

Chairman; Dr Steve Thomas; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Peter Watson; Mr Max Trenorden; Mr Mick Murray; Ms
Jaye Radisich; Mr J.A. McGowan

Division 46: Conservation and Land Management, \$171 546 000 -

Mr M.J. Cowper, Chairman.

Mr M. McGowan, Minister for the Environment.

Mr K.J. McNamara, Executive Director.

Mr G.J. Wyre, Director of Nature Conservation.

Mr A.W. Walker, Director Regional Services.

Mr J.R. Sharp, Director National Parks.

Dr J.C. Byrne, Director Corporate Services.

The CHAIRMAN: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard staff. The daily proof *Hansard* will be published at 9.00 am tomorrow.

The estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated fund. This is the prime focus of the committee. While there is scope for members to examine many matters, questions need to be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount within the volumes. For example, members are free to pursue performance indicators that are included in the budget statements while there remains a clear link between the questions and the estimates.

It is the intention of the Chairman to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered, and that both questions and answers are short and to the point.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee, rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. For the purpose of following up the provision of this information, I ask the minister to clearly indicate to the committee which supplementary information he agrees to provide, and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the committee clerk by 9 June 2006, so that members may read it before the report and third reading stages. If the supplementary information cannot be provided within that time, written advice is required of the day by which the information will be made available. Details in relation to supplementary information have been provided to both members and advisers, and accordingly I ask the minister to cooperate with those requirements.

I caution members that if the minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice with the Clerk's office. Only supplementary information that the minister agrees to provide will be sought by 9 June 2006.

I acknowledge the presence in the gallery today of students from the Eaton Primary School, in the Leschenault area. I welcome them to the Parliament of Western Australia. The member for Capel will ask the first question.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: I refer the minister to the major policy decisions on page 814 and to the budget for such. The first item listed in the table is biodiversity conservation. It is listed in other areas as well, so I could link it to other points. However, what is the breakdown of the estimated expenditure, and in which areas it will be spent, of \$8.25 million for the coming financial year and the \$4.5 million for the following year?

Mr M. McGOWAN: I thank the member for the question. As the member will note, there has been a substantial increase in the budget for the Department of Conservation and Land Management for the coming financial year. That is particularly directed at a biodiversity blitz in which we will put particular effort into dealing with some of the feral flora and fauna infesting the state. As the member would be aware, coming from a regional electorate, there are significant issues in country WA, and, unfortunately, prospectively in metropolitan WA also, that need to be dealt with. Therefore, the conservation dividend will increase expenditure on pest, animal and weed control by an amount in the order of \$4.8 million per annum, with a further \$750 000 per annum allocated to fox and cat control research, as well as significant expenditure on fencing. We will put more effort into dieback management, salinity management, threatened species conservation and associated research and biological survey. Additional funds will also be allocated to some of the issues to do with cane toads in the north of the state. I am working with the Department of Agriculture and Food on issues to do with starlings. We will work out the details of a lot of the other spending as the year goes by.

I went to the Treasurer about this issue. The potential impact on biodiversity of these introduced species is of great concern to me. Although Western Australia has been extremely adversely affected by them, to a large degree it has not been affected as adversely as have the other states, as the member would be aware, coming from Queensland. We would like to keep it that way. Of course, introduced birds have not had the same impact

Chairman; Dr Steve Thomas; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Peter Watson; Mr Max Trenorden; Mr Mick Murray; Ms
Jaye Radisich; Mr J.A. McGowan

in the metropolitan area. The member for Capel will recall that when he lived next door to the Brisbane River, the mynahs used to fly around the colleges there and they drove out many of the native species. Western Australia has not suffered that sort of impact, and we would like to keep it that way. These funds will be used to achieve that.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: Does the minister have a breakdown in any form that can be tabled, or, if it cannot be tabled in this hearing, sought as supplementary information, about not just the projects that the government intends to spend the \$8.25 million and \$4.5 million on, but also the geographical areas in which it intends to spend it, or is that still to be determined?

Mr M. McGOWAN: That is still being worked on. I want to put particular emphasis on dieback in an attempt to try to contain it to where it is at the moment. As the member knows, we have a phosphite spraying campaign. In particular, dieback infests some of the national parks in the south west. They are the jewels in our conservation crown. I am particularly keen to put some effort into managing dieback in those areas. We will work out many of the other details throughout the year. However, as I said before, we will work on fox and cat eradication, and we will put some effort into the eradication of cane toads. We are currently conducting a review into how to best spend that money in any event. The details will be worked out throughout the year, but the member can be assured that there will be a comprehensive effort to eradicate feral animals and introduced flora throughout the state, and, as I said, I would like to put some effort into managing dieback.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: I admire the minister's optimism in the forward estimates. I suspect that by 2008-09 the department will have many of these conditions and feral species under control, because the additional funding for biodiversity conservation drops from \$8.25 million this year to \$4.5 million next year, and then to \$750 000 the following year. Is that not being a bit optimistic about how much control the department will be able to manage to achieve in that time? Why does that funding start to decrease significantly two years down the track?

