM agreement, the facilities maintenance bit of it is all encompassing and involves every single bit of maintaining that asset. It involves some cleaning and maintenance of the air conditioners, carpets, seats and the roof—everything. Maintenance of every single asset in that building is undertaken under the FM, except a very minor part. As Mia will be able to tell members, a very minor part of the furniture, fixtures and equipment is done by the operator. The FF&E is not done under the DBFM agreement but under the operator’s agreement. The overwhelming majority of every asset that sits in that building is maintained by Westadium under the FM agreement. That is what that refers to. It is a holistic maintenance agreement.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The member can be confident that it is on the mark.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: It was a very good deal.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to paragraph 2 under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency” and the economic benefits expected from the FIFA Women’s World Cup.

The CHAIR: Is that page 555?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Sorry, chair—page 555 of budget paper No 2, volume 2. What will those economic benefits be, how will they be calculated and how will the actual be measured?

[9.20 pm]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: As the member is aware, Perth’s success as one of the host cities was subject to a bid by Tourism WA. The member’s question about the assessment of the economic benefit is, effectively, best directed to the Minister for Tourism, as it was an initiative undertaken by Tourism Western Australia to secure it. The member would be aware that from a capital upgrade benefit the rectangular stadium—it will be called the Perth Rectangular Stadium during the FIFA Women’s World Cup—will see some major upgrades to HBF Stadium to ensure that it is up to standard for that international event. That has seen some significant money invested in it to deliver a range of upgrades to the facility’s change rooms and player comfort services through to the new screens, new turf and a whole range of other upgrades. They are, of course, legacy items because the facility will become an even better facility for the existing co-demands on it and also, of course, for future programming from both a sporting and cultural perspective. As the member may be aware, Tourism WA has a budget that is allocated for such business with regard to the cost benefit. That line of inquiry is appropriate to the Minister for Tourism.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to the first sentence on page 555 and the commentary around live events and the impact that COVID has obviously had over the last couple of years. In particular, the financial model for Optus Stadium

was reliant on a certain number of events and football and cricket games being held. How is the impact of COVID reflected in the budget? Was that cost just absorbed by the government or is there an ongoing or trailing impact of not having those events generating income as a result of the live concerts not being able to take place?

Mr D.A. Templeman: I will ask the director general to respond to that particular part of the question, but one thing that I want to highlight to members is that we are expecting the patronage of VenuesWest-controlled assets to be some seven million patrons. That is in the forward estimates. That is a demonstration of the volume of activity that is filling our venues post COVID. We are now seeing a suite of cultural and sporting events and sporting activities being programmed at our key venues, including Optus Stadium. The fact that more people than ever will be utilising those venues is obviously a tremendous outcome. It also drives employment. Casual staff, for example, are required for an increasing number of events. It will be interesting to see the impact of—I do not know which football team the member supports—the poor showing of one of our football teams for the patronage at home games for the rest of the season.

Ms M.J. Davies: It is not my team.

Mr D.J. Kelly: What happens if they just fold the club? What impact will that have?

Ms M.J. Davies: That is typical of Eagles supporters—three poor games and they are all out if they are not winning!

Mr D.A. Templeman: The member hit a raw nerve!

Ms M.J. Davies: Have a bit of staying power!

Mr D.A. Templeman: The projection of seven million patrons in attendance is a remarkable turnaround. There is an impact on forgone revenues from empty stadiums because of COVID, remembering that although we had a closed border, we were still able to secure some significant events, including, of course, the AFL grand final in 2020, which was a major coup. We were still able to hold a range of things at our venues, subject to lockdowns and restrictions on the number of people who were able to attend. I will ask the chief executive officer to perhaps respond to the earlier part of the question.

Mr D. Etherton: As the minister said, seven million customers will be a new record if we get there. The record number of visitors in any year is 6.1 million visitors, and that was in 2018–19. We are looking to beat that in 2023–24. In terms of the specific question about the additional cost to government of the COVID era, probably the closest way to link that to the existing budget papers is the line item “Service appropriations” under the heading “Income from government” on page 560. Members can see a line item where the service appropriations dropped in 2021–22 by about \$15 million across the forward estimates. To answer the member’s specific question, about \$31 million worth of additional top-up COVID-19 funding was received over the three years affected by COVID-19, in 2019–20, 2020–21 and 2021–22. It went a little like that, obviously, as COVID did, but that is the money we got.

The Chair: That does not translate in *Hansard*.

