

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES AND  
FINANCIAL OPERATIONS**

**2015–16 BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARINGS**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE  
TAKEN AT PERTH  
THURSDAY, 25 JUNE 2015**

**SESSION ONE  
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND WILDLIFE**

**Members**

**Hon Ken Travers (Chair)  
Hon Peter Katsambanis (Deputy Chair)  
Hon Martin Aldridge  
Hon Alanna Clohesy  
Hon Rick Mazza**

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**Hearing commenced at 9. 30 am**

**Hon HELEN MORTON**

**Minister representing the Minister for Environment, examined:**

**Mr JIM SHARP**

**Director General, examined:**

**Dr JOHN BYRNE**

**Director, Corporate Services, examined:**

**Mr PETER DANS**

**Director, Regional and Fire Management Services, examined:**

**Dr MARGARET BYRNE**

**Director, Science and Conservation, examined:**

**Mr PETER SHARP**

**Director, Parks and Visitor Services, examined:**

**Mr ROD HUGHES**

**General Manager, Swan River Trust, examined:**

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** Good morning. On behalf of the Legislative Council Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations, I would like to welcome you to today's hearing. Can all the witnesses confirm that they have read, understood and signed a document headed "Information for Witnesses"?

**The Witnesses:** Yes.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** Witnesses need to be aware of the severe penalties that apply to persons providing false or misleading testimony to a parliamentary committee. It is essential that all your testimony before the committee is complete and truthful to the best of your knowledge. This hearing is being recorded by Hansard and a transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. The hearing is being held in public, although there is discretion available to the committee to hear evidence in private either of its own motion or at the witness's request. If for some reason you wish to make a confidential statement during today's proceedings, you should request that the evidence be taken in closed session before answering the question. Government agencies and departments have an important role and duty in assisting Parliament to scrutinise the budget papers on behalf of the people of Western Australia, and the committee values your assistance with this.

[Witnesses introduced.]

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** Do any of the witnesses wish to make an opening statement?

**The Witnesses:** No.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** If I could just request all the witnesses, and the members as well, to try to speak as loudly and clearly as possible. The acoustics in this room seem to work very well when people are standing up, as in a parliamentary session, but not so well when people are sitting down, and Hansard sometimes struggles to pick things up. Could we try to speak into the microphones, and as clearly as possible.

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I will open it up to questions from members. Can I have an indication of who has questions? Perhaps I might give the call initially to Hon Rick Mazza.

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** Thanks, Deputy Chair. I refer to the fourth dot point on page 642 of the *Budget Statements*. The first question I have is to do with prescribed burning, which has been a fairly big issue in the last 12 months. My question mainly revolves around the announcement that there would be an extra 100 seasonal firefighters. I just wondered: what were those firefighters doing in the off season?

**Mr J. Sharp:** There is a commitment for an extra \$20 million over four years, which is additional to what is already expended in relation to prescribed burning, so that averages out as an extra \$5 million per year. We have not indicated that that is 100 new seasonal firefighters, although we do have a large number of seasonal firefighters. I will ask Mr Dans to answer in response to the specifics of staffing coming out of that new arrangement.

**Mr P. Dans:** In the broader south west, which comprises the Swan, south west and Warren regions, we have in the order of 288 conservation employees. They are our frontline firefighters. Of those 288, something in the order of 90 to 100 are employed on a seasonal basis. They commence around October and run through until April or May, depending on the opportunities for prescribed burning. The new money will allow us to extend those seasonal contracts, to perhaps start them earlier when prescribed burning is commencing in and around perhaps as early as August in some areas, and keep them through perhaps even till the end of June, particularly in the Swan region to the east of Perth where we are continuing to burn even today.

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** If memory serves me right, there was also a commitment to employ a number of full-time firefighters; is that correct?

**Mr P. Dans:** Yes. The new money will allow us to employ a smaller number, probably five or six, with the express purpose of developing a small team that is dedicated to undertaking small, complex burns, which are right abutting the urban interface, so where Parks and Wildlife managed lands abut private property and infrastructure. Those are generally small, complex burns with high unit costs, so we will dedicate a team to chip away at those whilst our existing human resources will be able to get on with the larger more landscape scale burns in the program.

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** In the past you have been well short of the quota for prescribed burning each year. In fact, at a meeting at the Pemberton Mill Hall, which I attended, you said it was down as low as about 60 000 hectares, from memory. It could be even less than that. What do you expect to burn in this next 12 months?

**Mr P. Dans:** As of this morning, in the current financial year we have burnt 142 303 hectares —

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** That is a significant increase.

**Mr P. Dans:** — which is our best effort since 2009–10. I am quite confident that when the new funds start to flow from 1 July, with the right systems and processes in place, we are going to top the 200 000, which we are absolutely aiming for, and I think we will have the means to achieve that, given reasonably consistent and average weather conditions.

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** There has obviously been an increased effort, so we are getting closer to reaching that 250 000 hectares this year. At that meeting I think you mentioned that one of the limiting factors in the past has been some international standard of occupational health and safety that you had to maintain. Is that still something that creates some problems for you?

**Mr P. Dans:** I think what you are referring to, member, is my reference to the international standard for risk management, ISO 31000. That was introduced into our prescribed burning program following the Margaret River bushfire of November 2011. It was an undertaking the government put in place in February 2012. Getting our staff familiar with a whole new process for planning and implementing prescribed burns with due regard to risk management processes has taken a little bit

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of time, and it was a significant change from our previous paper-based processes in planning a burn. I think part of the reason for the increase in the current financial year is an increased familiarity and confidence with the new systems and processes. I am sure we are over that as an impediment to the burning achievement.

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** That is good to see. That is all I have at the moment, Deputy Chair.

[9.40 am]

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** Can I ask on prescribed burning, is there any publicly available information when burns are scheduled or when they are happening?

**Mr P. Dans:** We make our seasonal burn programs available in the respective district offices. We consult with local government, bushfire brigades and the local Department of Fire and Emergency Services officers; so if people really want to see what is on the program, their local parks and wildlife district office can provide that. On the day of the burn—and it is not possible to say that next Wednesday we are going to do this burn—the decision to burn is generally taken within six hours of ignition commencing, prevailing weather conditions being the dictating factor. As soon as we have determined a program for the day, as we did this morning—a program of three burns was signed off—and within probably half an hour our public information and corporate affairs section will release emails, media alerts, to regional and metropolitan media regarding the burns that are on a program and the day's burn program will be posted on the parks and wildlife public website.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** So it is available on a public website?

**Mr P. Dans:** It is available on a departmental website, updated on a daily basis when the day's program is approved.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** Would it perhaps be possible to communicate that, maybe even to members of Parliament's offices, because I get a number of constituent inquiries? People generally support the burning program, but there are a lot of people either who have respiratory problems or eye problems or who just feel that it might affect their health and if they know what is happening on the day, they can plan their life accordingly. I did not think it is very well-known; I certainly did not know about it. Perhaps communicate it through members of Parliament's offices.

**Hon HELEN MORTON:** I will pass that message on to the minister, and he can let us know the extent to which he would want to follow through on that sort of a suggestion.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** That would be great; thank you. Hon Rick Mazza, have you finished your questions?

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** I have finished on the fire side of things, but I have a few questions on Parks for People.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** Perhaps you can continue.

