

Mr Brendon Grylls; Mr Fran Logan; Mr Paul Omodei; Chairman; Mr Shane Hill; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Jeremy Edwards

Divisions 12 to 14: Agriculture, \$121 595 000; the Agriculture Protection Board, \$2 404 000; Rural Business Development Corporation, \$158 000 -

Mrs D.J. Guise, Chairman.

Mr F.M. Logan, Parliamentary Secretary representing the Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.

Dr G. Robertson, Director General.

Mr C.W. Thorn, Executive Director, Animal Industries.

Mr J. Murgia, Manager, Treasury.

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: I refer to the financial statements at page 242 of the *Budget Statements*. I note that FTEs will be cut by 27 in 2003-04. I require details of which offices will have staff cuts, how many staff will be removed from each office and which programs those staff deliver.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: In asking the question, it is best to deal with the global figures. We do not have a specific breakdown in front of us. We will have to take the question on notice and provide supplementary information.

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: I am happy to accept that. In addition to those answers, I also require information on the number of FTEs at Department of Agriculture offices in Merredin, Esperance, Albany, Katanning and Geraldton for each financial year from 2000-01 to 2003-04.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: The department is happy to provide the information.

[*Supplementary Information No B16.*]

Mr P.D. OMODEI: To do what?

The CHAIRMAN: To provide the information requested by the member for Merredin in concurrence with the parliamentary secretary.

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: I asked which offices will have staff cuts, how many staff will be removed from each office and which programs the staff deliver. I also asked about the number of FTEs for Merredin, Esperance, Albany, Katanning and Geraldton for 2000-01 through the budget out years.

The CHAIRMAN: Does the parliamentary secretary concur with that to the letter?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Yes.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: I refer to the appropriation and forward estimates at page 219 of the *Budget Statements*. What are the cuts to the Department of Agriculture from the priority assurance dividend, the Expenditure Review Committee savings initiatives and the savings through the Functional Review Taskforce?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: The member is looking for the priority assurance dividend figures in those areas. The budget figure for 2003-04 is \$6.691 million. The savings initiatives through the Expenditure Review Committee are \$4 million. The savings through the Functional Review Taskforce are \$1 million for 2004-05, \$2 million for 2005-06 and \$2 million for 2006-07.

Mr S.R. HILL: I refer to the major initiatives for 2003-04 at page 235. The last dot point refers to the use of the environmental management unit process to engage pastoralists in improved management of range condition and landscapes. Will it be done in consultation with the Pastoral Lands Board?

[8.10 pm]

Mr F.M. LOGAN: That is an operational matter, so I will refer it to Mr Thorn.

Mr THORN: We are undertaking a very extensive pilot project, mainly through the Gascoyne-Murchison area. We are looking at landscape management units and ensuring that land within those units is appropriately managed for conservation of the range resource and biodiversity-type outcomes. The project has been partly funded by previous Natural Heritage Trust grant schemes. We certainly hope to expand the project, but we will have to work our way through that over the next year or so. There is no funding from the Pastoral Lands Board. The work is being conducted through a direct application of NHT funding. We are working with the pastoralists. It is very much a direct relationship between the Department of Agriculture; the Department of Conservation and Land Management, which is a component in that project; and the landholders.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Before we continue, I want to clarify the information the member for Merredin asked us to provide as supplementary information. Is the member seeking the number of full-time employees employed through joint commonwealth-state-funded initiatives or simply through state-funded programs?

Mr Brendon Grylls; Mr Fran Logan; Mr Paul Omodei; Chairman; Mr Shane Hill; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Jeremy Edwards

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: I think it is the number employed through the state-funded programs, but it would be good if the department could provide both. I am trying to get the number of full-time equivalents in those regional centres so that we can track what has happened.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I am advised by the department that it can provide both, if that is what is requested.