[2.10 pm]

Mr M. McGOWAN: We will see what happens in future budgets. However, the member will note from this year's budget papers that the percentage change in the appropriation for CALM is an increase of 11.3 per cent in real terms, or 14.1 per cent in nominal terms. That is a significant increase.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: I accept that. However, the government is holding onto the remainder of that money for a pre-election year.

Mr M. McGOWAN: It is a significant increase. We will see what happens in future years. I understand the member's point. However, we are dealing with this year's budget. I am very pleased with the funding for CALM.

Mr P.B. WATSON: The ninth point on page 824 of the *Budget Statements*, under "Major Initiatives For 2006-07", states -

Complete negotiations with the Shire of Albany for transfer of Mt Martin Reserve to the conservation reserve system.

That is interesting, because it is quite a few years since we have had a shire of Albany. It is probably a misprint. Can the minister explain how CALM is dealing with those negotiations for the transfer of the Mt Martin Reserve?

Mr M. McGOWAN: I will refer that question to Mr Jim Sharp.

Mr J.R. Sharp: There have been ongoing negotiations about the future of a number of reserves. The Gull Rock Reserve negotiations have recently been completed. The issue of the Mt Martin Reserve has been raised, and negotiations have been undertaken locally, with indications that that process could be successfully concluded in the near future.

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: The fourth dot point on page 814, under "Significant Issues and Trends", refers to the management of fire for biodiversity etc. Can the minister provide details of the target burn areas for the 2006-07 budget, including the location, size and budgeted amount; the estimated actual for the burn program over the past two financial years; and the forward estimate for the following two years?

Mr M. McGOWAN: I thank the member for Avon for the question. I will answer the question in general terms, and I will then ask Mr McNamara to answer in more specific terms. As the member would be aware, CALM has a program to burn around 200 000 hectares a year. That means, in effect, that every eight years or so, every area is burnt. The program is designed to prevent the incidence of a large bushfire that has the potential to not only kill the forest but also destroy towns and dwellings and so forth. There has been some controversy about CALM's burn program, particularly in the winegrowing areas in the south west of the state.

Chairman; Dr Steve Thomas; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Peter Watson; Mr Max Trenorden; Mr Mick Murray; Ms
Jaye Radisich; Mr J.A. McGowan

The National Party has been very supportive of CALM's burn program. In fact, the member for Stirling put out a press release in which he congratulated CALM on its burn program and said he thought it should continue. However, at the same time a Liberal upper house member for the region was very critical - I suppose I could put it that way - of the burn program and said it needed to be changed. The burn program will always be controversial, and people will always have different views on this matter, ranging from the conservationists, who think there should be fewer burns, and other interests who think there should be more burns. I am confident that CALM is achieving a good mix. With regard to which areas are burnt, and when, CALM has a rolling program built around meteorological data, and history and experience.

Mr K.J. McNamara: We anticipate that by the conclusion of the 2005-06 financial year, CALM will have spent about \$6.6 million on prescribed burning, about \$11.3 million on wildfire suppression, and about \$7.1 million on planning, training, detection and equipment, and all the other things that go along with fire management, giving a total expenditure of about \$25 million. The 2006-07 budget includes an extra \$1.9 million for our fire management functions. We will continue with the program in the south west of seeking to achieve about 200 000 hectares of prescribed burning, as well as fire management and fire preparedness throughout the state on the areas that we are responsible for managing. In the previous year, 2004-05, we achieved 213 000 hectares of prescribed burning in the south west. That was slightly in excess of the target that we set for ourselves. So far this current financial year, as at 19 May, the figure sits at about 163 000 hectares. We will be continuing with that prescribed burning in the coming weeks, subject to suitable weather. We have had a wetter season in the southern forests of the state than was the case last year, so this year we will probably be a little short of last year's achievement of 213 000 hectares.

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: We are aware of the difficulty with the weather and those sorts of things. Would the minister be able to provide by way of supplementary information some detail about what CALM intended to do last year and what it was able to do, what CALM intends to do in the forthcoming budget year, and what CALM intends to do in the following year? We are interested in knowing the areas.