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** On the same page 642, first dot point, it talks about the Parks for People Caravan and Camping initiative, and a projected budget of \$21 million. What new camp sites have been established in the last 12 months?

**Mr J. Sharp:** There has been an ongoing program of implementation of the parks for people program, of which the \$21 million is over a four-year period. I do not have the specifics, but the director of parks may be able to elucidate what he can recall.

**Mr P. Sharp:** The parks for people program is rolling out a commitment to have 450 new camp sites in Western Australia. We have finished our work at Conto, which was an expansion of 46 additional sites. We have undertaken quite a bit of planning and design work and we have commenced work around clearing of sites down in Shannon and D'Entrecasteaux, Black Point. We have undertaken quite a bit of work—an additional 12 sites are there—and around Nanga.

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In Lane Poole Reserve we have established a substantial increase in the camp sites at the Old Mill site there. Over the coming two years we will add another 250. We have increased the capacity of camp sites by 241 camp sites in the last two years.

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** What is the current nightly charge to camp at these camp sites? Does it vary from camp site to camp site?

**Mr P. Sharp:** It depends on the level of facilities that are present. They are very modest fees. The objective of the government is to have high-quality, affordable camping opportunities for people. The camping fees vary from \$7 to \$10 a night.

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** Are there limitations on the number of people on some of those camp sites? Does it manage to say that a camp site is full this weekend? How are they managed?

**Mr P. Sharp:** They do have a capacity, and those are dictated by the number of sites that are present. We design the sites so that they are generally a four-person site or a six-person site. There are also group camping sites that cater for schools. The capacities are very much dictated by the available ablutions provided there. Depending on the time of the year, we will put up “camp site full” signs.

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** Is there a booking system or is it a first-in-best-dressed-type of arrangement?

**Mr P. Sharp:** That is a very good question. We are rolling out an online campground booking system; in fact, it has been successful. It has had some teething problems. Nevertheless, since we have had the campground booking system, it has improved our revenues by about 20 per cent and it is proving to be very attractive for a lot of people. I will give you an example. In Cape Range National Park where it used to be on a first-come-best-dressed basis; people would turn up to the entry to the park and be lined up in vehicles to get a camp site, because we have camp ground hosts who represent us. Since that campground booking system has been in place, there has actually been an increase during school holiday periods and public holiday periods for locals—and locals are actually availing themselves of the opportunity to book online for a period of a week or two weeks and go and enjoy the park. We have seen a substantial increase in the visitation to our parks as a result of having the online booking system as well.

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** It would be good to see that develop because there would be nothing more frustrating than mum and dad packing up the kids and driving for hours and then you cannot camp. Are many camp sites being established east of Albany Highway?

**Mr P. Sharp:** Yes, there will be out at Dryandra; we are putting increased camping at Dryandra. We are doing increased camping around Credo. We have moved to the north west. In the midwest we have increased camping opportunities around Coalseam. When you move down to Shannon, we are upgrading the old Shannon town site to become a major campground destination.

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** Would it be possible to get a list of the current camp sites in Western Australia. If you could take that on notice, thank you, Deputy Chair.

[*Supplementary Information No A1.*]

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Can I turn to page 645, and “Services and Key Efficiency Indicators”, and that third item, “Conservation Partnerships”. I want to ask questions about the Land for Wildlife program. Minister, can you or the department give me—or let me know—what is the cost per hectare of managing the Land for Wildlife program compared to the cost per hectare of managing the conservation reserve system? If I could have those figures for 2014–15, please?

**Mr J. Sharp:** I do not know whether those figures would be available in terms of the costing that we arrive at a cost or can calculated a cost. The Land for Wildlife land is privately owned land, which by way of agreement the owners agree to manage and protect their conservation values according to an agreement. We do not ask private owners what they expend or how they expend

funds on that, but we can for conservation lands vested in the commission, which we manage, we would have an indicator of a cost per hectare that is expended.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Mr Sharp, I think you are able to provide the cost per hectare of managing the conservation reserve.

**Mr J. Sharp:** Yes.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** I think up until this year there has been a big team in the Land for Wildlife program, or area, in your department. Could you give me the figures for the amount of hectares involved in the Land for Wildlife program, what the department spend has been per hectare? That would be great.

**Mr J. Sharp:** We could arrive at a costing of what was spent servicing Land for Wildlife by those officers and the other concomitant costs. I do not think we could provide that now, but we could provide that on notice and get an indicative cost of what our expenditure was on that program, servicing it that way.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** I am happy to receive that.

[*Supplementary Information No A2.*]

[9.50 am]

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Minister, I believe an evaluation report was prepared on the land for wildlife program and that report was undertaken in 2015, which I think provided the basis for that program needing to move to a new delivery model. Is there a copy of the evaluation report that can be provided to the committee by way of supplementary information?

**Mr J. Sharp:** The evaluation was of all programs and activities in the department. It was done within the department, which was a review of all the services and activities that we undertake. It was not done as a formal published report or even a formal report but an evaluation was done across all our activities in terms of their delivery.

In relation to land for wildlife and the delivery of eight part-time staff—I will get Dr Byrne to elucidate on that—it was determined in relation to the costs expended that it was more efficient to do it in a centralised way as part of all our off-reserve management being centralised. That was not part of a specific review of land for wildlife but a review of all our activities and programs.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** While I think about it, my last question about the average cost per hectare for land for wildlife land I think is reported in your annual report. Perhaps you might go back and use your report as a basis for it because I think you collect that information already.

You have done no report and you have done an internal evaluation of that program. Can you advise me on the number of staff and the FTE that was budgeted for the land for wildlife program in 2014? Can you also provide me with the number of staff who will be active in the land for wildlife program in 2015–16 and onwards?

**Mr J. Sharp:** By way of clarification, the land for wildlife program continues. It is a program by which members of the public can register their land and a covenant and reach an agreement for managing it for its conservation values. I misunderstood your earlier question. I do not know what those private landowners expend. You are asking a question about what we expend in servicing that. The servicing moved from eight part-time people to a centralised function. We could arrive at a costing of what would be spent on that. A range of costs are also spent on servicing land for wildlife, which is not just based on the staff directly servicing it but our regional staff. It is part of their responsibilities to assist and help with advice for private landowners who wish to conserve the values there. That is not necessarily cost as land for wildlife but it supports people who are making their land available or protecting it from a conservation perspective.

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We are also having ongoing discussions about community partnerships of engaging with community groups and NGOs in relation to providing advisory services as well as part of a model of engaging with the community to provide that level of service.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** I appreciate all that. All I am looking for is figures though. How many FTEs? The figures I have show that there were eight regionally and two in the metro area but you are telling me eight FTEs in total were working on that program alone in 2014–15.

**Mr J. Sharp:** If I could correct that, it was not eight FTEs; it was something in the order of three to 3.5 FTEs spread over a headcount of eight.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** By way of supplementary information, could you provide me with the exact number of staff and FTE who were involved in that program in 2014–15? If you could also provide me with the number of staff and FTE who will be working with that program in 2015–16 and onwards, I would be very grateful.

**Mr J. Sharp:** Yes, we can take that on notice.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** I think we can incorporate all of that as part of A2 because we are talking about the same program. The range of information you are seeking is quite clear.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Just looking at the budget papers and the services and key efficiency indicators, I have just done a quick and rough estimation. It looks like you have lost 40 staff.

