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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

Thursday, 23 September 2021

Legislative Assembly

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ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

The meeting commenced at 9.00 am.

Division 3: Premier and Cabinet — Service 4, Aboriginal Affairs, \$36 405 000 —

Ms M.M. Quirk, Chair.

Dr A.D. Buti, Minister for Finance representing the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs.

Ms E. Roper, Director General.

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

Mrs S. Black, Deputy Director General, Infrastructure, Economy and State Services.

Ms S. Meaghan, Assistant Director, Native Title Negotiation.

Ms T. Ninnette, Director, Aboriginal Engagement Directorate.

Mr A. Brender-A-Brandis, Chief Financial Officer; Manager, Finance and Payroll.

Mr S. Hayden, Senior Policy Officer, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. It is the intention of the chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 1 October 2021. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

The member for North West Central.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 58 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. The Aboriginal cultural heritage bill has \$795 000 attached to it. Could the minister explain what the 2021–22 budget estimate of \$795 000 is for?

Dr A.D. BUTI: This relates to the Aboriginal cultural heritage bill that the minister is hoping to bring on later this year. It is a very significant transforming bill to come before the house. Obviously, a lot of work has been done on the bill in consultation with various groups including various Aboriginal groups. The consultation has involved a lot of work. The bill took in a lot of submissions, but that \$795 000 has been provided to the Department of the Premier and Cabinet to support work from 1 July 2021 to 31 December 2021, which includes \$620 000 allocated to support the bill's implementation team, comprising nine FTEs; \$100 000 allocated to continue stakeholder engagement, which is a critical component to ensure that stakeholders are prepared for the introduction of the legislation, and commence consultation on key supporting documentation; and \$75 000 to engage professional services to undertake ongoing funding modelling to ensure that a sustainable model is put in place to support the new legislative framework into the future.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Given that part of the \$795 000 is for stakeholder engagement, is the minister able to provide a list of the stakeholder engagement that the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs or the department has carried out to ensure that consultation has occurred on the Aboriginal cultural heritage bill?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As I said, there were three rounds of stakeholder consultation and over 380 submissions. More than 1 500 people have participated in around 175 workshops, stakeholder meetings or public information sessions held across the state, most recently in August this year. Once the new legislation is in place, extensive future consultation and engagement is planned to inform the development of key documents to inform the legislation, such as draft regulations, Aboriginal cultural heritage management code, time lines and activity categories. In regard to

the specific names of who has been involved, I am sure that the member knows many of the people in his electorate who have been involved. If the member wants to put on notice a request for a list, he can. I am not sure that will be of any great value to the member but if he wants to put it on notice it is up to him.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: We are playing this game of putting things on notice. These are the estimates hearings. Can the minister supply as supplementary information the stakeholder consultation engagement that the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs has undertaken on a very important bill? In the interests of being open, transparent and accountable, can the minister provide it as supplementary information, rather than asking me to put it on notice as a bit of a cop-out.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I do not think it is a cop-out at all. Does the member want me to start reading out some of the list?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Go for it.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Let us start reading out some of the list now. I will talk about where the consultation was held and then I will go into some of the organisations.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is important to know because a criticism of the bill is a lack of consultation.

[9.10 am]

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am about to tell the member, and if the member wants to stop me at any time, please do. I will go back to 2018; over 100 workshops and information sessions were held across the state as part of the review of the Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972 and the development of the Aboriginal cultural heritage bill. There were 28 workshop information sessions in the Kimberley and 18 in the Pilbara. In 2020, over 75 meetings with stakeholders were held as part of the development of the Aboriginal cultural heritage bill. Six meetings were held with Kimberley-based Aboriginal stakeholder organisations and 21 meetings were held with Pilbara-based Aboriginal stakeholder organisations. In August 2021, five native title rep bodies and 22 prescribed bodies corporate from across Western Australia attended the ACHB stakeholder information sessions in Perth. Three were Kimberley-based PBCs and nine were Pilbara-based PBCs.

The following workshops were held in 2019: 15 May at Warmun in the Kimberley; 16 May at Balgo in the Kimberley; 16 May at Karratha in the Pilbara; 16 May at Warburton in the goldfields–Esperance; 17 May at Kalgoorlie in the goldfields; 17 May at Kununurra in the Kimberley; 17 May at Roebourne in the Pilbara; 18 May in Karratha; 18 May in Kununurra; 21 May in Katanning; 21 May in Carnarvon; 22 May in Busselton; 22 May in Geraldton; 23 and 24 May in Bunbury; 24 May in Meekatharra; 30 May in Moora; and 18 March in Kalgoorlie.

The following information sessions were held in 2019: on 22 March in Geraldton with the Yamatji Indigenous land use agreement traditional owner negotiation team; 1 April in Kununurra; 2 April in Fitzroy Crossing; 3 April in Broome; 16 April in Katanning; 17 April in Albany; 29 April in Geraldton; 30 April in Port Hedland; 30 April and 1 May in Moora; 1 May in Karratha; 1 May in Northam; 2 May in Meekatharra; 2 May in Roebourne; 2 May in Tom Price; 7 May in Busselton; 7 May in Derby; 7 May in Kalgoorlie; 7 May in Narrogin; 8 May in Bunbury; 8 May in Looma; 8 May in Warburton; 9 May in Fitzroy Crossing; 9 May in Leonora; 13 and 14 May in Broome; 14 May in Midland; 15 May in Bidyadanga; 15 May in Jigalong; 16 May in Ardyaloon; 16 May in Balgo; 16 May in Newman; 20 May in Carnarvon; 20 May in Esperance; 21 May in Halls Creek; 22 May in Kununurra; 22 May in Wiluna; and 23 May in Onslow.

The following relates to phase 3 consultation on the bill in 2020: 21 September in Albany; 22 September in Moora and Broome; 23 September, a closed meeting with Kimberley PBCs in Broome; 23 September in Bunbury; 24 September in Fitzroy Crossing and Midland; 25 September in Geraldton; 25 September in Kununurra; 29 September in Karratha; 29 September in Warburton; 30 September in Kalgoorlie; 30 September in Port Hedland; 1 October in Leonora and Newman; and 2 October in Esperance and Carnarvon.

The following phase 3 consultation–targeted stakeholder meetings were held in 2020: 4 September in Perth with the Western Australian Local Government Association. Does the member want to know the individual people who represented WALGA, or will WALGA do?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am more interested in which Aboriginal organisations were consulted.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The member did not ask that.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I asked for the consultation.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am about to tell the member now.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: If I were the minister, I would just put it as a —

Dr A.D. BUTI: On 7 September —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am happy for the minister to keep reading it out.

Dr A.D. BUTI: In 2020, a meeting was held on 7 September in South Hedland with the Kariyarra Aboriginal Corporation, and on 7 September with the Karlka Nyiyaparli Aboriginal Corporation. I am sorry about my

pronunciations. A meeting was held on 8 September with the Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation, and on 9 September with the Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation. Does the member want only the Aboriginal corporations? What about others?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Aboriginal corporations.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The following meetings were held in 2020: 11 September, Wintawari Guruma Aboriginal Corporation; 11 September, native title tribunal; 14 September, Kimberley Land Council; 14 September, Nyamba Buru Yawuru Aboriginal Corporation; 15 September in the goldfields, Native Title Services; 15 September, Central Desert Native Title Services; 16 September, South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council; 16 and 17 September in Perth, Banjima Native Title Aboriginal Corporation; 18 September, Ngadju Native Title Aboriginal Corporation; 18 September, Yindjibarndi Aboriginal Corporation; and 18 September, Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation.

Also in 2020, the Aboriginal Cultural Material Committee was consulted on 22 September, the Aboriginal Legal Service was consulted on 5 February and the Aboriginal Lands Trust board was consulted on 6 February. Also consulted were the following: Yindjibarndi Aboriginal Corporation on 6 February; Kimberley Land Council on 11 February; Nyamba Buru Yawuru on 11 February; the Shire of Broome on 11 February; the National Native Title Tribunal on 11 February; the Puutu Kuntj Kurrama and Pinikura Aboriginal Corporation on 13 February; the Robe River Kuruma Aboriginal Corporation on 13 February; Yamatji on 13 February; Yindjibarndi Aboriginal Corporation on 17 February; Wintawari Guruma Aboriginal Corporation on 17 February; Yamatji again, on 20 February; Aboriginal Advisory Council of WA on 25 February; and the Aboriginal Legal Service on 27 February. Then we have South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council on 5 March; Aboriginal Cultural Material Committee on 9 March; Goldfields families on 23 and 24 March; Kariyarra Aboriginal Corporation on 17 August; Karlka Niyaparli Aboriginal Corporation on 17 August; PKKP Aboriginal Corporation on 18 August; Robe River Kuruma Aboriginal Corporation on 18 August; Yamatji on 20 August; Kimberley Land Council on 24 August; Yawuru on 24 August; and Banjima Native Title Aboriginal Corporation on 28 August.

There were two stakeholder information sessions in August 2021—on 18 August with 13 representative bodies and on 19 August with 14 rep bodies. I have some more from this year: on 13 September with the Aboriginal Cultural Material Committee; on 20 September with Wajarri Yamatji; on 16 September with Palyku; on 16 September with Aboriginal heritage and native title, Lands and Main Roads; on 12 October with Robe River; and on 15 October with Yamatji. Five prescribed bodies corporate are still waiting to be heard.

[9.20 am]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is the minister able to table the document?

Dr A.D. BUTI: No. I think Hansard got that.

The CHAIR: Hansard has got its work cut out for it, I think!

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is not very fair on Hansard.

The CHAIR: There is no capacity to table in this setting.

Dr A.D. BUTI: We will give a copy of the list to Hansard.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Prior to the 2021 election, when the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs was Hon Ben Wyatt, draft legislation was released for consultation. After the 2021 election, there has been no draft legislation so there has been no visibility. Will people have an opportunity to look at the draft Aboriginal cultural heritage bill before it becomes a fait accompli and is rammed through both houses of this Parliament?

The CHAIR: That is enough of a question for the minister to answer.

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is the same draft.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: So the government is working on the same draft. When are we likely to see the bill? The minister stated that hopefully it will be this year.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Can I just correct myself, member? It is the same draft bill but, as a result of consultation, amendments have been drafted and are being worked on at the moment. When they are available, they will be released.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I suppose that was the point that I was getting at. There are amendments to the draft legislation of the previous government. There is a lot of concern about what the draft amendments will look like. When will the stakeholders get an opportunity to look at the draft amendments? Will it be when the government introduces the bill into Parliament or will the government allow the community, given all the consultation already undertaken, to review the amendments before the bill is introduced into Parliament?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The amendments that came about in response to the consultation have been discussed at those consultations. The amendments will not be a surprise to the various groups because they have been involved in the consultation that led to the amendments and the discussions about those amendments.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I do not know whether the minister is able to answer this next question given that he is not the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. Does the minister feel confident that enough stakeholder engagement has occurred given that many Aboriginal organisations have commented that they fear the amendments being one-sided?

The CHAIR: Member, I need to stop you there. I think you prefaced the question with the fact that this minister is not the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, and we are dealing with solid facts rather than feelings.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Fair call, Madam Chair; I take that on board.

Will there be an opportunity to look at the amendments prior to the bill being introduced into Parliament?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As the member would realise, there has been much discussion about this bill by various —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: There have been many protests as well.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Which would tell the member that people are well aware of what is in the bill.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The answer is no; the bill will be introduced without any further consultation once those amendments have been written up.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Consultation and discussions are continuing as we speak, member. Consultation is consultation. Just because there is consultation, that does not mean that a bill will always agree with the concerns of any particular group.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: That is the concern.

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is with any bill.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: A further question, Madam Chair.

The CHAIR: You are pushing it. I will give you two more.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: When will the bill be introduced into Parliament, and will it be introduced in the Legislative Assembly or the Legislative Council?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As far as timing, it is still planned for this year. I assume it will have to be in the lower house because it involves financial issues.

The CHAIR: A further and last question on this, member for North West Central.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Going back to the original question about the \$795 000 that is in the 2021–22 budget for the Aboriginal cultural heritage bill, is the minister able to map out the next 12 months of the rollout of the bill? The minister mentioned—I am trying to think of the changes —

Dr A.D. BUTI: The draft amendments?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: No, not the amendments. It will come to me. What other amendments will arise after the legislation is passed by Parliament? What is the pathway of the next 12 months?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Member, with all due respect, I am not Nostradamus; I do not know how the bill is going to go in the debate in Parliament. We do not know what will happen so it is hard to say what amendments will come in. We will have to leave that —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Yes, but the minister is not stupid either. He knows that the government has an absolute majority in both houses so it is going to get through.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Let us see how the bill goes through Parliament.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am not sure whether this falls under this section, but I am interested in this matter. I refer to page 58, budget paper No 2, volume 1. The third paragraph states that the government continues to prioritise negotiated settlements. I have been told by the local government in Geraldton that Oakajee land has been transferred to the combined group of five prescribed bodies corporate—that it was part of the settlement. Has the title of the Oakajee estate been transferred to the prescribed bodies corporate as part of that settlement or is that claim by the local council not true?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Oakajee is not part of the south west native title settlement.

Dr D.J. HONEY: So just to be clear, it has not been transferred. I was dubious, but I was told that by the shire of Geraldton.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I think that has to be deferred to the division on the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage.

[9.30 am]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 128 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the provision for the Aboriginal cultural heritage bill.

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is not in this section.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is Aboriginal affairs.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The member will need to leave that until we discuss the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage, which comes up later.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I will turn to this question then: I refer to page 58 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, under “Aboriginal Affairs Reform (including Native Title Negotiations and Closing the Gap)”. Can the minister provide a summary of the progress of the Closing the Gap national agreement and how Western Australians are performing?

Dr A.D. BUTI: In other words, the government’s performance with regard to Closing the Gap? Closing the Gap is obviously a very important program of reform in the Aboriginal affairs portfolio. The government prepared an initial implementation plan for Closing the Gap that demonstrates our commitment to work more closely in partnership with Aboriginal stakeholders. The first iteration of the implementation plan for Closing the Gap was submitted to the joint council on 6 August 2021. The plan comprises two parts. The first summarises the government’s high-level approach to the reform and targets and explains how this is aligned to the Aboriginal empowerment strategy. The second part is effectively a stocktake of strategies, programs and initiatives that contribute to the reforms and targets. The plan will provide a critical point of transparency and accountability, as well as the starting point for future planning. It creates a baseline from which the WA government’s current approach can be assessed as a whole and further reforms can be developed. The government has committed \$3.4 million for grants to support the strengthening of the Aboriginal community-controlled sector in WA. A further \$1.4 million will support the establishment of a consortium of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations.

Mr Y. MUBARAKAI: What resources is the Department of the Premier and Cabinet providing, and what work is it doing, to protect remote Aboriginal communities during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As we know, the issue of protecting remote communities from COVID-19 is a critical part of the work of the government and the community. The complex task team was created early in the pandemic by the State Emergency Coordinator and was transferred to the Department of the Premier and Cabinet in mid-2020. The team, now called the remote Aboriginal communities mobilisation unit, works to minimise the specific risk presented by the pandemic to remote Aboriginal communities. The unit coordinates between communities, government and other stakeholders to ensure communities can find solutions to problems that arise through the pandemic. It supports the State Emergency Coordinator in administering the emergency remote Aboriginal communities directions that limit access to remote Aboriginal communities, and administers the remote Aboriginal COVID-19 emergency relief fund. There is a \$3.1 million royalties for regions funding call to address emergency needs in remote communities during the pandemic. I should also say that a number of agencies have been involved to protect remote Aboriginal communities, besides the Department of the Premier and Cabinet—the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage, the Office of the Auditor General, Western Australia Police Force, the Department of Justice, the Department of Transport and the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries. Over the period of the pandemic, 31 staff members from 11 agencies have served in the unit or its predecessor, the complex task team for remote Aboriginal communities. The unit has no operational budget but administers the \$3.1 million remote Aboriginal communities COVID-19 emergency relief fund.

Last week, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and I had the pleasure of travelling to the Tjuntjuntjara community, one of the most remote communities probably in the world. It is only 200 kilometres from the South Australian border. Vaccination rates for first injections are quite impressive there. But the biggest concern—we were witness to this, and I have heard it from other communities—is the disgraceful misinformation being peddled by certain evangelical churches. It is appalling that they are putting Aboriginal lives in danger by peddling mistruth and absolutely appalling misinformation. I ask anyone who has influence in those organisations to please request that they stop peddling that misinformation.

The CHAIR: I remind members to quote a page number before they ask a question.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The minister would be aware that I have a large number of Aboriginal communities in my electorate, and also towns that have a high Aboriginal population; for example, Meekatharra, Carnarvon and Wiluna. We often hear about Aboriginal communities but do not hear about towns that probably have a higher Indigenous population than many of those communities. My evidence is that it is not an evangelical group that is preventing people from getting vaccinated, but the inability, or hesitancy, of people to walk into a hospital, or not knowing when they can get a vaccine. That is the issue.

The CHAIR: Is there a question here, member?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Which is the budget item?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am following the member for Jandakot’s question after the minister’s response. Has the department considered having a mobile vaccination clinic travelling around towns and communities, and not just for an hour or two? I will use Meekatharra as an example of a place that has one of the worst vaccination rates in this country. Could the mobile clinic staff stay there for a week and actually knock on doors and get people to be vaccinated? Has the department advocated for something like that?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The member asks a very important question because it relates to not just remote communities, but also the towns. When I mentioned the evangelical churches, I meant that they are not preventing immunisation, but

they are discouraging it. Obviously, they are not physically preventing it—as far as I am aware. With regard to the member’s question, that really does come down to the Department of Health. We now have a Vaccine Commander, Mr Dawson, the Commissioner of Police. They are matters he will work through. I know he is trying to address issues everywhere. One of the main reasons Western Australia’s rates may not be as high as New South Wales is obvious: at the moment, we are COVID-19-free and people are complacent. However, the member raises an important question. I know that more vaccination supplies will come on stream. Members must remember that for a long period we just did not have the supply, so even if we did have the mobile booths, there was no supply. I am sure the matters the member raises are being considered by the Department of Health and, more importantly, by the Vaccine Commander. Minister Dawson did meet with police commissioner Dawson this week.

[9.40 am]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is extremely important because we hear about vaccination targets of 80 per cent or 85 per cent, and generally that is for the whole of Western Australia’s population. My argument is that it should be 80 or 85 per cent—whatever target is set by the Department of Health—for every city and town in Western Australia because the regions are very vulnerable, given the high Aboriginal population, and the number of people who are travelling around and the resource industry. It would be a tinderbox waiting to explode if there was a COVID case in the regions.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The Commissioner of Police is the Vaccine Commander; I believe the Minister for Health met him this week, not last week. I do not disagree with what the member is saying. Breakdowns have been done for different regions, so we are aware of them. The Minister for Health did a tour of certain parts of the north a few weeks ago and he said that there are some Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal sections of towns where there are high vaccination rates, and others where the rates are very low. I know the commander and the Department of Health are working on a multipronged attack to try to ensure we can improve vaccination rates for the community as a whole, particularly Aboriginal and vulnerable groups.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to the “Service Summary” table on page 60 and the fourth line item, “Government Policy Management Aboriginal Affairs”. Why does the allocation for Aboriginal affairs double between 2020–21 and 2021–22?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The amount for 2019–20 is \$11 million, and then the amount for 2020–21 is nearly double that—is the member asking why it has doubled between 2019–20 and 2020–21?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Yes.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I might ask the chief financial officer to answer that.

Mr A. Brender-A-Brandis: The amount has increased from 2020–21 to 2021–22 by just under \$12.5 million. The significant increases are predominantly with regard to reclassification of grants that were previously underserved and had been reallocated to the service for Aboriginal affairs. They include significant grant allocations such as to the Browse regional body corporate; land and equity Indigenous land use agreements; the remote communities economic transformation project; the Yamatji Nation ILUA; the Dampier Peninsula project, which is royalties for regions—funded; the resolution of native title in the south west of WA; the Yawuru strategic development, also royalties for regions—funded; Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council, also royalties for regions—funded; the Gibson Desert Nature Reserve compensation settlement package; Plan for Our Parks, which is royalties for regions—funded; exploration incentive grants ILUA; and the south west settlement Noongar Boodja Trust and recurrent carryover for the south west settlement.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: There is a significant drop-off in the 2022–23 estimates, continuing in 2023–24. What is the reason for that drop-off?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will refer again to the chief financial officer.

Mr A. Brender-A-Brandis: The reduction in expenditure for the out years is predominantly because of reduced expenditure tapering off with regard to the remote communities economic transformation project for Bidyadanga; the remote Aboriginal communities COVID-19 emergency relief, which is royalties for regions—funded and also has a reduction in expenditure in the out years; Closing the Gap, the Aboriginal community—controlled organisation consortium; the Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council; and some other minor adjustments that taper off in the out years

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to page 62 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the first dot point under “Government Policy Management—Whole-of-Government”, which states —

leadership and coordination of cross-agency solutions to complex issues;

That obviously goes into Aboriginal affairs. Is there any aggregation of the total expenditure specifically related to Aboriginal groups and organisations? The reason I ask is that I believe outcomes for Aboriginal people are probably now no better or worse than they were when I was a child. I am not aiming this at the government; I think this applies to both sides of politics. Problems have been identified, new spending initiatives have been identified, and expenditure has been applied. I have not added it up through the budget as an exercise, but a vast sum of money

is being allocated. However, like the minister, when I go out and see communities, both close to and distant from large regional centres, I see a level of social disadvantage that is confronting and does not meet anyone's standards. It seems the solution is always to apply more funding. I wonder if there might be a point of reflection, especially given the function of this agency, to step back and look at that aggregate. Obviously, it would have to intimately involve the Aboriginal communities, but is that money being expended well? It seems to me that, at both a state and federal level, we are applying more and more money and are not getting the outcomes we would expect.

The CHAIR: Member, I had a bit of trouble discerning whether that was a question or a rhetorical statement. What would you like the minister to respond to?

Dr D.J. HONEY: Is there an intention on the part of the government to step back and look at this holistically, rather than at individual programs, and to do a review of the total expenditure?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As the member mentioned in his reference, the department provides leadership and coordination of cross-agency solutions to complex issues—very complex issues, as the member would well realise. This is a whole-of-government approach. One of the benefits of having Aboriginal affairs elevated to the Department of the Premier and Cabinet is that this department provides leadership and oversight across government. Obviously, part of it is also to try to empower Indigenous groups, and that is a complex and difficult issue. We always try to see that the money is going to be used in a way that will close the gap. One part of the member's question was: are we going to step back? I can assure the member that governments, federal or state, are always reflecting on and looking at ways in which they can do things better, but part of the solution has to be the empowerment and involvement of Aboriginal communities, otherwise it will not succeed in the long run. I am not going to stand here and say that it is an easy issue or that there has been great progress made. There have been wins. The member for North West Central has a lot of involvement with various Aboriginal communities and I am sure he has seen some positives, but there are also a lot of issues as well. All I can really say there, member, is that, yes, at times we have to step back and reflect, and I think that is done constantly, but there really needs to be a whole-of-government approach, which is why it is good that the Department of the Premier and Cabinet is leading the approach. The empowerment of Aboriginal groups has to be paramount.

If I can conclude with this. We need to be careful because it is very easy to always look at the negatives, and there are some dire issues, but there are also some positives. I think one of the keys is obviously to try to improve the educational attainment and retention of Aboriginal students. I think that would go a long way.

[9.50 am]

Dr D.J. HONEY: I recognise that, minister. I think the work that, for example, the Leedal do in Fitzroy River is exemplary and a great example of a very successful partnership of prescribed bodies corporate. In relation to seeing how we are going, I note there were broader Closing the Gap metrics that I did not notice in this section—I am happy to stand corrected—but are we tracking any metrics in outcomes so that the government is measured and held to account for the outcomes resulting from these programs?

The CHAIR: Minister—insofar as it relates to this division and service.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes; it is not really related to this section of the budget as such, but it is an important question. A Closing the Gap matrix is used by the commonwealth and the state to measure, but it is not a particular budget item.

Dr D.J. HONEY: To be clear, the metrics the state government is using are the commonwealth Closing the Gap metrics?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I might ask Fiona Hunt to elaborate; Fiona is the deputy director general, Aboriginal engagement and community policy.

Ms F. Hunt: There are 17 socio-economic targets that form part of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap that WA has signed up to with all the other states and territories. There is national reporting against those targets that form part of the implementation plan and annual reporting and tracking through, I believe, the Productivity Commission at the commonwealth level, but the state is contributing, through the national agreement, on government structures. The 17 socio-economic targets cover the full range of metrics that are being measured that WA state agencies have agreed to track.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to the first paragraph under “Expenses” on page 66 under the financial statements. There is an allocation of \$7 million for various Aboriginal engagements and initiatives. What are those initiatives?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Does the member want to know about the \$7 million for engagement initiatives?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Yes.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I might ask the chief financial officer.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I can take it as supplementary.

Dr A.D. BUTI: No; we have the answer. I will throw to the director general.

Ms E. Roper: It is \$7 million for Aboriginal engagement initiatives. They are the spending changes that are reflected on page 58 of the budget paper.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The original question was: what are those initiatives? As I said, I am happy to take it as a supplementary.

Dr A.D. BUTI: No; why waste time, member. We might as well give you the answer now. We are here to please. The director general will provide it.

Ms E. Roper: It is funding for the implementation of the Aboriginal cultural heritage bill for this financial year; Closing the Gap Aboriginal community-controlled organisation consortium; financial support for the inaugural Yajilarra dialogues; Mirning part B area Indigenous land use agreement; the National Agreement on Closing the Gap implementation resourcing; Aboriginal cultural centre planning project; the south west native title settlement; coordination of special projects and implementation costs; and the Tjiwarl native title compensation resourcing.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Did the director general mention planning for the Aboriginal cultural centre as one of the initiatives?

Ms E. Roper: Yes.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to grants and subsidies on page 66, where it refers to the Aboriginal cultural centre for which \$2 million is allocated. What is the time line, and is that \$2 million on top of the \$7 million?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is within the \$7 million and the time frame is 2028–29.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to “Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies” under the income statement on page 67; paragraph (c) says —

Refer to the Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies table below for further information.

I refer then to the line item “Aboriginal Engagement Unit Grants”. What is the reason behind doubling the funds in 2021–22?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Fiona Hunt to answer this question.

Ms F. Hunt: The increase in funds for the 2021–22 budget estimate primarily refers to the Mirning part B Indigenous land use agreement, which is where the \$1.2 million is being held currently, and the 2021–22 funding for the remote Aboriginal communities emergency relief fund. Some funding is for the Yajilarra dialogue. These are some of the things the member will have seen as spending changes held in this account.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The grants are not in the traditional sense of grants that an Aboriginal community or organisation can apply for. It is money already allocated to projects rather than grants for those applying for grants. Is that correct?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Ms Hunt might want to add to what I am going to say, but they go to communities, so it is a grant for communities.

The CHAIR: Any further questions?

The appropriation was recommended.

[10.00 am]

Division 44: Planning, Lands and Heritage — Service 4, Aboriginal Affairs, \$10 553 000 —

Ms M.M. Quirk, Chair.

Dr A.D. Buti, Minister for Lands representing the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs.

Ms J. Cant, Director General.

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

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

Mr J. Kwong, Chief Finance Officer.

Mr. S. Hayden, Senior Policy Adviser, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. It is my intention to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. This committee’s consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided,

I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 1 October 2021. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

I give the first question to the member for North West Central.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to the significant issues impacting the agency on page 728 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and the subheading "New Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Legislation". What role did the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage play in drafting the Aboriginal cultural heritage bill legislation?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I ask Ms Cant to answer that.

Ms J. Cant: The department worked very closely with the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and was obviously party to all the consultation. Once the legislation is in place, we will play a major operational role in getting that legislation on the ground; therefore, we are working in partnership with Premier and Cabinet.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The answer is that the department of Aboriginal affairs —

Dr A.D. BUTI: There is no department of Aboriginal affairs.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Sorry. The Department of the Premier and Cabinet actually drafted the Aboriginal cultural heritage legislation; is that correct?

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is correct. Of course, it would have been done by the drafting division of Parliamentary Counsel's Office, obviously; but, yes, it is the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. Just to clarify, the Department of the Premier and Cabinet is leading the drafting, drafting changes and so forth, not this department, but it is obviously involved.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: What involvement did the department have in drafting or developing the Aboriginal cultural heritage legislation?

The CHAIR: When you say department, you might need to expand for clarity.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage.

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

Ms J. Cant: As previously advised, we worked with Premier and Cabinet. We were part of the consultation process and we will be part of the delivery process.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to page 728 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and the second paragraph under the heading "Significant Issues Impacting the Agency". Can the minister provide a list of Aboriginal Lands Trust land that has been transferred thus far, and to whom that land went?

Dr A.D. BUTI: This is at page 728, is that right?

Dr D.J. HONEY: Yes; the second paragraph titled "Aboriginal Lands Trust Divestment".

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes. The Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage and the Aboriginal Lands Trust share the joint objective of divesting land currently owned or managed by the Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority and the ALT, jointly referred to as the ALT estate. Divestment of the Aboriginal Lands Trust estate was a commitment of the government at the 2017 election. It was central to increasing direct Aboriginal control of land to strengthen communities, foster economic opportunities, and secure and improve outcomes for Aboriginal people. As at 30 June 2020, the ALT estate comprised 306 properties—approximately 8.7 per cent of the state, or 22 million hectares—with 244 crown reserves, 50 freehold conditional tenure freehold properties, six general purposes leases and five pastoral leases. There are 142 permanent Aboriginal settlements or communities on the ALT estate, with approximately 12 000 residents. In 2019–20, the department received a budget of \$5.841 million through to 2024–25 to facilitate the divestment of 34 priority ALT properties.

There is a list of properties that we have leased. These include a lease to Murray Yarran in Quairading; two leases to Yura Yungi Medical Service Aboriginal Corporation in Halls Creek, with one at 8 Terone Street; a lease to Lombadina Aboriginal Corporation in the Dampier Peninsula; a lease to Coodingnow Incorporated for a property on Great Northern Highway, Paynes Find; two leases to the Winder family for 42 Marmion Street and 38 Marmion Street, East Carnarvon; a lease to MG Dawang Land Pty Ltd in Kununurra; two leases to Badimia Bandi Barna Aboriginal Corporation in Mt Magnet, with one in Priestley Street; three leases to Mungarlu Ngurrarankatja Rirraunkaja RNTBC in the Shire of Wiluna, in the Little Sandy Desert and on the Gunbarrel Highway; and a lease to Nyangumarta Warrarn Aboriginal Corporation on Eighty Mile Beach Road in the Shire of Broome.

More recently, an additional five properties were approved by the ALT and the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs for divestment. These include two Noongar Boodja Land Sub Pty Ltd properties—one in Mt Lawley and the other in Subiaco; a Pila Nguru Aboriginal Corporation property on the Nullarbor, located approximately 80 kilometres south of the Tjuntjuntjara community, where, as I said, I went recently; another unmanaged reserve of the state of Western Australia at 116 Kempton Street, Geraldton; and Lake Gregory pastoral station.

An additional three properties have been divested as freehold to Noongar Boodja Land Sub Pty Ltd—64 Matheson Road, Applecross, another property in Hamilton Hill, and a property in Greenmount.

That is the list of properties.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Is the minister aware whether any of those properties in regional areas have been divested as freehold title for individuals or otherwise, or have those properties been vested in a group—a prescribed body corporate?

[10.10 am]

Dr A.D. BUTI: There is some freehold. The land that the Winder family lives on in east Carnarvon is freehold; otherwise, the lands are owned mainly by the groups and corporations.

Dr D.J. HONEY: This is more of a preamble. One of the frustrations in the Aboriginal communities that has been expressed to me is that although it is obviously sensible to transfer the Aboriginal Lands Trust lands, the stated objective of economic growth or providing economic opportunity is largely not realised because there is no title to a piece of land. However, there seems to be a generational change. The older members in the Aboriginal communities seem to be happy with the collectivist idea that property is held by the group, but the younger people want to have a piece of property that is their own. The problem is that because there is no individual title, someone who wants to build a house cannot go to a bank to get a loan because the bank does not have a title against which it can hold a mortgage. That is true for starting a business as well. Frustrations have been expressed to me, particularly in the Fitzroy Valley where I have spent the most time, that the economic opportunities cannot be realised because the title is not in a form that allows people to take out a mortgage. Rather than empowering Aboriginal people, they believe that the way in which most of the land is transferred is in fact preventing them from engaging in meaningful economic activity. I wonder whether the department is considering looking at transferring more land to freehold title so that the people who live in those communities can realise greater economic activity and invest in their own home and be able to pass that on and the like. Obviously, all that land would still be subject to native title, so it is not as though the land would not be controlled by the local body corporates. I wonder whether there is a view on that, because it seems that although the current model allows for the transfer of land, it does not provide the economic opportunity that it should.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will take most of what the member said as a comment. Minister Dawson and I went to Tjuntjuntjara last week for the transfer of 78 000 hectares with a 100-year lease, and I can assure the member that the community was very positive and happy about that. I am not the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. I am dealing with the budget issues, but that is a policy issue and maybe that should be discussed in another forum.

Mrs L.M. O'MALLEY: I refer to expenses on page 70 —

The CHAIR: I think we have passed that division.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to the preserving Aboriginal sites grant program on page 728. What is the Aboriginal sites grant program? How is it accessed? What projects have been funded, and where are these projects located?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The program is for the Aboriginal community to protect and promote Aboriginal heritage sites. Aboriginal not-for-profit organisations can apply for the grant, which is up to \$30 000 per project, when the place is included on the Register of Places and Objects or is awaiting assessment by the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage. Grants are provided only to places that have been determined to be an Aboriginal site. Over the last seven years, \$1.75 million has been committed to Aboriginal not-for-profit organisations to complete projects such as installing fences and signs, the remediation of burial sites and graffiti removal to help protect these important heritage sites across the state.

Previously funded projects include Oyster Harbour fish traps in Albany; the Kukenarup memorial project near Ravensthorpe; fencing the Bungarun leprosy cemetery in the Kimberley; graffiti removal at Murujuga on the Burrup Peninsula; a restoration healing project in Woodanilling; and the restoration of the Paddy Coyne complex in Albany.

In 2021, preserving Aboriginal sites recipients have included the Albany Aboriginal Corporation; the Bunuba Dawangarri Aboriginal Corporation in the Kimberley; the Gnowangerup Aboriginal Corporation project; the Jidi Jidi Aboriginal Corporation in Meekatharra; the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre; the Kulyamba Aboriginal Corporation in the Gascoyne, in Carnarvon, which I am sure the member knows about; the Mangala Aboriginal Corporation in the midwest, Murchison and Gascoyne; the Gumala Aboriginal Corporation in the Pilbara; the Winun Ngari Aboriginal Corporation in the Kimberley; and the Yarramoup Aboriginal Corporation in the goldfields—Esperance—Ravensthorpe area.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Thank you, minister. Perhaps he might want to answer the question as a supplementary if he finds it difficult to pronounce the names. They are hard to pronounce.

Dr A.D. BUTI: They are hard, but do not worry. I have given the member an answer now. It will be in *Hansard*. The member does not have to worry about supplementary questions.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am very impressed. I am glad that the member is a minister.