Mr M. McGOWAN: We can provide that by way of supplementary information. I think the member for Avon is asking for last year. Did he also say the year before that?

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: The previous year.

Mr M. McGOWAN: So this year and last year -

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: Two years past and two years future.

Mr M. McGOWAN: So the member is seeking information for five years?

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: No - two years past, so last year's budget and the previous year's budget; this budget; and what is proposed in the budget after that.

Mr M. McGOWAN: So it is four years. We can provide that by way of supplementary information.

The CHAIRMAN: Would the minister please state exactly what information he will be providing.

Mr M. McGOWAN: CALM's prescribed burning program for the past two years, and for this year and next year; that is, the areas that are expected to be burnt during the remainder of this year, and next year.

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: We do support the program.

[Supplementary Information No A62.]

Mr M.P. MURRAY: This question follows on from the previous question about prescribed burning. I have been getting some complaints about the large tracts of land, or large bodies of forest, that are being burnt at the one time. Some people are complaining that the burns are affecting the biodiversity of the area because they are done as one complete burn rather than a part burn. Does CALM have any plan in the future to reserve some areas so that they are not included in a large burn?

Mr M. McGOWAN: I thank the member for Collie for the question. It is a good question. I am aware that some people in the conservation movement have some concerns that the prescribed burning program is having an effect on biodiversity and that some areas are being burnt too often, and, as a consequence, certain species of flora, and even fauna, are becoming threatened. They have indicated that they would like some areas, particularly those that have significant areas of biodiversity and are some distance from settlements or houses, to be reserved out of the regular burn program to allow the biodiversity of the area to recover. I understand a Council of Australian Governments' report provided some support for that way of dealing with prescribed burns. I have an open mind on this matter. CALM is examining that matter, and I will ask the adviser to provide some advice on that matter in a moment. The impact of fires is also causing problems in the north west, particularly in both the east and west Kimberley. Those fires, which are not prescribed fires but are essentially arson, are

Chairman; Dr Steve Thomas; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Peter Watson; Mr Max Trenorden; Mr Mick Murray; Ms
Jaye Radisich; Mr J.A. McGowan

having a significant impact on not only biodiversity but also some of the ancient Aboriginal rock art in that area. I think some of that art is what is called the Bradshaw art. Those fires are very difficult to deal with because of the distances involved, as the member would be aware. That is an issue that we need to come to terms with in that part of the world. I will ask Mr Alan Walker to provide more information on the proposal the member is talking about.

[2.20 pm]

Mr A.W. Walker: The department's objective in prescribed burning in the south west forest areas is to achieve a diversity of fire frequencies, season of burning, intensity of burning and scale of burning. Included in the prescriptions, quite deliberately, is a mosaic of burnt and unburnt areas. That varies from burn to burn. Some burns may be 70 per cent with 30 per cent unburnt, and other areas may have 60 per cent burnt and 40 per cent unburnt. In almost every burn there are some areas left unburnt. There are also areas called fire exclusion reference areas, which are identified throughout the south west. The aim is to keep those areas excluded from fire as a scientific reference area or benchmark from which to compare areas that have been burnt under the controlled fire regime.

Ms J.A. RADISICH: I refer to the fifth dot point under "Major Achievements For 2005-06" at page 819 of the *Budget Statements*. It refers to the preparation of the timber harvest plan with the Forest Products Commission. The minister may be aware that the Helena 02 and 03 coupes were previously listed to be logged. They are not included in the 2006 harvest plan. There is concern among people in my community about logging state forest in priority one catchment areas, which could potentially increase salinity and turbidity in the local streams and water courses etc. What is the position of the Department of Conservation and Land Management concerning logging so close to Mundaring Weir?

Mr M. McGOWAN: I thank the member for the question. As she will recall, I visited some of those areas in her electorate. It is certainly a very beautiful part of Western Australia. The member is very lucky to represent it.

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: Lucky to win the election!

Ms J.A. RADISICH: Twice!

Mr M. McGOWAN: The people of Swan Hills are very lucky to have the member. The logging program is a controversial issue. The member was not elected when it was more controversial in this house five or six years ago. It was extremely controversial and subject to many debates; so much so that the member for Cottesloe said during that time that it was the biggest issue ever to confront the Parliament in Western Australia. I think those were his exact words.

Ms J.A. RADISICH: The member for Cottesloe also said that the forest near the water catchment area should be concreted!

Mr M. McGOWAN: He did. He has differing views depending upon what time of the year it is.