**Hon HELEN MORTON:** Are you still on the same page?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Absolutely. I am still on page 645, the same dot point where I think 19 FTEs have been lost from conversation partnerships, 10 from conserving habitats, species and ecological communities, 10 have been lost from provision of parks and visitor services, more from forest management plan implementation and more from provision of services for commercial forestry. Looking at the next three pages, it looks like 40 FTEs were lost. Am I right in saying that only 40 FTEs will be removed from the department in the next financial year? Can you advise me how you lost those staff? Was it due to the efficiency dividend or whatever other reason?

**Mr J. Sharp:** There was a voluntary severance program. In total, the voluntary severance program was 50 staff, who left by the end of the last calendar year. The program ran until April, I think. A number of staff have been part of voluntary severances. Part of our process of identifying all our activities and services was to look at a range of programs in the context of people offering themselves for severances. We aligned where there were people wanting severances in relation to where it would least impact upon our core responsibilities. In the order of 50 staff would have left in that period of time.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Am I to presume then that you lost 50 but you are gaining 10 somewhere else if the net loss, according to the budget papers, is only 40?

**Mr J. Sharp:** Dr Byrne may help me with how we run those numbers in terms of redundancies as opposed to recruitment. Fifty positions were made redundant through voluntary severances.

**Dr J. Byrne:** The increase of 10 that you refer to on page 646 under “Prescribed Burning and Fire Management”, you can see an increase of 10 from last year to next year.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** I can see that increase of 10 on that line item but I have taken that into consideration. You have lost 50 staff elsewhere—there are 54 staff you have lost—but then you have put on four in the Swan River area and you have put 10 on in prescribed burnings. There is still a discrepancy of 10 between Mr Sharp’s answer and your answer, Dr Byrne. I am just wondering where those extra 10 have gone to or come from.

**Dr J. Byrne:** Ten out of 1 500 staff is really quite a small difference. That is a natural fluctuation from year to year. They relate to filling vacancies, how many come in et cetera. It is not a huge issue. There have been some lost from natural attrition. However, where people have left in the

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normal course of business, we have decided that we can rationalise the function and reduce the number of employees.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** I am not being disrespectful. It may not be a big issue for you. I am just trying to get to the bottom of the fact that there is a discrepancy between the number of staff. I am told that there are 50 redundancies and I can see 40 extra staff here. I am just trying to get a sense of where all the staff are located and what is happening. Can I perhaps ask by way of supplementary information how many vacancies you had at 1 June this year? How many positions did you have vacant and in what areas were they vacant, just to give me a sense of how the department is managing those fluctuations of people leaving and people coming?

**Mr J. Sharp:** We will take that on notice. As Dr Byrne has indicated, we have considerable fluctuations in head count, as Mr Dans has answered, even in relation to fire. At the point at which the numbers are taken can be reflecting how many people are employed seasonally, which adds up to an FTE number, we do have great variations throughout the course of the year but I will take that on notice and provide that.

[*Supplementary Information No A3.*]

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** I will just move to page 648 of Budget Paper No 2 and the line item “Bunbury Headquarters Business Plan”. Under “Completed Works” there is an allocation of \$250 000 in 2014–15, and that is also the estimated expenditure to 30 June 2015. Given that \$250 000 was allocated to prepare a business plan for the new proposed DPaW Bunbury headquarters and there was no allocation in 2015–16, when will the Bunbury headquarters business plan be available?

[10.00 am]

**Mr J. Sharp:** The \$250 000 that was allocated in this financial year is largely expended and we are doing the due diligence required to complete a business plan that relates to both heritage surveys and studies. There are several consultancies which are still underway and have not completed in relation to environmental studies which will inform the land assembly for the preparation of the business plan at that level. We expect the plan to be completed in the coming months.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** So the money runs out at the end of next week. So, you have expended the total amount of money and the report will be finalised in the next couple of months, or it has to be finalised and you will still expend more money next financial year?

**Mr J. Sharp:** That is right, and there are funds allocated in the coming financial year.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** I note that there is \$18 million down below for new works for a Bunbury headquarters and public access facility. Is it not unusual for money to be set aside without a business plan having been done? I would have imagined that the business plan would have made the case for this new headquarters and what it might cost, yet this seems to have prejudged a business plan because there is \$18 million in the budget from 2015–16 onwards for the building.

**Mr J. Sharp:** The government made a commitment to a new headquarters and allocated funds to do preliminary works to inform a final business plan and allocated the funds. They have not been drawn on yet. The \$250 000 is doing the work necessary to inform a more detailed business plan to proceed with the development.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Can I take from this line item—the \$18 million next year and the two following years—that that \$18 million will be the total amount needed for a new headquarters in Bunbury, or do you suspect that the figure will be a lot higher and therefore you will need to go back to Treasury to get an increase?

**Mr J. Sharp:** No. The \$18 million is what is allocated and will provide the first stage of what has been committed to for 100 staff in that first stage of the development of the new headquarters.

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**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Mr Sharp, in relation to that new headquarters, where do you anticipate staff moving from? From what current locations where you have office staff do you think will move down to this new facility?

**Mr J. Sharp:** We are underway in terms of preparing for the planning of what groups would go there. At the moment, we have staff across several settings, but the majority of our staff are now located at Kensington. There are some 500 staff on that Kensington site. The majority of the centralised divisions that provide the leadership are located on that site, so we would expect the majority to come from the Kensington site.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Do you still have a big number of staff located on St Georges Terrace?

**Mr J. Sharp:** No, we do not have any staff.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** So it has all gone to Kensington.

**Mr J. Sharp:** At the time of the separation of the Department of Environment and Conservation and the creation of the Department of Parks and Wildlife, on the day it was created, all of the directorates for the Department of Parks and Wildlife were co-located at Kensington.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Who owns that building in Kensington? It belongs to your agency?

**Mr J. Sharp:** It belongs to the agency, yes.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** As a result of a move down to Bunbury, is it anticipated that that building will be sold off?

**Mr J. Sharp:** No. There will still be a requirement for the science headquarters, a special purpose building which serves as the state Herbarium and science centre, to remain. We do have a number of staff who are located in Dongas on that site, so there will be a reduction in demand to use those temporary-type facilities.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** I have just one final question. I did not get the figure. Do you know roughly how many staff you anticipate being located at the new Bunbury headquarters?

**Mr J. Sharp:** One hundred.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** I just want to dig down a little bit deeper into one particular area of the line of questioning that Hon Stephen Dawson was pursuing. I refer to page 646 and service 4, "Forest Management Plan Implementation". Of those 100 employees going down to 90 this year, where are they based?

**Mr J. Sharp:** Sorry?

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** The FTE projection for 2015–16 is 90 employees who are responsible for implementing the FMP.

**Mr J. Sharp:** Yes.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** Can you tell me where they are based?

**Mr J. Sharp:** I cannot tell you explicitly the numbers, but they are based in a number of different sites. There are some based in Kensington, some based in Bunbury and some based in Manjimup, and then some located in districts and regions as well, depending on what their role is in implementing and managing the implementation of the forest management plan. They are distributed across the agency.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** I heard you mention that the Kensington site was essentially a science research site, or would be after the move to Bunbury. You do not have a science division anymore, do you? Is it a science and conservation division?