On page 729 under the heading “COVID-19 Response”, paragraph 9.1 refers to maintenance and infrastructure upgrades in remote Aboriginal communities. Can the minister outline the maintenance and infrastructure upgrades that will be funded in remote Aboriginal communities? I am happy to take it as a supplementary if the minister cannot answer it or does not have that information.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The remote Aboriginal communities infrastructure stimulus package is \$1.6 million. Maintenance and infrastructure upgrades across 11 remote Aboriginal communities provide economic and health benefits for local residents.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Which Aboriginal communities are they? The minister mentioned 11 of them. Can the minister provide me with a list of them?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I do not think we have that information available, but I am sure that if the member asks a question on notice, it can be made available.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Surely that is a supplementary question. There will be no skin off anyone’s nose by answering that as a supplementary question. The minister mentioned the 11 remote communities, how about providing that information? That is a fair question.

The CHAIR: One of the minister’s advisers is nodding.

Dr A.D. BUTI: We do not have that information. Even if the member seeks it as supplementary information, we do not have that information.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The government is funding \$1.7 million to 11 remote Aboriginal communities but the minister does not know —

Dr A.D. BUTI: We do not have the information here. I am not saying that we do not have the information; we do not have the information here. If the member puts a question on notice, I am sure we will be able to provide it to him.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Surely, minister, that is for supplementary information. I do not think there is anything controversial about putting it as a supplementary.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I gave my answer.

The CHAIR: It is quite clear that the minister is not prepared to do it, so let us not waste any more time. I am sure the member has other more pressing questions.

Dr D.J. HONEY: In relation to communications, I do not know whether that investment covers that area as well. There is a particular issue among some of the remote communities that they appear to have service arrangements with separate communication providers or corporations —

[10.20 am]

Dr A.D. BUTI: Where are we?

Dr D.J. HONEY: It is a follow-up question from the previous question.

The CHAIR: Give the reference number.

Dr D.J. HONEY: It is page 735.

The CHAIR: We are on page 729.

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is not what we were on.

Dr D.J. HONEY: We will go back; thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Let us make it a new question.

Dr D.J. HONEY: We will make it a new question.

The CHAIR: In which case, you better give the reference.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I will have to give that, will I not, chair. I refer to the table at the top of page 728.

The CHAIR: You did mention page 735.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I should say page 727, which is the table in part 11, “Planning and Land Use”. I refer to the delivery of services.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Can we stop? Are we on page 727 now, are we?

Dr D.J. HONEY: Yes, we are. I refer to the total appropriations and delivery of service to those communities. Is there a strategy around having unification of communication provision in the more remote communities? I ask that question because, as I understand it, there is an idiosyncratic approach to communication provision in the communities. I ask the question generally about whether the minister’s department has any influence or control in that area, because when people move between communities, they cannot communicate using mobile phones, which is very important now, because service providers are in different communities.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I do not think this department has anything to do with that.

Dr D.J. HONEY: The department does not have any control over that. Thank you.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 731 and the table under “Outcomes and Key Effectiveness Indicators”. The line third from the bottom of that table shows the percentage of statutory approvals delivered to the Aboriginal Cultural Material Committee within set time frames. I notice that in 2019–20 it was 93 per cent; actual in 2020–21 is 90 per cent; and then it goes down to 68 per cent for estimated actual in 2020–21; and then it jumps back up to 90 per cent. Can the minister explain why there is a massive drop in the 2021–22 estimated actual?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The variance between the 2020–21 budget and the 2020–21 estimated actual is mainly due to items tabled in February 2021 instead of January 2021 as there was no January meeting, and the delay of the June 2021 meeting on two occasions due to the unavailability of committee members.

The CHAIR: That is in note 3, member.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Does the minister think that it is realistic for it to jump back up to the 90 per cent mark even though it seems as though there has also been a reduction in department funds?

Dr A.D. BUTI: No, as I said, part of it was due to the unavailability of committee members and, hopefully, that will not be the case going forward.

The CHAIR: We are dealing with division 44, service 4, Aboriginal affairs. The question —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I have a new question if no-one else has one.

The CHAIR: All right. Just quickly, member for North West Central.

Dr A.D. BUTI: You built our hopes up there, member.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: There is plenty of time. Where does the minister have to go?

The CHAIR: I would like the Office of Multicultural Interests to get a run for a change.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: We will get there. Just quickly, I refer to carbon farming on crown land.

The CHAIR: Where are you looking?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 729, paragraph 8, “Carbon Farming on Crown Land”.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The member might want to ask me about that in my capacity as Minister for Lands in another division later.

The appropriation was recommended.

Division 10: Registrar, Western Australian Industrial Relations Commission, \$13 067 000 —

Ms M.M. Quirk, Chair.

Dr A.D. Buti, Minister for Finance representing the Minister for Industrial Relations.

Ms S. Bastian, Chief Executive Officer.

Mr M. Hadfield, Executive Director, Finance Data and Technology.

Mr J. Welch, Principal Policy Adviser.

Ms R. Marton, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. It is the intention of the chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee’s consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister’s cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 1 October 2021. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

The member for North West Central.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer the minister to spending changes on page 118. Under new initiative, it shows the appointment of an additional commissioner. What is the genesis of this initiative to have an additional commissioner?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It was an election commitment to fund for an additional commissioner to be appointed to the Industrial Relations Commission; that was the commitment made.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is this due to the current case load of the department or the registrar, and how does the case load compare with previous years?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The view is that the changes that have resulted from the new work health and safety legislation and the changes that will come with the new industrial relations legislation will result in an increased workload at the commission.

[10.30 am]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: What was the average length of cases in 2020–21 compared with what is projected in the forward estimates?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I do not think those figures are kept.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I wonder whether the statistics are collected. I refer to page 119 in volume 1 of budget paper No 2.

The CHAIR: If the member is on another page, that is a different question.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Only insofar as it refers to a metric on the timeliness of the service provided by the department.

The CHAIR: Which is different from talking about the appointment of a new commissioner. That is fine; ask the question. It is a new question, that is all.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Thank you very much. How is that metric achieved, minister?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Where is it on the page?

Dr D.J. HONEY: At the bottom of page 219, under “Outcomes and Key Effectiveness Indicators”, is the timeliness of cases.

The CHAIR: Right at the bottom of the page, minister.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes, I have it. An annual customer survey is completed for the year. Based on that, it works out a key effectiveness indicator.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Are there any other metrics in terms of efficiency of the service provider? It seems unusual that that is the only KPI that seems to be provided. There is another KPI, “Accuracy and relevance of information”, but I am not sure how that is arrived at, unless that is based on a survey. Are there any other metrics in terms of efficiency of use of resources within the department?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am not sure whether the member is able to come up with a suggestion. Each case that comes before the commission is different. It is hard to provide an index that will provide some measure of conformity across the various cases—they are all very different. Some cases may be completed in a day; some may take many more days. There is conciliation et cetera. I think it is quite appropriate to base it on a customer survey.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I appreciate that there will be some differences, but I anticipate that there would be a reasonable average across the year for the completed workload. I would have thought it possible to have metrics, even in terms of timeliness of response back to complainants and the like, but also to work out averages across the year.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I also wonder whether the member is in the wrong division. We are dealing with the Registrar of the Western Australian Industrial Relations Commission. This is not the actual commission making decisions on a case. Maybe that question relates to another division.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Sure. It is still a response, but in any case.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Correct me if I am on the wrong track here, minister: has the registrar had to deal with any industrial relations matters related to COVID-19?

The CHAIR: That sounds like a new question, too.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will defer to the CEO.

Ms S. Bastian: Excuse me behind my mask, minister and chair. In effect, any matter that is filed with the department of the registrar, we are the repository in the interface for the commission. Our role is really one whereby we collate the information, take the applications and then it is referred to the tribunal for determination. The registrar’s role is not to deal with any formal matter, unless it is directed back to the registrar for action by reference from the commission.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Have any matters come back to the registrar in regards to COVID-19; and, if yes, how many?

Ms S. Bastian: No, they have not.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to “Support to the Western Australian Industrial Relations Commission and Industrial Magistrates Court” under the service summary on page 119 in volume 1 of budget paper No 2. Has the registrar been consulted on the proposed regulations to the Work Health and Safety Act 2020?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Again, this would not be the division; it is not the registrar who would be consulted on this.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Under the service summary, it has “Support to the Western Australian Industrial Relations Commission and Industrial Magistrates Court”. I wondered whether that would also include support related to the Work Health and Safety Act 2020. I think the minister is saying that it is not.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The member referred to “Support to the Western Australian Industrial Relations Commission and Industrial Magistrates Court”. The actual costs are lower due to some positions remaining vacant. It is referring to how many FTEs are at this level. It is not related to any legislation. That is dealt with in another division; not with the registrar.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to the total appropriations on page 118. There is a significant increase of a little more than \$1 million above the appropriation in 2019–20. I appreciate there was some increase due to COVID and we are getting an additional registrar, but what is the additional expenditure for?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The increase of \$350 000 is for the annual indexation of accommodation expenses; variance of \$318 000 in employee benefit expenses because some positions remained vacant in 2019–20. The positions were filled in 2020–21; therefore, the budget forecast for 2020–21 includes full FTE levels. A decrease of \$634 000 in supplying services is mainly due to the end of the external contract for the ICT project for the commission’s website and the registry portal into 2019–20. This project was brought in-house in 2020–21. The increase between the total cost of services in the 2020–21 estimated actual and the 2020–21 budget estimate is mainly due to the employee benefit expense for an additional commissioner and administrative support for the chambers, and an interim commissioner.

Dr D.J. HONEY: When the minister said “employee benefits”, has there been a change in the employee benefits or is it simply that there is now a full complement of employees and these are the benefits that go with that?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Full complement.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Referring to the accommodation cost, is that a permanent increase in the accommodation cost and not a temporary increase?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is not temporary; it is permanent.

The appropriation was recommended.

Meeting suspended from 10.38 to 10.46 am

Division 16: Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety — Service 3, Industrial Relations, \$78 578 000 —

Ms M.M. Quirk, Chair.

Dr A.D. Buti, Minister for Finance representing the Minister for Industrial Relations.

Mr R. Sellers, Director General.

Ms M. Haasnoot, Executive Director, Corporate Services.

Ms J. Hammond, Executive Director, Government Sector Labour Relations.

Ms J. Shelton, Director, Licensing Services.

Mr I. Munns, Deputy Director, General Safety Regulation.

Mr R. De Giorgio, Chief Finance Officer.

Mr J. Welch, Principal Policy Adviser, Minister for Industrial Relations.

Ms R. Marton, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. It is the intention of the chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee’s consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister’s cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 1 October 2021. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

I give the call to the member for North West Central.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 246, budget paper No 2, volume 1, and the seventh paragraph, which states —
The Department has assisted the Commission for Occupational Safety and Health prepare a consultation draft workplace behaviour code of practice. Workplace behaviours remain a safety and health concern at many workplaces. Workplace sexual harassment has been an emerging issue with some high-profile cases reported in the media this year, and State and Commonwealth responses to the Australian Human Rights Commission’s report ...

How many bullying and sexual harassment complaints were made in 2020–21 and in 2021–22 to date?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The point is that it is a difficult question to answer, member, because they come under sections—mining and other industries. To get a figure for industrial relations, the member has to narrow it down.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: We are in the industrial relations section of the budget estimates. Have there been any sexual harassment or bullying complaints? I want to know the statistics for 2020–21 and 2021–22 to date. I am happy to take it as supplementary information if the minister does not have that information. It is pretty important information given the current climate in the resources sector.

[10.50 am]

Dr A.D. BUTI: If the member wants to ask that as a question on notice, he should go ahead.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: As I said, this is pretty important information. I would have thought the minister, or the team behind him, would have been prepared with that information.

The CHAIR: That is a statement, member.

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is not a question.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Will the minister provide that answer as supplementary information? They are pretty important statistics to have, given the current climate and a parliamentary inquiry into the resources sector.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The member has just mentioned the inquiry into the resources sector. Another member of the opposition who is the chair of that inquiry was supposed to be here. I am sure she can provide the member with those figures, but if he wants to put it on notice, he should put it on notice.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I have a further question. That is an inquiry —

The CHAIR: Is it a further question or just a debating point?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is an important point, chair. That is an inquiry; it is a committee. The minister has been on a committee; we have been on a committee together. The committee cannot disclose that information.

The CHAIR: Member, I am not going to entertain rhetoric. I have the member for Bicton next.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Can I add that we are dealing here with industrial relations. The inquiry to which the member referred is dealing with the resources industry under another minister—the Minister for Mines and Petroleum.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: So industrial relations issues do not cover any bullying or sexual harassment complaints at all?

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is not what I said. The member referred to the inquiry. The inquiry is under the purview of the Minister for Mines and Petroleum. If the member wants to spend the next half-hour talking about supplementary information and questions on notice, feel free. I have just told him that if he wants to put a question on notice, put it on notice.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Does the Industrial Relations Commission deal with bullying and sexual harassment complaints?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The member missed the boat there. That should have been asked in the previous section through the registrar who processes the complaints, not through the Industrial Relations Commission, which hears the cases.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Has the Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety received any bullying or sexual harassment complaints in 2020–21 and 2021–22 to date?

The CHAIR: This is service 3 only, member.

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is not relevant to this section. The member should ask the Minister for Mines and Petroleum.

The CHAIR: Does the member for Cottesloe have a further question on this or can we move to the member for Bicton?

Dr D.J. HONEY: Yes, I do. Have there been any complaints of harassment or bullying in this department—that is, the industrial relations department itself?

The CHAIR: It sounds like groundhog day to me. It is the same question.

Dr D.J. HONEY: No; it is different. It is related specifically to this.

Dr A.D. BUTI: We can deal only with the section in front of us. The member is relating the question to the whole department. I am not the minister for the whole department. We are looking at this section of the budget paper.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I ask about the industrial relations part of the department that is responsible for industrial relations.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes, and what is the member's question then?

Dr D.J. HONEY: Have there been any complaints of harassment or bullying in that department?

Dr A.D. BUTI: In industrial relations?

Dr D.J. HONEY: Yes.

Dr A.D. BUTI: And to which line item is the member referring?

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am referring to budget paper No 2, page 249, "Safety and Labour Relations Advice and Regulation".

The CHAIR: That is a different section to what the member was referring to.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I do not think it is relevant.

The CHAIR: Member for Bicton, put us out of our misery!

Mrs L.M. O'MALLEY: I refer to page 245 of budget paper No 2 under "Spending Changes". A line item under "Election Commitments" refers to the wage supply audit unit. How are these resources to be spent and what is the intended outcome?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will throw to the director general.

Mr R. Sellers: Thank you. I will pass to Mr Munns.

Mr I. Munns: Yes, that is a great initiative. We are looking to engage a number of officers to specifically monitor and ensure that the payments being made are appropriate when contracts have been entered into. We are in the process of developing the job descriptions for those new officers and then going out to recruit for them and build that unit in the private sector labour relations unit.

Mr M.J. FOLKARD: I refer to page 245 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, under "Spending Changes". Funding is identified under "Election Commitments" for stakeholder engagement. How are these resources to be spent?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The government intends that information and education material about the work health and safety laws to be provided as widely as possible. It is therefore appropriate for the government to partner with peak employee and employer bodies that are members of the statutory committees. The \$350 000 in funding for each of the next four years is a substantial investment by the government aimed at helping to achieve a wide distribution of information about the work health and safety laws. The peak bodies are able to target these messages aimed at particular issues relevant to their sectors. The approach will complement promotional activities being undertaken by the Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety. The peak bodies that are partnering with the government to promote the work health and safety laws are UnionsWA, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia, Master Builders Western Australia, the Housing Industry Association, the Chamber of Minerals and Energy of Western Australia, and the Association of Mining and Exploration Companies.

[11.00 am]

Mr Y. MUBARAKAI: I refer to the same page and the same line and ask about the implementation of resources that will be provided to make sure that the Work Health and Safety Act is implemented.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The government's commitment at the March 2021 election was for the work health and safety laws to commence in January next year, 2022. As part of that commitment, the government committed to providing employer and employee peak bodies with \$150 000 per annum over the next two years. The government recognises the importance of this legislation, allocating significant resources to meet our commitment and ensure a smooth transition to the new laws. The budget includes funding for 45 FTEs in 2021–22, which will be investigators, inspectors and legal policy communication ministerial officers, reducing to 34 FTEs in 2023–24. We are committed to working to meet our election commitments. The government has also allocated an additional \$200 000 for the Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety to promote the new laws in 2021–22. This is in addition to the \$450 000 previously allocated to DMIRS to promote worker safety. The total \$650 000 of funding will be used by DMIRS for a better worker safety campaign to promote the implementation of the Work Health and Safety Act and WorkSafe as the Western Australian agency responsible for the WHS laws. DMIRS has commenced publishing information and educational material about the WHS laws. More information will continue to be made available as the commencement date of the new law approaches. DMIRS is also finalising agreements with the employer and employee peak bodies on the grant funding commitment. It is a testament to the fact that this government is very committed to ensuring that people can go to work in a safe environment. That is all part of the new laws. The promotion of those laws will ensure that employees, employers and their organisations are fully across those laws.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to paragraph 7 on page 246. I quote —

The Department has assisted the Commission for Occupational Safety and Health prepare a consultation draft workplace behaviour code of practice.

Could the minister please explain why the department has assisted the Commission for Occupational Safety and Health to prepare a draft workplace behaviour code of practice?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I would have thought there is nothing unusual about that. I think it is what the department does, but I will throw to the director general on this.

Mr R. Sellers: The expertise for certain areas exists within both the department and other areas. It is not unusual for the department's expertise to be called on and be part of working up codes of practice. It happens across a range of expertise in DMIRS, including in safety and mining.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Paragraph 7 continues —

Workplace behaviours remain a safety and health concern at many workplaces.

Can the minister elaborate on the concerns that have been raised with the department?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask the department, but, obviously, I do not think it is any surprise. There are always going to be issues about workplace behaviours. That is part of the reason we brought in new legislation and provided significant funding for promotion and discussion with employer and employee groups. We have also improved legislation, whether it is the work health and safety legislation or the impending changes to the industrial relations legislation. I will ask Mr Sellers whether he would like to answer or throw to someone else.

Mr R. Sellers: I think Mr Munns might be able to lead us through a bit of that background.

Mr I. Munns: It has been an ongoing area of concern for quite some time. The Commission for Occupational Safety and Health issued a code on workplace violence and aggression in 2010. Workplace environments have obviously been changing over the last decade or so. As a consequence, we felt it necessary to revise that existing code. During the process of the revision, the commission felt it was best to break the code into some new, discrete pieces of work. One of the discrete pieces of work is the one on workplace behaviours. Everything had its genesis in the code that has been around since 2010. It is being revised given the changes in workplaces and in the technological environment in which we now work.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Paragraph 7 continues —

Workplace sexual harassment has been an emerging issue with some high-profile cases reported in the media this year, and State and Commonwealth responses to the Australian Human Rights Commission ...

Could the minister perhaps highlight those high-profile cases that have been reported in the media this year? Did the department assist the Commission for Occupational Safety and Health because it was prompted by the high-profile cases reported in the media?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I think Mr Munns provided an answer to that. It has been an ongoing issue. The department was involved in this way before the infamous cases that occurred in Canberra. The cases emanating from the Parliament House arena in Canberra were the highest profile cases in the last 12 months, but the department has been working on this for far longer than those high-profile cases. Of course, that just brought it to the immediate attention of the media.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: On sexual harassment complaints that have gone to government agencies, has there been an increase that the department is aware of?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Cases are brought before the Industrial Relations Commission. Cases are also brought internally to departments. Those cases that are brought to departments do not come through this department. Unless a complaint is made through the Industrial Relations Commission and the registrar, which we dealt with in the last session, that is the end of the matter as far as this department is concerned. As it mentions in the note the member referred to, it is talking about matters that have gone to the Australian Human Rights Commission or could have gone to the Equal Opportunity Commission, not the Industrial Relations Commission. Cases also go through the court system. Sexual harassment can be dealt with in many ways. Cases can be dealt with internally, through a department or through a complaint being made to the Industrial Relations Commission to the registrar, which was covered in the last session, the Equal Opportunity Commission in Western Australia or the Australian Human Rights Commission, but not through this department as such.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The minister is not the minister responsible and perhaps the ministerial adviser may be able to answer this —

The CHAIR: No; the question is directed to the minister.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I know that; that is what I am saying. I was saying that the minister is not the minister for this department but may be able to direct the question to the ministerial adviser. How many sexual harassment or bullying complaints have been made to the minister responsible for the Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety?

[11.10 am]

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am not acting for the Minister for Mines and Petroleum here.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Has the minister received any bullying or sexual harassment complaints directly as minister?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As minister for what?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: As minister representing the minister here, or as a minister.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Obviously, that is not a relevant question to ask in this session, but I can assure the member that I have not personally received anything about sexual harassment of one of my departmental employees. That has no relevance to this session, so can we move on?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 246 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, and paragraph 8 under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”. It states, in part —

... the Government introduced the Industrial Relations Legislation Amendment Bill 2020 (the Bill) into Parliament. The Bill lapsed when Parliament was prorogued for the 2021 State election. The Bill contains the Government’s response to the 2018 Ministerial Review of the State Industrial Relations System and the 2019 Inquiry into Wage Theft in Western Australia. The Government has made a commitment to reintroduce the Bill, as well as introduce various other industrial relations reforms ...

Other than the three reforms listed—the new minimum entitlement to five days’ unpaid family and domestic violence leave, enabling the concurrent appointment of suitably qualified industrial commissioners as industrial magistrates, and making Easter Sunday a public holiday in Western Australia—are any other reforms intended; and, if so, what are they?

Dr A.D. BUTI: There are other quite substantial reforms in this bill. We are dealing with the issue of the definition of “employee” under state industrial laws; the exclusion of employees engaged in domestic service in private homes will change. That will then be consistent with the International Labour Organization protocol of 2014. There will be a new anti-bullying jurisdiction for the commission, which will enable the commission to make orders to stop bullying or sexual harassment in the workplace. The commission will be enabled to make equal remuneration orders to ensure that employees receive equal remuneration for work of equal and comparable value. The commission will be given the power to review the scope of outdated private sector award clauses on its own motion to ensure comprehensive and equitable award coverage for employees. WA local governments will be enabled to move from the national industrial relations system to the state system. There will be an increase in penalties for noncompliance with state industrial laws and instruments to broadly reflect the penalty levels under the Fair Work Act 2009, which is commonwealth legislation. The compliance tools of industrial inspectors will also be broadened. There is a considerable number of reforms in the bill.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the minister give me a bit more detail on what the bullying part of those reforms entails?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Basically, they will mirror the anti-bullying clauses in the Fair Work Act 2009.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I assume bullying is part of the package, but we are improving the reforms in relation to that. What percentage of cases would involve bullying?

Dr A.D. BUTI: This department does not deal with cases. They go to the Western Australian Industrial Relations Commission registrar. As I mentioned to the member for North West Central, there are a number of areas to which complaints can be made. They can be made to the WAIRC registrar, which was covered in a previous session; they could possibly come under equal opportunity legislation and the Equal Opportunity Commission; they could possibly come under the Australian Human Rights Commission or the Fair Work Commission; they could even, in some cases, go through the court system; or they could come through this department under work health and safety, but that is another division, not this one.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: When does the minister think that legislation will be coming into the mix?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Hopefully in the balance of this parliamentary year.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to paragraph 9 on the same page, which outlines that the department is undertaking a range of strategies to combat the significant issue of wage theft. What are those strategies, as part of the Western Australian government’s 2021 election commitments?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The department has established a compliance team focused on the issue of wage theft and is undertaking a range of compliance strategies to combat wage theft, including continuing to conciliate and investigate reactive complaints and targeting high-risk industries such as the restaurant, cafe, horticultural and security industries, with proactive compliance campaigns involving unannounced inspections by industrial inspectors. In 2020–21, inspectors recovered more than \$1.2 million in unpaid wages and entitlements, which I think is an outstanding effort by the inspectors, but also a real indictment of those industries. There have been recent enforcement proceedings in the Industrial Magistrates Court that have involved migrant workers in high-risk industries, and a number of employers have been identified as high risk. The department is also working with other government agencies, including Australian Border Force, RevenueWA and the Fair Work Ombudsman, to combat exploitative working arrangements. In addition, the Report Wage Theft website was established in December 2019 and has successfully provided an avenue for WA employees in both the state and national industrial relations systems to seek help in resolving underpayments and anonymously reporting wage theft.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the minister tell me who in the department is responsible for that strategy, and what is the budget allocation for its facilitation?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will hand over to Mr Sellers, but obviously the department has established a compliance team.

Mr R. Sellers: I will pass over to the deputy director general, Mr Munns.

Mr I. Munns: The work for that area of activity is undertaken by the private sector labour relations directorate. It is led by one of our executive directors. There is a compliance unit within that area of quite a number of staff who are out and about, doing these sorts of activities. It also includes some of the unannounced visits that the minister mentioned that are undertaken after normal business hours, because it is a 24/7 operation in the current environment. We are active throughout the working period to ensure that all workers, regardless of when they are at work, can expect to have their remuneration correctly supplied to them.

The appropriation was recommended.

[11.20 am]

Division 37: Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries — Service 5, Sport and Recreation; Citizenship and Multicultural Interests, \$211 955 000 —

Ms K.E. Giddens, Chair.

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

Ms L. Chopping, Director General.

Mr C. Dykstra, Deputy Director General, Portfolio Capability and Performance.

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

Ms S. Sherdiwala, Executive Director, Finance and Procurement.

Ms K. Ellwood, Executive Director, Sport and Recreation.

Ms L. Fanciulli, Executive Director, Infrastructure.

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

Mr C. White, Manager, Community Infrastructure.

Mr M. Kavanagh, Principal Policy Adviser, Minister for Sport and Recreation; Citizenship and Multicultural Interests.

Mr S. Padshah, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. It is the intention of the chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 1 October 2021. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

I give the call to the member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to service 5 on page 544 of budget paper No 2, "Sport and Recreation Industry Support". What amount has been put aside for activations planned by the state ahead of and during the AFL grand final?

Dr A.D. BUTI: There are no funds from this department for that.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is the minister saying that no funds have been put aside from the Department of Sport and Recreation for the activation of the grand final?

Dr A.D. BUTI: That would be from a different department, not from this department, if any. Funds are not from this portfolio.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: What portfolio, minister?

The CHAIR: Is there a question? Are you seeking the call, member for Roe?

Dr A.D. BUTI: We are dealing with this section; it is not a budget item in this section.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 541.

Dr A.D. BUTI: On the last question, if the member is looking at activation and is talking about entertainment and so forth, it would be under the department of culture and the arts, not sport. I might be minister for a few things; I am not minister for everything.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: We will come back to the culture and the arts section, thank you.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Not with me you won't.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to the line item "East Fremantle Oval Redevelopment" about halfway down page 541. I note the Town of East Fremantle's media release on that. Can the minister confirm that the project will have outdoor hard courts as stated in the media release by the Town of East Fremantle?

Dr A.D. BUTI: All I can share with the member is what has been committed and is in the funding agreement. As he knows, we committed \$20 million to that development. The department is working with the Town of East Fremantle on the financial assistance agreement. Negotiations are occurring as we speak about a new agreement, which I am sure will take into consideration the issue the member raised about the hard courts. It is currently under discussion. All I can tell the member is that \$20 million has been committed by the government.

It is a great development. As the member will know, it is behind East Fremantle footy club—not the club that the member and I support, but anyway! It will include East Fremantle Bowling Club, East Fremantle Croquet Club and the football club, obviously, and the redevelopment and realignment of the oval. I think it is the largest oval in Western Australia, even larger than Optus Stadium. It will have a new playing surface, new synthetic lawn bowling rinks, new croquet greens, new playgroup and child-nursing facilities, a new adventure playground, a dog exercise area and community infrastructure such as community gardens. The football club will have new unisex change rooms, umpire change rooms, first-aid rooms, a gymnasium and coach meeting rooms. It will provide an important community asset for the community.

The CHAIR: Member for Burns Beach.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Further question.

The CHAIR: I have given the call to the member for Burns Beach, but the member can ask a further question if it is a further question.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am sure the member for Bicton is happy with it, but the media release from the Town of East Fremantle confirmed that there would be outdoor hard courts. I am looking for clarity. They certainly were not on the minister's list of the parts of that project.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Our commitment is consistent with the master plan put through by the Town of East Fremantle.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is the project still on track to begin in October this year?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It will commence in May 2022.

Mr M.J. FOLKARD: I refer the minister to the multicultural community grants program outlined on page 541. What is the funding for, and how will it benefit regional culturally and linguistically diverse communities?

Dr A.D. BUTI: This is a very important program. There has been an increase of \$500 000 annually to the Office of Multicultural Interests' community grants program, which will enable a total of \$1 million to be provided annually to support local multicultural groups around the state. This is an example of the McGowan government's commitment to multiculturalism and support for culturally and linguistically diverse communities throughout Western Australia. The program provides funding to empower communities in Western Australia to design, deliver and partner on projects that address their needs. The increase in funding will support activities led by CALD communities that celebrate and promote WA's cultural diversity, build the capacity of individuals, families and communities to contribute to the state's civic and economic life, and improve the accessibility and effectiveness of services. In addition, that funding will increase support for community festivals to provide a range of cultural experiences and activities that celebrate the contribution of CALD communities and build intercultural understanding among all Western Australians. In the last financial year, regional CALD communities benefited from funding for 12 projects, including activities in Walpole in the very south of the state through to Kalgoorlie in the east and Karratha in the north of the state. The member for Roe will be very interested in that because he has a very vibrant multicultural community in his home town of Katanning.

[11.30 am]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to the outcomes and key effectiveness indicators on page 546 of budget paper No 2. A quarter of the way down the page is the item "Percentage of Western Australians participating in organised sport and recreation". The 2019–20 actual is 63 per cent, the 2020–21 budget is 56 per cent, the 2020–21 estimated actual is 64 per cent and the 2021–22 budget target is 56 per cent. Why has the department projected a decrease in Western Australians participating in organised sport?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The increase in the 2019–20 actual compared with the 2020–21 budget is due to the increase in the number of Western Australians aged 15 and over who participated in organised sport or physical activities in 2019

when compared with the baseline of 56 per cent that was established in 2016–17. That was chosen as the baseline figure for participation in organised sport and recreation as it best reflects the targeted support provided by the department for the sport and recreation service delivery system.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Does the minister think that the target of 56 per cent is extremely low? What would the minister consider to be the optimum level of Western Australians participating in organised sport and recreation?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As the member knows, I would like to have 100 per cent participation, but this is a realistic and aspirational target that is achievable. It is also a target that is set by the federal government.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Given that Western Australia has had an extremely fortunate run of very limited COVID-19 lockdowns and given our openness as a state, surely participation in organised sport and recreation should be increasing and not decreasing.

Dr A.D. BUTI: When the member says a “fortunate run”, obviously he means due to the great policies of the Western Australian government.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Very fortunate run.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I believe that the National Party was siding with Clive Palmer on opening the borders.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: That is misleading. That is not true and the minister knows it. For the record, the minister was laughing and smiling when he said that.

The CHAIR: For the record, you are interjecting, member for North West Central. The minister has the call.

Dr A.D. BUTI: They are federally mandated targets. The WA rate is based on a survey in which only 22 000 people were surveyed. The percentage of people actually participating may be higher. I can assure the member that while I am minister, I will work as hard as I can to ensure that as many people as possible participate in sport and recreation.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 542 and the line item “Stephen Michael Foundation” under “New Initiatives”. This obviously affects both my electorate and the electorate of the member for North West Central. It is a very good program. Can the minister explain why the state government will no longer be funding the foundation, given that the last \$200 000 is included in the budget estimate?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It does not mean that we will not continue to fund it.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the minister identify where the government will be funding it in future years, after 2021–22?

Dr A.D. BUTI: No. The member stated that the government is not going to fund it, but things are always under review. A commitment of \$400 000 was made in February 2021 for \$200 000 for the next two years. After that, of course, the matter will be considered. It is a great foundation, which was established due to the great support of this state government.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Because the government has secured only two years of funding for the Stephen Michael Foundation, there will be uncertainty for the organisation going forward, particularly in our communities. Has the minister set parameters for outcomes? What is the likelihood of the Stephen Michael Foundation successfully getting further funding in the future?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The foundation was set up in 2017 as a result of funding that was provided by the government. The foundation deals with a range of programs in the electorates of both the member for Roe and the member for North West Central. On the issue of how it is assessed, basically the foundation has a mission statement and the department looks at that mission statement to see whether it is achieving its results, as it did when it was funded for another two years with \$200 000 for each year.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The foundation runs a very good Nightfields program in my electorate for activities for all sorts of students after school. It is a great way to occupy children after school. Is the minister saying that he definitely will look at it for the next budget and into the out years?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I imagine that the foundation will come back to government seeking further funding. When it does that, of course it will be considered.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: On the same page —

Dr A.D. BUTI: To add, we are in constant dialogue with the foundation.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Minister —

Dr A.D. BUTI: I received an email only yesterday from Julie Jackson. Do not worry, member; we are in constant dialogue with the Stephen Michael Foundation.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I thought the chair gave me the call. Do I have the call now?

The CHAIR: Member for North West Central, you have the call.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Under “New Initiatives” on the same page, page 542, is the line item “Lathlain Park Grandstand Redevelopment”. Is that Perth oval, where the West Coast Eagles train?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is where the Demons train—the Perth Football Club.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is also the home base for the Eagles. Can the minister explain what that \$2 million will be put towards? I know it is being put towards a grandstand. Is that a contribution to a greater amount?

Dr A.D. BUTI: That amount is committed to the Town of Victoria Park for the redevelopment of training, administration and social facilities for the Perth Football Club at Lathlain Park. The Town of Victoria Park has been consulting key stakeholders since 2015 regarding this precinct. As members know, the West Coast Eagles facility is located on the other side of the oval. This money will be utilised for the redevelopment of the Perth Football Club building at Lathlain Park, including administration, facilities and change rooms.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is the \$2 million part of a greater amount?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is \$4 million.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Will a contribution be made by the Town of Victoria Park?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I believe there will be \$5 million from the town.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is this the big grandstand —

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is the old grandstand.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Are they looking at redoing that grandstand or starting afresh?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am not sure about the actual details, but it is for the redevelopment of Lathlain Park. I do not think the actual grandstand is going to be demolished, but I am not 100 per cent clear on that. Obviously, it will be a major redevelopment.

No; it is for the demolition and a rebuild, which I am quite sad about because that is a famous ground that I used to go to as a little kid, even though I am a South Fremantle supporter. It is for the demolition and a rebuild.