Logging is a complex issue. As the member will be aware, CALM was intimately involved in the process of logging at the time. After we came to office we separated the issues and created the Forest Products Commission. This budget removes the financial connection between the Forest Products Commission and CALM, which existed until now. The financial connection was that the Forest Products Commission paid a fee of around \$7 million per annum for CALM's services in approving the forest management plan. That separation is now complete. We do not have that perceived conflict of interest as of this budget. It has essentially concluded the process of the forest protector being a perceived part of the process by which the forest is logged. That is a good outcome.

I am unaware of the coupes in the member's electorate. I will ask Mr McNamara to answer that question.

Mr K.J. McNamara: I am not very familiar with the specific coupes and when they will be on the forward logging plan.

Ms J.A. RADISICH: They are not on the forward logging plan. I would like to keep it that way.

Mr K.J. McNamara: The areas that are available for logging and those that are unavailable are set down in the government's old-growth forest protection policy, which started in 2001. The forest management plan gives effect to that policy. There is a rolling three-year forward harvest plan that is prepared under the forest management plan. The precise forward harvesting plans and the community consultation over those plans is the responsibility of the Forest Products Commission and not CALM. The Forest Products Commission is the agency that is responsible for the harvesting of timber and the sale of timber products.

Chairman; Dr Steve Thomas; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Peter Watson; Mr Max Trenorden; Mr Mick Murray; Ms
Jaye Radisich; Mr J.A. McGowan

Mr M. McGOWAN: As I understand it, there is a three-year rolling plan, which belongs to the Forest Products Commission. It may refer to a coupe for logging two years hence or whatever. The next year a particular coupe may not be in the rolling plan. As Mr McNamara said, the Forest Products Commission decides what is there and CALM works out whether it is acceptable as part of the forest management process. I cannot give the member any better advice about the two coupes. We could possibly talk about them afterwards. We certainly will not be concreting them!

Dr S.C. THOMAS: I refer to the sixth dot point at page 814, which refers to unallocated crown land. I will have to tease out my question a little. It is my understanding from briefings with various departments that unallocated crown land has not necessarily been within the active purview of CALM. What control does CALM have over unallocated crown land and what proportion of its budget has gone to controlling unallocated crown land to date?

Mr M. McGOWAN: There has been a very big increase in the amount of land that CALM is responsible for. Most of that land is unallocated crown land. There are some issues to do with neighbouring pastoralists who have concerns about feral animals which they claim are venturing from those lands into the pastoral leases. CALM has allocated some funds for dealing with that problem. I expect that, from the boost funding this year, more effort will go into dealing with feral animals. I am advised that the area in question is 89 million hectares. I will ask Mr McNamara to provide further details.

Mr K.J. McNamara: The area of unallocated crown land and unmanaged reserves outside the Perth metropolitan area and town sites is, as the minister said, 89 million hectares. The administrative responsibility and the on-ground responsibility for the land used to rest with the former Department of Land Administration. As part of the government's functional review in 2003, it was decided that from July 2003 CALM would assume on-ground responsibility for feral animal and weed control and for fire preparedness across those lands, because the judgment was made that, as a land management agency with a regional presence, CALM had the capacity to do that work and integrate it with other field activities throughout Western Australia. That was a preferred outcome over the previous regime, under which the land was administered by the former Department of Land Administration.

The expenditure on the function of managing unallocated crown land was approximately \$1 million at the time. That figure has grown through subsequent increases in the fire management budget and the cost of the control of feral weeds and animals. I estimate that the cost of providing fire management and feral species control in the coming year will be in the vicinity of \$2 million. A very high proportion of that amount will be directed towards neighbour relations with pastoralists and other adjoining landholders.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: I was not pushing to learn about neighbour relations just yet. I will ask about that later. At this stage I am inquiring into the overall land area that CALM is required to administer. Effectively, it cost CALM about \$1 million in 2003 to administer fire and feral species services over 89 million hectares. The cost is now about \$2 million. Is that for 2005-06 or the 2006-07 budget?

Mr K.J. McNamara: The original \$1 million was allocated in 2003. That amount remains in the budget. There have been subsequent increases in the 2004-05 and 2006-07 budgets. The most recent increases are for biodiversity conservation, with an emphasis on controlling feral animals and weeds. My estimate is that spending will increase to \$2 million for 2006-07.

[2.30 pm]

Dr S.C. THOMAS: Is the \$2 million that is expected to be spent in 2006-07 on the unallocated crown land outside of the other areas? What area of land did CALM have administration of, and management over, prior to the additional 89 million hectares being placed under its control? On a per hectare basis, I suspect that CALM has been dealt a dud hand by being given only an extra \$1 million.