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**Mr J. Sharp:** Yes, there is a science division, but it is incorporated into the science and conservation division, of which Dr Byrne is the director.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** So the science and conservation division is based at Kensington.

**Mr J. Sharp:** Yes. If I could qualify that, the science and conservation division, again, has the majority of staff located at Kensington, but it is again distributed across a number of centres, depending on the activities that are being undertaken. The fauna research component is largely located at Woodvale. There are a number of staff in fauna research located there. We have forest research staff located at Manjimup and forest researchers also located in regional settings as well.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** It is that forest research that I am particularly interested in, which is why I am digging into these figures under service 4. How many people have you got engaged in the science research work associated with forest management?

**Mr J. Sharp:** If I could pass that to Dr Margaret Byrne, who leads that division, she may be able to answer that question.

**Dr M. Byrne:** Currently, we have approximately 13 staff. It varies a little bit depending on whether the staff are actively engaged in work directly relating to the forest or whether their expertise is required on other projects. But it is around 13 FTEs.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** So 13 FTEs is the projection for 2015–16?

**Dr M. Byrne:** Yes.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** How does that compare with 2014–15 and the year before, 2013–14?

**Dr M. Byrne:** I do not have those direct numbers because, again, it varies depending on projects and where projects are directed to in terms of the forest management requirements.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** Could I ask for that on notice specifically, Mr Deputy Chair? With that same formula that gave you 2013 for the coming financial year, could you give me that figure for the previous two financial years?

[*Supplementary Information No A4.*]

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** Where are those 13 staff located?

**Dr M. Byrne:** A large number are located in Manjimup in the southern forests. Some are located at Kensington, depending on the expertise and depending on the requirements for the work they need to do.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** How many scientists engaged in research to do with forest management or forest conservation have you got based in Manjimup?

**Dr M. Byrne:** We have a mixture of scientists and technical officers based in Manjimup. I cannot tell you off the top of my head what the absolute exact breakdown is, but it is roughly half and half.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** Again, could I put that on notice, please? I just need to know the job classifications.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** I think we can incorporate that in A4 and receive an answer in totality.

[10.10 am]

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** That will give me an idea of whether that workforce has decreased. What about the services that are provided by the research unit looking at forest management; have any of those services ceased, or are they due to cease?

**Dr M. Byrne:** We review science and research functions regularly and we respond to priorities in those areas. Science and research projects naturally are directed towards particular priorities and they may have a specific function in that area, and once they are completed we move staff, according to their expertise, on to other projects. We have a smaller amount, or a reduction, in

forest entomology and fungi as areas that are of lesser importance in the current environment, and we are moving priorities into other areas associated with fauna recovery in the forest management area.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** So the devaluing of certain areas and priority areas being identified elsewhere, how is that determined?

**Dr M. Byrne:** That is determined on a priority setting process that occurs every year in conjunction with the forest and ecosystem management division, which is responsible for delivering the forest management plan. The two divisions and the two directors discuss the research priorities against the requirements of the forest management plan on an annual basis.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** The two directors being?

**Dr M. Byrne:** Dr Geoff Stoneman is the director of the forest and ecosystem management division.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** Do you publish that list of research priorities and the changes that have been made, and an explanation about how those decisions were reached?

**Dr M. Byrne:** The service delivery arrangements between the two divisions is an internal process that we go through, so it is not a formal published document.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** Right, okay. Who uses the services? You have research projects going on; let us just take the Manjimup office, which is in the middle of my electorate and also the middle of the forest. Who is using the services that are provided by the research component—the science and conservation people who are working out at Manjimup?

**Dr M. Byrne:** The forest management service area of the department is the key user of the information that is provided through the forestry research that is undertaken. It is used to support the direction of the forest management plan.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** Have you started considering the implications of the privatisation of the Forest Products Commission?

**Dr M. Byrne:** Sorry, could you say that again? I cannot quite follow.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** Have you considered the implications of the possible privatisation of the Forest Products Commission?

**Mr J. Sharp:** In relation to—I am not aware. We have not been set a date. That is not part of our —

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** So you have not considered it at all or you do not think it will have any effect on the —

**Hon HELEN MORTON:** Can I just interrupt that and say that I think that that is not related to the budget per se. That is a supposition that you have made in some form or another.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** We have got major expenditure on the forest management plan. Page 646 of the Parks and Wildlife budget talks about major expenditure—net cost of service is nearly \$11 million and \$10 million in the year to come. Clearly this is a financial proposition.

**Hon HELEN MORTON:** I think that that is a government policy matter that you might need to refer directly to the minister. It is not something that the agency is involved in.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** So there has been nothing to do with preparing for the privatisation of the FPC?

**Hon HELEN MORTON:** I do not even know that such a thing is happening. It is your idea that such a thing is happening.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** It is in the budget. It is on the list.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** It is in the budget. Do you not discuss the budget at cabinet meetings?

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** It is probably even part of the open tender process.

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**Hon HELEN MORTON:** I will just say that —

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** Order, please. We are having three conversations at the same time. As I said earlier, Hansard has enough trouble picking up one conversation at a time sometimes because of the acoustics when we are all sitting down, so please: the question has been asked and the minister is attempting to answer it; let the minister finish her answer.

**Hon HELEN MORTON:** I will just say again that the agency has said that they have not had any discussions about it, they have not been involved in any considerations on it, and if you want any further information over and above that, it might need to be directed to the minister.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** Interesting cone of silence over that one.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Surely I think it is reasonable for us to ask that because the budget clearly outlines that one of the proposals to be considered this year by government is the sale of the Forest Products Commission. You might not be aware of it minister, but it was in the budget and in the speech you read out, in fact. I think we are entitled to know what the impacts on the operation of this agency will be should the FPC be sold, because it clearly will have impacts on it, and whether this agency is doing any work on what those impacts will be and how it will manage those impacts? That is not an unreasonable question for estimates.

**Hon HELEN MORTON:** No-one said that it is unreasonable. The answer has already been given. But if you want just a tiny weeny bit more clarification around the area, the director general has got some more information. But I do not think it is an issue about whether the Forest Products Commission is being privatised; that is not the issue.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** No, the issue is what the impact for this agency will be, and that is why we are asking the question during this agency's session.

**Mr J. Sharp:** The only announcement I am aware of in that regard is that a commitment has been made for the government to consider the sale of pine plantations, not the sale of the Forest Products Commission. It is the sale of pine plantations, which are located on land some of which is state forest, so that would be the consideration. That is not the forest management plan as such. In terms of these services, these are the services we will be providing to the Forest Products Commission in relation to its responsibilities in native forest management and in plantations where they require those services. The question of the sale of the Forest Products Commission as a whole is not one that we have given any consideration to, nor are we aware of any policy commitment in that regard.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** But will it have impacts on your agency should those pine plantations be sold?

**Hon HELEN MORTON:** I am just indicating again that that answer has been given. There is no consideration taking place at the moment around the sale of the Forest Products Commission and the director general said that no discussion has taken place in this respect.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** My question was: will it have an impact on the agency? Which is different to whether there is —

**Hon HELEN MORTON:** You are really asking a theoretical kind of question that —

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Only if you are arguing that your whole budget was only theoretical, minister.