[11.40 am]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The top of the grandstand has very good elevation. I also suggest that the rebuild would not go astray. Has there been any contribution from the West Coast Eagles for that facility, or potential facility?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes. It has contributed \$1 million.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: On page 561 is the funding for the regional athlete support program, which is \$1.1 million this year and \$1.14 million in 2022–23, but then the funding seems to disappear. Can the minister enlighten me about what has happened to the regional athlete support program in the forward estimates?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As the member knows, it is an incredibly important program. One of the best things that I have done in the six months that I have been in this position is allocate these grants. The program has been running since 2013. Total funding of \$3.13 million has been allocated for the period 2021 to 2023 to support that program, of which \$1.1 million has been allocated in 2021–22. Going forward, that will be assessed and we will see where it lands, but I would be very surprised if the program did not continue in one form or another.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It appears to me as though the minister has to go into bat for quite a few of these programs because they have been cut off in the forward estimates.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Not at all.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am worried about the continuity. If the price of iron ore drops, the Premier could decide that he needs money for things other than the regional athlete support program, which we both agree is a very important program.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I think the term of the McGowan government since 2017 shows the member that we are committed to this program. In any case, the funding comes from royalties for regions, which is administered by another department, not by this department.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to the line item “West Australian Football Commission” near the end of the table headed “Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies” on page 561. The minister has made public comments about the WAFC and the salaries paid to many of the FTEs on the commission. The minister and I were both on the Public Accounts Committee, which the minister chaired. Now that the member is the Minister for Sport and Recreation, has his opinion of the WAFC changed given that the funding to the West Australian Football Commission seems to have increased?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Whether my opinion has changed is not necessarily relevant. I made some comments on this early in my term as minister. As the member knows, there is a funding agreement that lays out the arrangement between the government and the West Australian Football Commission, so it is a legal document. Funding has been provided and there was a response by the West Australian Football Commission to that funding agreement. It is a 10-year agreement and it will increase in line with the consumer price index. The member and I both studied that agreement in detail during that inquiry.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The very good and very just inquiry into football in Western Australia highlighted regional football as a major issue, including the distances the football leagues have to cover, the lack of investment by the West Australian Football Commission, and the West Australian Country Football League getting that money and passing it on to the football clubs. Has the minister raised with the West Australian Football Commission the issues and recommendations in the Public Accounts Committee report to try to address the issues such as in the Kimberley and Gascoyne football leagues, both of which are suffering immensely through distance, and has the minister asked the WAFC to provide extra funding to those football bodies?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Obviously, I have many discussions with the chair of the commission and with the commission itself. In the latest agreement, the WAFC has increased funding to the regions. We will watch this space with regard to the funding of regional football. I agree that football is a very important part of the fabric of regional communities.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Has the minister discussed the report of the Public Accounts Committee and the recommendations about the make-up of the WAFC with the chair of the WAFC?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: What was the outcome? Will any changes be made to make it a fairer playing field for those wanting to be on the West Australian Football Commission?

Dr A.D. BUTI: We are stretching this budget item.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is about the funding, and the government is funding it.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I have had discussions. I have mentioned it in public; it is not a secret. As the member, and, I am sure, the member for Roe, would understand, there was a report by Ron Carson into the constitution and make-up of the WAFC. A proposal for change was put forward that has to be voted on by the constituent members. As the member and I both know, we would like to have a more democratic representation on the board.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I understand that the minister wants to have a more democratic board on the West Australian Football Commission —

Dr A.D. BUTI: A more representative board.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Yes, of football in general, from the amateurs and up. What moves, if any, is the minister making to ensure that that change will happen in the future?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am having dialogue with the West Australian Football Commission and making my views clear. As I said, the member and I both know that there is a 10-year funding agreement at this stage.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: When does that funding agreement end?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I think it is in its third or fourth year at the moment.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Okay.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: While we are on page 561, I refer to the Western Australian Institute of Sport on the next line down. Can the minister tell me what the recurrent funding pays for at WAIS?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Obviously, it pays for the continuation of the Western Australian Institute of Sport, which is geared towards the high-performance training of our athletes. In regard to a specific breakdown, WAIS received a total of \$9 751 200 from the sports lotteries account in 2020–21 in addition to \$2 416 000 from the consolidated appropriation, which included \$5 725 800 for its annual operational funding, \$3 875 400 during the financial year for realigned funding adjustments, and \$150 000 for additional Olympian and Paralympian athlete assistant payments. The combined value of WAIS funding for 2020–21 is \$12 167 200.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Have any expenses been put out about the gymnastics inquiry?

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is an operational matter within WAIS itself. I have not funded that.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Would the minister be happy to take questions on that during the WAIS section further down the line?

[11.50 am]

Dr A.D. BUTI: I can give the member answers on what we have given the Western Australian Institute of Sport. I cannot give the member answers on what it is funding.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That is fine.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 561 and KidSport. The numbers are interesting. The 2019–20 actual was \$2 364 000. The 2021–22 budget is \$6 624 000 and then the 2020–21 estimated actual is \$3 424 000. Then it goes up in the 2021–22 budget estimate to \$7 824 000 and then in 2022–23 it goes down to \$4 624 000 and so forth. Can the minister explain the variations in that?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will give the member an overview of that very important program.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is a very good program started under former minister “Tuck” Waldron.

The CHAIR: Member for North West Central, you have asked your question. Wait for a reply, please.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Was that a question?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I just want to put that out there.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: There is funding into the out years as well.

The CHAIR: Member for Roe, nothing out of you, thanks.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The budget of \$7 824 000 includes underspent funding from 2020–21 due to COVID-19 impacts on junior sport participation. There also has been additional funding as a result of the COVID recovery package. The additional funding provided eligible children with access to up to \$300 KidSport funding in the 2021 calendar year. In 2021–22 there has been a significant increase in the number of families accessing KidSport vouchers, which support registration for some sports. Since 1 July 2020–21, 5 800 children have already accessed the additional funding. The extra funding in 2021–22 will enable more swim schools to be included in the KidSport program, with more than \$150 000 funded to support more than 1 100 children. The trend is continuing with positive engagement seeing new swimming schools registering for the KidSport program.

Over 29 000 KidSport vouchers were approved and funded in 2020–21 to over 25 000 Western Australian children, including 3 600 vouchers funded directly through the Lotterywest Back to Sport COVID relief program. These vouchers equated to just over \$4 million provided directly to eligible community sport clubs. Specifically for regional children, 10 292 vouchers were funded, resulting in \$1 298 070 paid into regional community sports clubs. In 2020–21, the KidSport program reported positive demand from a diverse community, including over 4 300 applicants, 70 per cent self-identifying as Aboriginal; over 1 600 applicants from culturally and linguistically diverse communities; and 1 900 applicants with a disability.

The fluctuation has been partly due to COVID stopping participation and then, of course, there has been the COVID recovery money as well.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am just curious. I heard the minister's response. Does the minister think this program could be expanded further given its importance? Obviously, the government has increased the budget estimate for this year, but then it seems to have dropped it back by \$3 million over the forward estimates each year.

Dr A.D. BUTI: There are a few different programs. The increased funding is for the Back to Sports component. KidSport funding has not decreased.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The feedback I get is that it helps out families perhaps for one sport but then they cannot go on and play their other winter or summer sports because it will cover only one particular sport or that particular amount. Does the minister think there is any capacity in the future, especially for our more disadvantaged families, to increase the scope and give more funding across another sport or so?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As I mentioned, there was increased funding in 2021–22. Obviously, these matters are considered in the normal budgetary process, so we will have to wait and see, but it is a very important program and has had some very good positive results.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 560, and the line item halfway down the page, "Community Languages Program". Can the minister explain what that program is all about and whether it reaches regional areas?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The community languages program fund supports 46 community language schools, teaching 32 languages to more than 6 205 students. I should add that, as the member will recall, the funding that the former Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Interests took away from Italian language teaching has been reinstated. The program is a competitive grants program that is open to all culturally and linguistically diverse community associations in Western Australia in any of the languages spoken by these groups. Funding for various languages depends on the applications received. The program provides per capita grants of up to \$120 per student to help with the costs of operating the school as well as new school grants to help with administrative costs of staff at the school. Funding is also provided to the peak body Community Language Schools WA, which provides professional learning programs, pathways to improvement, school development programs and a dedicated website. I mentioned the continuing support of the Italian language in-school insertion program that is managed by the Italo-Australian Welfare & Cultural Centre Inc, because obviously the Italian language is spoken by a considerable number of people. More than 3 000 people in Western Australia at the time of the 2016 census did not speak English at home, the majority of them being older. Really, the program is there and it is up to people to apply for it. It is a competitive grants system.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is there oversight of these community groups? The minister mentioned the Italo-Australian Welfare & Cultural Centre. Is there oversight of organisations such as that delivering the language program?

Dr A.D. BUTI: There is a funding agreement and, obviously, the funding agreement includes what has to be done by the grant recipient. That is always monitored by the Office of Multicultural Interests to ensure that organisations comply with the funding agreement. If they do not comply with the funding agreement, they will not be funded any further.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 565 and the community sporting and recreation facilities special purpose account. I notice that the 2020–21 budget was \$18 million and then the estimated actual was also \$18 million, but then it drops back to \$13 million in the actual budget estimate for 2021–22. Can the minister enlighten me on the \$5 million drop-off? That is in the appropriations line.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The \$18 million reflected in 2020–21 consists of \$12 million in new money to be allocated and \$6 million of carryovers from previous funding rounds as the CSRFF allocates money on a triennial basis. The \$13 million in the 2020–21 budget consists of \$12 million in new money to be allocated and \$1 million of allocated money carried over from previous funding. The reduction is due to the carryovers. There was a greater carryover, \$6 million, in the 2020–21 round, whereas in 2021–22 there will only be a \$1 million carryover.

[12 noon]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the minister tell me why it is appropriate to have this carryover? I would have thought just about every dollar of community sport and rec funding would have been taken up.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The funds are committed but the allocation does not happen until the project starts. The government makes a commitment but sometimes it takes some time for a project to commence—local government approval et cetera. There can be a carryover because the commitment has been made but it does not count until it actually commences.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The minister is saying that the \$6.923 million shown at the closing balance has already been committed, but it is just carried over until it is allocated. Is my understanding correct?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It has already been allocated.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Reallocated?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It has been allocated.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to the line item “Lighting Project Club Night Program” on page 561. I note there is \$10 million over the forward estimates—\$2.5 million for 2021–22. The line item just above that, “Lighting at Collie Recreation Ground”, has \$400 000. That does not leave too many ovals or sporting grounds to be lit under that fund. How many lighting projects around Western Australia does the minister anticipate that that \$2.5 million will fund?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As the member knows, this is a new initiative; it is a great initiative that the previous government committed to. This \$10 million lighting fund does not mean that lighting cannot also be committed under the normal community sporting and recreation facilities funding. This is additional lighting funding, so it is quite considerable. The Collie funding is allocated outside that program. It is additional funding.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Obviously, lighting is very expensive. For example, to upgrade the lighting to assist the Gascoyne football league in Carnarvon to play football at night would probably cost about \$1 million. That is critical in order for the Gascoyne football league to survive. Also, Carnarvon Speedway needs an upgrade. It is looking at somewhere in the order of \$350 000 to upgrade its lighting. How do organisations like that apply? Has the minister set the criteria? Has that \$2.5 million already been granted to organisations, local governments, or whatever the case may be? Has that money already been spent? What is the application process?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The night lights funding program provides up to one-third of the overall cost. The local government authority also has to come to the party, and also clubs and other funding sources. The member mentioned an issue that is a perennial issue in this portfolio, as all ministers would have come to: there is unlimited demand in the sport and recreation area. But of course governments have to come up with programs to fit certain budgetary parameters. The fact that we have committed an additional \$10 million to the night lights funding program is an absolute compliment to this government. I know from the clubs and organisations that I speak to that they are incredibly happy that this funding program has been instigated.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The minister is right in saying that it is a bottomless pit when it comes to the need, particularly in regional WA. When I look through the items under “Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies”, there seems to be a couple of projects in the Kimberley but nothing in between for any other regional community. Putting aside the politics, that is a concern.

Dr A.D. BUTI: People have to apply for it, member—that is the point. The previous minister to me, Hon Mick Murray—who is a Collie man, but was not Collie-born —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I see a lot of Collie projects in here!

Dr A.D. BUTI: The clubs and/or local governments have to apply. Part of the problem is there is no application. The member may be surprised to know that under the CSRFF, 43 per cent is metro and 57 per cent is regional. Out of the CSRFF, more than half goes to the regions. I am not saying it is not deserved; I am just letting the member know that more than half goes to the regions. The 2021–22 breakdown is: metro, 43 per cent; wheatbelt, four per cent; midwest–Gascoyne, 15 per cent; great southern, three per cent; goldfields, one per cent; Kimberley, 18 per cent; Pilbara, two per cent; and south west–Peel, 14 per cent. That is under that program. Of course, other election commitments and so forth were made for other projects. Under that program, a greater spread of money

goes to the regions. Money from the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development also goes to the regional development commissions. There is other funding to the regions. The regions are doing well, but there is always greater demand.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: When it comes to the lighting project and the community sporting and recreation facilities fund, who has the ultimate say—is it the minister or is it the department?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is a competitive process. It goes through a process in the department and it makes recommendations to the minister.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Say that again, sorry.

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is a competitive process. The department, of course, does an analysis of that and makes recommendations to the minister.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Does the minister have the final say? I see people nodding.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The minister signs off on it.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The minister has the final say by signing off on it.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The minister signs off on it.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: So the answer is yes.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The minister signs off on it.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I will take that as a yes.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: While we are talking about the CSRFF: a recent proposal from certain areas is that given the drop in volunteers —

Dr A.D. BUTI: Which budget item?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am flowing on from the questioning. The minister just quoted all these CSRFF —

DR A.D. BUTI interjected.

The CHAIR: Minister, let the member finish his question and then we will deal with whether it is relevant or not.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Can I just add one thing: an independent panel does the assessment with regard to the funding.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I understand that, but the minister has the ultimate say.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Sorry, member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Flowing on from the community sporting and recreation facilities fund that we have been talking about, there has been a recent proposal of 50 per cent, due to the lack of volunteers and a drop in the number of club members and so on, especially in regional areas. I know it is one-third at the moment: one-third from the club, one-third from the shire and one-third from the department. The proposal is that perhaps it should be 50 per cent from the department and 50 per cent from the shire. Does the minister have any comment on that, given the pressures that clubs are under at the moment?

[12.10 pm]

The CHAIR: Member for Roe, that is more of a general question than a budget-related question, so it is up to the minister whether he responds.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The minister introduced the subject of the community sporting and recreation facilities fund and my question flows on from that.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I have not heard of that proposal.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 561 and the line item “Sports Lotteries Account”. I note that there is a significant amount of money in that account. Does that account have to do with COVID and lotteries money being distributed to the Department of Sport and Recreation? Is that the fund that we are talking about here?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The line item “Sports Lotteries Account” in the budget papers is a funding source for the industry investment program, with approximately \$7 million allocated to state sporting associations to assist with operations and key strategic initiatives. As was mentioned previously, funding is also provided to the Western Australian Institute of Sport for discrete sport initiatives that benefit the community of Western Australia. The expectation in the 2020–21 budget was that COVID-19 would have a negative impact on the annual allocation over the forward estimates. However, in 2020–21, the sports lotteries account received its highest level of revenue, which is confirmed at \$18.6 million.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Can the minister provide a breakdown of where the \$18 million has come from?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It comes from the sports lotteries account.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: And what is it made up of? Where is the revenue coming from?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is five per cent of Lotterywest's net revenue.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: In terms of that sports lotteries account, is the minister able to provide a table of the distribution of those funds? I am happy to take that as supplementary information if the minister does not have the answer.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The member can put the question on notice if he wants further answers.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Minister, these are the estimates hearings. There are line items in the budget estimates and if the minister does not know the information for those line items, it raises questions about whether he knows his portfolio. If he does not, perhaps it can be taken as supplementary information.

The CHAIR: Member for North West Central, the response was that if you want to put the question on notice, you can.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: That seems to be the response of ministers who do not know their portfolios.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 541 and the line item "Small Commitments". Is the minister able to provide a breakdown of sport and recreation projects, multicultural interest projects and citizenship projects, or do they all come under sport and recreation?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Sport and recreation is not multicultural interests. What does the member want?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What are those small commitments and to what area do they pertain?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Would the member for Roe like me to read this list onto the record?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: No, thanks. Can the minister provide that list as supplementary information? I assume that they are election commitments.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will read them out. The member for Roe can tell me if he wants me to stop. The funds went to: Scarborough Surf Life Saving Club for equipment; Forrestfield Junior Football Club—a great club—for equipment; Wanneroo Districts Netball Association for upgrades; Quinns Mindarie Surf Life Saving Club for equipment; Jandakot Jets amateur football club for equipment upgrade; Kelmscott Junior Football Club for an electronic scoreboard; Scarborough Tennis Club for a clubroom fit-out; White Knights Baldivis Cricket Club for equipment; Scarborough Sharks Cricket Club for a clubroom fit-out; Ray Owen Sports Centre for an electronic scoreboard; Baldivis Brumbies Football and Netball Club for equipment; Centrals Football and Netball Club for women's change rooms and equipment; Break the Boundary in Kalamunda for two adaptive off-road cycles; Leeming Spartan Cricket Club for equipment; Rockingham Rugby Union Football Club for equipment; Sorrento Surf Life Saving Club for equipment; Warnbro Bowling Club for furniture; Mt Helena Swim Club for a pool blanket; Wanneroo Basketball Association, Joondalup Wolves, for a vehicle; Forrestdale Sporting Association for solar panels; Piara Waters Cricket Club for sporting equipment; and Maylands Tennis Club for equipment.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I would like the minister to stop now. He asked me when I would like him to stop and it is right now.

The CHAIR: Thank you, minister. Further question, member for Roe?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: We have other —

The CHAIR: Yes, the member for Roe is correct. There is another division and an off-budget item.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the minister provide that list as supplementary information so that I can peruse it over time?

Dr A.D. BUTI: No. I was prepared to read them out. I was reading them out.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: That is the government's rolled-gold accountability!

The CHAIR: Thank you, member for North West Central.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 561, the Western Australian Institute of Sport.

The CHAIR: Is the Institute of Sport an off-budget item? We have the WA Sports Centre Trust then the Western Australian Institute of Sport. If it is a separate item, it is a separate item. The member for North West Central can ask the question and we will make a decision afterwards.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: One of the issues in regional WA is talent identification. Are funds available for regional kids for travel and to provide accommodation, boarding, scholarships and all that?

Dr A.D. BUTI: That was in the regional athlete support program that we talked about earlier.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: In terms of identifying talent, does the Department of Sport and Recreation or the WAIS provide —

Dr A.D. BUTI: This particular section that deals with WAIS is really with regard to the agreement for funding between this department and WAIS. I will answer the member's specific question when we deal with WAIS.

The appropriation was recommended.

[12.20 pm]

Division 38: Western Australian Sports Centre Trust, \$131 110 000 —

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Dr A.D. Buti, Minister for Sport and Recreation.

Mr D. Etherton, Chief Executive Officer, VenuesWest.

Mr N. Lucas, Chief Financial Officer, VenuesWest.

Mr M. Kavanagh, Senior Policy Adviser, Minister for Sport and Recreation.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. It is the intention of the chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 1 October 2021. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

I give the call to the member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to paragraph 1.1 under the asset investment program on page 571. It reads —

\$23.5 million to finalise the Optus Stadium construction contract;

What is this dispute related to?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Mr Etherton to comment on this.

Mr D. Etherton: In any construction project, particularly one that goes for three years, a multitude of claims relate to the construction program. At the end of it, those claims are settled.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It looks to me like the taxpayers of Western Australia are on the hook for \$23.5 million because it is obviously a line item in the budget. Is there any ability to negotiate that figure or do we just accept it?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As the member would realise, we have to be careful what we say at the moment. Nothing is finalised yet. Negotiations are continuing. I will also add that this is coming out of a contract that was originally signed by a previous government.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thank you for enlightening me on that, minister. I also understand that we have been attending football matches there for several years now, so I was slightly surprised when I saw that this was still hanging in the air. What exactly is this related to? What is this \$23.5 million? I know it is about negotiations.

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

Mr D. Etherton: It is a similar answer to the answer I gave just a minute ago. In a construction project, a variety of different claims are made. The builder will say that we took too long to provide them with the advice they needed to design the venue, or that prices went up and we did not provide them with the advice required. There are myriad claims around almost any construction project, including this one, being the scale and the length it was. I do not propose to go through all the claims. The item sitting in there is just in case money is needed to settle. As the minister said, there has been no final agreement. It is still under negotiation between the state and Westadium. That negotiation is being led by the Department of Finance, but because the asset sits in our account, that potential payment is sitting in our account.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is it for a variation at the end, as we get with most building contracts, for any number of different things? Does this pertain to a variation of the contract?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Chair, I do not intend to answer this any further. I am sure the member understands the sensitivity of the matters. They have been negotiated and settlement is trying to be made to protect taxpayers' money as much as possible. I do not think that answering this question or going any further is helping the taxpayers of Western Australia.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: To wrap up, I guess, as the member for North West Central said, taxpayers are paying \$23.5 million. Can the minister tell us when he believes the negotiations will be completed?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As I said, this contract was signed under the Barnett government. We are dealing with issues arising out of that contract. It will be dealt with and settled when it is dealt with and settled.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to paragraph 1 under significant issues impacting the agency on page 568, which relates to the COVID-19 pandemic that continues to present major challenges globally and to all venues. Given that COVID has had an effect on VenuesWest venues and the state, and given nearly every day we hear the Minister for Health or the Premier say that, whether it be for the construction sector or nurses, ambos or police, it is mandated to have a COVID vaccine, have you, as minister responsible for VenuesWest, had any discussions with the Minister for Health or the Premier to mandate that those attending VenuesWest venues must be vaccinated?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The member's question was whether I had had discussions—no.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Has the minister's department or his office had any discussions on the future of whether it will be mandated that people be vaccinated if they want to go to a VenuesWest venue?

Dr A.D. BUTI: VenuesWest has had discussions.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Can the minister please elaborate on those discussions? Who was party to the discussions? Has there been a push by the Premier or the Minister for Health to mandate vaccinations if people want to attend VenuesWest venues?

[12.30 pm]

Dr A.D. BUTI: Before I hand over to Mr Etherton, the language is inappropriate. It is not mandating; they are conditions. If it were to happen, it would be a condition of entry.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am happy to change it, minister. As part of the conditions of entry to a VenuesWest venue, is it going to be mandated that people have to be vaccinated?

Mr D. Etherton: In essence, about five weeks ago I reached out to both the Chief Health Officer and the Deputy Commissioner of Police and asked whether that was coming—whether mandatory vaccination before entry to our venues was something that was being contemplated. I did not get a reply. I reached out again about a week and a half to two weeks ago and repeated the question, and got the reply that a policy had not been formed yet in relation to that. I replied that when a policy was formed, we would be happy to lead that consultation process with the venues industry in Western Australia, and that we would be well placed to do that. That is the extent of the discussions at the moment: is it coming; and, if so, can we consult with the industry to make sure that it is okay.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Obviously, this discussion is also happening at a national level.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: As the state government minister responsible for venues, does the minister support vaccination being a condition of entry to a VenuesWest venue?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Very good try, member, but where is that question related to a budget item?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is related to COVID-19 response, significant issues, and off the back of the director of VenuesWest who said that he had reached out to the Minister for Health.

The CHAIR: Member, you have asked the question of the minister and VenuesWest about the possibility of a policy containing conditional requirements for entry to some of the venues being discussed. They have responded to that. It is not appropriate to ask for the minister's personal view.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Has the AFL spoken to the minister at all in relation to next season at Optus Stadium and potential mandatory vaccination?

Dr A.D. BUTI: No.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Has it spoken to the director or has there been an inquiry in relation to that as well, for the 2022 season?

Dr A.D. BUTI: On my understanding, no.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Has the minister or his department been in any negotiations on providing the opportunity for people attending a VenuesWest venue to be vaccinated, such as basing a walk-in clinic at, say, Optus Stadium, or other venues? Given the fact that more than 60 000 people are about to attend the grand final, has the minister discussed or been in any negotiations to assist in increasing vaccination rates in the general public by having walk-in clinics based around venues to which large populations are going?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I think this came up in another section. That is a matter for the Chief Health Officer and the Vaccine Commander.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Has the minister or the department discussed those options at all?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I have not discussed that and, as I said, it is really a matter for the Vaccine Commander.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to the spending changes table on page 568 and the line item "Optus Stadium Revised Financial Forecast". Can the minister explain the origin of the amount in brackets, \$25 381 000?

Dr A.D. BUTI: With regard to the Optus Stadium revised financial forecast, because of COVID-19-related impacts, we anticipate reductions in expenditure of \$25.4 million and reductions in revenue of \$35 million, requiring an offset of an additional appropriation of \$9.4 million, leaving a minor residual deficit of \$200 000. Impacts arising from COVID-19 have been considered only for 2021–22, which is why those columns are empty. Any continuing impact from the pandemic will require revisions to the forward period beyond 2021–22. That is obviously interesting for VenuesWest. If there is a decrease in revenue because there is less activity, there will be a decrease in costs as well; it will not need to service a venue.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Will the financial forecast change following the grand final?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I think the obvious answer is yes. We only knew about the grand final 21 days ago, or less.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: How much will the grand final cost taxpayers?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Can the member tell me where that question relates to a line item?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It is in relation to running the event and the running of Optus Stadium.

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is not actually related to a budget item, but in any case, as has been repeated by the Premier and me, we have not paid a cent for the hosting rights for the AFL grand final. I can assure the member that the event being held at Optus Stadium will return a positive dividend for the state of Western Australia.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does the minister know the total cost of the waived fees and charges relating to the stadium for the AFL grand final?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I have given the member a lot of latitude here. We are dealing with the budget. We knew only 21 days ago that we would be hosting the grand final, so it is obviously not in this budget and the member cannot refer to a budget item. I am unable to provide that information.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: With regard to the revised forecast, I know that attracting employment has been a challenge for the stadium. Have there been any further successes in gaining employment? Hopefully we will have full employment for the grand final.

The CHAIR: Member for Roe, I appreciate the reasoning behind your questioning, but the minister has discretion as to whether he answers or not.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I know the member for Roe is very excited about the grand final, and I can understand that. For the weekend of the grand final, 2 600 additional workers will be employed at Optus Stadium. On my understanding, it was oversubscribed—there were people on the waiting list—so there is no problem with getting enough workers for this weekend.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Will the minister be working there on the weekend?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am always working!

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is the minister always a minister?

The CHAIR: No, member for North West Central. You do not have the call.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 570 and the line item “Total Cost of Service”, which has gone up substantially. With regard to the \$4.8 million to replace technology infrastructure in ticketing management systems at Optus Stadium, will it be upgraded or replaced in full?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Mr Etherton to respond to this.

Mr D. Etherton: That description is actually a lot narrower than what will occur. In essence, the \$4.8 million is being spent on ICT upgrades, including system upgrades at Optus Stadium.

There is a wide variety of information and communications technology requirements, including point of sale, the personal computers they use at their desk, the systems in place for ticketing et cetera. It is a wide variety. The ticketing system is not being changed or replaced.

[12.40 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Obviously, once again, the stadium has been in play for only two or three short years and this \$4.8 million is to upgrade or replace technology infrastructure, including ticketing management systems. I guess the question from the average taxpayer would be: why \$5 million when the stadium has been open for only a couple of years? Can we have a bit more of a breakdown of that?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will defer to Mr Etherton.

Mr D. Etherton: Technical equipment depreciates substantially faster than buildings. In our accounts, we generally depreciate a building over 40 or 50 years. ICT equipment is generally depreciated over between three and six years. Things like the digital screens might last 10 years, but PCs, servers and things like that have a shelf life of between

three and six years. In essence, of that \$4.8 million, the member will see there are smaller amounts—I think \$128 000 in the first year as not much had become old—but the number goes up and down over the years as that equipment reaches its end of life. It will go into myriad things, but I do not have the detail here.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The total cost of service on that line item has gone up from \$126-odd million in 2020–21 to \$155 million. On that line item, why has the cost of service gone up by \$30-odd million?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As I explained before, as the member knows, we had COVID-19, which, of course, resulted in many, many games not being played with crowds and so forth. As the capacity for crowds at venues increases, and the venues are used more, the cost of services increases.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to paragraph 4 under the spending changes on page 568 where it refers to construction of the rooftop attraction at Optus Stadium. Can the minister enlighten us on how that is panning out? Is it fully in place? How is it going?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am sure the member would love to be up there watching the game this weekend. It is underway; it is a new 42-metre-high viewing platform that will allow fans to walk several metres beyond the edge of the stadium roof. I know the member next to him has a great fear of heights, so he will not be up there!

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Not a hope in hell!

Dr A.D. BUTI: The new ring pull-shaped platform is set to create one of the world's best stadium viewing experiences. It will be brilliant. It will provide a 360-degree view for visitors. Construction is underway and we look forward to having it available in 2022—the intention is before the start of the 2022 AFL season.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the minister give me a bit of latitude here. Will the zip-line from the bridge be part of that package or will it be outside VenuesWest?

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is a Minister for Transport; Minister for Planning issue.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I think we have nearly come to the end. The big issue I also want to ask about is the HBF Park stadium expenditure for the FIFA Women's World Cup, where we are looking at about \$15 million over the forward estimates. Is the minister confident that will be completed within the time frame? Obviously, there is an urgent issue to do that.

Dr A.D. BUTI: It will have to be completed for the 2022–23 FIFA World Cup. Yes, I am confident. It is a great stadium now. These will be good improvements and I look forward to hosting a few great World Cup games here in Perth.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is it the nib Stadium?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is HBF Park.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Does Perth Glory play at HBF Park?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is HBF Park.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is a long time since I have been there. Will it be used for any of the Women's World Cup games?

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is where it will be; it is what we were just talking about.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Sorry; I am getting confused with HBF Stadium.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to paragraph 1.5 on page 571 where it says, "\$3.6 million on security infrastructure initiatives at Optus Stadium, HBF Park and RAC Arena." Can the minister enlighten us on what they pertain to?

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

Mr D. Etherton: The majority of that funding has been put towards hostile vehicle mitigation measures. We do not propose to go into much further detail than that for security reasons.

The appropriation was recommended.

WA Institute of Sport —

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Dr A.D. Buti, Minister for Sport and Recreation.

Ms L. Chopping, Director General.

Ms K. Ellwood, Executive Director.

Mr S. Lawrence, Chief Executive Officer.

Mr D. Fitzpatrick, Chief Financial Officer.

Mr M. Kavanagh, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. Members may raise questions about matters relating to the operations and budget of the off-budget authority. Off-budget authority officers are recognised as ministerial advisers. It is the intention of the chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 1 October 2021. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

Member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: We referred to this in the previous Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries division and the minister said that he would be happy to answer these questions when we came through to the WAIS section. I referred to page 561 at the time and asked about the recurrent funding.

[12.50 pm]

Dr A.D. BUTI: Okay. Chair, this is an interesting thing. The member cannot now go back to that. I do not know why opposition members requested the Western Australian Institute of Sport to come here for a start, but anyway, they have. Now we are dealing with operational matters of WAIS; we are not dealing with budget items. When we were dealing with the previous session, that was the department appropriating money to WAIS and we could have dealt with that issue. But the way that WAIS spends its money is an operational matter. As the member very well knows, I have answered this question in Parliament, and that is a different issue. The opposition asked WAIS to come today; I have no idea why. If we are going to deal with WAIS now, can we please deal with the budget item in front of us and not go back to things that have already been passed?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 577 under community services. The program provides opportunities for talented Western Australian athletes to achieve excellence in elite sport with support from their home environment. How are things going in relation to the gymnastics inquiry?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Gymnastics is not part of the WAIS program. There is no funding in this budget for gymnastics.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I asked the minister a question in the Legislative Assembly. Can he enlighten me on what is his role as minister in relation to oversight of the board?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I cannot see a budget item, but I will answer that for the member. As I told the member in Parliament, I have the final say on the selection of board members. Mr Lawrence will correct me if I am wrong; I can only remove a board member with 75 per cent majority support of the existing board.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Will the minister indulge me slightly as to the time frames for board members; that is, for how many years are they appointed?

The CHAIR: Minister, as pointed out, this is probably not a budget-related question, but it is up to you if you would like to respond.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I really do think we should bring this to an end; it is pointless going on. They are appointed for two to three years.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What is the maximum number?

Dr A.D. BUTI: They can be reappointed, but usually they would be appointed for two or three years. There is a maximum of 10 years.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What does the total cost of the asset investment program of \$143 000 each year provide?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will defer to Mr Lawrence.

Mr S. Lawrence: That is money that is spent on replacing operational assets within the high performance service centre itself. That is pieces of equipment over \$5 000 in value, of course, such as ergometers, treadmills, and gas analysis equipment that is used for assessing and testing athletes.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That is a mixture of both administration equipment and sporting equipment. Would that be the description?

Mr S. Lawrence: Yes, correct.

The CHAIR: That completes the examination of the Western Australian Institute of Sport off-budget authority.

Meeting suspended from 12.55 to 2.00 pm

DevelopmentWA —

Mrs L.A. Munday, Chair.

Dr A.D. Buti, Minister for Lands.

Mr F. Marra, Chief Executive Officer.

Mrs F. Barclay, Chief Financial Officer.

Mr M. Ryan, Executive General Manager, Planning and Transition.

Ms C. Smith, Principal Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

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I give the call to the Leader of the Opposition.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 769 of budget paper No 2, volume 2, and the significant issues impacting the government trading enterprise. Paragraph 6 refers to regional development and the models for land and housing delivery in regional WA. Can the minister talk us through some of the strategies that the government is using to address what has been a longstanding issue?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The whole issue of accommodation development in the regions is a challenging one. Land is available, but we need to work out the most appropriate way to open that up or release that land to ensure that we get appropriate accommodation. I will throw to Frank Marra to elaborate.

Mr F. Marra: The regional portfolio is one of the key portfolios for DevelopmentWA. Outside the Perth metropolitan area, many of the challenges are around the cost of developing land and then the cost of building upon that land. The state is responsible for the land and infrastructure costs and we have been challenged by the heated construction market recently, with construction costs increasing substantially. To try to ameliorate that, last year we introduced the Regional Land Booster program. That allowed us to reprice our land to the prevailing market conditions at the time. DevelopmentWA repriced over 1 000 blocks of land that it had held on behalf of the state, across the state. Some 290 lots have now been sold in over 40 towns across Western Australia. It is the first time that there has been a sale in some of these regional towns for five-plus years. That is one of the key ways that the state has addressed this challenge of affordability at the moment.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Can I confirm that 1 000 blocks came under the regional booster program?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Mr Marra is talking about the Regional Land Booster program that cabinet approved in July 2020 to the amount of \$166.3 million. After one year of the program, 290 lots have been contracted across 42 regional towns with a combined value of more than \$65 million. Construction on these lots is expected to generate 976 jobs with an estimated private sector investment of \$321 million.

With regard to the current status of the Regional Land Booster program, as of 22 September this year, 338 lots were contracted, with Karratha and Broome recording the highest sale volume. Of the contracted lots, 17 are in Port Hedland, 13 are in Pinjarra—all lots in Pinjarra have already settled—and 11 are in Karratha. Out of the 244 lots that have already been settled, 37 are in Karratha, 36 are in Broome and 43 are light industrial area lots. In Onslow, 22 residential lots are to be contracted to Mineral Resources. Over the next six months, the regional program will assess major regional locations that are exhibiting a continued demand and require new land stages to be developed. Sales have been achieved so far in 52 regional towns.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I am going to have to refer to *Hansard* to keep track of what the minister just said. Did the minister just say that 1 000 blocks in total were part of the Regional Land Booster program? How many of those have actually been sold?