The CHAIRMAN: I clarify that in providing supplementary information No B16, the department will give details of all the positions.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Yes.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: I refer the parliamentary secretary to the financial statements on page 442, and particularly the line item employee expenses under the heading "expenses from ordinary activities". I note that is budgeted to cost \$85.034 million in 2003-04 and to remain relatively constant over the out years. However, explanatory note (a) states that there will be a reduction of 143 full-time equivalents. How does that equate to the figure provided for employee expenses? The number of employees will drop dramatically but the expenses will remain static.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: The reason for the increase in employee expenses is the increased quarantine surveillance activities that will be undertaken by the department and the salary increases that would normally flow as a result of enterprise bargaining agreements. As the member can see, employee expenses decline slightly in the out years as part of the savings initiatives identified by the agency. Obviously, the figure will remain at that level because of the increased surveillance activities and the normal increases in employee expenses, including on-costs.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: The budget papers refer to 143 FTEs, which is a significant number. The figures do not seem to equate. However, I will take the parliamentary secretary's word for it.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Dr Robertson will clarify the reason for the reduction in FTEs.

Dr ROBERTSON: The main reduction in FTEs has been between 2001-02 and 2002-03. To come in on target with the identified 2003 budget reduction, staff numbers had to be lower at the beginning of this financial year. A small reduction in FTEs is going forward. Some of that is commonwealth driven and some of that is state driven. We are operating at that level now, as we must before we go into the next financial year. We will have a salary carryover at the beginning of the financial year because we must pay at the beginning of this financial year the people we will pay during the financial year. That is the explanation. It is a six-month advance adjustment to the budget. As the member is aware, the budget for this year is exactly as it was flagged in last year's forward estimates. We were fully aware of the extent to which we had to manage the organisation.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: I note that there is a \$6.7 million projected reduction in the agriculture budget this year, on top of a reduction of almost \$7 million last year. Can the parliamentary secretary confirm that that assessment is accurate?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: For the sake of Mr Robertson, I will repeat the question. The member is asking about the appropriation of forward estimates and for an explanation for the \$7 million reduction in the grand total in this and the forthcoming financial year. He wants this budget compared with those of 2001-02 and 2002-03. He is asking for an explanation of any further reduction in the total expenditure.

Dr ROBERTSON: The main reason for the reduction is the cessation of a number of one-off activities.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: I did not ask that question.

Dr ROBERTSON: Sorry.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: No, continue with the answer. I think I know the answer to my question.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: It is the cessation of various funding -

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Does Dr Robertson want to explain what those activities are to get them on the record?

Dr ROBERTSON: The \$4.2 million dairy adjustment package has finished. The \$4 million adverse seasonal funding and the exceptional circumstances funding has ceased, as will the \$1.63 million funding for the national campaign to eradicate red imported fire ants. That is the majority of programs that account for the difference between the two -

Mr P.D. OMODEI: I thought there was enhanced funding for the red imported fire ant program.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: No, we have come to the end of our contribution to that program.

Dr ROBERTSON: The contribution was \$3.1 million this financial year, and it is \$1.6 million in the next financial year.

Mr Brendon Grylls; Mr Fran Logan; Mr Paul Omodei; Chairman; Mr Shane Hill; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Jeremy Edwards

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Is it a good idea to cease funding?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: The advice we have received from the eastern States is that that program has started to become very successful.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: What chemical is used to stop the ants?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I am not aware of the chemical that is used.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Is it dieldrin?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I do not think it is dieldrin, but I know -

Mr P.D. OMODEI: They must be using something. They are not using Epsom salts, are they?

Dr ROBERTSON: The chemical is new. Queensland has a special permit for it to be used for that program. The chemical is unusual in that the ants take it back to the nest, where the queens are. It has potential for the management of termites elsewhere in Australia.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I refer to the third dot point under major initiatives on page 235. Could the parliamentary secretary provide an overview of the best practice methods being investigated to manage phosphorus pollution in the Peel and Harvey estuaries and the funding options for that? Will the best practice method also apply to the Leschenault estuary near Bunbury?

[8.20 pm]

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Given that that is an operational matter, I will refer the question to Dr Robertson.

Dr ROBERTSON: The best practice methods largely relate to appropriate sources of phosphate and using less soluble phosphate. It must be spread at the appropriate time, which is when the pastures are growing well and not over summer, as was the original practice. There is also significant work going on with regard to tree planting along drainage lines to intercept some of the phosphate. Clearly, the approach that has been taken in the Peel-Harvey estuary is directly relevant to the Leschenault estuary. Part of that successful best practice was using the bauxite residue. However, for the moment that process has been discontinued.