**Hon HELEN MORTON:** Those things have not been considered is what I am saying Hon Ken Travers; therefore, the answer is: it has not been considered.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** So were you misleading the house in the speech that you gave here about the budget, when you said that these things were under consideration by government?

**Hon HELEN MORTON:** Your question is: has it been considered by the Department of Parks and Wildlife, and they have said —

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** No, my question was: what are the implications for the department?

**Hon HELEN MORTON:** And it has not been considered by the department is the answer you were given.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** That is very negligent then, if you are going ahead with the sale of something and an agency that is impacted has not been allowed to make any consideration of the impacts. That is extraordinary, minister. That is extraordinary.

**Hon HELEN MORTON:** I know you pursue this as if that information has been considered by the Department of Parks and Wildlife, but it has not. The information has been given to you about that.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Clearly not, which I find quite extraordinary.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** Hon Ken Travers, I think you have had an answer to your question. You might not like it, but you have had an answer to your question. I think Hon Sally Talbot indicated she had finished her area of questioning for the moment.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** I do have a second area.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** Perhaps I will move around to the other members because I have at least three other members, and then if I get an opportunity, I will give you a second go. You are the first person who has asked for a second go, so you will kick off first.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** First, I refer to page 645 and subsection 2 under “Services and Key Efficiency Indicators”, which is “Conserving Habitats, Species and Ecological Communities”. Could I get an update, perhaps from the director general, with respect to the Perup Sanctuary? Are we continuing to get some positive results with respect to woylie recovery and any other native animals and endangered species that are within this sanctuary?

**Hon HELEN MORTON:** Before the director general makes a comment, can I just say that it obviously an area of great interest to you, given the work that you did as Minister for Environment in that area to start with. I would be very interested for an update on this as well.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** It is a personal interest.

[10.20 am]

**Mr J. Sharp:** There is considerable work being done around the recovery, using Perup as the centre for the recovery of the woylie. I ask Dr Margaret Byrne to answer that in more detail.

**Dr M. Byrne:** Certainly the Perup sanctuary has been very successful. The woylies that have been recovered within that sanctuary have undergone a lot of breeding, so we have had a large recovery in the population there, so much so that we have been able to use that as a source population to translocate animals out into wild areas where we have cat and fox baiting going on. We can then re-establish wild populations into the natural areas where they were. More recently we have done a translocation into Dryandra Nature Reserve as well, so we have been able to take animals and recreate a population at Dryandra. There are around 400 woylies now in Perup sanctuary and they are breeding very well and are actually getting beyond the carrying capacity of the sanctuary, so we are now able to move them out and establish other populations out into areas where we have active fox and cat baiting to reduce the predation pressure and establish populations in the wild.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** That is very good news. I will continue to ask that question every budget estimates. I refer now to page 648 under “Works in Progress” and perhaps for ease, because I recognise the time, could I get an update on both the Great Kimberley Marine Park and the new Kimberley national parks in terms of their establishment, particularly with respect to the proposed joint management arrangements?

**Mr J. Sharp:** Yes, there has been considerable progress in the creation of the Camden Sound Lalang-garram Marine Park and the Eighty Mile Beach Marine Park. Progress is being made on the management planning for the creation of the Horizontal Falls marine park and for the north

Kimberley marine park as well as terrestrial reserves. The Minister for Environment released the indicative management plan for Roebuck Bay Marine Park, which again is part of that overall strategy, last Friday. So they are all progressing. They are variously engaged. We have had successful conclusion of Indigenous land use agreements with several of the groups and they are entering into joint management and are progressing joint management arrangements with other groups. If you want more detail about where that is specifically, Mr Sharp may be able to give more detail.

**Mr P. Sharp:** The draft IMP for Horizontal Falls marine park and also the draft management plan for Horizontal Falls National Park are currently being considered by the Marine Parks Reserves Authority and the Conservation Commission. They have been drafted jointly with the Dambimangari Aboriginal Corporation and their members. We would anticipate that the draft plans will be released in the next few months for public consideration and comment.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** Remind me again, how long, once they are out for public comment, is it three months for the public comment period?

**Mr J. Sharp:** Yes, the period is usually a minimum of three months and there may be additional time given if that is over the Christmas season or whatever.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** Again, still on the page 648, under “New Works” and perhaps this might be a question on notice. Under the park improvement plans could I get a list of the proposed parks that would get some improvements this financial year?

**Mr J. Sharp:** Yes, we could take that on notice and provide the detail of the works that are proposed.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** Including the nature of the improvements. I would take that as a given, but if we could be all encompassing that would be great.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** It is always good to spell out exactly what you are looking for, including the nature of the improvements so there is absolutely no confusion.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Can we get that information for the out years as well? I think Hon Donna Faragher asked for the next year, but if we can have it for the out years.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** Let us add them all in.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** All right, if we can have them for the period of the forward estimates.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** We need to take into account that some of the ones in the forward estimates might not be formalised and confirmed just yet by the departments. I think we need to take that into account.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** They are a pretty good agency.

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** I know they are pretty good.

*[Supplementary Information No A5.]*

**Hon DONNA FARAGHER:** Finally, I refer to page 647, “8. Protection of the Swan and Canning Rivers System”. Could the minister or the agency please provide an update for me on the progress of the nutrient stripping wetland currently being constructed at Bayswater’s Eric Singleton Bird Sanctuary? I know that work commenced on that earlier this year. I am keen to find out where that is at and when it is likely to be completed.

**Mr J. Sharp:** That is a very important program for improving the quality of water in the Swan River. I ask Mr Hughes to respond to where that is at and what recent activities are being undertaken.

**Mr R. Hughes:** In the Eric Singleton Bird Sanctuary, the major part of the earthworks has now been completed. We did have two interruptions with rainfall, which is great to get but we just did

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not want it quite now, so we have had a couple of delays which will add probably about four or five weeks to the finishing off of construction. That mainly relates to the entry point through the sedimentation basin at the front end of the wetland and some repairs works caused by the damage to the drain, unfortunately. Fortunately, we still have all the equipment there to deal with that. At the same time, though, we have started the planting. We put in some 11 000 plants last week and that will be the start of some 150 000 plants to be going in around the edge of the wetland. Essentially, it means that the wetland will come into commission this winter.

**Hon ADELE FARINA:** My first question is in relation to the new DPaW offices. Can I get clarification in relation to lots 881, 882 and 883 Koombana Drive? In whose ownership do they currently sit?

**Hon HELEN MORTON:** Can you clarify the page number?

**Hon ADELE FARINA:** It is total appropriations, the first page.

**Hon HELEN MORTON:** Page 641?

**Hon ADELE FARINA:** You are proposing to build the new offices and I am trying to check who has got ownership.

**Mr J. Sharp:** As I indicated in an earlier response, work is being done by environmental and heritage consultants. I do not have that information right in front of me, but that is part of the land assembly process that is undertaken, but I can take that on notice.

**Hon ADELE FARINA:** I understand that the lots have recently transferred ownership and I am not clear to whom, so if that can be taken on notice please.

*[Supplementary Information No A6.]*

**Hon ADELE FARINA:** My understanding is it is the intention that stage 1 will be large enough to cater for 100 FTE; is that correct

**Mr J. Sharp:** That is correct.

**Hon ADELE FARINA:** From where are those FTE coming? How many of those are transfers from the existing Bunbury office of the department?