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is true. Incentives have been offered for 100 programs offering more than 1 000 lots in total, out of which 290 have been sold.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Did the program start last year?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: When did it start? Was it in last year's budget?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It was approved in July last year and it started a month after that. As of September, that many have been sold so far.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: So 290 have been sold—thank you. The minister said something about investigations that will be undertaken over the next six months in regional centres where there is still an overheated market. Can the minister tell me whether those target towns or regions have already been identified?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will defer to Mr Marra.

[2.10 pm]

Mr F. Marra: We have stock available in most markets across regional Western Australia. The markets we are actively working on at the moment to make sure that future land supply will be brought on are places like Broome north. We have land supply actively being brought to market in Albany in a couple of projects that were transferred recently from the Department of Communities to DevelopmentWA, and we are preparing a number of business cases for a number of local governments, such as the Shires of Jerramungup, Cunderdin, Dalwallinu and Dandaragan.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is that the exhaustive list or is there a list we can get by way of supplementary information?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Does the Leader of the Opposition want us to read out the whole list?

Mr F. Marra: That was the list, minister.

Dr A.D. BUTI: That was the list.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: That was the list, so—Jerramungup, Cunderdin, Dandaragan?

Mr F. Marra: The places are Jerramungup, Cunderdin, Dalwallinu and Dandaragan.

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is in the wheatbelt region. There are other regions. Does the Leader of the Opposition want the other regions?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Yes. I know I am the member for Central Wheatbelt; I am very interested in the wheatbelt!

Dr A.D. BUTI: We have the whole list here. Would Mr Marra like to read the list out?

Mr F. Marra: Certainly. In Albany, we will be activating lots at Oyster Harbour and Clydesdale Park. We have sites that we will be bringing to market in Middleton Beach in Albany as well. In the Shire of Plantagenet, we are working with a local agribusiness firm on expanding its abattoir capacity. In the Shire of Gnowangerup, we are supporting the shire's efforts to deliver new light industrial lots in the north west of the town.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is that outside the Regional Land Booster program? Is that just business as usual for the department?

Mr F. Marra: The Regional Land Booster program was aimed at existing stock that was held by the state.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is this new?

Mr F. Marra: These are new projects that will be developed and the pricing will be set to market. Effectively, the Regional Land Booster program is not required for these, because they will be repriced ready for the market at the moment.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I have a further question about the Regional Land Booster program. Will those lots stay at the price they were at at the application of the program across the forward estimates? Will they be pulled off the market? Will there be changes? How does the government intend to deal with them going forward?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Obviously, there is a continual re-evaluation of the price of land according to market forces, so it is hard to determine. It will not necessarily be a fixed price. The Regional Land Booster program has been of great value in unlocking land. I should also add that under the regional development assistance program, the state government will provide DevelopmentWA with direct funding to assist in helping local communities to try to develop land, whether it is residential, commercial or industrial. There is much work done. Of course, these things take a bit of time.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to the works mentioned earlier in Jerramungup, Cunderdin, Dalwallinu, Dandaragan and Albany. How does local government register and qualify for the program? I presume there are not unlimited funds available to government to do this. How are they prioritised? How are they applied for?

Mr F. Marra: As the minister indicated, DevelopmentWA runs the regional development assistance program, which is open to all regional local governments, so local governments are able to apply to DevelopmentWA. We then work with each local government to determine the priority of the landholdings and allocate that \$4 million in funding that the minister spoke of earlier to deliver land in those small towns.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is that \$4 million a year?

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is correct, but that is obviously in addition to the Regional Land Booster program.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have a further question. Gnowangerup was mentioned. I have some recent correspondence saying that the cost of blocks there makes them untenable to develop or to sell or pass on to anyone. Are there any strategies in place to improve that situation?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Mr Marra to add to my initial comments. Obviously, the Regional Land Booster program and the regional development assistance program are geared to assist. I am not sure whether Mr Marra has any further comment.

Mr F. Marra: The regional development assistance program is aimed at trying to meet the cost differential between the cost of production and the selling price. That is why we prioritise each individual project to try to make that \$4 million go as far as possible to as many different sites. It is fairly typical in small country towns for the development cost to exceed the revenue that can be achieved; therefore, that \$4 million per annum is used as a subsidy to meet the market, so to speak.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is there a high level of engagement between the department and those local governments to enable some other methodology of getting these blocks to market at a sensible level?

Dr A.D. BUTI: There is constant engagement by DevelopmentWA in the regions. The chair often discusses this issue with me. I am not quite sure what the member means by “different methodology”. These programs are in existence now and, as I said, DevelopmentWA is constantly talking with authorities and others.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Has there been any thought given to increasing the amount available to that program at the moment and freeing up more affordable land so it encourages people to build and create new spaces? I am talking about the \$4 million, especially in the context of the housing shortages we are experiencing. I can think of several cases in Northam of people being willing to free up their accommodation if they had the opportunity to expand into a different type of house. I know we are not talking about building houses under the minister’s department, but it is land accessibility and the price of land that prohibits building, particularly in smaller communities, as the member for Roe mentioned. Was any thought given to framing this budget as a COVID response and to increasing that amount across the forward estimates, given some of the challenges we are facing?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The amount is considerable at the moment. It is \$4 million per annum under the regional development assistance program, and \$166 million under the Regional Land Booster program. That is quite a considerable subsidy and incentive for development in the regions. That is what it is at the moment, and it is quite considerable.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Was there no request for or consideration of that increasing? It is outside of the Regional Land Booster program, which I acknowledge is new and very welcome. There has always been a program to develop blocks. Has that been static or was consideration given to increasing that?

Dr A.D. BUTI: What we have at the moment is what we have at the moment, and I think it is quite considerable. That is what we have.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is the minister’s assessment that that is meeting the needs or the demand that is currently present?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I never said that, member. As I said in the earlier session about sporting clubs, there is never enough money. The Leader of the Opposition knows that very well, having been a former minister of the Crown. This is a considerable, significant contribution.

[2.20 pm]

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 770, and the 2021–22 dividend retention. Paragraph 7 states —

DevelopmentWA will retain its forecast 2021–22 dividend payment ... to instead contribute to funding future infrastructure investment.

Could the minister unpack for me what “funding future infrastructure investment” means? Are there programs to which that is already attached to determine where that \$64.6 million will be applied? In what years would the minister anticipate that would be spent?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Obviously, as the member will realise, strategic infrastructure requirements are a very important part of DevelopmentWA. Those funds will be guaranteed for future business cases, and in the fullness of time they will be utilised. I am not in a position now to talk about where the funds are going, because the business cases have not been formulated.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The decision for that dividend to be retained, is it parked in DevelopmentWA waiting to be spent?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It will be utilised in a strategic manner.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I am not trying to be difficult, minister. It is not an inconsiderable amount of money and DevelopmentWA must have some priorities that it would like to see achieved. Quarantining that amount without any detail probably does not pass muster, in terms of transparency. Can the minister provide no indication of what kinds of projects that might be applied to across the forward estimates?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Going forward, the strategic infrastructure requirements are going to basically three different areas: regional, industrial and metropolitan.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is there a delineation of what percentage would be spent in each of those three categories?

Dr A.D. BUTI: No.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: There is \$64.6 million floating in DevelopmentWA that is not attached to any projects. When does the minister envisage that those business cases will be developed and put forward for utilisation of those funds?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is not floating.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: It is not attached to anything, so the minister cannot tell me where it is going.

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is not floating in the air somewhere.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: It may as well be; it is not going anywhere!

Dr A.D. BUTI: I know the Nationals WA has a hard issue with financial responsibility.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I am trying to find out what the minister wants to do with that money. I think I am being very financially responsible, asking where the minister's \$64.6 million is going to go.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The business cases have to be brought to the minister, then they have to be approved by the Expenditure Review Committee. That is the normal process.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I understand that business cases are required, but is there no notion within DevelopmentWA or in the minister's mind of what that would be applied to?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I have nothing further to add.

The CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, the minister is not answering anything further. Do you have a new question?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Yes. I refer to page 769 of budget paper No 2, under the heading "Machinery of Government Reforms". Could the minister explain paragraph 3 to me a bit further and expand on what is there?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I think it is reasonably clear. As a result of the machinery-of-government changes, the former Department of Communities' land development functions have now been moved over to DevelopmentWA. DevelopmentWA now effectively becomes the development arm of social housing. There has been a transfer of the Department of Communities' commercial land development projects, assets and staff to DevelopmentWA. That process is basically what is mentioned there, that DevelopmentWA becomes the development arm of mainly the social housing component of the Department of Communities.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Could the minister tell me the number of staff who have come across as part of that transfer?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Twenty staff.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to the same page, 769, and paragraph 5, which states that DevelopmentWA will have a greater role in the delivery of social housing. Can the minister tell me how this will play out?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As I mentioned in the previous answer, DevelopmentWA now has the development arm of social housing that was formally in the Department of Communities, with the transfer of staff members. I will hand over to Mr Marra if he wants to add any comments.

Mr F. Marra: The Department of Communities' land bank, land operations and associated projects were transferred to DevelopmentWA, which will continue with those projects and continue development, either outright or in joint venture partnerships that already existed when those projects transferred across. We will then make land available for the social housing program, as occurred in the past with the Department of Communities. Further, where there is higher density or more complex projects, DevelopmentWA will engage with the market to get the social housing constructed for the Department of Communities.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is it just with the Department of Communities, or is there also a relationship with the Minister for Housing?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The housing and planning ministers and I, as Minister for Lands, are part of the steering committee looking at the issue of social housing.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Areas have been identified, such as Geraldton, Bunbury and Albany. Is there an intent for DevelopmentWA to also look at places like Esperance, which is desperately in need of social housing? There appears to be a focus in regional areas on those three larger centres. Is there a focus on other areas of need as well?

Dr A.D. BUTI: All areas of the state are being considered, but obviously these decisions have been made in conjunction with the Ministers for Housing and Planning. DevelopmentWA will obviously have the role of developing social housing, but decisions are also made through the dialogue between the Minister for Housing, the Minister for Planning and me.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 772 under the heading "Asset Investment Program". I have a couple of questions about this one. I note that a number of industrial parks are listed there but not the most important, which would be Avon Industrial Park, which is on the doorstep of my electorate. I am wondering whether any work has been done in relation to the AIP; and, if so, how has that been progressed and supported, and are there any planned investments? For the minister's background—I am sure he has been briefed—it has been a challenging area to develop over time. It does not seem to have progressed, yet it is very close to Perth; it is ideally located. What is the government's intentions for trying to activate that particular park?

[2.30 pm]

Dr A.D. BUTI: I might just hand this one to Mr Marra.

Mr F. Marra: Thank you for the question. We have had the Avon Industrial Park project on the books for a number of years. We actually have available stock in the area and we work with the development commission and the local authority to activate that stock. There have been a number of inquiries over the years for that land, and we will continue to market it and make it available to the market. Currently, we have some eight lots available for purchase and activation at Avon Industrial Park.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Are all the lots serviced?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Mr Marra.

Mr F. Marra: The lots are serviced suitable for a particular use. It really depends on the final intended use of the land and whether further servicing would be required.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Can the minister advise what budget is applied to the promotion of the opportunities at the park? Over time, I think there have been various different efforts to try to elevate that, but I wonder what particular effort is being made and what is in the budget that is being applied.

Dr A.D. BUTI: We do not have those exact details. I do not think that we can actually provide them even later on, but it is around three per cent of total project spend for Avon.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is there a ranking for the business parks? There is a number listed in the budget papers. I wonder whether there is a ranking in terms of where the government is aiming to activate and attract tenants or facilitate investment.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Every region has an industrial park. It is important. In regard to the priority, the member should address that matter to the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation and the Minister for State Development, Jobs and Trade.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: In terms of where the investment is, does the minister think that the policy gets it there rather than from DevelopmentWA? Is there no ranking within DevelopmentWA in terms of which estates need to be, or could be, developed or where the best bang for buck would be?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Mr Marra.

Mr F. Marra: We work with the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation to help prioritise at a state level. In individual region areas, the regional development assistance program provides us with advice, as do the regional development commissions, but we aim to have industrial land available in each of the regional areas, and that is why the minister indicated the importance of making land available in each area. Where land is available, we prioritise those regional areas where land is not available at the given time.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I draw the minister's attention to the second sentence of paragraph 1.1, which states —

The ILA portfolio is forecast to deliver more than 4,500 jobs during construction and around 10,000 jobs once businesses are fully established.

They are nice, round figures. Can the minister give me an understanding of how he arrived at the 4 500 and 10 000 figures? Do those figures include all the industrial parks or is it just the ones listed? I am trying to get an understanding of how the minister can make a claim that there will be that many jobs.

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is not a claim; it is a forecast. I will hand over to Mr Marra.

Mr F. Marra: Thank you. DevelopmentWA employed an economist to give us an indication as to the impact that our industrial estate has on the economy. The Industrial Lands Authority is forecast to deliver a certain number of estates over the budget period. We have forecast that as that land is sold and developed by private interests, the development by those private interests will release those 4 500 jobs during the construction phase. The ultimate use of that industrial land is what gives the 10 000 jobs once the businesses are fully established. Therefore, it is the leverage that the Industrial Lands Authority is able to achieve by releasing the land in the first place.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Would that not depend on, essentially, what the land is used for? I mean, you could put a big shed in an industrial park that has only two people working on it. I am assuming that there is some standard of modelling that was used somewhere along the line. I am just trying to understand how those figures were arrived at and how that is measured.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will throw to Mr Marra shortly. Obviously, as the member can see in that paragraph, a number of significant projects are listed, and that formed part of the modelling forecast that the experts look at. But I will refer further to Mr Marra.

Mr F. Marra: The minister has indicated the methodology that we use, which is that we look back over previous estates and make an assumption as to how they will be developed in the future. Therefore, in that case, it is an estimate based on the past informing the future. Those estimates could be higher or they could vary depending on the ultimate use, but we have found that when we take the perspective of a large sample size, this is a reasonable estimation as to what the economic impact will be from developing the sites that the Industrial Lands Authority releases.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Those 4 500 jobs during construction and 10 000 jobs once businesses are fully established assumes that all those industrial parks are full; is that the premise we are working on?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is based on what we expect to sell over the next four years. It is not on all of them because it is not possible to do all those in the next four years.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to the same page, 772, and paragraph 1.3. I was wondering whether I could have an update, considering that the Esplanade Hotel was knocked over in 2006 and here we are 15 years later, on how the Albany Middleton Beach project is going.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Actually, it is going very well, member. I was down there not so long ago, and I invite the member to join me, if he wants to, on another occasion. It is going actually quite well, but I will hand over to Mr Marra to elaborate further.

Mr F. Marra: Thank you. Since the site was acquired, it has been fully rezoned. Infrastructure has been put into place. The road has been realigned. The site has been created for the landmark hotel on the beach side, and the mixed-use precinct area has also been delineated and created. We have been able to contract the sale of the hotel site to a Western Australian body. It is preparing plans at the moment and is finalising those with the City of Albany. Further to that, to try to activate the remaining mixed-use precinct, DevelopmentWA has taken it upon itself to demonstrate an innovative new product. We have recently received development approval to produce six duet homes, which are dual-key, terraced homes that we will build on the Middleton Beach site, which will allow for downstairs business occupancy and upstairs residential occupancy. There can be a cottage industry kind of operation downstairs, whether it be a cafe or a tourism-related business, and accommodation upstairs. We are in the market at the moment getting tender prices and we hope to be under construction within the next few months.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will add to that. In regard to the hotel, it is expected to be a four star-plus hotel, with 80 to 100 rooms, alongside beachfront, food and beverage facilities.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to the duet homes. Can they be owned by two different parties—the downstairs and the upstairs—or is it an arrangement in which one person owns it and subleases the other part?

[2.40 pm]

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is aimed at a single owner with dual occupancy.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: With the hotel site being on the beach side, has that blocked out the vision of those buildings, duet homes or whatever on the other site that are obviously on the inland side?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The duet homes do not face the beach; they face Mt Clarence.

The CHAIR: That completes the examination of DevelopmentWA.

Division 13: Finance, \$1 337 950 000 —

Mrs L.A. Munday, Chair.

Dr A.D. Buti, Minister for Finance.

Ms N. Godecke, Director General.

Miss K.J. Ingham, Deputy Director General, Advisory Services.

Mr S. Whitmarsh, Deputy Director General, Building and Contracts.

Mr G.R. Gilbert, Deputy Director General, Service and Investment.

Ms M.M. Nicolaou, Commissioner of State Revenue.

Mr D. Geraghty, Chief Finance Officer.

Ms H. Farrell, Chief Customer Officer.

Ms P. Brown, Chief of Staff.

Ms A.G. Kidson, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. It is the intention of the chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information he

agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 1 October 2021. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

I give the call to the Leader of the Opposition.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to the second paragraph under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency” on page 163 of budget paper No 2, which relates to the establishment of the infrastructure delivery unit and its intersection with the major projects directorate. How do those two interact? They appear to be two directorates or delivery units doing the same thing. Could the minister enlighten me on their difference and why they are both operating?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Is the member talking about the infrastructure delivery unit and the major projects directorate?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Yes. It seems like there is an overlap. Two units are now delivering infrastructure. I presume that the infrastructure unit is related to major projects. It seems like there is an overlap. How do they work together?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The infrastructure delivery unit within Finance was developed in 2020 to oversee the delivery of the WA recovery plan and the entire state's \$30.7 billion asset investment plan, involving 1 450 projects. The major projects directorate is dedicated to high-value, high-profile, high-risk infrastructure. Obviously, there is an interaction between the two, but the major projects directorate is specifically responsible for those high-value, high-profile, high-risk projects. I might ask the director general if she would like to add any comments.

Ms N. Godecke: The infrastructure delivery unit exists at the moment but it was temporarily funded. It has oversight of the whole asset investment program. In the context of the really large high-risk projects that are coming online, there is a need to have some specialist expertise in that area. The infrastructure delivery unit will be a unit within the major projects directorate. The idea is that we have oversight across the whole program but we then have specialist expertise across each major project as it comes online through the delivery phase.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: So that I have it clear in my head, will the infrastructure delivery unit be the overarching body and then the major projects directorate will sit within that?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is the other way around.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The major projects directorate will be the major body and then the infrastructure delivery unit is underneath.

Ms N. Godecke: It is a directorate—major projects and infrastructure delivery, and they sit as a directorate within the Department of Finance. At the moment, we have Buildings and Contracts, which basically oversees all the infrastructure delivery. The new directorate will be called the major projects directorate, and it will have responsibility not only for the new major project delivery, but also the overarching infrastructure delivery unit will actually sit as part of that directorate.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: What are qualified as major projects?

Dr A.D. BUTI: For instance, a major project would be the new women's and babies' hospital, the redevelopment of Bunbury Hospital at South West Campus and Peel Health Campus, the new metropolitan facility for the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, and new and upgraded laboratories. They are major complex infrastructure.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Have criteria been created or is it done on a case-by-case basis through cabinet or the department?

Dr A.D. BUTI: There are no set criteria. It is what is considered to be a major spend and obviously of significant importance and complexity.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Obviously, that will be decided when something is announced or the government makes a decision to proceed; it will be in the sheep run and drafted off to the major projects directorate. Who makes the ultimate decision—the Expenditure Review Committee or cabinet?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The decision is made by cabinet.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: How many staff will be involved in that directorate?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will hand over to the director general.

Ms N. Godecke: There are approximately 40 staff, and that will obviously flex as further major projects come into the directorate. Twenty-three of those are existing infrastructure delivery unit staff who are temporarily funded and will become permanently funded. Seven new staff are in the major projects directorate, six new staff are fee-funded directly from the projects, not appropriation funded, and four existing roles that sit within the Buildings and Contracts area will be transferred across, and they are linked to current major projects that are winding down.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Will the positions occupied by the people who have been shifted from within the department to become part of that directorate be backfilled, or were they just transferred across to the new directorate?

[2.50 pm]

Dr A.D. BUTI: The roles have been transferred; that role does not exist anymore, so it does not need to be backfilled.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 163 and paragraph 6, relating to market-led proposals. It mentions that two proposals have been finalised under the MLP process. Is there information—I think I have seen it somewhere, so I am happy with an answer of yes or no—on how many MLPs have been received and assessed or knocked out along the way?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As the Leader of the Opposition knows, the market-led proposals process is a very important policy, but it is only when proposals get to a certain stage that they become public. Information that is publicly available is on the MLP website. Once a proposal gets to stage 2, it becomes public, but I am unable to let the Leader of the Opposition know about anything prior to stage 2.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: When a project reaches stage 2, it is either accepted or rejected, and then whether it has been accepted or rejected becomes public. Do we get to know about the ones that fall off?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The ones that fall off or are rejected are not published.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is there a way of knowing the total number of projects that come into the department and are assessed?

Dr A.D. BUTI: At the moment, we have received 58 proposals.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: When did that process start? Was it last year? I know that forms of MLP have been around for a long time.

Dr A.D. BUTI: It was in 2019.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: There have been 58 proposals since 2019?

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is correct.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Can the minister help me understand paragraph 6, which states that considerable activity has occurred on assessing 30 market-led proposals. Are they the ones that have been made public or is that just for this financial year?

Dr A.D. BUTI: They are the proposals that are currently live.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: A concern raised about this process is that there is a lack of transparency: we do not know and we cannot see who the government is dealing with or how it is meeting that public accountability process. What measures are in place to make sure that the government is acting with the highest level of transparency? I can understand those concerns when we have private developers coming to government and pitching ideas that may or may not get any scrutiny from Parliament, the opposition or the public.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I understand, member, but if the proposals are to progress, they will become public at stage 2. If a proposal is rejected, it does not go any further, so I am not sure whether there should be that much concern. If a proposal has been rejected, it will not go any further, and a project at stage 2 that may progress to full completion will be made public.

I should add that probity advisers are appointed throughout the process. In many respects, it is at arm's length from government for much of initial stages of the process.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: What role does the minister have in that process?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The MLPs sit within the Department of Finance, so the Minister for Finance is responsible for the MLP process. The secretary will make an assessment of the proposal. It will also go to the minister responsible for the area—it might be health or it might be education—and they will look at it and agree with the assessment or not. Cabinet makes the ultimate decision on whether something is progressed at each of the stages.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: At what stage would the minister be aware of a proposal that comes into the department?

Dr A.D. BUTI: When it is brought to cabinet or when it goes public as well.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Does it require a cabinet decision to go public?

Dr A.D. BUTI: There are a few processes here.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: It is not a gotcha; I am trying to understand where the minister is in the process.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The Leader of the Opposition asked a legitimate question. The secretary will make—director general, please correct me if do not get this right—an assessment. It will go to the minister responsible for that project and the Minister for Finance as well. Then the minister makes a recommendation to cabinet on whether to accept or reject the assessment by the secretary. Then, ultimately, cabinet will make the decision on whether it is rejected or it proceeds, and that will also happen at stages 2 and 3.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: When a proposal is brought to government, it goes to the unit within the department and an assessment is made. What happens to the proposal in the period between arriving at the department and getting to the minister's desk?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It goes through a steering committee process before it goes to the ministerial level. It is at arm's length from government in the initial stages.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Minister, tell me if this does not fit in where we are, but I understand that this is a market-led proposal. I understand that the developer Cedar Woods' apartment complex had been approved for progress and was ready to go by 5 February this year, but it was not announced by the government until after 13 March. There has been some criticism that it was not announced prior to the election because it was a controversial project. Does the minister have any comments on that?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As the Leader of the Opposition knows, it is on the website. I do not have any comment to make on the Leader of the Opposition's assessment of any controversial aspect to it.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Could the minister confirm when the final decision to progress that particular project was made by government?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I was not the minister at the time. I really have nothing further to add.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: So the minister cannot tell me as a matter of public information when the decision was made?

[3.00 pm]

Dr A.D. BUTI: Obviously, the decision would have been made at the cabinet level. It only goes public when it gets to stage 2, and that is the situation. If the member wants to put it on notice, I will see whether we can provide her with more information.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Can the minister confirm whether that process had been completed or progressed through to the point at which it could be made public by 5 February this year?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The member should put the question on notice.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 164 and paragraph 11. Can the minister talk me through the \$20 million savings that have been achieved through the government office accommodation reform program? Where have those savings been achieved? It says that that focus will continue during 2021–22, so what is the plan in terms of achieving further savings on that front?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Since the government office accommodation reform program targets were met and the reform program closed in early 2020, the Department of Finance has identified a further \$20 million in savings, taking the total savings since the reform was approved in 2017 to \$165 million. This has largely been achieved through negotiating more favourable lease terms, improving the use of government's existing assets through better asset management, and implementing various backfill strategies and contemporary office layouts such as activity-based workplaces. The Department of Finance in conjunction with other government agencies continues to work on establishing a portfolio that relies on a one-government approach, a more flexible approach that aligns with the government's broader initiatives and is scalable to accommodate any government need for changes. That is the situation.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 164 and paragraph 13, which states that "Finance is responsible for delivering two components of the State Electric Vehicles (EV) Strategy". How is that going? When it refers to "eligible vehicles", what are the eligible vehicles? There would be a significant fleet in regional WA. Is that problematic?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The government is committed to transitioning the fleet to low or zero emission electric vehicles. This is essential to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and supporting battery and hydrogen industries in WA. I hand over to Ms Ingham.

Miss K.J. Ingham: I thank the member for the question. Just to provide a bit more background on this item, as the minister has already mentioned, the Western Australian government is committed to transitioning its vehicle fleet to low or zero emission; however, as the member mentioned, it will only be those cars for which it really makes sense, so it does not include the whole of the state fleet. In terms of where we are now, we are talking about small and light passenger vehicles, so light fleet; small passenger vehicles; and the small and medium SUV fleet. We currently have 12 EVs in the fleet and we are progressing well towards that target. Our biggest challenge is around implementing charging infrastructure, but the government has already addressed that by putting aside \$800 000 to install charging infrastructure, so we are now focusing on rolling that out.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Is there a breakdown of where that is happening? Obviously, it is relatively easy for that to happen in metropolitan areas, but is that happening regionally as well?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I hand over to Ms Ingham.

Miss K.J. Ingham: Thank you. I thank the member for the follow-up question. To provide that additional piece of information, it is happening where it makes sense to do so. Obviously, we are not going to put EVs where cars are going to be driving for a very long period and where there is no charging infrastructure. If the member would like specific information about where we are targeting our efforts, we can provide that as supplementary information.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Yes, I would; thank you.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Finally! Finally, some sense!

Dr A.D. BUTI: I am the minister, so I will decide on those matters, thank you, member in the background. Is he registered to speak?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: He is.

Dr A.D. BUTI: You cannot have four of you.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: There are three of us.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The minister's department has indicated that the information is available. Will the minister provide that information?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will determine that. If the member wants to put it on notice, we will provide the information.

The CHAIR: Does the minister agree to provide the supplementary information? If so, state exactly what information will be provided.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will provide it on notice if the member wants it. If the member wants it, she can put a question on notice.

The CHAIR: That is not being provided as supplementary information?

Dr A.D. BUTI: No.

The CHAIR: Thank you, minister.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Apparently not, because the minister is not willing to actually provide any information, even though that is the whole purpose of budget estimates. It is actually available in the department. I do not understand why the minister would not want the public to know. The information is available in his department.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I do not know why the Leader of the Opposition will not put it on notice. Put it on notice!

The CHAIR: Members, let us move on.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the minister tell me what is the ability of the Department of Finance when we have a situation —

Dr A.D. BUTI: Excuse me; page number?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: This is a further question regarding the electric vehicle strategy. As the minister knows, if someone travels from Perth to Esperance, it is a long way—about eight hours. We have mining companies in Ravensthorpe that are ready and willing to help out with the installation of electric vehicle charging stations, and we have Western Power and others making it very difficult for them to implement those charging stations. The Department of Finance is responsible for delivering those components. Can the minister tell me what ability the department has to work with Western Power to enable them in an important place like Ravensthorpe?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I think the member should refer that to the Minister for Energy.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: We are not getting a lot of joy there either, I am afraid, so I thought the Minister for Finance might have a strong hand.

The CHAIR: I think the question has been answered and we will move on.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I refer to page 163 and paragraph 7. My question relates to the state's building bonus and the administration of the HomeBuilder grants and building bonuses that the state provided. Can the minister provide some additional information on the criminal prosecutions that were secured in relation to the supply of false information? It says in that seventh paragraph that a number of other applications are under investigation. What was the total number of applications, and how many of those applications are under investigation?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will provide the member with some initial information on the total number of applications. We are dealing with the federal scheme, as well. As of 13 September 2021, 25 994 building bonuses and 21 638 HomeBuilder grants have been received. With regard to those that have been prosecuted or are under investigation, it is a small number. I will hand over to the Commissioner of State Revenue to elaborate if possible.

[3.10 pm]

Ms M.M. Nicolaou: Applications are carefully vetted, as there have been several instances in which applications have included false information to obtain a grant. We have had a person plead guilty to nine charges relating to fraud or attempted fraud and also a pair of individuals pleaded guilty to falsifying a statutory declaration. We are also investigating a further 33 applications.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Sorry; I missed the bit where the minister said the total number of applications.

Dr A.D. BUTI: If the applications for the building bonus and the HomeBuilder grants are added together, as at 13 September, the total is 47 632.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: And 33 are being investigated. That is not bad.

The appropriation was recommended.

Division 44: Planning, Lands and Heritage — Service 2, Lands, \$76 249 000 —

Mrs L.A. Munday, Chair.

Dr A.D. Buti, Minister for Lands.

Ms J. Cant, Director General.

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

Ms A. Gibson, Executive Director, Land Use Management.

Mr J. Kwong, Chief Finance Officer.

Ms C. Smith, Principal Policy Adviser, Minister for Lands.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. It is the intention of the chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 1 October 2021. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

The member for North West Central.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 727 of the budget papers and the table of appropriations, expenses and cash assets. It seems that there is a reduction of \$20 million in funding for the delivery of services over four years. How will this impact service delivery constraints?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I might ask the director general to elaborate, but mostly this involves one-off additional funding, so it should not affect the forward delivery of services. Ms Cant might like to elaborate.

Ms J. Cant: The minister is quite correct. We have an increase of \$22.9 million and it is mostly for one-offs around native title compensation and the remote Aboriginal communities initiative, so we would not expect it to impact the services.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Can the minister describe those one-offs?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes. There is \$8.2 million for native title compensation for the Ashburton North Strategic Industrial Area; \$6.2 million for the remote Aboriginal communities initiative; \$4.9 million for finalising the remediation of the lead tailings termination at the Northampton town site; a \$2.7 million increase for the system for the state development assessment unit; a \$2.6 million increase in funding for the WA recovery plan initiatives, including for Parry Street, Fremantle Prison, the Arthur Head cliff face restoration and investment in Aboriginal communities; \$300 000 for Mirning part B native title compensation; and \$245 000 for the Ashburton North Strategic Industrial Area native title compensation in relation to area 3.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 727 and the new initiatives. There is a line item for "Action Plan for Planning Reform—Phase Two". What is this and how has stage 1 gone?

Dr A.D. BUTI: That relates to the Minister for Planning, not to my portfolio.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: So it has nothing to do with the Minister for Lands' portfolio?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage and it is planning and land use, but I am the Minister for Lands so that question has to be asked of the planning minister.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: So it has nothing to do with the Minister for Lands?

Dr A.D. BUTI: No; it is about the action plan for planning reform.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I turn to page 733 and service 2, "Land Administration Services". The second dot point refers to unlocking the land potential for the state. Can the minister elaborate on what land he is unlocking? As the minister knows, there is a shortage of housing, particularly in regional WA, where there is a lot of land but it simply has not been unlocked because of various issues, whether it be services or native title negotiations. I will give the minister one example in my electorate. In Exmouth, there is plenty of land, but the minister's department

does not seem to be allowing the land to be subdivided and therefore sold off for building. What land is the minister looking to unlock around the state, particularly in regional WA, and does he have a list of those parcels of land, given that we have a massive housing shortage in this state?

Dr A.D. BUTI: If the member had been here during the division on DevelopmentWA, he would know that we spent a considerable amount of time talking about unlocking land or making land available in the regions. That is being done through the Regional Land Booster program, with \$166.3 million plus \$4 million per annum in regional development—I am not sure of the title of it. A considerable amount of money has been put forward and DevelopmentWA is working on making land available. Often it is not land availability that is the issue; the cost of construction has become more of an issue in recent times. Considerable work has been done and lots are being released all the time.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Lots are being released all the time! Can the minister show me where in WA those lots are being released?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I do not have the file in front of me now, but if the member reads the transcript of the previous session, he will see that I went through the regions where the lots are available as a result of the Regional Land Booster scheme. It is already available. I mentioned it during the division on DevelopmentWA.

[3.20 pm]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: That may be the case, but I was not part of that division.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I do not have it in front of me. I said it during a previous division. The member can put it on notice or read *Hansard* tomorrow and he will find it.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to the third dot point under “Land Administration Services”, which says —
managing the risk of Crown land, including managed and unmanaged Crown land;

Can the minister elaborate what the risk is to the government?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I might ask Mr Darcey if he can possibly answer.

Mr M. Darcey: It is primarily related to bushfire risk mitigation. We work with the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions to manage the bushfire risk on the crown land estate. There is royalties for regions money for that purpose.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: How much has been allocated to managing risk on crown land?

Mr M. Darcey: There is \$15 million for the bushfire management program over the forward estimates.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: There is \$15 million over four years to manage the risk on crown land throughout the whole state; is that correct?

Mr M. Darcey: That is correct; through that program.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to the second last line item on page 727, “Coastal Erosion Hotspots (CoastWA)”.

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is for the Minister for Transport or the Minister for Planning.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That is for the Minister for Transport rather than the Minister for Lands.

I will move to a new question. I refer to the Fremantle Prison master plan.

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is for the Minister for Heritage.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: This is division 44, Planning, Lands and Heritage.

Dr A.D. BUTI: As was mentioned earlier this morning, when sections go across different ministers, members have to ask the minister in the chair questions that are relevant to that minister. I am sure that the member is a reasonable man and does not expect me to answer questions that go into the portfolio of another minister. That is a heritage question for the Minister for Heritage.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to the fourth dot point on page 733, “delivering primary land tenure for strategic infrastructure projects”. What primary land around the state needs to be delivered for strategic infrastructure projects?

Dr A.D. BUTI: That refers to providing a legislative framework to ensure that we can provide land tenure that will assist in the development of strategic projects. We are not talking about the identification of that land; we are talking about the legal structure. Work is being done on amendments to the Land Administration Act, which will provide a system that will help with the land tenure for strategic infrastructure projects.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: When will those amendments be introduced—this year, next year or future years?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Obviously, it is a very comprehensive set of amendments. I know the member is very keen on consultation—we want to make sure that proper consultation takes place before they are introduced into Parliament.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Have those amendments been drafted?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will not discuss what might be going through a cabinet process.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Are we likely to see those amendments in this term of government?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to carbon farming on crown land, at paragraph 8, second from the top, on page 729. What support is the department providing for this initiative?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I defer that to Mr Darcey.