Mr D. Etherton: It does not translate? The additional resources required in those years was quite variable, depending on where we were at in the COVID cycle.

The Chair: That did the trick.

Mr P.J. Rundle: I refer to the first significant issue impacting the agency on page 555 that the member for Central Wheatbelt brought up. It says —

However, the competition provided by alternative venues at other Australian destinations is significant.

This is a genuine question about Optus Stadium. The patrons can get mid-strength beer, but there are parts of the stadium where some patrons can get full-strength beer. Can the minister explain the logic of only getting mid-strength beer but right behind the mid-strength beer patrons can buy bourbon, gin and tonic and all those other spirits? How does that translate? Why is full-strength beer not on offer in some places in the stadium?

The Chair: Is that a liquor licensing question?

Mr D.A. Templeman: It is a policy question. I did not realise that the member for Roe was a member of the temperance movement because I have seen him at places within the stadium that are not subject to the restrictions of lower alcohol beverages. However, my understanding—the chief executive officer might be able to add some clarity—is that the various policies and practices are determined and then implemented, be it tenders for various beverage providers through to restrictions or otherwise on alcohol content, and they are always an interesting item of debate. I understand they are revisited on occasion.

The chief executive officer might want to briefly add his thoughts on this matter.

[9.30 pm]

Mr D. Etherton: As the member is aware, VenuesLive runs Optus Stadium on behalf of VenuesWest. VenuesLive liaises with the liquor licensing regulator to understand the entire volume of alcohol being distributed across the whole

stadium and comes up with a plan in terms of the provision of full-strength alcohol in some areas and mid-strength alcohol in others. I might add that Gage Roads Brewing Company has some magnificent mid-strength beers that taste just as good as full-strength beers.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It is a genuine question, minister. The logic does not stand up for me when a person can buy only mid-strength beer, yet spirits are available to purchase right next door. That is a genuine question that mystifies me in some ways.

The CHAIR: It is not really a question; it is a statement. We need to move on.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have a new question. I refer to the bottom of page 560 and the line item “Seed Funding — Urban Sports/E-sports”. Can I have some detail on that item, minister?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I will ask the chief executive officer to respond, but I want to highlight the emerging importance and opportunities with urban sports and e-sports continues to increase. I do not want Western Australia to be left behind in terms of further investigations about what we should be supporting or encouraging in that space. Melbourne has a couple of different venues that cater for e-sports on quite a reasonable scale. We know that within the broader gaming industry, there is an increasing interest in and support of e-sports. That allocation is to allow for further exploration of what that might mean for Western Australia and to inform us, if you like, of what potential infrastructure we might need to provide. Quite often these places are essentially black boxes that are wired with all the up-to-date technology that allows people to gather and play e-sports in big numbers whilst being connected to players around the world. I have seen a couple of examples of this in Melbourne. Western Australia needs to not ignore that. That \$100 000 has been allocated to further explore the opportunities in that area. The director general might want to add something to that—sorry, I have promoted him. I defer to the chief executive officer.

Mr D. Etherton: During COVID, we had less activity in our venues, so we looked at a number of our longer term strategies, one of which was our targeted sport strategy. In updating that targeted sport strategy, we made it very clear that we need to focus on sports of the future. We need to focus on sports that will get kids involved in the future. In essence, this is a very small amount of money to do some initial investigation, as the minister said, into what facilities might need to be provided for those two areas. It is the way that VenuesWest classified it in our accounts that made it stand out like that.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 560, the bottom of the income statement table and the line item “Surplus/(Deficiency) for the Period”. They are not huge numbers but there is deficiency along that bottom line. Can the minister outline how we have arrived at that position?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am happy to ask the CEO to respond.

Mr D. Etherton: I draw the member’s attention to the top line of page 561 that talks about the current cash assets that VenuesWest has. Although those current cash assets are not all what we call “unrestricted cash”, a portion of those are unrestricted cash. Our capacity as an organisation to absorb those losses in the out years at the moment is there. Those cash assets on the top of page 561 are often things like the money for Coldplay tickets sitting in the bank, but a portion of that is unallocated. Then when we do the budget with Treasury, it has no concerns with giving us a small deficit when we have an unallocated amount of cash to cover it.

The appropriation was recommended.

Division 43: Planning, Lands and Heritage — Services 3 and 4, Heritage, \$50 670 000 —

Ms M.M. Quirk, Chair.