**Hon HELEN MORTON:** These questions have been asked already in estimates. I know the member was not in the chamber at the time. The information has been asked about precisely how many staff are involved and where they are coming from et cetera. I am happy for the director general to go over it again, but I am aware that most of the information so far that you have been requesting, other than ownership, is information that has been asked and answered.

**Hon ADELE FARINA:** Minister, the reason I am asking the questions is that I have been asking these questions in Parliament. We are getting different answers every time we ask questions, so I am seeking clarification now face to face.

**Mr J. Sharp:** The first stage, you are correct, will cater for 100 staff with the intention that there be 300 located on that site eventually. The first stage of the development will be for 100 staff. Those 100 staff will be in addition to the staff that are already located at the regional office who provide regional functions, and it will be headquarter functions and centralised functions. They will all be staff located from elsewhere into Bunbury—the first 100 into the Bunbury office.

**Hon ADELE FARINA:** I am having difficulty with that answer. Are you saying that all the staff currently located at the office on South Western Highway will remain located at that office and will not to be transferred across to the new offices on Koombana Drive?

[10.30 am]

**Mr J. Sharp:** Yes, that is the intention.

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**Hon ADELE FARINA:** Then why did the minister, when he made the announcement of the new offices, say—it has been reported in the media—that he expected only the firefighting staff members, a small component of the staff members, on South Western highway to remain at that office, and the rest of the staff would be transferred to the new offices?

**Mr J. Sharp:** That is not my understanding of what the minister said and the commitment that he has made. The discussions and our planning will be that 100 additional staff will be located in Bunbury at headquarter facility. The current regional services provided into the region directly will be provided from the existing facilities.

**Hon ADELE FARINA:** So those 100 staff members are all coming from Perth?

**Mr J. Sharp:** I do not know whether they will all come from Perth, but the intention will be that they will be coming from functions that are provided in Perth, so one could assume that they will come from Perth.

**Hon ADELE FARINA:** What happens if the staff member who currently holds the position—the FTE position in Perth—does not want to relocate?

**Mr J. Sharp:** The process by which people are relocated and, if you like, regionalised through a decentralisation mechanism is one that we are giving consideration to, along with the Public Sector Commission and others as to how that might occur. There are a number of ways and strategies in which that can take place.

**Hon ADELE FARINA:** When the decision was first announced before the last election in relation to the new DPaW office in Bunbury, when it was announced in relation to the Turkey Point location, there was a \$3 million commitment for scientific research into the Leschenault Inlet. I am just wondering whether that money has been withdrawn, because I cannot find it anywhere in the budget.

**Mr J. Sharp:** My understanding, and I may stand corrected, but that \$3 million is incorporated into the \$18 million allocation that has been allocated for the Bunbury headquarters.

**Hon ADELE FARINA:** Yes, but only \$15 million is actually required for construction of those headquarters, and when it was proposed to be built at Turkey Point, \$3 million was going to be directed towards scientific research for the Leschenault Inlet. That money is very much needed, but there has been no mention of it since the decision was made to relocate the new offices to Koombana Drive, so I am just asking: has that funding commitment for that scientific research been dropped, because what we are hearing from the mayor of the City of Bunbury is that that \$3 million will be used to upgrade the boardwalk around the mangroves and Big Swamp?

**Mr J. Sharp:** The \$18 million allocation includes the \$3 million which was for enhancement of the inlet. Part of the proposition for the 100 people and the functions that are going to be located in Bunbury is that those high-level scientific and other activities that take place will be available locally, and that will be part of that contribution into managing the inlet.

**Hon ADELE FARINA:** So there is going to be money available for scientific research into the inlet?

**Mr J. Sharp:** The specific allocation will be determined, and how it is allocated, but there will be effort expended in the management and the science of the inlet, and that is part of the logic of relocating a significant part of our headquarters to Bunbury.

**Hon ALANNA CLOHESY:** I refer to page 643. How much was expended on the Ellen Brook wetland to remove nutrients from Ellen Brook in 2014–15?

**Mr J. Sharp:** I will ask Mr Hughes if he could respond with a figure.

**Mr R. Hughes:** There was a combined \$3.2 million over four years for both the Ellen Brook wetland and the Bayswater Brook wetland. So, \$1.2 million of that went to Bayswater —

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**Hon ALANNA CLOHESY:** How much went to Ellen Brook?

**Mr R. Hughes:** Two million dollars went to the Ellen Brook wetland in the previous period. That wetland is now going through the last stages of commissioning. We are just testing the nutrient-stripping basin, and then hoping for some flow to come through the Ellen Brook wetland as the winter sets in.

**Hon ALANNA CLOHESY:** What was the delay in the implementation of the project?

**Mr R. Hughes:** I am not aware that there has been any delay in the implementation of that wetland.

**Hon ALANNA CLOHESY:** It was delayed by six months in the first instance.

**Mr R. Hughes:** Well, it might have been week-by-week delays, but in a project of that size, I do not think that is a major departure from the plan. It is ready as a safe commissioning for this winter.

**Hon ALANNA CLOHESY:** For 2015–16, how much has been allocated?

**Mr R. Hughes:** As I say, the construction for Ellen Brook wetland is now largely complete, and so there is no major budget allocation for that project. There will be ongoing maintenance and management by staff, so that would be staff time and I could not give you a figure for that.

**Hon ALANNA CLOHESY:** Okay; I still understood that there was some work to be completed from 1 July, and that would require a budget allocation.

**Mr R. Hughes:** Well, as I say, the works are largely complete. The work we are doing now is simply to commission the wetland itself, which involves pumping from the Ellen Brook into the nutrient-stripping basin, and then that flows back into the waterway. There is no major works program scheduled for 2015–16.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** Minister, on page 641, under “Spending Changes”, there is an item listed as “Biodiversity Audit and Hydrological Monitoring, Off-Reserve Conservation” There are savings of \$1.5 million this year, and the same in the out years. Can you tell us what that is about?

**Mr J. Sharp:** As indicated, as a review of all of our activities and functions, line by line, consideration was given to what levels of hydrological services were required, given the range of factors, including a drying environment and our alternative ways of realising the information that we needed. That was a review of hydrological monitoring, but I can ask Dr Margaret Byrne to be more specific.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** Yes, and as you pass it over to Dr Byrne, can I just ask: are we talking about two things here? Is there a biodiversity audit and hydrological monitoring?

**Mr J. Sharp:** Yes, you are talking about two different items.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** And off-reserve conservation, so three things?

**Mr J. Sharp:** Off-reserve conservation, yes; three. Yes, there is.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** Can you give me an explanation of what each of those three things involved, and how much money is being cut from each of them?

**Mr J. Sharp:** I will ask Dr Byrne to explain what the components are. I do not know that we can give a precise breakdown of each, but we could possibly take that on notice.

**Dr M. Byrne:** Yes, certainly. There are several areas in the hydrological monitoring area. Under the salinity action plan, we were involved in developing recovery catchment management plans; most of those have now been finished and completed. There was hydrological monitoring of watertables going on to inform the development of those catchment management plans. That is now with the production of the plans and the broader context—that recovery catchment is going to be needed across a broad natural resource management framework, because most of the activity is going to be required to be off conservation reserves. We do not need to continue that level of hydrological

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monitoring. So there is a reduction in hydrological monitoring associated with no longer needing that information because it has already been supplied to develop the recovery plans.