Mr M. Darcey: The department has been working across all agencies to develop some policy principles around carbon farming. The carbon farming issue is focused particularly on human-induced regeneration at the moment. That requires eligible interest holder consent from the Minister for Lands. There is a whole suite of policy parameters around that. Part of it is that the land has to be put aside for a minimum of 25 years. It is primarily on pastoral land, so it is really a policy piece of work.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: How many sites have been chosen for carbon farming use?

Dr A.D. BUTI: At the moment, 74 projects have been registered with the emissions reduction fund and 53 proponents thus far have been contracted to deliver 11.4 million tonnes of abatement.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: How much income is the minister projecting for the government to generate through these sites?

Dr A.D. BUTI: None; that is not the purpose of it.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is the government not engaged in the carbon credit arrangement as part of this?

Dr A.D. BUTI: We are setting up the legislative and policy framework.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What companies are engaged with the carbon farming initiatives and what are the time frames of the agreements? Are they 25, 50 or 100-year agreements?

Dr A.D. BUTI: They are individual agreements with pastoralists and so forth. I do not have that information.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is the minister happy to provide that information through supplementary information?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is private information; we do not have it.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to the fifth dot point under “Land Administration Services” on page 733, which says —
ensuring that in the case of land subject to Native Title rights and interests, security of land tenure is provided by dealing with Native Title appropriately depending on the use and type of tenure proposed;

Can the minister explain that? I give an example of a business in Exmouth that wants to purchase land next door to enable it to expand, but it is subject to native title. Can the minister explain what he means by “dealing with Native Title appropriately” and the costs associated with someone who wants to expand their business on land adjacent to their existing business?

Is a methodology used whereby the department says that if the land is worth \$1 million, the native title settlement is worth half a million dollars? Can the minister explain that process?

[3.30 pm]

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will make some general comments first before I ask Mr Darcey to elaborate. Native title is a very important issue that has been hard fought over a long period of time by traditional owners. When governments or individuals deal with native title owners, their rights have to be respected. A legislative framework emanates from the Native Title Act that a conservative Liberal–National government in Western Australia tried to abolish. It lost 7–nil in the High Court of Australia when it tried to abrogate native title rights in Western Australia. We respect native title rights. I will hand over to Mr Darcey.

Mr M. Darcey: I am not sure whether it is determined as exclusive possession or not, but irrespective of that, we would encourage the proponents wanting to deal on that land to set up an Indigenous land use agreement with the native title parties. The state is resisting compulsory acquisition of native title rights now, so the way forward is for the land to be taken by agreement between the native title party and the person who wants to access the land.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: In the example of a business that wants to expand onto a piece of land that is owned by the state, that business has to pay the Department of Lands for that land. Can the minister explain the methodology for that process in terms of a native title settlement? I am not saying that there should not be native title settlements. How is that settlement figure arrived at? My understanding is that if the land is worth, for example, \$1 million, the advice is that the business pays half of that cost to the native title holder. Is that correct, or is the business told, for example, that the land is worth X, so therefore the settlement should be half or three-quarters that amount, or a matching amount of \$1 million each for the state and the native title group? Can the minister explain that process?

Dr A.D. BUTI: These agreements are determined between the traditional owners and the business.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: My understanding is that advice is given by the minister's department to the person or business that wants to purchase the property on how they can proceed to purchase the land off the government. A figure is generated and given to the purchaser so that they have an understanding of how much it will cost them to purchase the land and also pay out the native title holders.

Dr A.D. BUTI: My understanding is that the member is not correct. The advice that I have been given is that the actual monetary compensation value is not given out by the department. In any case, if someone wants to expand onto unallocated crown land, they have to reach an agreement with the prescribed body corporate on what they want, irrespective of the purchase price.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I want some clarity on this. This is often a major problem in regional Western Australia. It inhibits the growth of any regional town. I am not against native title—do not get me wrong—but when the cost of building in the regions is in the order of 40 to 50 per cent higher than in Perth and the banks make it difficult to get a loan, because the evidence is not often there in the regions, trying to acquire land owned by the state will often end up costing double what it would normally cost in Perth because of the native title settlement requirements, and, therefore, the project does not go ahead. Is there a way in which the government can set some parameters for the settlement in terms of a percentage, rather than having a negotiated outcome, which then blows that potential development out of the water? That is the reality of what is happening in regional WA. If I want to purchase land that is subject to native title and owned by the state, can the minister explain the process involved? Does the department instruct the proponent to negotiate an Indigenous land use agreement before a negotiated price outcome is worked out with the state?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I think that, fundamentally, the member does not understand native title. I will make a couple of points. Firstly, if the state is to provide advice, it provides advice that an agreement must be reached that is beneficial to the traditional owners or the PBC. The government cannot say what the land value is because its value is different to different native title owners—it depends on the land and the significance of the land to that particular Indigenous group. When we say that an agreement must be reached to the benefit of traditional owners, that does not mean just a monetary benefit—it may include a partnership, jobs or enhanced cultural programs. The government does not have a formula to work out the monetary value of the land that would allow it to advise a private owner in negotiations with a PBC.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Therein lies the problem. Regional development, which mean jobs, progress and growing regional communities, is not occurring because this process simply does not stack up financially. As I said, there are issues with the cost of building and with banks not lending, because the evidence is not there, or they require a 40 to 50-plus per cent deposit before a person can borrow money. When we add it all up, it just does not pay to invest \$1 million or \$20 million. This process is stifling growth in regional WA. Has the minister thought about a way to set parameters, to draw a line in the sand or to negotiate with realistic outcomes, whereby the government, instead of charging \$1 million for the land, charges half a million dollars and the native title settlement is half a million dollars? The government technically owns the land, but it does not own the land because it is subject to native title, so perhaps the state and the native title holder should be the ones to reach an agreement that enables that private development to occur.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will note a few things in the member's expansive commentary on his question. Firstly, he mentioned that native title is a problem. Native title owners would not consider native title to be a problem; they see it as an opportunity in recognition of their long-held ownership of land. The previous Premier from a conservative Liberal–National government saw it as a problem and tried to wipe it out in Western Australia. It is part of a national scheme that is recognised by the High Court and embedded in native title legislation. Secondly, we are talking about native title rights; there is no line in the sand. Thirdly, the government does not charge for the use of the land. Fourthly, we provide a template in the form of an ILUA, but it is up to the proponents to negotiate.

[3.40 pm]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am trying to say that yes, the government charges for the land if I want to purchase some. I have given the case in Exmouth as a classic example of a business wanting to expand. There has been a significant amount of money, but, of course, it does not stack up because of what the minister's department wants to charge for that piece of land plus negotiating native title, which also makes it financially undoable. At some point there needs to be that line in the sand so we get development and jobs. That could perhaps be by ensuring that the department negotiates with the native title holder that the land is worth a million dollars, and perhaps there is half a million dollars each, if the minister knows that I am trying to say.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will stand corrected. We do charge for land. I repeat what I said: the member's solution is the abolition of native title.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: No, it is not.

Dr A.D. BUTI: We have native title. It is not up to the government to negotiate. It is up to the person who wants to use the land, which has native title rights over it, to negotiate with the traditional owners. That is what the system has been set up for. The member is asking the government to provide a monetary value for native title rights, which

will vary according to the significance of the site for various people. As I said, we provide a template and it is up to the private owner to negotiate with the traditional owners on settlement, which may not just be a monetary issue, but an issue of jobs, partnership or so forth.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to the second line item “Land Administration Services” in the service summary on page 730 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. The estimated actual for 2020–21 is \$66 million, and then the budget estimate for this year has gone to \$76 million. Can the minister explain the difference there? Why is that figure dropping by \$10 million next year, \$15 million the year after and then \$21 million the year after that?

Dr A.D. BUTI: That relates to carryovers.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the minister explain to me how those carryovers work?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Basically, between the 2020–21 budget and the estimated actuals, there has been a carryover in regards to, for instance, the Northampton lead tailings project, Wittenoom asbestos management area, Yamatji Indigenous land use agreement, south west native title settlement and the remote Aboriginal communities transformation program. They were delayed and then they were carried over.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is any of that to do with administration of pastoral lease fees?

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is not related to that item.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to the sixth dot point under “Land Administration Services” on page 733 of the *Budget statements*, which states —

- administering the Government’s Land Asset Sales Program, whereby surplus or underutilised Crown land assets are identified and prepared for sale. Sale of land enables the assets to be used for a higher and/or better use in a way that unlocks the full potential of the assets for the benefit of Western Australia ...

Can the minister provide a list of land asset sales, land surplus or underutilised crown land that the government is preparing for sale? I am happy to take that by way of supplementary information. It could be the first time the minister does it. He could give provide information about where that land is to be sold.

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is on the website, but if the member wants to put it on notice, I will give him the information.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: On the website is the detail of the government’s land asset sales program? Is that correct?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is surplus or underutilised crown land identified on the website as well?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Only the land that has been identified. That is the only land on the website, because it is the only land that has been identified.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is all the identified land the government is preparing to sell on the website? Is that right?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Has the government sold any of the land detailed on that website?

Dr A.D. BUTI: When we do sell it, it is not secret. Usually there is a press statement and it is on the website.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Does the minister have a list of land that was sold in the last financial year, what has been sold to date and what its net worth is?

Dr A.D. BUTI: There is 472 South River Road, Carnarvon; Scarborough, Reserve Street; lot 5235 Twelve Mile Creek Road, Pippingarra; 41 South Terrace, Fremantle; 72 South River Road, Carnarvon; 21 Atkin Street, Jarrahdale; 11 Hickory Road, Quinns Rock; and lot 500 Wyatt Road, Bayswater.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: What is the value of the land sold?

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is not disclosed. It is sold at market value.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have a further question about the property at 41 South Terrace.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Did the member buy it?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I did not, but I would love to know what it is.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I do not know what relevance it really has.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: We want to see whether the minister sold it to his mates!

Dr A.D. BUTI: I do not have that information.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does the minister have a value on that property at 41 South Terrace?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It sold for \$3 231 818.19.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That is not the South Fremantle power station by any chance?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Not 41 South Terrace, Fremantle. Gee, that would be cheap!

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to the third item on page 734 under “Explanation of Significant Movements”. It says —
The increase in Employees between the 2020–21 Estimated Actual and the 2021–22 Budget Target is due to an increase in full-time equivalents to meet growing demand for land use management actions and to implement the South West Native Title Settlement.

Could the minister tell us how many FTEs that has increased by and what their roles are?

[3.50 pm]

Dr A.D. BUTI: There are 20.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What are the roles of those extra 20 employees pursuant to implementing the south west native title settlement?

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

Mr M. Darcey: Thank you, minister. There are 20 FTE for the backlog of land transactions. In addition to that, nine FTE are for the south west settlement land estate and four for the Yamatji Nation Indigenous land use agreement.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: How is it progressing? Would the minister be able to put a time frame on that?

Dr A.D. BUTI: How is what progressing?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The implementation of the south west native title settlement. Where are we up to?

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is not my responsibility. I am not the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. The member will have to ask the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It is listed here that the department has put more FTEs on to implement the south west native title settlement.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The actual negotiation itself, though, comes under the purview of the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: How long does the minister foresee that the completion of the implementation of the south west native title plan will take?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Five years.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to the “Explanation of Significant Movements” at the top of page 734. Under “Notes”, paragraph 1 states that the Wittenoom town site closure has expenditure of \$2.8 million. Can the minister explain in detail what that \$2.8 million is being used for? I know it is for the closure, but what is the detail of that \$2.8 million?

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

Mr M. Darcey: Certainly, minister. That money is provided for the acquisition of the last of the properties owned in the town. That is what is left over. There was previously a larger budget. This money has been put aside for once the bill has passed and we can compulsorily acquire those properties and manage to pay compensation for those.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: How many properties out of that \$2.8 million has the government acquired?

Mr M. Darcey: I am sorry; I do not know the answer to that. There are still 14 to go. I do not know the answer of how many we have acquired to date.

Dr A.D. BUTI: If the member wants to put it on notice, we will provide it.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I think it is worthy of a supplementary.

Dr A.D. BUTI: If the member wants to put it on notice, we will provide it.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is that \$2.8 million for the Wittenoom closure solely for buyback or compulsory acquisition of land to make the town—it is not a town anymore—safe or to prevent people from travelling there?

Dr A.D. BUTI: That money is for the compulsory acquisition of those 14 remaining privately owned properties and also the subsequent demolition of the Wittenoom town site. In other words, it will stop encouraging people to go there.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Like I said, it is part of my electorate. I have doorknocked Wittenoom, which I probably should not have done but a few people were still living there. How is the minister going to prevent people from visiting Wittenoom given that the cost to the Shire of Ashburton, which is a defendant with the state, now amounts to \$5 million a year in compensation being paid for those people who may have visited Wittenoom for half a day or an hour? The cost to the ratepayer is starting to be significant. How will the minister prevent people from going there to stop those actions against the state, the Shire of Ashburton and James Hardie into the future?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The member raised an important point. It is very frustrating that people still feel a need to go there. Obviously, part of the plan is to close many of the roads leading into Wittenoom so that people will not be able to get there, and also to have multilingual signage to significantly discourage people from going there. It is not possible to completely prevent people from going. We hope the closure of roads and signage will go a long way towards that.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I do not know whether the minister is aware that there are a lot of resources around that area as well and there are still truck movements going through Wittenoom. Is the minister going to prevent those haulage roads from being able to go through Wittenoom?

Dr A.D. BUTI: We closed a lot of the roads, so it will not be very accessible for trucks to go through.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: My understanding is that there are still roads that are utilised and will be utilised.

Dr A.D. BUTI: We cannot close all the roads; we are just trying to do as much as we can. The government cannot do everything. We are doing everything we possibly can, and then we rely on the common sense of people not to go to Wittenoom. The member's party is different, but his alliance party does not like a nanny state. I know that the member's party is an agrarian socialist party—it is a bit different—but the Liberal Party does not like the nanny state. We will be doing everything that we possibly can, but we cannot prevent people from being stupid all the time.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Given that the state has benefited from Wittenoom in terms of royalties through mining activity, and reports from traditional owners, who want tailings dams and Wittenoom to be cleaned up to make it safe, will the responsible minister finance the clean-up of Wittenoom once and for all to ensure that it adheres to the wishes of traditional owners, who want to see it cleaned up? They are the native title owners of the land. Since the minister's party is a very big advocate of native title —

Dr A.D. BUTI: Which the member was not a minute ago.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: — will the government look after traditional owners and clean up the land as they have requested?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The Wittenoom steering committee will be meeting with traditional owners and others to work out what can possibly be done by the state.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: That is not a no and not a yes; is that correct, minister?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The steering committee will be having meetings with the traditional owners on the issue.

[Mr S.J. Price took the chair.]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to paragraph 2 on page 734, which states —

The increase in Income between the 2020–21 Estimated Actual and the 2021–22 Budget Target can mainly be attributed to the final phase of pastoral lease rent increases resulting from the last review in 2019.

Can the minister tell me how much that increase in income is?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is \$3.75 million.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does the minister perceive that there will be more pastoral lease rent increases to come?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is up to the Valuer-General to determine the valuation.

[4.00 pm]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I have a further question on that. Under paragraph 2 —

Dr A.D. BUTI: Can I just add to that. Obviously, we are looking at amendments regarding the methodology of rent review.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: With that, the minister also has land tenure and a potential bill coming in to reform the Land Administration Act. Is the minister consulting with pastoralists and land users at the moment? When will a draft of the bill be put out to the public so proper consultation can occur?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I have a couple of points to the member's question. We are consulting and we have been consulting. A lot of consultations have been done over the years. As the member knows, his former colleague Hon Terry Redman tried to bring a bill through Parliament. Regarding the second part of the member's question, he has asked me that previously, and I said that I will not disclose matters that have to go through a cabinet process, so I am not able to give the member dates.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: When does the minister anticipate the Land Administration Act reform —

Dr A.D. BUTI: I just gave the member the answer. It has to go through a cabinet process.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: When does the minister anticipate that? Is it this year or next year when we can expect to see it introduced into Parliament?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I really do not know whether I am speaking English. Maybe I am not! I just told the member that it has to go through a cabinet process, and I am not in a position to give the member a timetable.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is the legislation a priority of the government?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is a priority of the Minister for Lands.

The appropriation was recommended.

Division 46: Western Australian Land Information Authority, \$48 233 000 —

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Dr A.D. Buti, Minister for Lands.

Mr G. Gammie, Chief Executive.

Mr G. Dewar, Chief Finance Officer.

Mr B. Roberts, General Manager, Registration Services.

Mr G. Goldfinch, General Manager, Valuation Services.

Ms C. Smith, Principal Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. It is the intention of the chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 1 October 2021. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

I give the call to the member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: My first question relates to page 755 and the top line "Delivery of Services". Can the minister outline why the budget estimate for 2021–22 of \$39 475 000 goes up another \$15 million or \$16 million in the forward estimates in the next year?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I might ask Mr Dewar, the chief finance officer, to elaborate.

Mr G. Dewar: Thank you, minister. The 2021–22 increase is mainly as a consequence of the change in the Midland building ownership—Landgate's headquarters. The balance of that, for the 2021–22 increase, is changes in the asset investment program.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I notice that the drop-off after the 2022–23 year is down by \$6 million. What does the minister attribute that to?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will let Mr Dewar elaborate, but I assume it is because the Midland building negotiation would have been settled by then. Mr Dewar, would you like to elaborate?

Mr G. Dewar: Certainly, minister. The decrease from 2022–23 to 2023–24 is as a consequence of a decrease in appropriation associated with the Landgate partial commercialisation and the government's pledge to ensure that Landgate had sufficient cash to continue to trade.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the minister also clarify the reduction in capital appropriation held by the agency?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The 2021–22 figure is a carry-forward of capital expenditure and associated funding that was not required in 2020–21. So \$1.892 million in capital expenditure was carried forward to 2021–22, with \$700 million of the funding reduction capital appropriation in 2021–22. The increase in funding is all capital contribution in agencies. The holding account does not increase in 2021–22 for the reduction in 2020–21; then the member is aghast at a further reduction going forward from there into 2022–23. Mr Dewar, would you like to say anything?

Mr G. Dewar: Certainly, minister. The year 2021–22 is a larger capital program than 2022–23 because the projects that we have in that financial year require more spending, essentially. Therefore, we are only appropriating the amount that we need to pursue the projects that we have on.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 756. An item under "Other" and "Office Accommodation" is "Lease Update Bunbury Office". I just need some explanation of the numbers in 2021–22, 13; 2022–23, 13; and then 2023–24, 9. Is that \$9 000? Is that what this number means in terms of a lease update for the Bunbury office? Is that correct?

[4.10 pm]

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes, it is. It is a reduction in the rent funding agreement.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is there still an office in Bunbury?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: How large is the office?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is the same. It has not changed; the only change is the amount of rent being paid.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to “Midland building lease”. For 2020–21, the estimated actual for the expiry of that lease is \$1.189 million, and then it goes all the way up to \$4.153 million and so forth. Has the rent increased by nearly \$3 million?

Mr G. Dewar: The lease for the building in Midland expired in March 2021. The land is owned by the Crown. However, the building was owned by a South Australian superannuation company. That ownership reverted to state ownership in March. When Landgate was a tenant and the building was owned by the state superannuation authority of South Australia, Landgate recorded the lease of the building as a lease for accounting purposes. That is no longer the case because the land and building are now owned by the state of Western Australia. We are now a tenant of the state of Western Australia, and that will be administered through the Department of Finance, as is the case with most government agencies. As the member will see, there is an increase in expenditure but there is a decrease offsetting that as well.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am trying to get some clarity on this. The building has reverted to state ownership, yet the government has approved \$16.9 million in accommodation expenses over the forward estimates period. Is this an accounting item between different departments? Is that what the minister is saying?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Mr Dewar to elaborate, but it is a reduction.

Mr G. Dewar: Overall, we are now paying the Department of Finance for the accommodation costs.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Instead of paying the South Australian superannuation authority, Landgate is now paying the Department of Finance?

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is right.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I still do not understand; forgive my ignorance. In 2020–21, the estimated actual was \$1.189 million. In 2021–22, the budget estimate is \$4.153 million, a rough increase of close to \$3 million. By taking over the building, it is now costing nearly \$3 million a year. Is that correct?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Mr Gammie to elaborate.

Mr G. Gammie: The \$1.18 million is a reduction in rent payments to the Department of Finance for the balance of the financial year in which the lease ceased with the superannuation fund of South Australia. The numbers in the out years are reductions in rent, so we need less funding to pay for the rent for the building under our state ownership.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Under the South Australian superannuation company, what was the department paying for that lease?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Does the member mean: what was Landgate paying?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Yes, what was Landgate paying?

Mr G. Dewar: The arrangement was actually with the Department of Finance. Landgate did not pay the state superannuation fund for any of the lease itself; it was paid to the Department of Finance. The arrangement was never direct with Landgate and the South Australian superannuation fund.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Landgate never saw the bill that it was paying for leasing the building from the South Australian superannuation company. Is that correct? Was it conducted through the Department of Finance?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Previously, Landgate paid about \$8 million a year. Now it will be paying around \$4 million a year. That is a significant reduction.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am seeking to clarify what was being paid before.

Dr A.D. BUTI: It was \$8 million. The figure of just over \$1 million in the budget papers is for only part of the financial year.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Under “Midland Building Lease”, the budget papers set out “Expiry” and “Agreement”. The estimated actual for the agreement is \$1.115 million in 2020–21; in 2021–22, it is \$3.836 million; then it goes up, then it goes down and then it goes back up. There is still a difference of over \$3 million. Can the minister explain that number from \$1.115 million all the way to \$4.060 million in 2024–25?

Dr A.D. BUTI: That first figure is only for part of the financial year, while the others are for the full financial year.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Even if it was for part of the financial year, is that \$1.115 million half or one-quarter of the financial year?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The ownership reverted in March 2021.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: So over three months, the authority was charged \$1.115 million for rent?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes.

Mr G. Dewar: The table shows expenses from an accounting perspective. The amounts are not payments of cash. Part of the reduction in the figures relates to the way we are accounting under the leasing accounting standard for reducing the lease arrangement that sat within Landgate's financials. As I said, it is not a payment. We should not get mixed up in saying that this is how much the lease payment reduced; it is the expenses only.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to the first paragraph under "Significant Issues Impacting the Agency" on page 756. As the minister knows, the Transfer of Land Amendment Bill has gone through the lower house.

Dr A.D. BUTI: After your outstanding contribution!

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I thought so.

I note that a public education program will be required due to the functions of the duplicate titles et cetera. Does the minister have any estimation of how much that public education program will cost?

Dr A.D. BUTI: No, I do not. The member might be the first to hear that—this is between you and me—I may appear in a video speaking in Italian. The member for North West Central would understand that a lot of Albany Italians might be a bit hesitant about this. Watch this space.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: We look forward to it.

With 67 per cent of the issue of duplicate certificates being held in bank vaults and the minister pointing out that the cost savings related to their removal will be saved by the financial institutions, in dollar terms, how will that flow on to the customers? Will it decrease Landgate's expenses as well? Can the minister explain where those savings will accrue?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I might ask Bruce Roberts to explain.

[4.20 pm]

Mr B. Roberts: A number of savings will be involved. The first level of savings released to the processing of transactions involve duplicate certificates of title—essentially, the processing of the transactions and the reduction in processes that are required to deal with duplicate titles. I cannot provide the member with a cost estimate, but we will be working through that. The other level of savings relates to the banks themselves, and that is really the cost of holding the duplicate titles in the banks' vaults. Ultimately, when titles become no longer active under the legislation, they will be in a position to essentially destroy those titles, so they will no longer have holding costs for those titles. The third level of saving is really at the consumer level. When someone does a land transaction under the existing duplicate title regime and they have a mortgage on that property, they are charged a title production fee. When we no longer have a duplicate title, they will not be charged a title production fee.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Will there be a program to go through that? Let us say I have the title for a house sitting in a bank vault and we move to the electronic system, how will that transpire, because theoretically there will be an electronic version in one place and a paper version sitting in the bank vault? How will that work?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Mr Roberts to answer, please.

Mr B. Roberts: Legally how that will work is that under the legislation we will set a date on which duplicate titles will no longer be effective in law. Once they are no longer effective, we will then move to essentially a process whereby we no longer need to take in duplicate certificates of title. Prior to that, as the minister alluded to, we will be undertaking public and industry education programs around the processes that need to change, so that when transactions that previously involved duplicate titles no longer involve them, the requirements for how people deal with land will be set out in materials on both our website and in our processes. Essentially, it is how we will deal with it at a business level and then how industry will deal with it in terms of no longer having to produce duplicate certificates of title.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: As far as the banks go, will Landgate have a comprehensive program to tell them to remove all the titles sitting in their vaults, or will it be up to them when a new settlement happens to say, "That's no longer relevant"? How will that play out with the banks?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will again ask Mr Roberts to respond.

Mr B. Roberts: Member, we certainly intend to provide information bulletins to all our stakeholder groups, particularly the banks. I might add that we have consulted significantly with the banks on this legislation, and they are very supportive of this approach. Essentially, we will advise them in advance of the date on which the duplicate titles will no longer be effective. By that date, they should have been given sufficient time to conduct a transaction without a duplicate title. There will be lead time and then the transaction will occur without duplicate certificates of title.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 757 and paragraph 5 under the heading "Significant Issues Impacting the Agency", which states —

Landgate is modernising its valuation system which generates rating and taxing valuations for the State. The current system has been in place for 20 years ... new technologies to improve valuation processes, efficiency and service delivery for Landgate's customers.

Basically, it is enhancing the management of cybersecurity risk. Given that Landgate has been partially sold off or privatised —

Dr A.D. BUTI: I do not accept the premise of the member's question, but move on.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Does the minister or the department know whether there have been any cyberattacks or whether any information has been accessed through cyberattacks?

Dr A.D. BUTI: No. As far as we are aware, there have been none.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Landgate expects to finalise the procurement of a new valuation system in the next 12 months. How is that progressing? When will Landgate meet that target of finalising procurement of a new system that will obviously provide further cybersecurity protection?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Mr Goldfinch to respond.

Mr G. Goldfinch: It is a good question. We are currently progressing through the procurement, as the member mentioned. The intention there is to move through the procurement and sign off on a contract in the next 12 months, but there is a lot of work to be done in the meantime. Certainly, we have been through a fairly rigorous evaluation process to this point, but, as it is a procurement process at this stage, I am unable to go into the details of that.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Given that the process to finalise the procurement of a new valuation system will take 12 months and that technology is rapidly changing, the number of cyberattacks is rapidly growing—as we all know—and Landgate holds a lot of personal information, does the minister see the procurement process blowing out longer than 12 months? Is Landgate trying to get it done within 12 months, importantly, so that it can protect people's personal information?

Dr A.D. BUTI: As we stated before, as far as we are aware, there have been no cybersecurity breaches that have gathered information from Landgate. We do not expect the process to take longer than 12 months. This system is secure now; we are just going to make it even more secure with better technology.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 762 and the line item “Strata Titles Act 1985 Reform” under the heading “Works in Progress”. It is nearly two-thirds of the way down that table.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Is the member referring to paragraph 1.3?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It is referred to in paragraph 1.3 and the line item further down the page. I was looking at the line item under the heading “Works in Progress”.

I notice that the amount expended rapidly diminishes and wraps up with a \$1.65 million budget estimate in 2021–22. Is the minister sure that there is no need to extend this funding beyond this budget year, because although the Strata Title Act reform is happening at the moment, I would have thought the advertising and administration will continue in the out years to some extent?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It has been going for a considerable time already, and there has to be a time when it is all completed. Finalising the system and process changes needed to implement the system is going well and we do not see any problems, but Mr Roberts might want to elaborate on that.

Mr B. Roberts: The minister is correct. Essentially, the wind-down in costs over this period is really just the clean-up of the final system changes that we are making to give effect to the community titles schemes that we are putting in place under the legislation as well as the changes under the Strata Titles Act.

[4.30 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the minister give me a short summary of how he believes the implementation has gone? I imagine that some of the strata companies have adapted quickly; some that are caught back in the darker ages may not have adapted. Can the minister give a short summary of how that is going?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The member has asked me for my understanding. My understanding is that it is going well.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Have we had any disputes in the State Administrative Tribunal pursuant to the Strata Titles Act reform?

Dr A.D. BUTI: The question of whether there are any disputes before the State Administrative Tribunal is actually a matter for the Attorney General, but my understanding is that the reforms have broader benefits that appeal to the community and have generally been accepted. The matter of strata title disputes would come under the State Administrative Tribunal and the jurisdiction of the Attorney General.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 763 and income statement. Point 2.1 under subheading “Expenses” states —
additional planning costs for the replacement of the Valuation Services system and an expected increase in cloud-based software services as a consequence of the move away from on-site storage ...

Can the minister elaborate on “in cloud-based software”? Where is the department going to purchase its cloud space from—here in Western Australia, or over east or overseas? Can the minister elaborate on where the cloud is going to be? Is it hovering over us or is it hovering somewhere else?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Mr Dewar to respond.

Mr G. Dewar: Landgate uses cloud storage as part of our business, and we have done for quite some time now. We tend to use one of the larger firms. It is an Australian-based cloud storage set-up. It is in Australia.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Whereabouts in Australia is it?

Mr G. Dewar: Cloud storage is an interesting phenomenon that allows for storage to be moved between different data centres. In our case, it can move between several data centres between major capital cities.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Can the minister explain how it moves around? Firstly, I am interested in the security aspects of it being an Australian company; secondly, I just want to know whether there are any Western Australian companies that offer a cloud-based service. We are all about buying local. Are there any local companies that have bid for Landgate's work?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Mr Dewar to explain.

Mr G. Dewar: Cloud-based service offerings generally require significant infrastructure, and, as far as I am aware, there is no level of cloud storage offered by a Western Australian-owned company, so we are using the multinationals, but based in Australia. There are data centres within Western Australia, and certainly our on-premises systems that we operate in Landgate are operated at data centres in Western Australia.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 756 and the second item under "Significant Issues Impacting the Agency", which relates to the electronic conveyancing marketplace. It states that Landgate is participating in ongoing work through the Australian Registrar's National Electronic Conveyancing Council and that, once drafted, there will be a regulatory impact statement et cetera. Will that require new legislation? Obviously, we have the Transfer of Land Amendment Bill coming through, but will new legislation be required to join this national marketplace?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Eventually, legislation will be required.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It will be required?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does the minister foresee that coming in this term of Parliament, considering it appears in —

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Will this change to the national electronic conveyancing marketplace result in a reduction of FTEs for Landgate?

Dr A.D. BUTI: No.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 763, under "Financial Statements" and "Income", point 3, halfway down the page —

In 2020–21, Government incentives stimulated activity in the new housing market and increased buoyancy was experienced in the established housing market, even after the incentives ceased. This resulted in a 39% growth ...

It goes on to state that the department does not expect this to be sustained in 2021–22. Can the minister elaborate on that? The department has experienced growth but does not believe that it is going to be sustained over the 2021–22 period. What decrease is the department forecasting and for what reasons?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is because the state and federal building bonuses and HomeBuilder grant stimulus are coming to an end. That is why we expect it to eventually drop off.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Does the department have a level of understanding of whether it will drop by 30 per cent or 40 per cent?

Dr A.D. BUTI: No.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Has the department done any modelling? I imagine that the department would know how many grants are given out by the state and federal governments to assist in new buildings. Surely the department can anticipate a drop-off in new housing?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Last year it was 330, and we expect that in the next financial year —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Sorry, what is 330?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It was 330 000 and is expected to go down to 275 000.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Can the minister just explain what those numbers are?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will pass that to Mr Gammie.

Mr G. Gammie: Thank you. The 330 000 refers to the number of document lodgements we had in the last financial year. In the current financial year, based on our assessment of likely market activity, we are expecting about 275 000 lodgements, and those are the figures that are reflected in the *Budget Statements*.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: What is the average number of lodgements in a year, so that we have some way to compare it?

Dr A.D. BUTI: We do not really have an average a year. We are dealing with this budget item; we do have other sectors to go.

The CHAIR: If we finish early, we cannot start the next division until five, anyway. Member for Roe.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: We are trying to do our job here. If you want to leave and go home early—well.

The CHAIR: Member for North West Central, no-one asked for any sort of comment from you.

Dr A.D. BUTI: You haven't asked one sensible question all day!

The CHAIR: Minister! Member for Roe.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: You can't answer any of the questions!

The CHAIR: Member for North West Central!

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have a very high quality question coming up here, Mr Chair.

Dr A.D. BUTI: That will be a surprise!

Mr V.A. CATANIA: You won't get the same as an answer!

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 759 and land titling. The table there refers to "Employees (Full-Time Equivalents)". I notice that we seem to have a gradual decline from the 2019–20 and 2020–21 estimated and actuals, and then we are down to 96 FTEs in 2021–22. Can the minister explain to me what is going on there? I want to know whether this will impact on service delivery.

[4.40 pm]

Dr A.D. BUTI: No, it will not impact on service delivery.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Will these positions be redeployed within the Landgate business?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Obviously, there is a reduction in FTEs. No.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: We have lost at least 14 jobs from land titling and electronic scenarios et cetera. Can the minister guarantee that he will continue to deliver services effectively on behalf of the government?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Landgate has been a great deliverer of services and I am very confident that it will continue to do so.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 758 of the budget papers and the line item "International standards for accuracy and uniformity of rating and taxing values are met". Under "Gross Rental Value", the rate for 2019–20 is 4.22 per cent; in 2020–21, it is less than seven per cent; it is not applicable in the 2021–22 estimated actual; and in 2021–22, it is less than seven per cent.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Is the member talking about the coefficient?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Yes.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Get it right. The member said one and then he jumped one. Does he mean the line "Coefficient of Dispersion to check uniformity of values", which is underneath that?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Yes, where it has "Gross Rental Value".

Dr A.D. BUTI: Yes, but there is "Gross Rental Value" above that too; which one is the member referring to?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: No-one jumped anywhere; that is my line item.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Which one is the member referring to?

The CHAIR: Minister, let the member finish his question.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The line item "Gross Rental Value" under "Coefficient of Dispersion to check uniformity of values". Can the minister also explain the "Unimproved Value" line item as well?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Mr Goldfinch to answer the question.

Mr G. Goldfinch: That relates to the deferral of the regional GRV program, which therefore created difficulties for us in measuring that activity, so that is that result.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Can the minister explain why there is a deferral and why regional WA has not been able to be measured?

Dr A.D. BUTI: I will ask Mr Goldfinch to elaborate, but I imagine that part of it is to do with COVID-19 and not being able to travel, but I may be wrong.

Mr G. Goldfinch: Yes, that is correct, minister. The deferral by the Valuer-General was determined as a result of COVID-19 and also as a result of the impact of that on commercial operations and the residential market. Therefore, the decision was made to defer that GRV program.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Correct me if I am not understanding this, but obviously the Valuer-General influences local governments and how they rate ratepayers, pastoralists and so forth. How have they been able to calculate their budgets going forward if there has been no Valuer-General rating in regional WA? We have seen some large increases, particularly in the pastoral industry, and in some cases, the increase has been more than 50 per cent, if not more. Has this had an effect on that?