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: I refer to the major initiatives for 2003-04 on page 235 of the *Budget Statements*. Will the parliamentary secretary refer to the line item that indicates how much money has been set aside for salinity in the agriculture budget? Is there a specific allocation for the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: There is no specific line item. However, the member will be aware - the Minister for the Environment and Heritage spoke about this in the Legislative Assembly and the Minister for Agriculture spoke about it in the upper House - of the agreement with the federal Government that it will fund up to \$31.5 million of the \$88 million that WA has claimed should be funded on a joint basis. The departments will be working towards securing the \$88 million over the next six months and having it backdated to when the process started. The department is hoping that, once the bilateral agreement has been signed, the \$31.5 million will flow into the State over the next few weeks. Unfortunately, it is not allocated as a single line item.

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: Does that mean that no national action plan money will come out of the agriculture budget?

Dr ROBERTSON: The department's commitment to the national action plan is the \$10 million. Also in the budget is \$300 000 for catchment initiatives, which is specifically new money in this budget.

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: So there is \$10 million?

Dr ROBERTSON: Yes, \$10 million will form part of the salinity national action plan, which is in the Department of Agriculture's budget -

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: Is there a line item?

Dr ROBERTSON: No, it is a combination of the agriculture resource management area and the plant industry, because some of it is used for direct work with community groups. For example, \$2.9 million has been directly allocated to support the community groups with their catchment assessment programs, particularly their design of drainage programs and the like. The other parts are, for example, part of the plant-based salinity solution to the salinity Cooperative Research Centre and a range of other perennial legumes and salt land revegetation activities.

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: Can Dr Robertson, through the parliamentary secretary, outline from where in the agriculture budget the \$10 million will come, so that it is on the record? Dr Robertson obviously knows where it has come from, but he cannot direct me to a line item. If he explains where the \$10 million has come from, that is just as

Mr Brendon Grylls; Mr Fran Logan; Mr Paul Omodei; Chairman; Mr Shane Hill; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Jeremy Edwards

good as directing me to a line item. Obviously the \$200 000 ones do not matter, but it would be good to know where the major ones are coming from.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: As Dr Robertson has already pointed out, there is direct regional support of \$3.5 million for assisting regional natural resource management groups to develop their regional plans. I also direct the member to the participation of and the contribution to the cooperative research centre for plant-based management of dry land salinity and the valuation of drainage, particularly in the upper Blackwood catchment. As the member knows, the department has a network of 1 200 groundwater monitoring bores. The annual expenditure, as part of that \$10 million spent on salinity, used for monitoring the air with a variety of techniques is about \$1.1 million.

Dr ROBERTSON: I do not have a total breakdown of the \$10 million, but \$300 000 is for the catchment demonstration and \$800 000 for the rural towns program. I can provide a list of the initiatives that make up the \$10 million.

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: I would like a breakdown of the \$10 million that is coming from the agriculture budget.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: The department will provide that information over and above and inclusive of the information that has already been provided tonight.

[Supplementary Information No B17.]

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Does a coordinated approach exist between the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Conservation and Land Management, the Forest Products Commission, and the Water Corporation on this issue, because the paper provided to us today by the Minister for the Environment and Heritage on this very issue indicates that the Department of Agriculture will have \$9.88 million this financial year for the department, which is one of the agency baseline funding issues? Under the new initiative the paper refers to \$0.375 million for regional land care and then a further catchment demonstration initiative of \$1.5 million. The total amount equates to \$41.541 million and it will stay roughly at that figure for 2004-05. It will then decrease to \$34 million and then \$33 million in 2006-07. This matter is an important issue and impacts everybody in regional WA. I know that I am not asking a question now -

The CHAIRMAN: I hope that you will do so soon.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: This is the forum in which comments should be made.