[10.40 am]

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** What is the biodiversity audit?

**Dr M. Byrne:** We produced the first biodiversity audit in 2002, which is an assessment of the amount and condition of biodiversity across the state according to the IBRA regions in the state—the Interim Biodiversity Regionalisation of Australia regions across the state. We decided to do an update of that audit in 2013. We have collected all information across the state for the amount of biodiversity and the condition of that biodiversity and have collated that into a database and that database is now available. We have completed that piece of work so we do not need to have that level of investment in that area.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** When is the next biodiversity audit planned for?

**Dr M. Byrne:** We have no ongoing plans for an audit. They are done as a snapshot in time. We have done these two now at 10 years apart. We will review further down the track if we consider there is a need to undertake another one.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** But the audit now becomes publicly available on the website.

**Dr M. Byrne:** Not at this point. The audit database is available as a database. We have produced that database and our staff are using it now in conservation planning in the regions. We will evaluate how that is working and if we need to do any refinements to that database before making it potentially publicly available.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** When would you expect the audit outcomes to be made public?

**Dr M. Byrne:** We have to have a discussion around that and we will review how much of that can be made public in relation to the database that we have got and what the capacity of that is.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** What does that depend on? What sort of decision is that, whether you make it public or not?

**Dr M. Byrne:** That is a decision that I need to make with the director general. We will review the information that is available and what we do. A large amount of the information is already available within the 2002—Vizwik produced a very fat, large audit document as well as a synthesis and summary of it. A lot of that information and the background information is already available in those documents and this is just a snapshot update at 2013.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** I imagine that there would be a lot of people with a very keen interest in seeing how things have progressed during that 11 years. Are you saying that the audit outcomes in 2002 were published?

**Dr M. Byrne:** They were published as a book. It is a very large, thick book that is available —

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** When was that published?

**Dr M. Byrne:** I do not have the exact date but around 2002 or 2003 is the time frame that that audit publication was —

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** So you may or may not publish the 2013 audit report?

**Dr M. Byrne:** It has been done in a slightly different way. We have captured all the information and we have captured it into a database that can then be used in conservation planning to access the information. We are not planning on releasing a large document that then kind of sits on a shelf. We have that information in a more interactive form in a database.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** So who uses it? Is it available for use by planners or other government agencies or who?

**Dr M. Byrne:** At the moment, internally, our staff are using it. We want to evaluate how well they are using it and how well it meets their functions before we then make it available to others—if we find it is working effectively and we can get the right information, or whether we need to invest more effort into just refining the database to make it publicly available.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** How many staff in DPaW and other agencies were involved in the audit and what has been the cost of doing the 2013 audit to date?

**Dr M. Byrne:** Sorry, I cannot give you an estimate of the cost directly.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** We might just put that on notice.

*[Supplementary Information No A7.]*

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** I will try to be as quick as possible and I appreciate succinct answers so I can ask more questions. Back to page 645 and service area through conservation partnerships. I want to ask about other off-road conservation initiatives. Can the minister or the agency confirm that the DPaW's mallee industry research and development program will cease to operate in 2015–16; and can you advise me what the basis is for that decision?

**Mr J. Sharp:** I will ask Dr Margaret Byrne to give the detail around that. Again, that is part of that review and when a process came to a conclusion and when its funding source came to a conclusion, but I will ask Dr Margaret Byrne to give the detail.

**Dr M. Byrne:** Thank you. The oil mallee research program was carried out in association with the Future Farm Industries CRC and the work that has been done was funded through that CRC. That CRC came to a conclusion in June 2014. We have the bulk of our research finished in conjunction with the finish of that CRC. We have done a small amount of continuing work this last year to tidy up a few loose ends around that but we will not be continuing that given that the large research function that was associated with that has now been concluded.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** How many staff were involved or working on that program and therefore will not be there anymore? What was the FTE number?

**Dr M. Byrne:** The FTE number varies depending on whether you include what level of staff we had and what level was included in association with partnerships with the Future Farm Industries CRC.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** I might ask for that by way of supplementary information, please.

*[Supplementary Information No A8.]*

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** I have another quick question on the same dot point. Again, has the Roadside Conservation Committee also been abolished this year; and, if so, how many staff worked in that unit on that program in 2014–15? If it has not been abolished, how many staff will work or provide support to the Roadside Conservation Committee in 2015–16 and onwards?

**Mr J. Sharp:** As such, the committee has not been abolished. It provides important functions and draws representation from a range of different sources to assist in that process of encouraging the protection of vegetation on roadsides. The support for that in terms of its costing and staffing will be answered by Dr Margaret Byrne.

**Dr M. Byrne:** Certainly, the Roadside Conservation Committee is supported by two staff; an executive officer and technical officer who undertook mapping of vegetation on roadsides. The large proportion of the mapping on roadsides work is now complete and we are amalgamating those two functions into one function. We will still provide executive support to the committee and undertake a smaller amount of the roadside mapping in key strategic priority areas.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** I have one final point on page 642 and the dot point that talks about the preparation of a new biodiversity conservation act. This dot point has probably been in

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numerous budgets over the last eight to 10 years. When will we finally see a new, long-promised biodiversity conservation act?

**Mr J. Sharp:** Yes, you are correct. There has been something like over 20 years of discussion and consideration, and more vigorously perhaps over the past 10 years. The Premier has made the commitment that it will be introduced before the end of this year.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** What has been the delay, Mr Sharp? I know you guys run a tight ship and do a good job. Has it been the fact that the agency could not get its act together and get a document finalised or have there been other reasons?

**Mr J. Sharp:** Is this in reference to the full 20 years or more recently?

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Certainly in reference to the last seven years.

**Mr J. Sharp:** There has been considerable work done in relation to the biodiversity conservation bill, preparing a bill, and there has been much consultation within government taking on board all of those comments and all of the positions that have been put over that period of time. We think it has been a good process of arriving at a bill, which will meet the government's policy commitments.

[10.50 am]

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** I look forward to seeing you next year, Mr Sharp, and there being a line item in the budget that says we have created a new biodiversity conservation act. I will ask you some questions then too.

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** Just in reference to page 648, on the "Completed Works" program I see there is "Firefighting Fleet Replacement" of just under \$4 million a year. Then in "New Works" you have also "Firefighting Fleet Replacement" of just under \$4 million—it is rising by a hundred thousand dollars or two. Is that for new firefighting units or upgrading existing firefighting units?

**Mr J. Sharp:** I will ask Mr Dans to outline our program of upgrading and replacing our firefighting fleet.

**Mr P. Dans:** The department operates a fleet of around 100 heavy-duty fire appliances or trucks and I think it is 18 pieces of heavy earthmoving equipment—bulldozers and front-end loaders. They generally have a workable life of around 10 years, so about 10 per cent of that fleet of 100 trucks is turned over each financial year. It varies a little bit; it might be 11 in one year and then nine the next. Usually, one or two pieces of heavy earthmoving equipment are replaced each year as well.

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** Some of the existing units that you have that may not be at the end of their lives may need safety additions or upgrades. Is that something that falls within that budget?