Dr A.D. BUTI: If there is a delay, it is based on the existing valuation. Local government authorities rely on the existing valuation until there is a change.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: If the Valuer-General had found that the value had decreased and the valuation could not be done this financial year, but in the following financial year there was an increase, obviously the ratepayer would potentially miss out on a reduction in their rates. When the minister says that the Valuer-General has not been able to get out there because of COVID, I do not understand that. How is that the case when we have had only three lockdowns in 18 months?

The CHAIR: Member for North West Central, wait until you get a response and then you can ask a second question.

Dr A.D. BUTI: There have been lockdown periods, but even when there have not been lockdown periods, there has been a reduction in the ability to travel by air and other means. Councils adjust their rates according to the revenue that they need to finance their services. They are not supposed to use them to obtain a profit.

The appropriation was recommended.

Meeting suspended from 4.45 to 5.00 pm

Division 36: Communities — Volunteering, \$2 121 566 000 —

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Mr R.R. Whitby, Minister for Volunteering.

Mr M. Rowe, Director General.

Mr M. Goff, Policy Adviser.

Mr M. Crevola, Chief Financial Officer.

Mr M. Richardson, Director, Management Accounting.

Ms C. Irwin, Assistant Director General Strategy and Partnerships.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. It is the intention of the chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 1 October 2021. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

Member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to line item "Volunteering WA Digital Platform" under "Election Commitments" halfway down page 514 in volume 2 of budget paper No 2. Can the minister explain why the funding tapers off from \$100 000 in this budget estimate period down to \$45 000 and then to \$15 000 in each of the last two forward estimates.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Thank you, member, for the question. That item is an election commitment that we took to the last election. It is not a recurrent spending arrangement. It is a one-off commitment of \$175 000 for Volunteering WA to develop a statewide digital platform that supports the coordination of emergency volunteering. The member will be aware that when something dramatic or an emergency happens in his electorate, many people are keen to support the cause and chip in to offer assistance in some way. Often that is difficult to coordinate. It presents its own logistical challenge to local governments, which can often be small local governments in regional areas especially, as the member will know. It is a difficult issue because Western Australians are very generous and quick to lend a hand. The commitment is to create an online platform where people can offer their services and that can be

coordinated. We are developing a plan with Volunteering WA to look at how we can improve our digital presence in response to coordinating emergency volunteers. I think there is a phrase for it—spontaneous volunteering. When something happens and many people in the community want to help, it is a wonderful thing, but it can often be difficult to manage or get the best out of those wonderful offers from volunteers. We hope that this is a way to better coordinate that assistance to result in positive action.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does this platform extend across the base volunteer organisations such as the volunteer bush fire brigades? What areas does it cover?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: As I described earlier, it covers more of the spontaneous response from people who often volunteer. The administration or the coordination of volunteer emergency responders, whether they are from a bush fire brigade, the volunteer fires and rescue service or the State Emergency Service, is already coordinated by the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and their lines of operation are already clear. This is more about people who may not have volunteered before and want to lend a hand. We saw it happen this year with the Woorloo bushfire and cyclone Seroja when people asked how they could help out or get involved. This is a way of streamlining that response online. Things are yet to be worked out, but I would imagine that people would put online a description of themselves, their capabilities and the areas that they want to lend a hand in, and that information would then be passed on to organisations that could use that assistance. At present the response is ad hoc with people calling the police or the local council or fire station. This online platform would reduce and streamline the impact of that load of calls from people who want to make a positive contribution.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 517. Paragraph 13 states —

The Department will provide \$175,000 in funding under the Volunteering Platform and Technology Improvement initiative ... and explore benefits and improvements to Volunteering WA's volunteer database ...

How will that assist smaller remote communities whose volunteers are burnt out?

I will give Coral Bay as a very good example of volunteer burnout. The population at Coral Bay can be up to 7 000 people at any one time. There are businesses who help those 7 000 people enjoy Coral Bay. In the past, there have been volunteers who have not had the adequate time to save lives. There are no police to assist, so it is often one or two volunteers or the community that helps get behind the ambulance volunteers. Another situation we had was that a month ago in Carnarvon, for the first time, St John could not respond to a call-out. It was the first time in the history of St John in Carnarvon that it could not respond to a call-out, and it was simply because there were not the volunteers to carry out work for the ambulances. The same thing happens in Cue and Mt Magnet where volunteers are scarce. Often, given the health system is not adequate enough to cater for the community, these volunteers travel hundreds and hundreds of kilometres to transfer patients to, say, Geraldton from Cue or from Cue to Meekatharra. It is dangerous and exhausting for these volunteers. What is the government doing to try to grow the volunteer base, noting that there is an ageing population in these communities? Has the government thought about any financial remuneration to entice younger people to take up volunteering, particularly ambulance volunteers?

[5.10 pm]

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I thank the member for the question. The member has drawn together a number of issues that do not necessarily sit under this line in the budget, which is about the better coordination of spontaneous volunteering, but I am happy to respond to his question about the greater challenge more globally of how to get more people to volunteer. The member is right that it is an issue, and I think it is an issue in modern society right across Australia and perhaps the world, where people have busy lives. How do we engage people? It is fair to say that many volunteers are of senior years and during COVID they left volunteering because of concerns for their health and wanting to take the medical advice to stay home and protect themselves. There has been an issue with getting those people back into the volunteering space now that they have left. That is one issue. The other issue the member raised was how to engage young people. It is something we are always keen to do.

The member mentioned that there could be some incentive. I am not sure that incentive payments are really the motivation for people who volunteer. I travel right across the state and I know that in some ways if we were to approach some volunteers with an offer of payment, they would take a very ill view of it because they are very much people who want to contribute and give to their local communities without reimbursement or compensation. It is something they want to offer without anything in return. I am not sure that a financial incentive is always the way to go. However, in numerous ways the state makes it easier and less expensive for volunteers. I know those seeking certification to work in volunteer capacities get heavily subsidised fees when applying for police clearances and other documentation. That is one way that we try to make it less expensive for people to offer their volunteer services.

The member also commented on an issue, which we are very aware of too, of the challenge in regions with lower populations. Obviously, in large population centres there are more people available to volunteer. In many country towns there are what are called “cross-dressers”; the member would be familiar with that term. It is the volunteer who puts a blue shirt one moment to fight a fire and then a green shirt at another to drive the volunteer ambulance. We ask a lot of volunteers generally, but particularly in the regions. We are trying to make it easier to volunteer.

We are very keen, through Volunteering WA, to promote the idea of volunteering. Having a greater online resource that allows people to connect when there is an incident will have a positive outcome. Once someone volunteers and has that experience for the first time, which they are likely to get through spontaneous volunteering, they are introduced to the world of volunteering. They are likely to come back for more, and the hope would be that they make that volunteering arrangement more ongoing.

The CHAIR: The member's question was rather lengthy. Could he keep his questions a little bit more concise and directed at a particular item? We are discussing a very important topic, and I am quite happy to give the member bit of leeway, as long as the minister is comfortable with responding to those sorts of questions. It was a fairly broad-ranging one, but a very important one.

The appropriation was recommended.

Division 37: Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries — Service 4, Racing and Gaming, \$23 922 000 —

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Mr R.R. Whitby, Minister for Racing and Gaming.

Ms L. Chopping, Director General.

Ms S. Sherdiwala, Executive Director, Finance and Procurement.

Ms G. Larcombe, Executive Director; Racing, Gaming and Liquor.

Mr C. Dykstra, Deputy Director General, Portfolio Capability and Performance.

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

Mr T.J. Robinson, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. It is the intention of the chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 1 October 2021. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

I give the call to the member for Roe.

[5.20 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to the table at the top of page 542. Under the section "Other" is "Perth Casino Royal Commission Expenditure". It has \$568 000 and then \$933 000. Can the minister provide some context around that expenditure?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: The member would know that the Perth Casino Royal Commission was established in March this year and is due to report on 4 March next year. This is about funding the royal commission. Estimated costs over the 2020–21 financial year are \$568 000 and for the 2021–22 financial year, \$933 000.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What is it actually for?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I guess the member can understand that royal commissions require expenditure and that includes the staffing of two FTEs for eight months. Additional funding is for Gaming and Wagering Commission board members who need additional preparation time for their appearance before the commission, but most of it is legal costs and the cost of the digitisation of records.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is the minister telling me that GWC board members are being paid more because of the fact that they have to meet more often for the royal commission?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I have been informed that there was an allocation, but that money has not been paid. If there is a requirement for them to spend a lot of time on it, there is the ability for them to be recompensed for that time. At the moment, it is only an allocation and no money has been paid.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 543 and paragraph 9, which states —

The Perth Casino Royal Commission (the Royal Commission) was established in March 2021 to inquire into the suitability of Crown Perth to continue holding a casino gaming licence and to examine the State's regulatory framework ... The outcomes and recommendations of the Royal Commission are likely to have a significant impact on the Department and the Gaming and Wagering Commission in relation to governance arrangements and legislative framework.

The minister is responsible for the Gaming and Wagering Commission. Is that correct?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I have responsibility for the agency, yes.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The minister is always a minister for that agency unless he takes leave; is that correct?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Yes.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: When the minister takes leave, does he sign over a piece of paper? How does he take leave to say that he is not a minister at that point in time?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: To be honest, I am not full bottle on the process because I have not taken leave yet, but I know that when I fill in for another minister who is on leave, there is certainly some documentation to be signed.

The CHAIR: Member, I am sure this is relevant somehow.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Yes, it is. I will get there, chair. I want to confirm that unless the minister takes leave, he is a member of Parliament and he is still a minister. Is that correct?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I am trying to work out what this has to do with this part of the budget.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is important to know that the minister is the minister responsible for the inquiry into the Perth Casino Royal Commission that is occurring in the minister's department and the casino. I want to make sure that the minister's role, as a member of Parliament, is always there as a member of Parliament —

The CHAIR: Member for North West Central, the question is not relevant to the budget. The minister has discretion whether he would like to respond to that and the member can move on to the next question.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: In the minister's role as minister, being party to the Perth Casino Royal Commission, would he take a chopper flight with someone who is being inquired upon in regard to the Perth Casino Royal Commission?

The CHAIR: Member for North West Central, once again —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is in relation to the Perth Casino Royal Commission line.

The CHAIR: No, it is not relevant to the budget papers. Once again, minister, it is not a relevant question and it does not have to be responded to.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I will have a further question, if I can.

The CHAIR: A new question?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I can call it a new question. It will be under the same line item.

The CHAIR: The previous one was not a question, member for Roe, so if the member has a question, that would be helpful.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 543, paragraph 9 about the Perth Casino Royal Commission. The paragraph states —

The Royal Commission delivered an interim report which was tabled in Parliament ...

I have it here. It further states —

The outcomes and recommendations of the Royal Commission are likely to have a significant impact on the Department and the Gaming and Wagering Commission ...

The operational relationship between the Gaming and Wagering Commission and the department was highlighted. Has any work been done to improve or clarify the communication channels between the two agencies?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: As the member rightly pointed out, there is an interim report that made some observations, but no recommendations, about the regulatory structure in relation to the royal commission. Perhaps I will mention for clarity for people present today that I do not have carriage or responsibility for the royal commission. The royal commission is an independent legal process, appointed by the government and another minister. To say that I have some control or carriage of, or responsibility for, the royal commission is incorrect. It is an independent process. It will deliver findings or possible recommendations to the government, and at that stage, the government will consider those recommendations.

The member asked about the interim report and the mechanism and the structure around the regulatory process of the casino. Certainly, the agency has already acted. It has done a number of things to improve governance and regulatory delivery. It has looked at and taken note of some of those early interim report comment lines, if you like.

The result is that the agency is already looking to move in the direction that it believes it should, of its own volition, and that would involve structures to improve portfolio management, capabilities, strength of governance arrangements, enhancing the leadership team and making sure that the regulatory structure is enhanced and more efficient, in line with what the commissioners have observed in their interim report.

[5.30 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I understand that the minister is not responsible for the royal commission; but he is responsible for his department, which is part of that. I note that on page 121 of the interim report there is a suggestion of regular meetings between the department and the operations division of the Crown Perth casino for which the minutes are recorded by a Crown employee on Crown letterhead and at the time of the report these records were not being passed on to the commission. Minister, can I ask whether has this changed? Are these meetings still occurring? How frequently are they occurring and who attends them?

The CHAIR: Member, once again, even though the *Perth casino royal commission: Interim report on the regulatory framework* is mentioned in the budget, the question is not related to a budgetary item. The member is asking a general question —

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It is in the budget papers.

The CHAIR: No. The member is asking a question out of a matter contained in the interim report. The interim report is not part of the budget; there is just a reference to it. Once again, the question is not relevant and the minister does not have to answer it.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I have a point of order, Mr Chair. The interim report is referenced in the budget papers and it is our understanding, and has been the understanding in all my time in this place, that any reference to the budget can be questioned by the opposition.

The CHAIR: There is no point of order, member for North West Central.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have a further question, Mr Chair. Page 543 of the *Budget Statements* state —

The outcomes and recommendations of the Royal Commission are likely to have a significant impact on the Department and the Gaming and Wagering Commission in relation to governance arrangements and legislative framework.

That was mentioned here in the budget. I am just asking the minister —

The CHAIR: The member is asking about a specific item contained within the interim report, which is not part of the budget.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Further to that, if I can, Mr Chair, as we pointed out earlier, the commission and the department have been allocated money in the line item of \$568 000 and \$933 000. What steps, if any, have been taken to improve the training and education of all departmental staff involved in the administration, regulation and review of any and all gaming and wagering matters in WA?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Thank you, member. I think I already answered that in my previous response.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: If I can, I want to go back to the line item of \$568 000 and \$933 000.

The CHAIR: That was on page 542—is that correct?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That was on page 542. Is the minister expecting a significant impact following the final royal commission report? Is any preparatory work being done ahead of the final report being handed down as part of that funding that has been allocated for the government support to the royal commission?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: The money that the member has pointed to funds the costs of the agency's involvement in the royal commission. As I said, there are a lot of legal and other administrative costs. As I said earlier, there has been action around how the agency is repositioning and restructuring in a regulatory sense. That is not using that money; that money will come out of the general finances of the agency. Let us be clear: the appropriation is in terms of basically responding to, and dealing with, the royal commission. The demand on documentation, evidence and legal advice is quite extensive, so that is what the funding relates to. But the agency is certainly very proactive in responding to and adjusting its regulatory structure to be much more pointed, efficient, relevant and improved, and funding for that is coming out of the general finances of the agency.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The current director general said that she will be cracking down on regulation and training and the like, unlike the previous director general who noted in his evidence that he did not have the experience or training for that. Has the minister implemented some training and regulatory experience into the department, or has the director general implemented some of those measures in conjunction with the royal commission?

The CHAIR: Minister, before you respond to that, I will speak. Member, once again, you are referring to a document that is not part of the budget. It is a close link and —

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: No; that was evidence given at the royal commission —

The CHAIR: Correct. And the member is referring to the interim report again, so I will give the minister the discretion —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I have a point of order. Can I get some clarification here, Mr Chair?

The CHAIR: Yes, member for North West Central.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: My understanding is that the minister's department is funding the royal commission. Is that correct?

The CHAIR: I do not know.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Well, can I ask the question?

The CHAIR: No, member. This is not a place for a general conversation. The previous question from the member for Roe addressed the issue that I am raising quite well, so the member for Roe just needs to be careful with the way he phrases it.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I will start afresh.

The CHAIR: Thank you, member.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer back to page 542 and the line item "Perth Casino Royal Commission Expenditure". The minister pointed out earlier that this allocation funds two FTEs. Do either of these FTEs regularly attend meetings with Crown Perth operational division staff; and, if so, how often?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Those FTEs are involved in responding to the royal commission. We are talking about the response of the agency to the royal commission.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 543, paragraph 9, which states —

The Perth Casino Royal Commission (the Royal Commission) was established in March 2021 to inquire into the suitability of Crown Perth to continue holding a casino gaming licence and to examine the State's regulatory framework.

Has the minister's department or commission put any money into the royal commission—yes or no?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: In terms of the royal commission, the only funding from this agency would involve the agency's response and involvement in the royal commission. I do not believe that it is the responsibility of the agency to actually fund the royal commission.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: So the royal commission is not being funded in any way through the budgets of Racing and Wagering WA or the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Member, that might be a question for another minister, but the expenditure is in relation to this agency's involvement with, preparation in assisting, or having people respond to, the royal commission. Again, there is no funding from this agency to run the actual royal commission itself.

[5.40 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I return to the line item on page 542, "Perth Casino Royal Commission Expenditure". Can the minister tell me what the two FTEs are being paid for?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Basically, they are dealing with the administrative processes around responding to the royal commission. The royal commission will produce what are known as notices to produce—NTPs. It might be documentation or information. That involves searching for information, collating it and preparing it for submission to the royal commission. It can be quite an onerous process, given that the royal commission can ask a lot of information, often going back 30 years, which involves digging through the archives and accessing information, making sure it is information that has been requested. There have been 51 of those NTPs to date. There is a significant workload. That is what those two FTEs are required to do.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: How often do those two FTEs report back to the director general? Have they minuted any meetings they have been involved in? Have they been asked to declare any interests?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Those staff have no involvement with Burswood. They are administrative staff sitting in the agency responding to requests for information from the agency.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Is the minister saying that they do not have any interaction whatsoever in relation to the royal commission; they are responding in an administrative sense?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Their interaction is receiving requests and delivering information. That is their involvement.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to paragraph 9 on page 543. It has been flagged that some departmental staff have perceived conflicts with Crown, including one marriage. I would like the minister to comment on that if he would not mind.

The CHAIR: Member, I am not sure where you are reading that.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It was pointed out in the interim report, which has been tabled as part of the budget documents.

The CHAIR: It is mentioned as part of the particular item that you are talking about; it is not part of the budget. I have already made it clear on a number of occasions that it is just referred to here; it does not form part of the budget. If you want to incorporate it into your questions, you need to think about how you phrase that.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I think it is fair to ask whether the two FTEs have a declared interest on that basis.

The CHAIR: I am not sure whether that was the same as your previous question.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Does the minister consider that to be a fair question?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I am happy to answer that question. The member is asking a different question. Every single member of staff has an approved conflict of interest management plan in place.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am pleased to hear it.

The appropriation was recommended.

Racing and Wagering Western Australia —

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Mr R.R. Whitby, Minister for Racing and Gaming.

Mr I. Edwards, Chief Executive Officer.

Mrs C. Mills, General Manager, Racing.

Mr T.J. Robinson, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. Members may raise questions about matters relating to the operations and budget of the off-budget authority. Off-budget authority officers are recognised as ministerial advisers. It is the intention of the chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 1 October 2021. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

I give the call to the member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to the line item "Wagering Systems and Products" under "Works in Progress" on page 301 of budget paper No 2. Why does the funding peak in 2021 and then tail off as we go into the forward estimates?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I might ask the CEO to respond to that query.

Mr I. Edwards: This line item refers to capital expenditure within Racing and Wagering. The particular line item referred to by the member involves a number of things, including investment in wagering systems, product development, user experience and customer experience. It fluctuates from time to time depending on accounting treatments and what we capitalise onto our balance sheet through the year. A couple of significant projects were undertaken in 2020–21, including the replacement of all of our terminals in the retail network, which was a project of some significance. It is an item that can fluctuate on occasion from year to year.

[5.50 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: How much of that funding will be used to invest in assets and products that could potentially be included in the sale of the TAB?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I will get the CEO of Racing and Wagering Western Australia to respond.

Mr I. Edwards: Under a potential sale of the TAB, all assets that are classified as wagering assets would likely be part of that sale. Every asset that is not classified as a specific wagering asset will remain the property of the racing authority.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is Tabcorp still the preferred buyer of the TAB and has the COVID-19 pandemic done anything to the TAB's sale price?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: For my assistance, can the member state the budget line item he is referring to?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is a follow-up question, as the CEO for Racing and Wagering Western Australia just mentioned the sale of the TAB. I want to know whether Tabcorp is still the preferred buyer and whether the pandemic has affected the TAB's sale price in any way.

The CHAIR: Member, that is a bit of a stretch. The previous question referred to the assets of Racing and Wagering Western Australia.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: That is an asset.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It was about wagering system products.

The CHAIR: That is correct. But a specific question about the preferred purchaser of the TAB is probably not appropriate. The minister may decide to answer.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: The chair is right that it is probably not appropriate, and I will point out that the carriage of the sale of the TAB is the responsibility of the Treasurer.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Does the minister know when the sale of the TAB will be completed, given that he is the minister responsible for the TAB?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: As the chair would know, information is out in the public that the process has stalled as a result of a request by Tabcorp, given COVID. Again, going forward will be a matter for the Treasurer.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is the minister saying that Tabcorp is still the preferred buyer of the TAB, but the process has stalled because of COVID-19? Is that correct?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: All I am saying is that the responsibility for sale of the TAB lies with the Treasurer.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Surely, the minister in charge of the TAB has some idea of who is the preferred buyer and when the process to sell the TAB will commence? Or is it underway—we do not know? Surely, the minister would know that information. Surely, that should be public information. It is public that the TAB will be sold under the minister's government; therefore, what is the time frame?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: The member is right that there is public information out there. I can repeat that for him: the process was stalled because of COVID at the request of Tabcorp. The process is now under consideration with the Treasurer because the Treasurer has carriage of the sale of the TAB.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is important to know whether Tabcorp is still the preferred buyer of the TAB, what the process is from now on and when the sale will be completed, because regional racing clubs will benefit from the sale of the TAB. There has always been a fear that the sale of the TAB will impact on regional racing infrastructure. I want some clarity. There is nothing sinister about my question. The racing fraternity in regional Western Australia wants to know whether this process still exists, Tabcorp is still interested and when the saga of the sale of the TAB will end, so we can guarantee that regional racing still has a future.

The CHAIR: Minister, even though you have answered this question at least twice previously, you can respond if you like.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I am happy to respond.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: He has not answered it; that is the issue.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I am happy to respond again. The member brought up the issue of country racing. Of course, the government is absolutely committed to supporting all codes and codes in the regions as well. We are very supportive of that. As I have said before, the carriage of the sale process is with the Treasurer, but I think it has been stated publicly that if there is a sale of the TAB, we will make sure that it is in the best interests of the racing industry.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I have a further question.

The CHAIR: Is it a different further question?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is a further question to the questions. Does the minister have a global figure of what the TAB is worth in the current climate? Surely, the minister in charge of the TAB would know whether it is worth \$300 million, \$1 billion or somewhere in-between? Does the minister have an idea of what it is worth and what the government would like to get for it?

The CHAIR: Members! The minister is the person who responds to questions, not you. Once again, it is a bit of a hypothetical stretch of the questions and it is up to minister if he would like to respond.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: There is only five minutes left, chair.

The CHAIR: I have two hours with the member in the other place after the dinner break!

Mr R.R. WHITBY: If I wanted to sell an asset, I would not let anyone know what I thought it was worth. I would be after the best possible price. That is just a personal observation. I think I would be mad to put a number on any asset that I, or anyone else, wanted to sell because I would want to get the best price possible. Having said that, the Treasurer has carriage of this matter and I know that the government is intent on making sure that if there were to be a sale, it would get the best possible outcome for the racing industry.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The minister pointed out a minute ago that Tabcorp had asked the government to delay the sale due to the COVID situation. To give surety to the industry, can the minister quantify what he thinks the time span might be for the sale? Are we talking two, three or four years?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I appreciate that the industry is looking to the future, and I understand that, but, again, I may be the minister, but I am not the Treasurer.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I will put it another way. If a sale did occur through the Treasurer, would the minister guarantee that RWWA will not have to come cap in hand every year looking for a contribution to continue the good work that it does at both metropolitan and regional racetracks? Will the government make a solid commitment to continuity of funding?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I think everyone in the government wants a very positive future for racing and wants to ensure that racing is sustainable.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 301 of budget paper No 2, volume 1 and the asset investment program regarding the line item "Racing Systems, Infrastructure and Minor Capital". Do these figures include the running costs of Touchstone Farm?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I will again refer that to the CEO.

Mr I. Edwards: Yes, they would include the capital expenditure associated with the Off the Track WA estate. It is not the operating and running costs, but any capital expenditure to improve the site would be part of that number.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the minister clarify how many FTE Touchstone Farm employs and how many ex-racehorses are currently accommodated there?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I might refer that to the general manager, racing, Charlotte Mills.

Mrs C. Mills: We have approximately two FTE associated with the Off the Track estate. We have a landlord who manages the estate and we obviously have an administration support person who also works in the RWWA office doing a broader approach to the retraining program. In terms of the number of horses on the property, it is not a static number; we obviously have a flowthrough of horses to the rehoming program. Last financial year, we rehomed 40 thoroughbreds and standardbreds.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: This might be the lucky last question. What is the average ongoing running cost year on year for Touchstone Farm for rehoming and so forth?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I will get Charlotte Mills to answer again.

Mrs C. Mills: Overall, we apply approximately \$500 000 to thoroughbred and standardbred welfare. Touchstone Farm receives a small proportion of that to cover the FTEs. The conversion of the property from a breeding facility to a retraining and rehoming facility has been covered in capital expenditure.

The CHAIR: That concludes the examination of the Racing and Wagering Western Australia off-budget authority.

Meeting suspended from 6.00 to 7.00 pm

Division 30: Fire and Emergency Services, \$228 661 000 —

Ms M.M. Quirk, Chair.

Mr R.R. Whitby, Minister for Emergency Services.

Mr D. Klemm, Commissioner.

Mr M. Cronstedt, Deputy Commissioner, Strategy and Emergency Management.

Mr B. Delavale, Acting Deputy Commissioner, Operations.

Mrs G. Camarda, Chief Financial Officer.

Mr R. Burnell, Executive Director, Corporate Services.

Mr M. Carter, Executive Director, Rural Fire Division.

Ms M. Pexton, State Recovery Controller.

Miss M. Onorato-Sartari, Principal Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. It is my intention to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee's consideration will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 1 October 2021. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

I give the call to the member for Moore.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Before I ask a question, as the local member who represents most of the country affected by tropical cyclone Seroja, I put on record my appreciation of the work by emergency services volunteers and staff. I thank them for their efforts.

To start, I want to ask a question, but it is not about cyclone Seroja; I will come back to that in a little while. I also apologise that we may have to mix and match with other committees so I may have to leave at some point. The point I want to raise concerns the relationship to government goals and desired outcomes on page 458 of budget paper No 2. One outcome on that page states —

A diverse team of volunteers and staff with a wide range of skills ...

In order to have a diverse team of volunteers, we need volunteers. There have been some disturbing reports of late about the position of volunteers who operate as fire control officers, and that under the new Work Health and Safety Act, people could potentially be held liable for an injury or, even worse, a death on a fireground. The minister knows that the penalties for that include up to five years' jail and a very serious financial penalty in some circumstances. I refer to an ABC report on 22 September—yesterday—which quotes the CEO of the Shire of Chapman Valley, one shire affected by Seroja, and Mr Brown, the chief bush fire control officer of the Shire of Dandaragan, who said that they do not want to expose themselves to ongoing risks under this legislation. Will the minister outline, either now or in some other way, his understanding of how this legislation will affect volunteers, especially volunteers in a position of coordination on a fireground; their employers, who might be farmers and who send them there; and local governments, which in some cases control bush fire brigades?

The CHAIR: Let us stop there; you can always ask further questions.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: There was a lot of commentary there. Could the member be more precise in his question?

Mr R.S. LOVE: I am asking whether the minister understands, and whether the department has drawn up any understanding of, the risks that volunteers face when acting in a supervisory capacity, especially when an accident occurs on a fireground or on the way to a fireground, or anything related to a volunteer's efforts on a fireground, under the new Work Health and Safety Act, which captures volunteers? There are reports from my electorate —

The CHAIR: I think you have encapsulated the question. We will leave it to the minister to respond and then you can ask further questions.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: This legislation is not my legislation, but I know it applies to emergency responders. Perhaps it would have been better for the member to ask another minister about the impact of this legislation on volunteers. However, in terms of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and volunteers throughout the state, I understand that there has always been a requirement to provide protection for emergency responders. There has always been an obligation on people who fight fires and who respond to emergencies to have certain levels of training. That obligation extends to someone having the reasonable capacity to provide that direction and control of volunteers.

This legislation applies throughout most Australian states. It applies in Queensland, New South Wales, Tasmania and the Northern Territory. It has done so for more than a decade and it works well. The overall observation I will make is that it is good that our volunteers are treated in the same way as career personnel. I often make the observation that career responders and volunteers put their lives on the line to the same degree whenever they are required to provide protection, whether that is physical protection in protective clothing or when using modern appliances and equipment, or when providing protection in occupational situations. That is the first issue I will raise. That is a good thing. I also make the observation that, as I said, there was always an obligation under previous occupational health laws to provide the right training and expertise to people who are being sent into harm's way.

[7.10 pm]

Mr R.S. LOVE: I am aware that those obligations may have existed in the past. However, there is a great deal of concern in rural communities about the implications of this act. If the government wishes to have a diverse team of volunteers on the ground, I would suggest that the department, the minister or someone will need to act to clarify and educate people about what the changes will mean and assure them about the limits of the new legislation. There are people who are seeking to profit from causing concern in the community around this issue. They are offering to provide services at a greatly inflated cost to farmers et cetera. Putting in place protocols may help protect them. This is causing a lot of concern. I suspect that that might be at the bottom of some of this, but it has blown up, and

not just in this newspaper; I have received text messages from people who are concerned about their liabilities. I fear that there will be a withdrawal of service of some very senior volunteers if something is not done. I ask the minister, the commissioner or someone to take this matter in hand and understand and address the concern.

The CHAIR: I do not know whether that requires much of a response other than to acknowledge it.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Nevertheless, chair, I am happy to respond. The member is right. It does require engagement with the Department of Fire and Emergency Services to educate people and provide that service. Indeed, that is exactly what is happening. I will refer to someone in a moment who can provide more detail about that. The team at DFES is engaging with the Western Australian Local Government Association and other agencies and authorities to pinpoint the issues that are in this legislation and to better educate people. This legislation has been around for a while. In fact, the former Attorney General Hon Michael Mischin, MLC, introduced the green bill, so this will not surprise anyone. I refer to Mr Richard Burnell to explain some of the detail.

Mr R. Burnell: I am happy to provide some information to the house. The Local Government Insurance Scheme convened a webinar on 31 August to which all local governments were invited to attend. My understanding is that 160 people attended the webinar. At that webinar was some legal representation, and the Local Government Insurance Scheme provided a clear understanding of the implications of the act. DFES was also invited to talk about the training that is available through the DFES Rural Fire Division and about all the documented procedures and work practices that we have. That was made available to all the local governments. The Local Government Insurance Scheme, as I understand it, has committed to provide detailed answers to the questions that were raised by all those who participated in the webinar. Those answers will be provided within a fortnight. We were involved in that process and we are providing whatever support we can.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: For the benefit of Hansard, I mispronounced Mr Burnell's name; I said Burrell. Apologies for that.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have a further question to that. It is more of a question/comment.

The CHAIR: Just stick to the questions, member for Roe. You can write the minister a letter if you want to comment.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Pursuant to that, my understanding is that when a farmer or a farm worker arrives first on the scene, it creates a problem. If the local government turns up first on the scene, that is covered by insurance, as was just pointed out. However, my understanding is that if a farmer or a farm worker turns up first on the scene, the farmer is not covered and is liable under the Work Health and Safety Act. That is why I agree with the member for Moore. We are getting examples like Dandaragan farmer Richard Brown who says that he will step down as the shire's chief fire control officer due to the new workplace safety legislation. This is turning into a public relations disaster.

The CHAIR: I am waiting for the question, member. Is there a question? You were seeking a legal opinion, I think.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: If the farmer turns up before the local government authority, does he have to accept liability under the new work health and safety laws?

The CHAIR: I am mindful that the minister is being asked for legal opinion, which might be contrary to the standing orders, but he can attempt to answer it.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I will not go into legal opinions, member. I think that with new legislation people are often uncertain, and that is why DFES is making concerted efforts to educate and inform people, which is a good thing. Going back 10 years ago, when almost identical legislation was introduced in the other states, there were similar claims that volunteers would walk away. That simply did not occur in those other jurisdictions. I might refer to the commissioner for some more commentary.

Mr D. Klemm: Good evening to everyone and thank you, minister. I will cover a couple of points. Going to the member's question, I fancy that the answer to that question will be in the some 160-odd questions that the Local Government Insurance Scheme will respond to as a result of the webinar that Mr Burnell referred to. DFES also has volunteers that it has been responsible for in various forms over the course of the last 90 to 100 years. We have a really well established training system and program. We also have modern and robust standard operating procedures, or doctrine.

To answer the member for Moore's comment about people seeking to profit from this, all those procedures, the training and the doctrine is available at no cost to local governments to use for their bush fire brigades and/or farmers. Under Murray Carter's leadership, the Rural Fire Division has developed training for farm workers on responding and attending to bushfires. That training goes for only six hours. So DFES has done a lot of work to provide assistance to local governments and their volunteers through bush fire brigades to prepare them for not only this summer but previous summers as well.

[7.20 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am saying that we are trying to help and do not underestimate the situation.

The CHAIR: I gather that is not a further question, member. Any further questions? Member for Moore.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I turn to page 457 and the line item “Severe Tropical Cyclone Seroja Enhanced State Recovery Structure” under “New Initiatives” in the “Spending Changes” table. I wonder whether the minister could outline what that funding represents. There are two payments over the forward estimates with a combined total of just over \$9.6 million. If the minister could explain the commitment that that represents to the communities, I would be grateful. Could the minister also explain what the commonwealth’s contribution is towards these?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I do not have a page 457 tab. Can I get some more information about the item the member is talking about?

Mr R.S. LOVE: I am talking about the line item under “New Initiatives” in the “Spending Changes” table on page 457, which is “Severe Tropical Cyclone Seroja Enhanced State Recovery Structure”. There are two payments of \$4.404 million and \$5.237 million.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I am just trying to find the right page. What is the member’s question again?

Mr R.S. LOVE: I wonder whether the minister can outline what that commitment of \$9.6 million represents.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Member, the same support is expressed in different ways in the budget. Hence it will take a little to get on top of it, but this funding is just part of the funding. As the member would be aware, a historically large amount of money has been committed to the recovery for cyclone Seroja. This \$9.641 million is to facilitate financial assistance and allow the state to help deliver that assistance across a range of agencies.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Is that part of the category C and E arrangements or is it something additional?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I might get the Seroja State Recovery Controller to respond.

Ms M. Pexton: I think Georgina Camarda might be able to provide a bit of advice on the \$9.6 million and then I am happy to talk to the question regarding commonwealth funding.

The CHAIR: Could the chief finance officer respond, please.

Mrs G. Camarda: The \$9.641 million is allocated to DFES over two years and to provide enhanced resourcing to DFES, in particular the State Recovery Controller, to help administer a number of disaster recovery funding arrangement packages throughout the state. The \$9.6 million is funded by the consolidated account and also through reimbursement through the DRF arrangements.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Are we saying that is all for administration?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I will let Ms Camarda continue.