The CHAIRMAN: No, member for Warren-Blackwood, this is the forum for questions.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: I have asked a question, but now I will round it off. Is there coordination between the government departments about this issue, because we are being made to look silly on this matter. The toing and froing that goes on between the State Government and the federal Government does neither Government any good. In the end the people who are missing out are the people on the ground in rural WA. It is about time this issue was brought under control and we got our act together.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Yes, there is coordination between the agriculture and environment departments and the Natural Heritage Trust because there is more and more of a similarity between the two funding issues.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Can we have a consolidated response from all of the departments so that we as members of Parliaments, and as opposition members, can lobby our federal counterparts? We need a consistent response.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Yes, and the Minister for the Environment and Heritage has already stated that during question time.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Her answer was different from that of the parliamentary secretary.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: From my own experience - Dr Robertson can qualify this - of attending commonwealth ministerial meetings, I know that the agencies and the directors of the agencies are working together to resolve the issue. I know they are coordinating their efforts, but it is difficult. As the member knows, it is very difficult when the Commonwealth continues to move the goal posts in the bilateral arguments and negotiations about what it will and will not fund and how it will fund it. It would be the same if the Opposition were in government. For example, for all the crowing that the federal Government has done about the Natural Heritage trust fund, very little of that money has hit the ground. The National Party has claimed that we should get on and sign up and get the money. We have signed up; we have negotiated the bilateral agreements.

[8.30 pm]

Mr P.D. OMODEI: What has been signed up?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: An example of what we have got out of what we have claimed is an amount of \$31.5 million to date. The agencies are definitely working together on this issue. Dr Robertson may be able to qualify that.

Mr Brendon Grylls; Mr Fran Logan; Mr Paul Omodei; Chairman; Mr Shane Hill; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Jeremy Edwards

Dr ROBERTSON: The member referred to \$9.88 million plus \$300 000 for the catchment demonstration, which is largely what is in our budget for that area. I think those figures are quite consistent. It is a moveable feast. Since the budget papers were prepared we estimated \$15 million would be coming from the Natural Heritage Trust to Western Australia, and as of 24 hours ago it looks like that amount might be \$20.7 million. The figures are very active and it is very difficult to say what position we are in at any moment.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: When the Liberal coalition Government was in negotiations leading up to the national action plan in 2000, Premier Court made a public statement that he had a commitment from the federal Government that this State would not be penalised for any money that was expended. That has changed. He made a public statement in *The West Australian* that the Western Australian Government would not be penalised for any moneys that were spent by the Government on salinity when it was to be matched on a one for one basis. As the member knows, the federal Government has changed the rules and we are being penalised. States like Queensland that have not acted early and have not taken the initiative on salinity in the way that Western Australia has have not been penalised. The moneys they have now put forward have been matched; for example, the \$32 million that Queensland is picking up. The moneys that both the previous Government and this Government have spent have not been honoured by the federal Government. That is the sort of situation this Government is dealing with when the Commonwealth continues to shift the goal posts.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: I recognise that the former Premier of Western Australia made public statements on this issue, and I understand the Prime Minister made public statements about dressing up old money and creating the fund that was necessary to match this money. The parliamentary secretary mentioned the shifting of the goal posts. Surely he would have reminded the Prime Minister, the Treasurer or the federal Minister for Primary Industry that these statements had previously been made. Why has he not carried the day and had these matters resolved? Time goes on, and it reflects on the institution of government in Western Australia that we have not been able to achieve this very important outcome.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: There is no disagreement about the impact this is having on the capacity of the State to address the salinity issue, but when the federal minister and the Prime Minister do not respond to the letters that are written to them, or respond only after a significant period -

Mr P.D. OMODEI: You should go and see them!

Mr F.M. LOGAN: We have, in state ministerial meetings. It is most disappointing - it is appalling for a State Government to be treated this way - when the answer comes back through a party that is in opposition; for example, through the National Party. That is how we were informed about what the State was to be told before the State Government was told. As the member knows, if that had happened when his party was in power, with a Labor federal Government and a Labor opposition, he would have been shouting and bawling about it. That is exactly what has occurred, and it is disgusting.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: I know exactly what this Government is doing in a lot of areas -

The CHAIRMAN: Order!

Mr F.M. LOGAN: The member for Warren-Blackwood asked how we can improve our relations. How can we improve our relations when the Commonwealth Government treats the State Government in such an appalling manner?