Mr D.A. Templeman, Minister for Heritage.

Mr A. Kannis, Director General.

Mr V. Davies, Assistant Director General, Heritage and Property Services.

Mr M. Hanrahan, Chief Financial Officer.

Ms T. Widdicombe, Chief of Staff, Minister for Heritage.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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Mr R.S. LOVE: Can I get some clarity, chair? The estimates committee schedule lists services 3 and 4, yet service 4 is actually Aboriginal affairs, which I thought was dealt with this morning. Is now the time to talk about service 4 as well?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: No—only service 3.

The CHAIR: It is not Aboriginal heritage, in other words.

Mr R.S. LOVE: There is a mistake in the committee schedule. The meeting of great minds made a mistake.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The meeting of great minds over there.

The CHAIR: Does anyone have a question on division 43?

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to page 720 and explanation of significant movements that notes —

1. The decrease in Total Cost of Service between the 2022–23 Budget and 2022–23 Estimated Actual of \$1.6 million is mainly due to deferral of expenditure for the Tropical Cyclone Seroja Cultural and Heritage Asset Clean-up and Repair Grants program to 2023–24.

Can the minister provide some clarity around the reason for the delay? Was it because the grants were slow in being applied for or was there another reason for that delay?

[9.40 pm]

The CHAIR: That is note 1 on page 720, minister.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am happy to ask Mr Hanrahan to respond and explain, and I might add to that.

Mr M. Hanrahan: The delay is because we are actually not getting a lot of claims for grants and assistance in this. A lot of the affected people are covered by their own insurance, so we keep carrying the money over, waiting for potential applicants to come through. At some stage, a time will come when we will return that money if it is no longer required.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The current status is that three claims have been paid in total; that is my understanding. A total of \$40 154.84 has been paid out, and a total of 50 applicants have been recorded, but the numbers expected to undertake and claim for eligible works are significantly lower and expected to be only in single figures. As Mr Hanrahan highlighted, a lot of the damage to some of the properties of a heritage nature has been covered by owners' insurance.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I have heard that claim often enough, but, as a local member, I also know that people were underinsured or simply could not complete the project. Correct me if I am wrong, but under the terms of the grants, people have to complete projects and then claim back the funds. The problem is that if they could actually complete the project, they would be liquid enough to complete the project. The minister can see the problem here.

The CHAIR: Okay. We get the question.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The question is: has there been any discussion within the department about the appropriateness of the criteria that were set, and has any feedback been given to either the Department of Fire and Emergency Services or the Department of the Premier and Cabinet on those issues?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: First, the department maintains contact with the current applicants to assist in their recovery and conservation works. In terms of criteria, people have until June 2024 to complete the remaining works and make a claim, so they still have just over 12 months in which to complete those works and make a claim. I am assured that the department will continue to work with applicants on that time line, and if there are unforeseen circumstances, I am sure that the department will consider them on an individual basis.

Mr D.J. KELLY: I refer to page 722 of budget paper No 2 and ask the minister: can he give an update on the conservation work being undertaken at Fremantle Prison and what we can expect over the coming financial year?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I thank the member for the question. Fremantle Prison is a very important heritage and award-winning tourism asset for the state. In fact, it won a number of tourism awards. Visitation numbers were impacted during COVID, but those numbers have now recovered. The ongoing demand for conservation work is apparent. In March this year, I announced extensive conservation works on some key components of Fremantle Prison, including the prison's commissariat, the main cell block and the parade ground. Those \$3.16 million worth of works have been completed. That was a 20-month program funded by state and federal governments. A lot of the work was done by Aboriginal contractors, businesses or firms and Aboriginal workers, which I think is a great achievement, and that work is of a very high quality.

We have committed \$17.8 million to the prison, including \$12.6 million over the next four years, and that will continue to do essential conservation work and will allow greater activation of the site. The prison is now a popular

site for concerts and for cultural hire, as well as for traditional tourism-related visitations and tours. The tunnel tours continue to be popular and have recommenced. Overall, the government has made a significant investment in this World Heritage Listed and UNESCO World Heritage site. We will continue to support the Fremantle Prison director with the strategic plan that continues to look at activation opportunities. The McGowan government has invested and committed some important money over the coming four years.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Page 725 refers to local government heritage consultancy grants. Can the minister outline what those grants are for? Are they to help local governments with the preparation of heritage lists? What is the aim of that?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Clearly, local government has a critical role in identifying and considering the protection of heritage assets within its municipality. Essentially, part of this grant program has been to support local governments in updating what used to be called “municipal inventories” but are now called “surveys”. Through community heritage grants, this fund also allows them to activate community events and activities that assist in the broader heritage interpretation of projects. A variety have been funded over the period and will continue to be funded under the community heritage grants. Funding of up to \$20 000 is offered. Quite often, we find in regional communities that an event or activity is focused on a particularly famous or well-loved heritage site or place, and that money is available for local governments and not-for-profits to promote and celebrate our history.