The CHAIR: Can I just say that it assists Hansard if any acronyms, such as DRF, could be said in full. That would help them a lot.

Mrs G. Camarda: I might refer that one to State Recovery Controller Mel Pexton to explain resourcing.

Ms M. Pexton: That package refers to a number of resources and not all those are administrative by any means. For example, our community recovery officers have now gone out into the region. They are working across a number of local governments areas. We have a range of resources in there to support the delivery of the packages. So, across that \$104 million record package for the disaster recovery funding arrangements, as the member may be aware, we have a number of grants and community welfare and outreach support services. Sorry, I do not have the exact number in front of me, but the approximately \$9 million contributes as part of the delivery of that program.

The CHAIR: Do you have a further question, member?

Mr R.S. LOVE: I think that is perhaps as much information as I am going to get now. I might put a question on notice and seek some more detail around the funding arrangements.

Mr M. HUGHES: Evening, minister.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Evening.

Mr M. HUGHES: I refer the minister to page 458 and the heading “Capacity to maintain Frontline Operations” under “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”. I am referring specifically to point 3.2 and the new career Fire and Rescue Service facility in the south east metropolitan region. Could the minister provide an update regarding this station and the benefits it will provide to the community?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Certainly. I thank the member for the question. Given that he represents an electorate that is very bushfire prone, the member would be aware of the importance of having both volunteer and career fire services on hand. The growth of the Perth metropolitan area is such that DFES is required to look at whether the growing demand can be serviced by volunteer brigades or whether a new career fire station is required. Certainly we have identified a need for a new career fire service station in the growing south east metropolitan region. DFES is looking at the best location for that station, but we have committed \$14.5 million in the forward estimates to provide funding for that station, including \$2 million in the current year to acquire the necessary land and also for the additional fire appliances that will operate there. This is a significant investment in the south east metropolitan region. It will be very welcomed and will supplement existing career and volunteer fire services in the south-eastern corridor of Perth.

We have excellent career fire stations in the area but Perth is growing. It is growing southward, and the member would be aware of very strong growth in the south-east part of Perth. There always comes a point at which we look at the volunteer service and, as very good as that is, we want to expand our career fire service as well. We have made a commitment in this budget to provide for extra career fire stations. This will be the twenty-fifth career fire station in the metro area.

That is an important milestone. I am sure it will be welcomed by those communities in the south-eastern suburbs of Perth.

[7.30 pm]

Mr R.S. LOVE: I want to turn to page 463, the emergency services levy, and the changes in the budget around that. Funding into the department from the emergency services levy in 2020–21 was estimated at \$29 million; it is a comparatively small amount of \$4 million this year; \$12 million next year; and \$23 million and \$26 million the following years. The emergency services levy goes into an account. Is this the drawdown from that account or is it the actual money that the department has raised? What does this reflect, or is this just the amount that is being used in a particular manner within the department's budget?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I might throw that question to Georgina Camarda.

Mrs G. Camarda: Just to confirm: is the member referring to the asset investment program on page 463?

Mr R.S. LOVE: Yes.

Mrs G. Camarda: That is for the 2021–22 financial year, and \$4 million of the emergency services levy is being used to fund the asset investment program for that particular year. The emergency services levy is raised every year to the amount that is approved by government. This year, the emergency services levy is \$391 million, from memory. That is used to fund our operations, some of which goes towards the asset investment program, which is the number the member just highlighted. The amount allocated towards the asset investment program varies each year. Have I answered the member's question?

Mr R.S. LOVE: Minister, I am trying to find out how much flexibility the department has in the use of the emergency services levy. Presumably, a fair bit of money can be used for capital purchases in a given year, or not. There is flexibility in how it is used—it does not have to be used within a particular time or for a particular purpose.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I make the point that all dollars raised through the emergency services levy are spent, and have to be spent, on emergency services. That is the first point I make. In terms of how the funding arrangement is worked out, there is an agreed budget each year of the needs of the agency in terms of all its operating costs and its desire for capital expenditure, including new appliances. Everything is worked out as an annual budget. It is from that that the ESL is calculated. A return from the ESL will cover whatever the agreed budget is for that year. I can hand the member over to the commissioner, who might like to elaborate on the source of revenue.

Mr D. Klemm: What the member sees there is some of the challenges we have had with delivering our asset investment program, particularly in relation to COVID and fire appliances, and some of the delays in building caused by COVID. In some cases, we carry funds over from one year to the next because of the challenges we have with this construction, and that is what is seen there. The important point is that the emergency services levy can be used only for the purposes of the emergency services act, which I am responsible for. Every dollar raised through the ESL is spent on emergency services.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Within the fact that it is all to be used for emergency services, there is a fair degree of flexibility in any given year, which would mean that there is an agreement that the department will hold the money in trust until such time as it is used in the appropriate way. Is there any pressure on the commissioner to spend all the money in a year and get it out the door, as such?

Mr D. Klemm: Yes, there is. We strike our budget each year. We must go through quite a lengthy process to get the ability to carry funds over from one year to another. Importantly in the asset investment program, as an example, is fire trucks, which are on a replacement program. Anything we do not build this year still has to be funded next year because the trucks have to be replaced. The funds the member is looking at demonstrate some of the delays we have had due to COVID, and of course it compounds itself because when we get into the next financial year another whole series of trucks have to be replaced because they have met their replacement date.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The department has a fairly mature capital replacement program in which it has laid out all the replacements for its fleet.

Mr D. Klemm: Yes.

Mr R.S. LOVE: And presumably some level of growth into the future in innovation or different machines that may come forward. Who determines how much will go to local government grants within that program? Local government bush fire brigades et cetera look for assistance. Is it the commissioner or the government? Who determines the level of grants that are available?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: The commissioner can elaborate. There is a local government grants committee, consisting of representatives from DFES, local government and the volunteer association. The actual decision on the success of grants is determined by that committee. It is an independent committee, inasmuch as there is a DFES representative, but there is also a local government representative and a volunteer association representative.

Mr R.S. LOVE: My understanding is that is how it is divvied up but not how the size of the pie is decided.

Mr D. Klemm: About \$35 million a year is applied to both the capital and operating grant process for local government. In the first instance, it is for the management of trucks. The trucks that are provided to local government bush fire brigades are on a replacement program; exactly the same as the trucks that DFES has responsibility for. That is for both bush fire brigades and the State Emergency Service. An operating grant is also available through the LGGS, or the local government grants scheme. The committee is not necessarily dealing with the operating grant because that is just an average of the last couple of years' expenditure. Capital grants are managed and decisions made by the local government grants committee, albeit there is quite a mature process around the replacement of trucks that the local government grants committee does not need to make a decision on. Some \$35 million to \$36 million is provided each year.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Further to the local government grants scheme: are we talking about the section that is on page 467, "Emergency Services Grants", with footnote (a)? Is that the local government grants scheme that we are talking about? It sits in the budget this year at a bit over \$38 million.

[7.40 pm]

Mr R.R. WHITBY: The member is correct; the current estimate is \$38.6 million.

Mr R.S. LOVE: That is the point that I am trying to make about how the department determines the size of the pie. The emergency services levy, a source of revenue for the department, is growing across the forward estimates. Last year, it raised \$349 000 000 and across the forward estimates that increases to \$428 000 000 but there does not seem to be any growth in the very static amount that is granted to local governments under that scheme. Rather than being a percentage, is it an amount that is somewhat arbitrarily decided?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I might refer that question to Georgina Camarda.

Mrs G. Camarda: Just for clarity, the emergency services levy is one of our funding sources; it is our primary funding source. If the levy looks like it is going up in the out years—the forward estimates indicate that it is—that means that another funding source is coming down. We only raise what we need to raise to meet our total cost of services and asset investment program. In terms of who determines the local government grant scheme budget, it has been set historically. We have sought increases in that budget in the past and have been successful. I suppose it is on a needs basis of local governments, the bushfire brigades and the State Emergency Service. If there is a need, certainly the department will put forward a case to Treasury and seek additional funding. A departmental submission would need to be made to determine a greater budget of the LGGS if required. As I said, the emergency services levy is our primary funding source and just because it is going up in the out years, that does not necessarily mean that our total expense is going up in the out years as well.

Mr R.S. LOVE: On the emergency services levy again, the primary interface between the department and ratepayers and property owners is when they get their rate bills. Can the minister explain why the levy in 2019–20 stood at \$381 million and then declined over the next few years?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I refer to the chief financial officer.

Mrs G. Camarda: There was a fall in the emergency services levy revenue in 2021. That was associated with the government policy decision to freeze ESL charges, which resulted in households or property owners paying the same or less in their ESL charge and, hence, we recovered less revenue that year. The government provided a \$40 million injection in 2020–21 to provide for the shortfall in the emergency services levy revenue. We are collecting a little more in the emergency services levy this financial year. There was a policy decision to increase the levy rate by 4.3 per cent. The government subsidy to provide for the shortfall in the ESL revenue is \$14.9 million this year. That is the reason the levy has gone down in the last two years compared with 2019–20.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I gather from what was just said that a government freeze was imposed 18 months or so ago. Does that mean that the underlying property value, the underlying rate or something else has not recovered since then because I would have thought that immediately upon lifting the freeze, it would shoot straight back up to the higher levels of 2019–20? Was it a freeze or a reduction or is it a reduction in the underlying valuations?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: The intention of the government during COVID was to freeze household charges. There was a reduction in the ESL for that particular year and the disparity in funding was topped up by consolidated revenue. Coming out of that, we have had a slight increase in this budget, but we have also moderated that with an additional top-up from consolidated revenue of some \$15 million. The increase that the member is seeing in this budget is the increase as opposed to the year before when there was a reduction. But if the member compares the current amount with the amount before that freeze or reduction, householders are still paying less ESL than they did before COVID because of the moderation of the increase this year due to the extra \$15 million from consolidated revenue.

Mr R.S. LOVE: That is actually the amount that is making up the shortfall, not causing the shortfall. I will move on from that.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 462 and item 4.3, which refers to \$2.9 million for plant and equipment, including \$400 000 for a fixed repeater tower in Esperance. Can the minister indicate when that fixed repeater tower will be built? I note that it was recommendation 12 in the coroner's report into the Esperance fires. I am sure the people of Esperance are keen to know.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: The sum of \$355 000 is for the construction of a fixed repeater tower in Esperance, which will obviously contribute to much enhanced bushfire management and volunteer capability in that part of the world. In terms of the timing of its installation, I might refer to Richard Burnell to clarify that.

Mr R. Burnell: We are putting in a number of telecommunication improvements around the Esperance region, given that the question relates to just the Esperance region. The tower has been planned for this coming budget year. It took a length of time to determine the specific location, which was agreed with the local government. We are now working through the land acquisition process and we will then purchase the equipment and install the tower. In the interim, we have provided some portable repeaters so that the area has radio communications. Those portable repeaters were used at the Norseman complex fires. We have also been working with the federal government on satellite wi-fi services so that if there are communication failures with the standard cellular network, at least the local government communities, with the evacuation centres, will have the ability to communicate through satellite services. Those will be rolled out before December. Telstra has been putting through applications for round 2 of the Strengthening Telecommunications Against Natural Disasters funding package, which is a commonwealth package. My understanding is that all the applications from Western Australia have been accepted and we are waiting for final approval. That will also improve telecommunications in the Esperance area.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I assume that the tower will not be available this summer but that other temporary arrangements are in place.

Mr R. Burnell: That is correct; that is my understanding.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Can the minister, or perhaps the commissioner, provide any information about the implementation of any of the other recommendations in the coroner's report into the Esperance fires that will occur over the next year or so?

[7.50 pm]

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Is the member able to point to the budget item for that?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: It is really just under the total cost of service on page 461. I just want to get an indication of the 12 recommendations. Obviously, not all of them came under DFES, but a substantial number did. Are there any others, besides the repeater tower?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: It is difficult because the member is referring to another document that is not the budget. If he is able to point out a particular part of the budget that we can respond to, we are happy to do that.

The CHAIR: The member did refer to the repeater tower under new works on page 463. As I understand it, the member wants to know what other works are being done in conjunction with those recommendations. You may have to put a question on notice, member.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: What the member is asking is a broader request outside the budget. Indeed, the state has responded already to every one of those recommendations and has tabled that paper as its response. It is public information that the member can draw on, or he can ask a question on notice. That might be the better way of handling it.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I turn to page 467 and the volunteer marine rescue service under "Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies". I note the ongoing commitment of around \$8 million a year to the volunteer marine rescue service. Is that a matter simply of various grants for equipment or are fixed costs picked up in running some of those organisations in terms of buildings and volunteers et cetera? I am trying to get an understanding of the difference between the subsidy component and the grant component of that money.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Yes, the information I have is that that funding relates to both equipment and any other operating costs that may have been incurred—so all costs that are incurred.

Mr R.S. LOVE: How much is a regular ongoing cost and how much is grant funding, as in capital, boats and one-off equipment that might go to different centres?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I will defer to the executive director, Richard Burnell.

Mr R. Burnell: The majority of the dollars are associated with the volunteer marine rescue service, because the extent of the funding is only a fairly recent issue. There are over 70 vessels in the volunteer marine rescue service fleet. A lot of the vehicle replacement program has been planned. There are 36 volunteer marine rescue associations, many of which own their own buildings. They have not had audits undertaken on the standard of the buildings and the work that needs to be undertaken on them, so we are providing assistance to the volunteer marine rescue associations themselves to undertake those audits. They are also going through and replacing a lot of old vehicles,

trailers, plant and equipment. There is a capital grants committee, similar to the volunteer State Emergency Service or bush fire service, that operates in a similar manner. Each year the associations put forward funding applications for the replacement of whatever their capital is. That is the majority of the spend that is seen in the budget.

Mr P. LILBURNE: Good evening, minister. Thank you for your candour this evening; it has been very good and pleasing. I thank also the advisers here this evening for their time and ongoing service to our community. I appreciate it greatly. I am interested in the expansion of the state's emergency services fleet. I refer to the spending changes on page 457 and the line item "State Operational Support Fleet". What is the significance of this and what will it mean for emergency services in the community moving into the future?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I thank the member for the question. I appreciate his interest in this area. Obviously, the government is keen to invest in emergency services to keep the community safer. A key part of this is our emergency responders having greater access to the best available —

Mr P. LILBURNE: Excuse me, I cannot quite hear, minister. There is some noise over there.

The CHAIR: Let us start again, minister.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Obviously, the government is keen to provide the very best level of service and equipment to our responders so they have the best equipment. This could include fire appliances, flood boats, better communications equipment et cetera. The budget includes \$11.2 million over the forward estimates for the state operational support fleet. This gives DFES greater resources and communications capabilities at strategic locations across Western Australia. The funding includes \$1.2 million over the budget and forward estimates periods for operating costs, and \$10 million to boost funding for the replacement of ageing high fire season fleet appliances—new fire trucks. This will expand and modernise the emergency services fleet across all hazards. It is an extra \$5 million per annum over 2023–24 and 2024–25 that will strengthen our capability to mitigate and manage seasonal remote and peak period hazards and risks across Western Australia. Having that backup high season fleet gives the ability for DFES to move resources around. Western Australia is a very big state. The fire seasons are at different times in Western Australia, so it makes sense to have that backup fleet that can be moved around so that when the fire season is at its peak in the north, the vehicles are there, and then as the season moves on and the risk changes to the midwest or the southern parts of Western Australia, that high season fleet can be repositioned to respond. We will always need our fleets to be in situ and to be there for all eventualities. But having that secondary line, if you like, of well-equipped and modern vehicles and not relying simply on second-hand or lesser vehicles means that the high season fleet is equal in terms of its age and capability to other appliances and can be moved around as required as the fire season and other needs arise to reposition it.

[8.00 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I thank the minister for his copious answer. Can I move on to the line item for "Mapping of Bushfire Prone Areas" under ongoing initiatives on page 457? What areas are covered and why has that funding now cut out in the forward estimates?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: It is a responsibility to update a fire map, essentially, of Western Australia. It is not something that we are required to do every year but it is required to be updated from time to time. The member can understand there is a set expense in the budget to provide for that and it is currently underway. We want to see a much more useful, more granular map so that the Department of Fire and Emergency Services is better able to respond to fire. It will examine not just the existence of vegetation but also what type of vegetation it is. If fire is moving through an area, it is good to know whether it is grassland, shrubs or big timber. At the moment, we can do better. We can have a better resource to help inform our firefighters and give a greater picture of the state and where the risks and potential areas for fire are. As I said, it is not something we do every single year. The department is required to update it from time to time, which is the process we are now in.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: How is it funded? Will it come out of the emergency services levy?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I will refer to Murray Carter for the detail on that.

Mr M. Carter: The answer to the question is "partly". The contribution is split across the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage and will be seen in its budget papers. That part of the contribution is a part-time staff person from DFES to provide the oversight to that reform project, which is around a review of the map of bushfire-prone areas, as the minister mentioned, and some work being done on that by the CSIRO currently. Of course, the impact of the map itself will then play out in the amendments made to *State planning policy 3.7*, which is around planning and development in bushfire-prone areas. The modest amount in the budget reflected in our budget papers is part of a policy position that is to deal directly and collaboratively with the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage on that reform work before we then normalise the map of bushfire-prone areas back into our normal routine operation within the agency. That is why the funding comes to an end, to answer part of the member's earlier question.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The last questions I have on this are: How will the program be rolled out? What impact does the department anticipate it will have? Will it be rolled out through local governments? How will the map be distributed?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I am happy for the commissioner to respond.

Mr D. Klemm: The map of bushfire-prone areas is available on the DFES website. It works in reverse, member. We receive information from local governments from a land point of view about land that has been cleared this year as opposed to land that was not cleared last year. That is when the map of bushfire-prone areas is updated. As Mr Carter mentioned, the map is then reflected in planning decisions. The map is always available on the DFES website for anybody to look at. It clearly identifies, for the whole state of Western Australia, bushfire-prone areas.

The CHAIR: I am going to indulge myself and ask the minister a question about that. The minister mentioned —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Page number!

The CHAIR: It would be on page 457, “Mapping of Bushfire Prone Areas”. It is a further question. The minister mentioned that the ongoing process will drill down to a more granular level so that the map is a bit more accurate, especially on the fringes. The CSIRO has been enlisted to assist in this process. When do you anticipate that it will be finished, and when do you anticipate that better outcomes will occur due to more accurate mapping?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Thank you, chair, for the toughest question of the evening.

The CHAIR: Excellent.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: We are relying on input from the CSIRO and, as the chair may be aware, the eastern states are battling with lockdowns and the impact of COVID.

The CHAIR: It has been going for four years, minister.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Yes, that is right. We are very keen to get it back. We have been told, on many occasions, that it will be with us shortly. There was some issue with the people working on the map in Melbourne, I understand, who were working from home, could not go to the office and did not have the bandwidth capacity. I am as annoyed by these continual excuses —

The CHAIR: You cannot be more annoyed than I am, minister!

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Maybe I am the second-most annoyed, because it is something we have been waiting on. It is beyond the control or the ambit of the state government to deliver this. We are relying on our friends at the CSIRO. Once they come through, we will be onto it.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I will let someone else get back with a wet lettuce leaf. I give the call to the member for North West Central.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Thanks for asking that on behalf of what we asked you to do! I have a new question. It is on page 457, under ongoing initiatives. I refer to the large aerial tanker and lead aircraft. In 2021, there is \$2 443 000 and no funding in the forward estimates. Given the fact we have had probably our wettest season on record since 1975, and I would imagine we are very fire prone all over the state, why has funding not been allowed for a large aerial tanker? One was used in the last lot of bushfires and we will probably have to use it again into the future. Is there an agreement in place? Why is it not in the budget?

The CHAIR: There are three questions there, but—minister.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I can assure the member we are not stepping away from the provision of a large aerial tanker capacity in Western Australia. It is something we have had for a number of years now and will continue to have. Because we simply do not know what sort of season lies ahead and what sort of requirement there will be for a large aerial tanker, it is funded after the fact. The arrangements are that a draw is made from consolidated revenue to finance that after the provision of the service.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: On the large aerial tanker and the smaller tanker, from helicopters to the C-130s and whatever that big plane is called that throws down the red stuff—the fire suppressant—are they locked in for our fire season now? As I said, our rainfall can be compared with 1975 when there was large rainfall and, obviously, there has been large growth everywhere right across the state. Even in the Gascoyne, where people think there are not many trees, growth is very high. We experienced this after the 2010–11 floods when we had one of the largest fires. I think it burnt 750 000 square kilometres of land. Will the minister have those aerial tankers and helicopters booked in and ready to go in the event of a pretty disastrous fire season?

[8.10 pm]

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Absolutely, member. We always have to be prepared, and I think the indications are that this season, because of the large amount of rainfall we had over winter, the fuel load will be quite high. The potential is that, in our long, hot summer, that fuel load will dry out. The member is absolutely right: there needs to be a significant aerial tanker capacity coming into this summer. There will be announcements down the track, but I can assure the member that this will be the most impressive season ever in terms of aerial capacity, including large tankers and some other aerial assets. They will be provided for. I will refer to the commissioner to elaborate, but we saw the effectiveness of those large aerial tankers in the Wooroloo–Gidgegannup fires, where there were inaccessible areas and valleys that are very difficult to get to. That support was very important and critical. Increasingly, those large aerial tankers are part of the resources that the Department of Fire and Emergency Services can draw on. I will refer to the commissioner to elaborate, but certainly there will be a big commitment this coming summer to aerial suppression.

Mr D. Klemm: The aerial fleet that DFES and the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions are responsible for each summer is a mixed and varied fleet, for very good reasons. We have a number of different risks that require different ways of delivering water and/or retardant to fires. DBCA largely manages the single-engine air tankers, referred to as SEATs, which spend most of winter and a bit of spring spreading fertiliser and pesticides onto crops, and are then repurposed as water bombers during the bushfire season. We also have helicopters that are incredibly efficient in and around homes, and really effective at protecting properties; they come in a couple of different sizes. Then there are large air tankers, which was the focus of the member's question. We are currently in negotiations with both the National Aerial Firefighting Centre and the federal government around having a large air tanker to be placed here in Western Australia, as there was last year. One of the challenges for the aerial fleet is that we often do not know how often they are going to fly. Costs are different for sitting on the ground as opposed to flying, so we have a retrospective model, if you like, in terms of recouping the costs of flights once we get to the end of the bushfire season, every season. That is called supplementary funding, as the minister referred to, and it is funded out of the consolidated account to cover off something that is extremely difficult for us to budget for in terms of what it is going to cost.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: In terms of being able to have these larger aerial tankers, I know the minister mentioned that they use fire retardant. There are a few sceptics out there on the effect that has on the environment, as opposed to putting out fires. How is the minister dealing with the environmental fallout of having that retardant once it hits forests? Secondly, in terms of filling up the tankers with water, do we have the right infrastructure at, say, Perth Airport, to be able to fill up these larger aerial tankers in a timely fashion by having the proper fittings or proper piping infrastructure to get the water to the aircraft?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: The member is absolutely right: there needs to be infrastructure when the plane is on the ground, and certainly DFES has that capacity also. Maybe the commissioner can explain more.

Mr D. Klemm: In relation to the first part of the member's question, to do with the environmental impacts of the retardant, the retardant has to be approved through US government standards. There are a number of reasons for that, but it is the same retardant that is used everywhere in the world, essentially, so from that point of view, it has the environmental clearances to be able to be used. In relation to the infrastructure to be able to fill up large air tankers, last year we established a large air tanker refilling capability, including retardant, at Busselton Airport. That was done to an extremely high standard by the local State Emergency Service volunteers in Busselton. Over the course of what was a pretty busy year for the large air tanker flying out of Busselton, they implemented a number of improvements to, at one stage, be able to keep three large air tankers running during the height of the Wooroloo fire, and their efforts are to be commended for not only delivering that service but also improving it while keeping those three planes flying, one at a time, out of Busselton to go over the top of Wooroloo. In preparation for this year and coming years, DFES is almost at the end of development of a transportable refilling facility, so that should the need arise and we need to operate a large air tanker out of Esperance, Kalgoorlie or Geraldton, we can deploy that refilling capability into those areas. It may sound reasonably simple and that it is just a matter of connecting a hose to a plane and refilling it, but the retardant has to be continually mixed or it settles in the tank. That is a really key component and requires some tanks and infrastructure to be able to do that.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 467 and the line item "Bushfire Mitigation Activity Fund—ESL", under "Rural Fire Division". The estimated actual for 2020–21 is \$1.8 million, and then there is a 2021–22 estimate of \$13.4 million. Note (b) states that the estimated actual represents an underspend of \$7.4 million from the 2020–21 budget because of weather conditions and the eligibility of local governments to participate in the program. That tells me that our fire mitigation program is well behind the eight ball. As the member for North West Central said, we have just experienced the wettest winter since 1975. Does that concern the minister? What are the plans to bring things back up to speed?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: As the member said, there was an impact on mitigation activity from both weather and COVID; that was also an aspect. The extent of the funding arrangements has been incredibly impressive. Since we have been in office, more than \$30 million has been spent on mitigation support to local governments, and there is a lot of money in the forward estimates, too. Maybe Mr Carter can elaborate on how we can catch up, in essence.

[8.20 pm]

Mr M. Carter: The heart of the member's question is around that scale-up. We have moved, over a three-year period, to a \$30 million-plus investment; that is just for on-ground work. The investment in planning, resources and support for local government is above that again. Prior to this program being put in place, we had around 16 local governments; we now have 87 local governments engaged in the program and, notably, 54 of those now have an endorsed final bushfire risk management plan, and that is the key to eligibility, as mentioned in the budget papers.

Once the plan is endorsed, they become eligible for the mitigation activity fund. There has been some underspend in previous years on top of the specific factors mentioned, climatic conditions and COVID, but it is also about the ramping up. I expect that in the coming year and following years that will even itself right out so that the spend for on-ground mitigation work will reach a maximum amount in the current year or the following year. Another factor is that it is emergency services levy and royalties for regions funding. Of course, not all the royalties for

regions funding is made available to us; it is held by the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage. As we work through the grant programs—twice a year they are run across both programs—eligibility by individual job lot across local governments is established, but it moves around. In terms of the midyear review and the budget processes with Treasury, those figures move around depending on which local governments are successful in getting their grants and whether they are non-metro or regional local governments that are eligible for royalties for regions.

I think the heart of the answer is that we will catch up and we will catch up quickly. The number of local governments now engaged in the scheme and the support we are giving those local governments to put in place work on the ground has risen significantly over the past three years. I am very confident that the amount for on-ground mitigation of over \$30 million, as mentioned, will have \$8 million to \$10 million a year on top of that.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: With the government's latest forestry announcement, I wonder whether the likes of Mr Carter would be very concerned about the fire mitigation issues that will now arise from having all our state forests locked up and being unable to mitigate?

The CHAIR: That does not sound like a further question; the member has branched off to a tangential matter that —

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I think it is a pretty relevant matter in relation to fire mitigation.

The CHAIR: It is not relevant in the sense that it is not in the minister's portfolio.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Okay. I have a further question. Mr Carter indicated that it should be okay to catch up. Will it take the whole financial year to get back up to speed, I guess? It is a question about the timing.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Thanks, member. I will refer that to Mr Carter. But I think, as has already been explained, we are often dealing with things that are unpredictable. The ability for local governments to get their mitigation plans in place to be able to qualify is affected by issues like the weather and, dare I say, COVID, but I will let Mr Carter elaborate.

Mr M. Carter: That largely is the answer, given there is seasonal dependence for particular aspects of the program, particularly within the planned burning space. The mitigation activity funding funds a range of activities, and planned burning is a key one, but not the only one. It is also for chemical use for firebreaks, access track enhancements and maintenance, and things like mechanical fuel removal and modifications such as flashing and shredding of vegetation, and scrub rolling as well. Some of those activities are not as prone to seasonal variations in weather—planned burning clearly is. What gives me confidence is the quantum of local governments now involved. We are getting such a large number of local governments that variations across the state can be catered for by shifting the investment into regional areas. As the opportunities arise, with enough agility and flexibility in that program, we can make sure that money actually hits the ground; whereas, in previous years, we have been slightly restricted because of a lighter number of eligible local governments. Now there is a different scenario and that gives me confidence that we will be able to catch up and hit the areas when they become available and move that money across the regions, basically.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 457 of budget paper No 2 and the items under the heading "Recovery". We have heard a lot about severe tropical cyclone Seroja, which hit in April this year. Can the minister provide a list of where the state and commonwealth funding of \$104.5 million has gone or is going?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Sure, member.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am happy to take it as supplementary information if the minister does not have it.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I am happy to respond. It is a big question because there is a lot of money and a lot of support. We have the Seroja State Recovery Controller with us here this evening who can also elaborate on it. The funding is significant. In May, funding of \$104.5 million was announced. It is a record amount in terms of Western Australian disaster recovery funding.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: There was major damage.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: That is right.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The minister says it is a record amount, but it was a major event.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: That is right, and it is good to know that we were able to respond in concert with the federal government accordingly.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Appropriately.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Appropriately, accordingly, there is a record amount that will go to recovery in terms of community support—the psychological support that is needed on the ground through Communities and the Red Cross —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Minister, I understand all of that; I would just like a list of where the \$104.5 million is going. I want to know what has been spent so far and where it has been spent, where future money will be spent and the time frames. I am sure the minister has that list. Can the minister provide it as supplementary information so that we can continue and ask further questions rather than taking up everyone's time?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I am happy to give the member an indication of that this evening, because I think it is important to talk about it. I know that the recovery controller can do that also. It involves community welfare and outreach

programs, recovery and resilience grants for insured residents of up to \$20 000, clean-up and recovery support for primary producers and small businesses of up to \$25 000, and support for the clean-up and restoration of community recreational heritage assets of up to \$25 000. Also, very importantly, member, there is support from the federal government under this program to provide worker accommodation. There is a range of support there.

In terms of who is accessing the support at the moment, a lot of the support is provided as reimbursement. Once someone has paid for repairs on their property, there is a process to seek the money as reimbursement.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Does that include local government? Is that part of that reimbursement program?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I believe so, but I might refer that to the state recovery controller.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I still want that list, minister.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: The member is entitled to put a question on notice.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Come on; the minister celebrates the fact that it is \$104.5 million and says, “This is a great announcement; how good are we?”, but it was one of the biggest cyclones to hit Western Australia. Anyway, putting that aside, why does the minister not want to provide that list as supplementary information? The minister can hand over the document right now. I would have thought that it is a cause for celebration.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I am happy to provide it as a response to a question from the member—no problem.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: To me?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: No. If the member puts the question on notice, I am happy to provide it.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The minister wants to celebrate that it is \$104.5 million; well, let us celebrate it and the minister can provide a list of where that money is going. I think that is pretty fair.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Member, I am happy to —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: That then causes concern that that money is not being spent in the right manner. Should I be concerned?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: The member should be aware that this program of support—a record amount—has come from the grassroots. It involved consultation with communities —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It was a record disaster.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: It involved consultation with 16 local governments and cooperation with the federal government. I would say that this is a long-term program and there is a long time for people to apply—from memory, until 2023. Perhaps I will get the state recovery controller to elaborate on how extensive this program is.

[8.30 pm]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am looking forward to it.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: The member has only to desire to put a question on notice and he will have that.

Ms M. Pexton: Thank you, minister; and thank you, member, for your question.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am sorry you have to answer it.

Ms M. Pexton: As the minister indicated, the \$104 million announcement was based on a commonwealth–state funding package. As the minister outlined, that includes particular grants that will be available to different parts of the community identified as needing further support, given, as the member indicated, the impact that occurred.

We have a recovery and resilience grant for individual residents who are insured to apply for funding of up to \$25 000. That allows them to build further resilience measures into their properties, which, given the location and the fact that there was a category 3 cyclone, is a really important measure. Primary producers can also seek assistance of up to \$25 000 to clean up around their properties and fix any damage. There is a similar grant of \$25 000 for small businesses. There is a cultural heritage grant of up to \$20 000 for areas where we know heritage assets are the primary focus. Further to those grants, as the minister indicated, a very extensive community welfare and outreach package will supplement resources on the ground to support communities that have been considerably impacted. Another component of the package is the delivery of community recovery officers to work alongside regional local governments—16 in total—that are underdone in terms of capacity and capability to manage a recovery of this scale.

Further to the minister’s comments, the actual eligible measures of the disaster recovery funding arrangement will go for two years. As the minister indicated, they will go through to the end of the 2023 financial year. All the grants I have outlined are open for a full 18 months, allowing for that closure at the end of the 2023 financial year so people will have time to get work done and apply to have that money reimbursed.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The minister mentioned the \$104.5 million—the largest ever—and workers’ accommodation. How much of that \$104.5 million will be dedicated to workers’ accommodation? Where is the workers’ accommodation going to be put in a place like, say, Kalbarri? How many beds will there be? What is the time frame for building the workers’ accommodation?

The CHAIR: That is four questions, minister, but I know that you can answer them.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I think he is a very capable minister; he can answer all those questions. I have asked them before, I think.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: The workers' accommodation is a key part of the recovery. At the moment we have an in-principle agreement with the commonwealth to provide workers' accommodation specifically for rebuilding after the damage caused by Seroja. I think it is the first time that Western Australia has secured an agreement under the disaster recovery funding arrangements, so that is significant in itself.

Land has been secured in Kalbarri and we are in the process—the state recovery controller can elaborate on this—of deciding on a provider for the work camp. The intention is to ascertain the numbers that are required initially, but it will be important to remember that under the recovery arrangements we can provide accommodation only for workers involved in rebuilding after cyclone Seroja. It is important to remember that.

Other parts of the midwest were impacted by the cyclone. The member knows very well that not only was Kalbarri impacted, but Northampton was impacted dramatically. Workers' accommodation will be required in Northampton and, I believe possibly in a small number in other places, including Morawa, Mingenew and Perenjori. The in-principle agreement and our negotiations with the commonwealth will enable us to access funding for that accommodation. We are working as hard as we can to get it done as soon as we can. I know that there is still a lot of the work, for instance, in agricultural areas and farming communities, and farmers have not had time to scratch themselves. They were seeding when this thing happened and now they are about to start harvesting. The time will come after the harvest when they will turn around and realise that they have significant damage on their property and that will be the time to address those issues. That is why a long-term period has been allocated for the recovery program. I think a lot of the people who would qualify for support probably have not yet had time to put in an application. That is why it is difficult to take a snapshot of what the final picture will look like and to appreciate the full significance of the package, how many people have taken part and what allocations there have been to individuals. I am mindful, of course, that some people can apply for multiple grants because they qualify as residents, business owners and primary producers.

We want to get the workers' cottages there as quickly as possible. Once we agree on an arrangement with the commonwealth government, we will get what we can in place as quickly as we can. We have already had a lot of early success with emergency accommodation. No-one who asked for accommodation has gone without a roof over their head. Indeed, we secured a number of caravans, which the member is aware of.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Have they been licensed?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Those caravans are providing people somewhere to live. I was just speaking to the CEO of the Shire of Northampton yesterday, in fact. He was very appreciative of those caravans and they were supplied as required by those individuals. It has been a very successful program.