Mr J.P.D. EDWARDS: I draw the parliamentary secretary's attention to dot point four on page 221 concerning the relocation of the Midland saleyards to Muchea. Given that \$14 million was raised from the sale of the Midland saleyards and was to be allocated towards the running of those new saleyards - I believe I am right in saying under an independent board - will that \$14 million be allocated towards the running of the saleyards; and, if so, will there be a guarantee that fees and charges will not rise under private management?

Dr ROBERTSON: The member indicated that the \$14 million was available. At this stage the land from the existing site has not been sold and the Government is currently in the process of evaluating the options. It is far too early to make any call about what will happen regarding the expressions of interest that have been received and are currently being considered by the minister.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: I return to the financial statements at page 242 and refer to the expenses from ordinary activities. I acknowledge the comments made by the Director General of Agriculture in relation to the reductions in the budget and the exceptional circumstances for dairy assistance. I make the observation that we are seeing a reduction of 143 full-time equivalents over two financial years, and by any measure that is a major reduction in the activities of the Department of Agriculture. It seems that agriculture in Western Australia is being used as a milch cow to support health and education in Western Australia. Surely the parliamentary

Mr Brendon Grylls; Mr Fran Logan; Mr Paul Omodei; Chairman; Mr Shane Hill; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Jeremy Edwards

secretary is concerned to see this reduction in the efforts in agriculture across Western Australia and to see a very proud and important industry being diminished by policies of his Government.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: There are a number of reasons for a reduction over that period. The reduction between the closing financial year and the forthcoming financial year is significantly down on the two previous financial years in terms of the number of full-time employee positions. Many of the full-time employee placements occurred as a result of commonwealth funding, which has now dropped off. That was for particular programs. A number of the full-time employees were contract-type employees whose contracts came to an end and were not renewed. Also, a number of programs changed. For example, the Queensland Department of Primary Industries program was not renewed. There is a natural ebb and flow in any agency and any job in terms of the number of employees -

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: The tide is out.

[8.40 pm]

Mr F.M. LOGAN: No. There is a natural tendency and ebb and flow in any organisation in terms of full-time employees, particularly when a department is engaged in a number of different programs. The priorities of those programs change. Full-time employees are necessary for those programs, but the number needed may change. I pass to Dr Robertson to qualify what I have said.

Dr ROBERTSON: Thirty-three of the staff reductions in the current financial year are a result of reductions in the Natural Heritage Trust positions funded through the Department of Agriculture. The majority of those positions will be staying in Western Australia and funded through the regional community catchment groups into the future. It is not a net loss to service in agriculture, but it is part of the reduction in Department of Agriculture staff.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: I refer to the output on food and fibre industry development on page 229 of the *Budget Statements*. There has been a decrease in the estimated person hours involved in research and industry development for horticulture, the grains sector, the meat, dairy and other animal products sector and the wool sector, and a drop by six in the number of FTEs. The parliamentary secretary can talk about the Commonwealth as much as he likes, but it seems that there has been an overall decrease in the activity of the Department of Agriculture in Western Australia. That is inevitable with a reduction of \$6.5 million in funding. Is that accurate? Is that the ebb and flow? It is the ebb all right; it is going out at a rate of knots.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I ask Dr Robertson to answer that question.

Dr ROBERTSON: Those figures are accurate. As was pointed out in response to one of the member's earlier questions, there are productivity and assurance dividend reductions of nearly \$7 million and a reduction of \$4 million through the expenditure review committee, which will continue into this year. That will obviously impact on service delivery in addition to the impact caused by commonwealth funding reductions and other changes. As a total, we have been particularly successful in increasing funding from external sources, which this year was about \$8 million above what we estimated it would be.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I refer the parliamentary secretary to the fifth dot point under the major achievements for 2002-03 on page 252 of the *Budget Statements*.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: You should be asking questions about the reduction in activity so that we can get it back up, not about the namby-pamby things that happen.

The CHAIRMAN: Member for Warren-Blackwood!

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I did not hear what the member for Warren-Blackwood said; can he repeat that please?

The CHAIRMAN: Do not encourage bad behaviour!