**Mr P. Dans:** No. There was provision made for a firefighter safety makeover, if you like, of all of our heavy firefighting fleet of trucks in the 2013 midyear review. That was in response to the tragic burnover incident at the Black Cat Creek fire in Albany. Those works have been completed and include deluge spray systems for the cabs, the replacement of some plastic components, roll-down radiant heat shields for the windows in the cab, the shielding of hydraulic and electrical lines and the like. That program was completed well before the southern bushfire season commenced around about November 2014.

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** Just on the completed works, there is the line item "Firefighting and Fleet Equipment—Carryover". Could you just explain what that is? It is \$361 000 a year.

**Mr P. Dans:** Excuse me, member, are you referring to the "Retro Fitting Heavy Fleet—Carryover"?

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** It does not really explain what it is. It just says, "Firefighting and Fleet Equipment—Carryover", \$361 000 a year.

**Mr P. Dans:** I think that refers to the funds that I mentioned that became available in the 2013 midyear review. They carried forward into that 2014–15 financial year and finished the works, as I said, around about November in 2014.

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** Has there been any calculation of the direct cost to the department of dealing with the Walpole–Denmark fires?

**Mr J. Sharp:** Yes. There is an ongoing calculation of the cost, but we have an estimate of costs, if Mr Dans can make that available.

**Mr P. Dans:** Yes. The current cost of the O’Sullivan fires—the Northcliffe fire—is about \$14.14 million. That includes all of the costs associated with the eastern states’ deployment of firefighters from Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland; and the firefighting aircraft that came from the eastern states as well. So, those components alone.

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** Just one last question: is there any calculation of the number of volunteer hours that were used for those fires?

**Mr P. Dans:** I think that question would be best put to the Minister for Emergency Services.

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** Okay; thank you.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** We have got them coming up next. Very quickly, Hon Ken Travers.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Next Wednesday—a very exciting day for the department I am sure—you get 598 525 extra hectares of land to look after. Where is the money in the budget to manage those lands? I cannot find it. Could you give me the line item?

**Mr J. Sharp:** In reference to?

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** The land that is coming over from the pastoral leases on Wednesday. You must be excited; I am.

**Mr J. Sharp:** There is a range of lands that are still in the process of transition. Some of those lands that will be transferred are subject to specific funding, such as the Ningaloo coast, and there is a process of rationalising that. We will be taking on the responsibilities within our current budget. There is not a specific line item; they will be managed by the regions and the districts depending on —

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** So you are getting almost 600 000 additional hectares next Wednesday and you do not have a single additional dollar to manage that land. Is that what you are saying?

**Mr J. Sharp:** We are going to manage it within the existing resources that are made available to us.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** What areas will be cut back in existing lands that you manage to allow you to manage the new lands—the 600 000 extra hectares you get. That is still the figure, is it not? I assume it has not changed since last year.

**Mr J. Sharp:** I will ask Mr Peter Sharp what is the exact figure; it is around that figure, yes.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** It is a lot of extra land to manage from existing resources. Surely, you must be getting some additional money to do that?

**Mr J. Sharp:** We are not getting additional resources. We are doing it within the resources that we have available to us. Currently, we manage for fire, ferals and weeds, some extra 80 million hectares in relation to unvested crown land which we take responsibility for. We manage that within the resources we have, reassigning priorities for those lands and according to the values that they have.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** That is what I asked earlier. What areas are you having to cut back on to then allow you to create resources to manage this additional land? There must be some cutbacks occurring elsewhere in terms of what you do to reprioritise.

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**Mr J. Sharp:** The reprioritisation will take place in the districts and regions where those lands are located.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Can we get a list of what those reprioritisations will be—what activities will be changed?

**Mr J. Sharp:** That will depend on what level of management input is required. It may not require any great management input in this first year. In terms of fire plans, those sorts of activities, we will incorporate them into a planning process and be ready for suppression on those lands.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** People already complain about your poor performance with respect to controlling wild dogs on your land. Do you have any management plans in place to make sure that wild dogs do not establish in the 600 000 hectares you pick up on Wednesday? I thought you would have done it, Rick, already!

**Mr J. Sharp:** In terms of our land management responsibilities, we prioritise where there are issues such as ferals and weeds and there are fire risks across the whole landscape. It is a matter of just adding those to the landscape that we look at in terms of setting those priorities. It is not done as a case by case of saying we will not undertake that activity, but rather we will do the highest order activities. It is a responsibility we take every day in terms of managing the responsibilities that we have.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** It must be tough to get 600 000 extra hectares and no extra money, but I wish you all the best with that, then.

In terms of the Gngangara pine plantation, how many hectares do you get given back as needing revegetation because you have had the pines cleared off it each year? In hectare terms, what is the amount of land that is cleared each year and at the moment is just being left to go to weeds? So, how much do you get each year?

**Mr J. Sharp:** Off the top of my head, I cannot answer the rate of clearing on an annual basis in terms of removal of pines, but the consideration of the future of the Gngangara mound and particularly the pines over the top of that area are part of the state strategic assessment process, and that is under consideration by government.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** One of the things that strikes me is that it seems to be the way in which the land is being left at the moment increases the fire risk, so what risk assessment have you done in terms of the land when it is left in a very weedy state regarding the fire risk that it creates on your land and neighbouring properties because it is not being properly managed at the moment?

**Mr J. Sharp:** Perhaps I could respond by saying you could barely say it is not being properly managed.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** I am happy to go for a drive through it with you at some stage and show you the bits that are just left to weeds.

**Mr J. Sharp:** There is a specific allocation—Mr Dans may be able to help me—in terms of managing the Gngangara pine plantation area and certainly the areas we make publicly available. Also, there is a specific allocation from the FPC in relation to fire management where we provide a specific fire service, which enables additional patrolling and an increased capacity to suppress. But there is an annual allocation for the management of that area.

[11.00 am]

**Mr P. Dans:** There is an active program to deal with post-harvest woody debris. Obviously, that is heaped and burned as part of the prescribed burning program.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** The area is left and goes to weed and invasive species and all sorts.

**Mr P. Dans:** After disposing of the harvest debris, as the director general indicated, a lot is waiting for the outcome of the strategic assessment.

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**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** We will have to wind up there.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** Just one last question on this.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** It will have to be very short. Short question, short answer.

**Hon KEN TRAVERS:** How much does the Forest Products Commission give you each year for fire suppression, and how much does that reduce by each year because the area they have pines on is reduced?

**Mr J. Sharp:** I will need to take that on notice in terms of the actual allocation. It does not reduce each year directly in relation to the area that is harvested but I can derive that figure for you. It is part of an overarching about \$7 million.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** We understand what the question is.

*[Supplementary Information No A9.]*

**The DEPUTY CHAIR:** Thank you, members. I am sorry we did not get around to everyone who still had questions to ask but it shows the level of interest in this area from members of this chamber.

The committee will forward any additional questions it has to you in writing in the next couple of days, together with the transcript of evidence, which includes the questions you have taken on notice. Responses to these questions will be requested within 10 working days of receipt of the questions. Should you be unable to meet this due date, please advise the committee in writing as soon as possible before the due date. The advice is to include specific reasons as to why the due date cannot be met. If members have any unasked questions, I ask them to submit these to the committee clerk at the close of this hearing. On behalf of the committee, thank you all for your attendance today.

**Hearing concluded at 11.01 am**

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