The other thing we need to remember is that the Western Australia economy has been doing particularly well and the mining industry is booming, which means that there is competition for resources and labour. That probably predates Seroja, but, of course, it adds an extra burden when trying to secure tradespeople, resources and building materials. There is a lot going on. The state recovery controller could talk all day—or all night—about the issues involved, suffice to say—the member pointed this out earlier—that it was a significant disaster and it has had a significant impact. The response, reaction and recovery will take a long time. I think we have an excellent structure—one of the most comprehensive recovery structures of any disaster in Western Australian history. I think we can be pretty confident saying that. I will say it again because I know the member likes hearing it: it is a record amount of money. We need to thank our friends in local government—16 councils—who are dealing with really immense pressures.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Huge pressures.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Exactly. They are small shires, as the member knows, with small numbers of staff, and we are supporting them. They are doing it tough. But our response has been built from the ground up in terms of what their needs are. I also have to say that the commonwealth government has been very good. There has been cooperation between the state and federal government. My opposite number in Canberra is a National Party MP, Senator McKenzie, and I have her phone number. We get on very well and she is very responsive. It is a good news story.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: She is a very good friend of Western Australia.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Indeed, and it is good to see that state and federal governments can cooperate when they really need to.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: There is \$104.5 million available and it has been seven months since the cyclone but there is still no workers' accommodation. That is having an impact on accommodation in Kalbarri and Northampton. Geraldton, where a lot of tradies and builders are staying, is full as well. It is very difficult to get accommodation in Geraldton at the moment because everything is full. When people drive up and down the highway, as I do, they see the historical buildings in Northampton that probably will not be rebuilt because they were underinsured or there was no insurance. There was an earthquake in Boulder some years ago and I am pretty sure that the

government came up with a fund of \$5 million to \$10 million to keep the heritage buildings in Burt Street, Boulder. There was money to keep the facades and to fix buildings because there was no insurance to fill the gap to rebuild those historic buildings.

Would the Minister for Emergency Services and the government consider looking at a fund to protect that heritage and rebuild some of those buildings along the highway in Northampton to ensure that the heritage is kept? One example is the pub, which probably will not get rebuilt because of the insurance complications. It is a significant, iconic building. Is there a heritage fund like there was when there was an earthquake in Kalgoorlie–Boulder?

[8.40 pm]

The CHAIR: I will stop the member there, mainly because I suspect that maybe the question should have been put to the Minister for Heritage, but if the minister is able to answer it, he can.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I think the member raises a good point. Part of the recovery arrangements talk about heritage and community assets. It is certainly something that would depend on the building itself, I imagine, and whether it is part of the community asset. Certainly there is a provision to look at the protection of heritage assets in the community. It is an issue. Quite often, the insurance for historic buildings and the ability to get tradespeople with the skills to work on the architecture who have knowledge of the past practices makes it expensive. I refer to the state recovery controller. Maybe she can elaborate on the heritage aspect of the recovery arrangements.

Ms M. Pexton: As the minister indicated, we currently have a grant, which we have outlined to the member. However, it is important to understand that the state–commonwealth arrangements are not one stop and we are done. As we work through the nuanced issues such as heritage, we have the opportunity to go back and further consider additional grants and levels of support and so on and so forth. As the minister and the chair have indicated, that would be done in partnership with the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage because it maintains the Register of Heritage Places and there are certain protocols around that. Similarly, local governments have a part to play. We will watch that closely and, as needed, we will consider what other measures may be required.

The CHAIR: I have the members for Roe and Carine on the list. I do not know whether the minister needs a comfort break.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: We can end this division and have a break at nine o'clock, if that is okay.

The CHAIR: Member for Roe.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to the line item “Primary Fire and Emergency Fleet” on page 463. The budget for 2021–22 is \$22 906 000. How is the Collie emergency services vehicle manufacturing group going? I assume that is part of this budget to build primary fire and emergency fleet vehicles.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: That is a really important government initiative and is a boost for Collie, obviously, to provide a new range of appliances for the emergency vehicle fleet. As the member points out, there is an underspend in 2021–22. I think the member was pointing that out. As I understand it, the issue is with the delivery of the cab chassis that underpin the appliances. All fire vehicles come in as a cab and a chassis, and the superstructure is built on top. We have a very good company engaged by DFES to supply the parts that go on top of those chassis. The member might be aware that there is a real issue with buying a new car anywhere in the world because of the shortage of computer chips.

That is also impacting on the provision of trucks to be imported to become fire appliances. That is a real issue. I know that the commissioner has been frustrated about that, but we simply cannot get access to those vehicles. That is why there has been an underspend of some \$12 million. We are trying to procure a supply of those chassis so that improvement work can be done in Collie. The company is turning out excellent fire trucks. They are amazing. I handed one over the other day to the Karnup Volunteer Fire and Emergency Service. The volunteers were amazed by what is being turned out in Western Australia and which will be turned out in Collie as well.

Mr D. Klemm: The minister is quite correct about some of the delays we have had involving the cab chassis. That goes across all the fire appliance fleet in particular, including the Toyota LandCruisers, which are the cab chassis of choice for the light tankers. We are just starting to run those out, but we are on somewhat of a drip-feed from Toyota for the number of cab chassis that we can get. The problem goes all the way up to Isuzu trucks. The delivery time for those cab chassis has almost doubled. Getting the Scania cab chassis from Europe has been pushed out to 10 or 11 months. There are challenges with the build program, but the good news is that we now have all of our build contracts in place with all the builders for all the different types of fire appliances. Once we get a steady flow of cab chassis, we will be able to catch up reasonably quickly. The company that does the bulk of our building is establishing itself in Collie. It is not long until the first trucks will roll out of that facility.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I thank the commissioner. Did the minister’s department have any input into the tender decision that awarded the total allocation to a business based in Malaga instead of engaging with a regional business such as one my electorate in Narrogin, the Narrogin fire service, which had a fantastic business but has now basically been totally wiped out? It was prepared to deliver the same service. Did the minister’s department have any input into the tender decision to award the business to build those vehicles to a business based in Malaga?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Certainly, the government leaves those operational decisions about which equipment to acquire and sorting out tenders to DFES. DFES will always make a judgement on the best value and best return for the taxpayer dollar when meeting the needs of DFES and delivering a quality product. The commissioner can elaborate.

Mr D. Klemm: As we went through the new build contracts, tenders were put out for the various vehicle types. The successful tenderers were chosen, as the minister said, partly for value for money and also for whether the quality of the product the company provides is fit for purpose, to ensure that we are providing the safest possible trucks in this instance to the volunteer and career personnel out there.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Would the minister be as disappointed as the local member—as I am—when I have seen a local business wiped out in Narrogin that had an excellent tender to build those vehicles, and then, at the same time, we now have a Malaga-based company with a shed in Collie, which from what I gather —

The CHAIR: You have got an answer on this. This sounds like rhetoric to me.

[8.50 pm]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: From what I gather, that —

The CHAIR: Sounds like a question for private members' business.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The question is whether the minister is as disappointed as I am to see a local business wiped out when there is a shed in Collie with a few pieces of metal and no building or any trucks whatsoever?

The CHAIR: I am ruling that question out of order, member.

Mr P. LILBURNE: In light of the scheduled break, would it be appropriate through the chair to put the question to the minister on notice at some point in the future or at a later time?

The CHAIR: No, we will go to the break at 9. Fire away. I am sure the member for Roe will be returning with a question that complies with standing orders. Member for Carine.

Mr P. LILBURNE: Thank you, chair. Minister, I am interested in bushfire risk management and I refer to page 471 and the bushfire awareness campaign. Can the minister explain the significance of that campaign and what it will mean for emergency services in the community?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I thank the member, and it is a good question. It is a timely question because as we move into the high fire season it is important that members of the community become engaged with the issue, consider their own circumstances, and plan, especially if they live in fire-prone or susceptible areas, to have a response if they are faced with a catastrophic fire. As in previous years, and certainly last year, My Bushfire Plan WA, as it is called, will be part of our response. The idea is that there will be certainly public education through advertising. "How fireproof is your plan?" is a question we ask, and that will be across all media forms. We urge people to think about their personal risk and plan what they will do if a bushfire strikes. It is really important that people think about their personal situation at their home and work out a plan for if they are faced with the catastrophic situation. We urge people to download the app on their phone. I can tell the member that when there is a major fire event, the number of downloads of that application on people's phones skyrockets. Over the last fire season, there was a big increase in the number of people downloading that app. We want to see that continue. Part of the education campaign is urging people to download the app. It has basic information on what people should do, how to decide whether to stay and defend or leave and critical issues about how people handle the situation.

I can tell the member, and I have told members this before, that the suburbs where most people have downloaded the app and made their plan is Ellenbrook with 102, closely followed by Baldivis with 97. I was very disappointed that my electorate got pipped at the post by Ellenbrook, but it demonstrates that people at the urban fringe are very aware of the fire risk and they are keen to get involved with planning and thinking about the risk of fire. The country town with the most plans created was Margaret River with 78. That again tells us the important story that people in the regions are also very aware of this issue. The more public education we can have the better.

It is very interesting to talk to people who went through the Wooroloo fire recently. Even people who have been aware of the fire risk and have some experience with fire, when faced with an absolutely catastrophic, massive blaze, a very fearsome and rapid blaze, as we had at Wooroloo, would tell us they would never stay and defend again. I think the commissioner spoke of people with that story. It is very important people appreciate the risk and the danger and the fierceness of bushfires that they can face. It is a story we heard many times; people say that they thought they could deal with it and that if they had their time over again, they would have got out. At the end of the day, we know that property loss is devastating. We saw 86 homes destroyed at Wooroloo, but those homes can be rebuilt and, thankfully, we did not have one loss of life in Wooroloo, which is really astounding given the nature and rapidity of the fire.

I do not know whether the commissioner wants to share some of his thoughts.

Mr D. Klemm: I thank the minister. The minister is quite correct. A number of community members in Wooroloo spoke to me of the belief that they had prior to the fire that they were prepared and ready to stay and defend their property. They felt like they were prepared both mentally and physically to do that, and then with the passage of

that fire, they took the opportunity afterwards to reflect on their preparedness and discuss with me that it was not a place that they were going to stay and defend again. The preparedness level they were at was not what was required once a bushfire of that significance and intensity hit their location. The bushfire awareness campaign is really, really critical for this.

One of the major reasons that Ellenbrook has downloaded the app the most is the potential impact of the Wooroloo fire on Ellenbrook late on that Monday evening and into Tuesday morning. We would argue it is fantastic to see people engaging with the app, but preferably they would have done that prior to the bushfire season. Rather than accessing the app the moment the fire is at the front door, we would prefer that members of the community undertake that preparedness well before that.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to page 464, halfway down the page, and income. Point 3 refers to the \$12.2 million budget estimate and the increase in the emergency services levy revenue. Can the minister tell me how many or what percentage of householders now pay the maximum ESL rate?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: It is an interesting question. I might refer to the chief financial officer who might be able to answer that.

Mrs G. Camarda: I will take a moment to see whether I have those facts and figures for the member. The 4.7 per cent is the proportion of properties that are paying the maximum and the levy applies to 1 311 452 properties.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Many householders who contacted me are concerned about the increase in ESL rates by 4.3 per cent, as identified in this line item. That is well above CPI, as the minister will know, and it seems to be that we are building momentum. It used to be just a small \$35 charge when it started. Now it has become a massive impingement on all ratepayers in WA. Can the minister tell me why it has increased well and truly above the rate of CPI?

[9.00 pm]

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I think I explained this earlier in the evening. The increase logged for this financial year is actually lower compared with the previous year. In the previous year, we had a freeze on household charges to help people out with COVID. The emergency services levy take was much lower and it was supplemented by \$40 million from the consolidated account. The actual increase compared with before COVID, in the budget year before that freeze, means that people are paying less than they were. The increase is based on a cut. I do not have in front of me the actual increase in real dollars, but it is only a few dollars. We have done a great service to people by accepting that COVID presented difficulties. We wanted to freeze the cost of the household basket. We reduced the ESL take from residents and ratepayers, and we supplemented that loss from the consolidated account of government. Now, in this budget year, we are still supplementing that ESL money with just under \$15 million from the consolidated account. Ratepayers are actually paying slightly less than they were before COVID.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I will take that on board. I think the member for Moore brought up earlier the spending of the ESL on non-fire-related activities such as marine rescue, which did not use to come out of the ESL. When did this pattern develop?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Member, the emergency services levy is not a fire services levy; it provides for all emergency requirements. DFES is not just a fire agency or department; it is an emergency services agency. I would hate to think that we were not going to fund marine rescue or the State Emergency Service, which provide excellent service to the Western Australian community. Those volunteers might be quite upset if the member were to suggest that they should not be funded.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: What I am really concerned about is that a pattern appears to be developing. I agree that marine rescue do a great job as well. Government expenditure is reducing and the levy seems to be replacing it. To me, that pattern seems to be developing, including the 4.3 per cent increase this year. It is a concern that I would like to put out there.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I think that is an odd thing to say, especially given that, as I have pointed out, in this budget and in the previous one the ESL has been supplemented from the consolidated account. I also point out that most other jurisdictions across Australia use a levy-based system on rates to fund their emergency services. It is not unique and I think people want to know that their emergency services are well funded. I do not think it is a case of the taxpayer, or at least the government, getting out of its responsibilities. This is a government initiative. The emergency services levy is part of the way the government raises revenue. The beauty about the ESL is that it is defined and, according to the budget and the requirements of emergency services, it is worked out what the rate needs to be. Ratepayers enjoy the protection of emergency services if their house catches fire or there is the risk of a bushfire, or if they go to sea and they need rescuing; they get this service.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Plenty of our ratepayers have to pay the levy and put the fire out as well!

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I cannot understand the member's logic.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: What percentage of ratepayers now pay the maximum \$750 ESL levy, and is the increase in the number of ratepayers paying the maximum level because gross rental values have gone up?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I will refer to the chief financial officer.

Mrs G. Camarda: Can the member please repeat the question?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: What percentage of ratepayers pay the ESL maximum of \$750, and is that because the gross rental value of properties has gone up? Has that led to an increase in the maximum one can pay, and what percentage of people pay the maximum ESL? Of those ratepayers paying ESL, what is the maximum amount that households pay?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Before Mrs Camarda responds, as I described before, the movement in gross rental values does not determine the funding of DFES through the ESL. DFES requires a certain budget. That budget is approved and then a calculation is made to fund what is required through the levy system. It is not simply that we become windfall beneficiaries because of the movement in house prices. That is not the case. That is the reverse. The budget is worked out first and then a calculation is made in terms of how we find enough revenue to fund that approved budget.

The CHAIR: Minister, I think the question related to the percentage of people who have hit the maximum.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: But I think also the indication was somehow that the number was increasing because of a movement in —

The CHAIR: No; I think it was just a straight-up question.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The first question was: what percentage of those paying ESL have hit the maximum amount of money paid?

Mrs G. Camarda: It is 4.7 per cent of properties that pay the maximum amount.

The appropriation was recommended.

Meeting suspended from 9.07 to 9.16 pm

Division 17: Small Business Development Corporation, \$16 816 000 —

Ms M.M. Quirk, Chair.

Mr R.R. Whitby, Minister for Small Business.

Mr D. Eaton, Small Business Commissioner.

Mr R. Buttsworth, Director, Corporate Resources.

Mr T.P. Monaghan, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. It is the intention of the chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by close of business Friday, 1 October 2021. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

Member for North West Central.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to page 261, under the heading "Significant Issues Impacting the Agency", specifically the fifth paragraph, which states —

The Corporation also assisted with the delivery of a grant scheme for small businesses impacted by Severe Tropical Cyclone Seroja, which devastated the Mid West ... One-off targeted business assistance grants of \$4,000 were provided to small businesses most impacted by structural damage and/or ongoing loss of revenue ...

Is the minister able to advise how many small businesses in Kalbarri accessed the \$4 000 grant and how many applied for the \$4 000 grant, which will give me an indication of how many were successful?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Yes, indeed. A total of 308 applications were submitted, of which 215 were approved and paid. The total amount paid was \$860 000.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is that for the whole catchment area of the midwest and not just Kalbarri?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: That is the whole of the 16 affected local government areas.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Does the minister have a breakdown of the towns —

Mr R.R. WHITBY: No, we do not. Sorry.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Is the minister able to provide that by way of supplementary information?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: If the member puts a question in, we will provide it.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Okay; we will play that game again.

I have raised many times in Parliament the mum-and-dad small businesses that did not meet the criteria of a minimum turnover of \$75 000 or being registered for GST and were not eligible for the \$4 000 grant despite needing it. Has the minister considered changing that criteria because those whose turnover was less than \$75 000 and whose business does not pay GST would have desperately liked to have received that \$4 000 given that they were in the same situation as someone whose business turnover was more than \$75 000 and who was paying GST?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I understand the question. I know that many businesses have done it tough. The requirement for GST registration and a minimum turnover of \$75 000 applied to those grants because we wanted to get the money out the door as quickly as possible and with a minimum of administrative burden on the people who were applying. If you are registered for GST and have an ABN, it minimises the requirement for a non-company to be handing over information and documentation. That process has been applied across Australia and it has happened with the lockdown grants in Perth, as the member would be aware.

The disaster recovery funding arrangements, which come under another portfolio, are pertinent to small businesses in the region affected by cyclone Seroja that the member asks about. They will be able to apply under the disaster recovery arrangements for assistance of up to \$25 000. No minimum turnover will apply. Most applicants under the Premier's Seroja grant were successful and received \$4 000—some were not. There is always a difficulty. I do not want to disrespect businesses that turn over less than \$75 000. I know that is an important source of income or supplementary income for many families. However, it is hard to define once it gets below that figure, and there is no ABN, what that business is. Is it someone who makes candles at a weekend market? I am not suggesting that people the member knows fit into this category, but we have to be prepared.

[9.20 pm]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am talking about the instance of a cleaner.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I get that, and there is a range of people, and people who just miss out. But the good news for those in the midwest who were affected by cyclone Seroja is that they will be able to apply for up to \$25 000 in support under the disaster recovery funding arrangements and there will be no minimum requirement for turnover. If someone has a small business in the midwest and was impacted by the cyclone and their home was destroyed or damaged, they can also receive up to \$25 000 in support under the DRFA. Primary producers can get up to \$25 000. On top of that is the Lord Mayor's Seroja appeal, which provides \$25 000 and \$10 000 for total loss of property or major significant partial loss. I understand that that has recently been increased for anyone with damage over \$100 000 to receive another amount of \$25 000. Someone's business could have been hit with structural damage. If they did not receive the Premier's grant, they will certainly be able to receive assistance under the DRFA for their business. If their home was impacted, they have significant support under the Lord Mayor's Distress Relief Fund, and there would have been other support early on in the emergency. There was support through the Department of Communities and the federal government of payments of \$1 000 an adult and \$400 a child, and also income support for up to 13 weeks under the federal government. The Premier's grants were simply part of the picture. It is likely that if someone was impacted and in need, they would have received funding and support through other means and can still do so into the future.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I have raised this with the minister before. If a property owner was leasing out their retirement home in, say, Northampton, but they do not live there, they are unable to access those \$20 000 to \$25 000 grants because they had to be living in the property at the time. There are some gaps in the program. There will always be gaps in whatever is done, and I understand that. However, I think the people who need it the most seem to be the ones who always miss out.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Perhaps the member is not aware—it is recent information—that the Lord Mayor's Distress Relief Fund appeal, in its second tranche of support, now acknowledges that some people with losses can apply for a second home, such as a holiday home. There is that avenue of support under the Lord Mayor's appeal.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: That is good to know.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I refer to the second paragraph on page 261 regarding the corporation providing a wide range of support in relation to dispute resolution between small business tenants and commercial landlords. I have had quite a bit of fallout myself from a variation of both sides of the argument. Can the minister or his advisers comment on whether disputes are still going on, because I believe they probably are, and to what extent?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I will let the commissioner elaborate, but I will make the comment that the Small Business Development Corporation is one of the agile agencies of government. The staff who work there have real-world experience in managing small businesses of their own. They are very good and the service they provide is excellent. I advise members to contact the service if small businesses in their community ever need assistance. A range of support is available through the telephone and online. It is all free. There are very inexpensive workshops for people to gain more experience and obtain advice.

Regarding commercial tenancies, all of us as local members have stories about tenants struggling; unresponsive landlords; and sometimes major corporations that are landlords and are not responsive to changing the rental terms and somehow, inexplicably, have empty shops, which I cannot understand. That is an ongoing issue. There was an issue during the COVID lockdowns when people had no income and sought relief. It is an ongoing issue. It is one of the major reasons that people contact the Small Business Development Corporation and get support. The SBDC has the ability to negotiate and try to mediate those situations. I think the commissioner could probably occupy the rest of the night on this issue.

[9.30 pm]

Mr D. Eaton: The member is quite right. The COVID situation caused a lot of challenging negotiations between landlords and tenants. As the member would know, legislation was introduced to put a framework underneath those negotiations. It certainly caused a significant peak in demand for our information services on rights and responsibilities, our case management services and our mediation services. We had an increase of some 200 per cent and 300 per cent in demand. I think the beginning of the member's question was whether it is still ongoing. I am pleased to say that we have cleared a huge amount of the casework. We are still dealing with some cases, but it is really a very small proportion compared with at the peak of COVID. The broader situation caused a lot of dispute negotiation. At the risk of seeming too optimistic, although the case load tripled, in comparison with the number of leases in place in our community, I suggest it was relatively small. Although I cannot give evidence of this, it might indicate that, in fact, the framework that was put in place through national cabinet and state Parliament actually gave a foundation for negotiation to occur between landlords and tenants, and therefore a great proportion were able to do that based on the framework. Those who could not then came to us, and we were able to assist with those negotiations. A smaller proportion would go on to a dispute, and, ultimately, when we could not assist them, go to the State Administrative Tribunal for adjudication. Certainly, our number of referrals to the State Administrative Tribunal went up significantly. The number of cases coming to us now is relatively small. We are dealing with a few outstanding cases.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Talking about the State Administrative Tribunal, does the minister have any figures on how many cases ended up going to SAT?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I will refer to the commissioner.

Mr D. Eaton: Certainly there was an increase—about five or sixfold—in the number of cases that were referred to SAT, but that is off an extremely small base. It is interesting to compare metrics between states. The SBDC has a long record of much lower referral rates to the State Administrative Tribunal compared with our counterparts in New South Wales and Victoria, for example. That is more about the model we established in Western Australia from the beginning. We tend to try to facilitate outcomes between landlords and tenants without adjudicative intervention. The figures came off a very small base. Generally, we refer about 20 cases to the State Administrative Tribunal. I can get the member the exact number, but I think it went up to about 100 cases. It is a lot of cases, but compared with the number of leases in place, it is relatively small.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I have a genuine question for the minister. I refer to his comments made in this morning's paper on Carillon City. Could that issue be potentially referred to the Small Business Commissioner? It appears that there is a dispute arising between the tenants and the landlord. Obviously, the tenants want to go through to Christmas at least.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: The member obviously read that I made it very clear, and I think everyone agrees, that those tenants should be given the opportunity to trade past Christmas because that is obviously when they make their main profits for the year. It is very disappointing that they are not getting that opportunity. I referred the matter to the Small Business Commissioner, who has been in contact with that company and with the tenants. Would the commissioner care to elaborate?

Mr D. Eaton: This is, unfortunately, what we do day to day. We have been in contact with the majority of the tenants in the last 48 hours and I have been in contact with the landlord in the last 24 hours. There is no resolution as yet, but I am certainly intervening and engaged with both sides.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: All of us on the outside looking in are obviously concerned about those shopkeepers and tenants. Does the minister think there is an opportunity for a good resolution to this or at least a resolution in which they will be able to at least go past the Christmas period and be able to improve their numbers and their businesses before they have to vacate the premises?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: It is very difficult to know. It is very early. That is certainly the desire of everyone involved. These are private leases with a private company that has made this call. We are doing what we can.

The other point I will make, and it is what we are trying to initiate, is that there are vacancies elsewhere in the CBD, in fact very near the Carillon. We are looking to see how we can assist those people who have been given 28-day notices to relocate. I understand that shop fittings and things are an issue, and that it takes time but, nevertheless, that could be a good option or a better-than-nothing option that we could assist them with.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I think that highlights that we hear a lot about how wonderfully the economy is going, but, if we talk about small businesses, particularly in the CBD, they are struggling. Regional businesses cannot find workers. I may be a little bit out of line here, minister, but what is the department doing to assist those businesses that are in desperate need to increase trade? They are still paying higher rents. It is not only the effect of not paying their rent; the landlord then does not pay their rent, and there is a flow-on effect of not getting their money and people cannot pay their mortgages. Is the minister looking at any way in which we can lift the small businesses in the CBD in some way?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I know the commissioner would have some keenness to respond. It is a really interesting scenario. There are two stories going on with COVID. If the member is familiar with the suburbs, particularly what is going on with hospitality and cafes, he would know they are actually booming. In my electorate of Baldivis, you have to book weeks ahead to get into one of our popular local cafe restaurants. People are out there spending money. That is putting pressure on trying to source staff as well, as the member would well know. Indeed, in many parts of the regions, the tourist boom is fuelling good business. I have spoken to businesses that have told me that they have well and truly made up for any downside of the COVID year so far by the fact that they are doing much better business than they have done previously.

I think we all appreciate that the CBD is an issue. There are a couple of things going on. More people are working at home, so there are fewer numbers of the traditional base of customers in the CBD. I have spoken to cafe owners in the central city who have told me that they used to know that on certain days they would get certain trade, but they now know that people take Fridays off, in particular, to work at home, or other days off to work at home. Their takings on those particular days and, indeed, all through the week are much reduced. That is spread across all sorts of service providers in the city, including clothing stores and boutiques—you name it.

The other issue is a cultural change. It is much easier to drive to a suburban shopping centre than find a park in the city. A lot of people vote with their feet, and we have seen the rise of the suburban shopping centres, particularly lately, with the redevelopment of the major centres and new centres popping up. That is another challenge for the small businesses in the CBD. I know the government is very much committed to trying to invigorate business activity, and I think it relates to getting a critical mass population in the city that will go to shops in the city. That is one thing, but also things like the Perth City Deal—\$1.5 billion, in cooperation with the federal government. We are moving Edith Cowan University into the city, for instance. That is going to have a huge impact; just servicing the needs of those students will have a positive flow-on effect on small businesses right across the CBD. We are very much keen on invigorating Perth, and I know that Perth City Council is of the same mind, but it is a challenge. A lot of CBD businesses, right across Australia, are facing this same challenge. COVID has made things worse, but there have been some cultural changes in shopping patterns over the years, as well.

[9.40 pm]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: These are real issues affecting small businesses, and what the Small Business Development Corporation did in going up to cyclone-affected areas was fantastic. Out of all the agencies, I can say that SBDC's legwork on the ground has really impacted on and assisted a lot of businesses. It is important to highlight how we have all these speeds occurring in our economy, especially in small business. Going to the regional aspect of not being able to get workers, forget about workers' accommodation and housing for a moment. It is more of a tourism/small business issue, and we hear a lot about agriculture, but we probably need thousands and thousands of hospitality workers and small business workers. Is the minister looking at programs for how we can attract workers who probably do not have work over east, to eventually, when borders reopen, come here in a working holiday-type scenario so we can fill some of those positions that businesses are desperate to fill? They are fatigued; they are under a huge amount of pressure, and I worry. At the end of the day, it hurts the tourism market because they are shutting shops.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: The member raises some very real issues. Western Australia is not alone in those pressures, but, obviously, COVID has made them even worse and more difficult to solve because of the restrictions on people coming into Western Australia. The member asked what the government is doing. We held a skills summit recently that the member may have heard about, and we asked people for ideas. We got a lot of positive feedback. The member mentioned getting people out to visit and work in the regions.

One of the good ideas that came from the skills summit was: how do we get the grey nomads who are already equipped with their own accommodation and are highly mobile and are out there and do not mind working? They will have trades or professional skills, and often it will be a husband and wife, so it is a ready-made source of labour that is highly experienced and skilled. A lot of these people are recent retirees, so could easily go back into the workforce. They are trustworthy and wonderful people. We are actually looking at that. One of the issues that retirees or people

on a pension have is that if they earn an income, it will impact on their retirement arrangements' funding or pension. We will be asking the federal government if there is a way it can allow these people to earn a certain amount and not have it impact on their retirement income. I think that is a really good idea that came out of the summit. That probably fits exactly with the kind of thing the member is talking about.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Yes, and I have mentioned many times in Parliament the two aspects of youth and seniors. I refer to paragraph 6 on page 261 and the small business–friendly approvals project, which apparently continues to gather momentum. There are now 49 local governments participating in the initiative. Can the minister provide, by way of supplementary information, the names of those 49 local governments? It is an important issue to continue growing so that the more visibility and the more ability for local members to promote this initiative the better. Can the minister provide the names of those 49 local governments who are participating?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I can give the member an update: it is now 51 local governments, and the member is right, it is a very good program. Local governments that are participating in it rave about it. I was in the Shire of Ashburton a couple of months ago and it proudly had its certificate on the front counter to say that it had been part of the program. The program is a way of looking at the way local governments do business. A lot of it is a cultural issue, a hangover from the past in terms of the way local government operates —

The CHAIR: Minister, if I could just interrupt for a second, I have actually found the list of local governments on the SBDC website.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I was going to let the member know that he need not worry; he can just go to the website and he will even see the two new ones. If there are local governments in the member's community that have not taken part, he should get them to get involved. The important thing is that it cannot be forced on them; the local governments have to be prepared to do the work and accept change for it to work. But when they do, it is very successful.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer again to page 261 and paragraph 7, which talks about the negative impact on economies worldwide and international travel restrictions, in relation to business migration. Is there a breakdown of business migrants between metro and regional Western Australia, or is the primary purpose to develop opportunities in the metro area? Is there a regional pattern as well?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Sure, I will ask the commissioner to respond, but I will say one thing: I am aware of at least one in the regions who is ready to invest money and provide a great business, so I personally know that it is not restricted to the metropolitan area.

Mr D. Eaton: It certainly is not restricted to metro, and there are some very good examples of business migrants who have brought capital and skills into regional areas. I cannot give the member the exact breakdown right here, but I will say that the metrics can take up to four years for a migrant to be accepted, and they then have up to four years to establish a business and their bona fides before they become accounted in terms of the capital. But I can certainly provide the member with the split, if he would like.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: As long as the minister can give me the split without me having to put it on notice, yes!

Mr R.R. WHITBY: If the member wants to ask a question, it is there, ready to be provided.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Thank you. I refer again to page 261 and paragraph 8, the Collie tourism readiness program, which commenced in July 2020. Is there a plan to fund a program to other potential emerging regional locations?

Mr R.R. WHITBY: As the member will know, the community of Collie has been particularly impacted by the decision to shut down part of its coal-fired power capacity. We know that the future is in renewables, so the government took a very responsible step in looking at the future of Collie. There are some amazing things going on in Collie and that region; it is actually transforming and has one of the most impressive mountain bike trails. That is a sport that is overtaking surfing, someone told me. There is Lake Kepwari as well. It is a former mine that has become a dam and has infrastructure around it. There are enormous opportunities. I will throw Wellington Dam into the mix; it is a nearby significant tourist attraction.

The member is asking the wrong minister about tourism, but I know that impressive work is going on across Western Australia to promote tourism, to get people to Wander Out Yonder.

[9.50 pm]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: There is nowhere else to wander, but keep going.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I do not think the amount of internal tourism in Western Australia now has been matched in the history of our state; it is incredible. You cannot buy a Land Cruiser, a caravan or boat these days. One only has to go travelling to see the impact that Western Australians are having. Interestingly—this is the tourism portfolio, so maybe I should not stray too far—the net benefit to tourism of keeping our own tourists in Western Australia is greater than allowing tourists to come from overseas. I know there are issues with certain businesses that mainly provide for the overseas market. We are aware of that and lately there has been support of some \$60 million for those businesses, which the Minister for Tourism would have talked about. Western Australians spend more on

tourism than tourists who come to Western Australia so there is a net benefit of the current borders. We do not want to see that continue, obviously; we want them to open up when it is safe to do so, but, in the meantime, business is actually the beneficiary of that increased tourism spend.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Given that a lot of people are travelling to my electorate, it makes it very difficult for a local member to get around and get accommodation. You can spend a lot of time sleeping in a swag because you cannot get accommodation. Those are the challenges that people have.

I want to say this because it is important to get it on the record. Yes, it is busy in regional Western Australia, particularly in the north, but the shortage of workers really has an impact. Even though someone might go online or ring up and ask for a room, they will be told it is full. Often—this is evidence I have from going to Broome—hotels will be 80 per cent full because they simply do not have the staff to wash the sheets and clean the rooms. Housing staff is another issue; they end up housed in a hotel. Yes, it is good, but it is also applying a lot of pressure and a lot of places are not capturing the huge opportunity that exists at the moment. That is more of a comment, but I think it is important that we reflect what is happening.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I take on what the member said. It comes back to that issue of securing enough skilled labour and the shortages that everyone is experiencing. Again, the government is really keen to address this as much as it can. The skills summit I just described came up with many suggestions to try to alleviate that issue. Of course, there is lots going on in other portfolios, in tourism, housing and elsewhere. It is not my portfolio, but I know that there has been a significant commitment to housing in the regions as well to try to support that population. I refer that to the Small Business Commissioner who will add some more.

Mr D. Eaton: In the broader role, the member touched on two things about an economy in which some people are doing very well, but there are niches of small businesses that are challenged—adapting the model in the CBD or, indeed, the challenges the member outlined to the minister tonight. I wanted to assure the member that one of the beauties of the Small Business Development Corporation is that it is nimble and adaptable and is therefore always looking for those small businesses in the niches that are lost or perhaps hidden, and the member described some of them tonight. We have those workshops and advisory people on the ground to assist them and coach them. Then, of course, as commissioner, I am constantly hearing some of the things that the member said and giving advice to government about a focus on those sorts of things. I suppose I wanted to round things out because part of the functions of, and the funding to, the SBDC is to provide that information and advice, not so much where it is booming, but where the challenges still lie.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I will finish off with this because we have all had a long three days, or weeks, on this side of the chamber.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: Well, you have!

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I made that comment about SBDC being on the ground in places like Kalbarri and Northampton because when businesses are at the end of their tether, they are busy and do not have time to look at what is really hurting them. Therefore, it is absolutely critical to have someone on the ground for them to have that conversation with. I suggest that Tourism needs to do the same. The model of getting people out into the regions in WA is critical to get that on-the-ground feedback that eventually gets to the minister. Perhaps something that could be looked at in the future is having a small business/tourism person based in the development commissions so that on-the-ground information can be fed to the top. I think over time there has been a huge disconnect and that feedback has not been making it to the commissioner and the minister.

Mr R.R. WHITBY: I appreciate those comments, member. It is a good suggestion and I am always keen to get good ideas from all sources. I appreciate the fact that the last question in the estimates hearings is a positive contribution. Thank you.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I think he is ready to step into the minister's job!

The appropriation was recommended.

The CHAIR: Before I wind things up, I congratulate in particular the opposition members on their stamina; I am most impressed. Thank you, that is the last division we are dealing with, so that completes consideration of the estimates by this committee.

Committee adjourned at 9.56 pm