Mr P.D. OMODEI: I will meet the member for Collie outside.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I do not think the member for Warren-Blackwood was looking at the major achievements. I think he wants to ask other questions.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I refer to the ministerial review of the skeleton weed eradication program. Can the parliamentary secretary explain how the new surveillance method has increased the detection of that weed?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: In terms of the new identification process, and particularly the technology involved, I will pass to Dr Robertson. He explained it to me the other day, but I am sure that I will probably get some of it

Mr Brendon Grylls; Mr Fran Logan; Mr Paul Omodei; Chairman; Mr Shane Hill; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Jeremy Edwards

wrong if I repeat it. In terms of the technology involved and the automatic spraying of skeleton weed, I turn to Dr Robertson.

Dr ROBERTSON: For a number of years the skeleton weed program conducted insufficient surveillance of areas in which skeleton weed had not previously been found. Surveillance was largely carried out by government officers or paid contractors in areas where skeleton weed was known to grow. The Department of Agriculture took over the management of this program about three years ago. In the year before last it did some random surveillance of farms across the State to look for skeleton weed. It unfortunately found skeleton weed on about one farm in every four that were inspected, including places on the south coast right up to the northern agricultural area.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: One in every four?

Dr ROBERTSON: Yes, in that order. There was obviously a lot more skeleton weed out there. The review of the process came up with the basic supposition that it had been growing for a long time in a couple of areas and farmers elsewhere had not been particularly vigilant in looking for it on their properties. They knew the search for skeleton weed was being carried out around Narembene, Southern Cross and Yilgarn, so they did not think that they needed to look for it on the south coast. The program that was put in place this year worked with farmer groups to ensure that they made certain that every property in their district was examined in detail by the person who knew it best; the farmer. The result was a significant increase in the detected area this year. However, we are reasonably confident that we are now much closer to a realistic assessment of the extent of the problem than was previously the case. The department was fortunate this year - although it was unfortunate for the farmers - that farmers had a lot more time to look for skeleton weed because the harvest was so poor and they spent very little time on harvesting machinery. The farmer groups and the skeleton weed steering committee, which the minister established, are working very hard to develop a plan for going forward next year. The budget allocation through the levy is about \$2.5 million and will be spent totally in this area next year.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I will add to that. The member for Collie also asked about the technology involved in identifying on-farm skeleton weed. Optical identification technology is currently being developed, which will be fitted to farm equipment and, as the equipment is driven round the paddocks, will be able to identify the greenness of skeleton weed and differentiate it from the normal yellow colour of various grains. When it identifies the green skeleton weed, it will automatically spray that area. That technology is being worked on at the moment. The area searched for skeleton weed over the past financial year was significantly greater than in previous years.

Dr ROBERTSON: Yes, it was a several-fold increase. The area surveyed this year by farmers was several times the area surveyed in previous years.

[8.50 pm]

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: The automatic identification system is still a long way off.

I refer to the capital works program of the Forest Products Commission at page 289. Does it include the \$32 million plantation forestry initiative for the establishment of strategic afforestation in the agricultural zone, and will this be funded through borrowings from Treasury either in whole or in part?

The CHAIRMAN: That question deals with division 15, which I understand has already been dealt with.

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: I thought we were doing all these in conjunction.

The CHAIRMAN: No, we are considering divisions 12, 13 and 14.

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: We have done fisheries and the development commissions.

The CHAIRMAN: I will double-check with the clerks and while I am clarifying this, I give the call to the member for Greenough.

Mr J.P.D. EDWARDS: I refer the parliamentary secretary to page 222, and the fourth dot point under the heading "Biosecurity", relating to international terrorist attacks. While I support this initiative, can the parliamentary secretary enlarge on the project of ensuring that adequate biosecurity risk management measures are in place? What funding is available for this, and where is it coming from?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: As this is an operational matter, I ask Dr Robertson to respond.

Dr ROBERTSON: The key focus of that project is working with the emergency response groups in Western Australia - the Police Service, the Fire and Emergency Service Authority and others - in developing those plans. For example, some months ago there was a hoax anthrax "attack" at a bank in Midland. The Department of Agriculture, having seen the disease and the organism, is the only source of expertise to deal with anthrax. What

Mr Brendon Grylls; Mr Fran Logan; Mr Paul Omodei; Chairman; Mr Shane Hill; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Jeremy Edwards

we are doing is paid for as part of recurrent expenditure, through the animal health laboratories. It focuses on the risks, the potential vectors and the likely impacts, and contributes that information and expertise to a whole-of-government approach to terrorist response capability.