The appropriation was recommended.

Division 46: Heritage Council of Western Australia, \$1 540 000 —

Ms M.M. Quirk, Chair.

Mr D.A. Templeman, Minister for Heritage.

Mr A. Kannis, Director General.

Mr V. Davies, Assistant Director General, Heritage and Property Services.

Mr M. Hanrahan, Chief Financial Officer.

Ms T. Widdicombe, Chief of Staff, Minister for Heritage.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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Are there any questions about the Heritage Council of Western Australia? I call the Leader of the Opposition.

[9.50 pm]

Mr R.S. LOVE: I refer to page 761 and the heading “Heritage Grants Program” under significant issues impacting the agency. Could the minister please tell me how many heritage grants were provided last year? Is that number fairly constant or have there been lumps along the way?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Last year and each year, we announce the program and then, later of course, those that are successful. In 2023–23, the program received 45 applications, and, of those, 25 state heritage grants and 13 community heritage grants were deemed eligible, which makes 38 in total. A total of \$1.1 million was awarded. They vary in amounts and, from memory, the most is up to \$100 000. They vary and support restoration works, heritage works or conservation works for a variety of applicants.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 763 and the heading “Cultural Heritage Conservation Services”. Can I just clarify that under the Heritage Council there is no role in relation to Aboriginal cultural heritage? Are the services provided under this section the purview of the department, and do they include Aboriginal heritage management? Is there overlap? Is there a role anywhere for the Heritage Council in Aboriginal cultural heritage?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: No.

The CHAIR: No. That is enough, minister; we have to move on.

The appropriation was recommended.

Division 47: National Trust of Australia (WA), \$4 244 000 —

Ms M.M. Quirk, Chair.

Mr D.A. Templeman, Minister for Heritage.

Mr J. Donaldson, Chief Executive Officer.

Mr M. D’Souza, Chief Financial Officer.

Mr E. Sirna, Deputy Chief Executive Officer.

Ms T. Widdicombe, Chief of Staff, Minister for Heritage.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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I give the call to the member for Roe—a quick one.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 769 and under completed works is line item “Collie Roundhouse Restoration”. It has \$999 000 estimated expenditure, then \$78 000 for 2022–23. Hon Alannah MacTiernan once spoke about this as a project to create a coffee house et cetera. Is the National Trust part of that restoration project complete? It is under completed works, but I understand there is still work to be done.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: There was an allocation to deliver a range of works on the Collie Roundhouse. The ultimate delivery of a tourist-related entity there is subject to negotiations with a commercial provider. I will ask the CEO to make further comment.

Mr J. Donaldson: The funds are all but expended and those funds, in the main, have been used for deconstraining the site and the conservation of the fabric of the roundhouse to the extent that we would make it safe after the deconstraining. The funds that remain will be used for the development of a master plan for the site, which will then express the proponent’s concept so it can move to a more granular quotation phase for the next development stage.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I turn to page 770. In 2022–23, under income of other revenue, there is a cost of \$4.4 million. Could the minister explain why that is \$2 million more than what was received?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am happy to ask the CFO to respond.

Mr M. D’Souza: In 2019, there were changes to accounting standards AASB 15 and AASB 1058. The National Trust receives money through appeals and foundations in that period, especially when we have foundations as well—that was previously treated as income and expenditure in our income statement. With the changes in the Australian Accounting Standards Board standards, it is no longer shown as an income and an expenditure; we show the appeals balance as a liability in a balance sheet. That is the reason that when we prepared the budget, we took the total figure of appeals and foundation as income. The total net effect of the foundations and appeals income is \$1 650 000, which has now been adjusted through the budget process in the estimated actuals for this financial year and in all the forward estimates going forward from next financial year.

The appropriation was recommended.

Western Australian Institute of Sport —

The CHAIR: In addition, I note that the Western Australian Institute of Sport was not examined.

Committee adjourned at 9.58 pm