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: On page 235 one of the major initiatives for 2003-04, listed at the seventh dot point, refers to on-ground works commencing for the catchment demonstration and engineering evaluation initiatives. Can the parliamentary secretary detail what this project is and the location of these on-ground works?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: As the member will be aware, the Government has made a commitment of \$4 million from the Water and Rivers Commission and \$6 million from the Department of Agriculture for catchment demonstration initiatives for the engineering evaluation of drainage for tackling salinity. That program continues to be rolled out this year, and the budget from the Department of Agriculture for the forthcoming financial year is \$642 000. That is jointly funded, with \$321 000 from the State and an equal amount from the Commonwealth. Dr Robertson will deal with the individual projects and their location.

Dr ROBERTSON: It is rather complicated, because one of the conditions the Commonwealth has put on the matching funding for new money is that no decisions for the location of the projects will be made until the Commonwealth is around the table. The projects must be clearly identified in the regional strategies being prepared by the natural resource management groups. Considerable work has been done by the NRM groups. Each one is looking at an appropriate catchment and the Minister for the Environment and Heritage has established a working group to identify the scope of the drainage projects. That group has made some considerable progress, but at this stage the final decisions have not been made about where they will be, and they will not be made until the Commonwealth is part of the process. Hopefully, as the parliamentary secretary indicated, the Commonwealth has now unequivocally said that it is bone fide matching money, and it will be around the table on that very quickly.

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: Does that mean that those drainage initiatives will have to be prioritised in the regional NRM plans to go forward?

Dr ROBERTSON: Yes.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: I refer the parliamentary secretary to output 2, agricultural resource management, on page 233. Can the parliamentary secretary explain the reduction, or the underspend, between the 2002-03 budget and the estimated actual; in other words the budgeted \$59.176 million compared to the actual \$43.027 million? I see there has been a reduction again in 2004-05 for the same output. I note that that is due to exceptional circumstances funding being lower. I am not sure what this is based on - perhaps rainfall. Can the parliamentary secretary explain the underspend of \$16 million and the reduction of seven full-time equivalents in that program?

Dr ROBERTSON: The main difference is that the budget allocation for the exceptional circumstances was made earlier this year as a special allocation from the Treasury, but it has not been expended as yet, and reduce NHT.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Are you talking about the \$16 million or the \$3 million?

Dr ROBERTSON: I am talking about all of that, and it includes the commonwealth money. This is the total cost of the output, in state and commonwealth money. As the member will be aware, the Commonwealth contributes 90c in the dollar for the interest subsidy for exceptional circumstances. That money was in the budget to be allocated, but at the moment the money is still being rolled out and the exceptional circumstances cases are still sitting there, hopefully waiting for a very imminent decision from the Commonwealth.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Is that in regard to those districts that comply?

Dr ROBERTSON: Yes - those districts that comply.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Does that amount to \$16 million?

Dr ROBERTSON: Yes.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: I refer the parliamentary secretary to the Agriculture Protection Board budget, and the question of wild dogs in the eastern wheatbelt, the Nullarbor, and pastoral areas. I note that there is an increase in the budget. Has the committee set up by the minister deliberated and reported? If so, what has it reported, and is this enough money to address the issue of wild dogs in rural and regional Western Australia?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I will run through this briefly for the member. The review of the wild dog program has identified a number of issues.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Can the parliamentary secretary table that report?

Mr F.M. LOGAN: No, it is not available yet. My understanding is that the review is not complete.

Extract from *Hansard*
[ASSEMBLY - Tuesday, 20 May 2003]
p140b-148a

Mr Brendon Grylls; Mr Fran Logan; Mr Paul Omodei; Chairman; Mr Shane Hill; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Jeremy Edwards

Mr P.D. OMODEI: Meanwhile, the dogs keep chewing up the sheep and cattle.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: The budget is similar to last year in its funding and its approach.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: I understand it is an increase to match the rates paid.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: That is correct, in the way it is structured.

The CHAIRMAN: I am sorry to interrupt, but if there is a question in the air, it will have to be put on notice. My task now is to put the question.

The appropriations were recommended.

Committee adjourned at 9.00 pm