Mr K.J. McNamara: The area of land that CALM manages under the CALM act as national parks, state forest, nature reserves, conservation parks, timber reserves and other lands is in the vicinity of 24 million hectares across the state; that is, 10 per cent of the state. The vast bulk, but not all, of CALM's budget is spent on those lands. It is more costly to manage lands in south west of the state where there is more intensive land use, more recreational access and a much higher number of neighbouring communities and issues to deal with and a lot of visitation to parks such as the Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park and so on. It is more expensive to manage those lands than it is to manage vast areas of desert lands in the interior, which make up a large portion of the unallocated crown land. More money per hectare is spent on the national parks and nature reserves and so on than is spent on unallocated crown land.

Chairman; Dr Steve Thomas; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Peter Watson; Mr Max Trenorden; Mr Mick Murray; Ms
Jaye Radisich; Mr J.A. McGowan

Dr S.C. THOMAS: With regard to that expansion, CALM is responsible for feral animal, weed and fire control. Now that CALM has been given full management control of unallocated crown land, are any additional functions required of CALM? Large portions of the 89 million hectares are yet to be surveyed. The government has no idea whether there is a weed problem in a great portion of the 89 million hectares of land because it does not have that information.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Mr McNamara set out the truth of the matter. Some parts of the state's crown land, regardless of the title arrangement, require more money to manage than do other parts of the state. Under the old-growth forest management strategy, the government spent more than \$25 million on facilities and upgrades to those areas. To put this into context, in the last full year of the previous government, CALM's budget was \$67 million, and it is now \$170 million. Despite some factors, there has been a real increase to CALM's budget. I will let Mr McNamara answer the specifics of the member's question.

Mr K.J. McNamara: CALM was not allocated formal responsibility for all the unallocated crown land. The administrative responsibility and all the legal responsibility still rests with the Department for Planning and Infrastructure as the government's crown land agency. CALM has been allocated responsibility for the feral animal and weed control and the fire preparedness response, but not the bush fire response. As I said, that was effectively a continuation of an existing budget allocation that was transferred to CALM because it was judged that, because of our regional presence and our integration with other activities, the transfer of the existing allocation from the former Department of Land Administration to CALM would provide a more efficient delivery of services and the government would get more bang for its bucks. That is all that happened at that time.

Mr P.B. WATSON: I refer the minister to the management of fire for biodiversity and the protection of private and public assets under the fourth dot point on page 814. Will the water bombers be based in Albany again this year? They have been very successful over the past two summers. Has money been put aside in the budget for the water bombers to return to Albany?

Mr M. McGOWAN: I assure the member for Albany that it is at the top of our priority list.

Mr P.B. WATSON: It is relevant to not only Albany, but also Esperance and the other regions it services. It is a tremendous service.

Mr A.W. Walker: CALM has a fleet of eight fixed-wing water bombers, two of which are stationed in the metropolitan area, two in Bunbury, two in Manjimup and two in Albany. The funding for the two water bombers in Albany is part of a recurrent allocation that was made several years ago. That funding will continue, which will enable the two water bombers to be based in Albany. As the member for Albany mentioned, the water bombers can be based in other areas, which gives us a wider span of utility for the fixed-wing water bombers to attend to fires across the south coast. In the current fire season the water bombers east of Esperance have proved very effective in attacking a series of lightning strikes that could have become large fires. They are very effective at quite a distance away from their home base in Albany.

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: I refer to the third dot point on page 814, which is the management of state forest for timber production. The lack of access to CALM forest to collect timber for combustion fires is a serious issue in Avon. Although the collection of timber is not directly CALM's problem, the access to timber on CALM's land is. Last year the timber used by pensioners in the Avon valley came from the south west. It was green jarrah and was burnt in places such as Northam. I would like to know what the air pollution was like at those times. Again, that is not a CALM issue but the point is that the cost for combustion fuel for people in the Avon Valley who do not have a great deal of money is enormous and is putting a lot of pressure on families who must pay between \$120 and \$140 for a tonne of timber. Why can the three contractors who substantially supply firewood for pensioners and other people in the Avon Valley not access CALM land?

Mr M. McGOWAN: I will defer to the executive director.

Mr K.J. McNamara: I may need some assistance from Mr Walker to elaborate on this answer. The law prohibits the collection of timber on CALM land that is either a national park or a nature reserve, although it is possible to access firewood from state forests. We have gazetted firewood areas in the northern jarrah forest, and that system is being extended further south as demand increases. Access to firewood is a minor forest produce outcome of the logging activities of the Forest Products Commission, which also manages a supply regime. Mr Walker may be able to elaborate on that.

Mr A.W. Walker: The allocation of public firewood areas for the collection of firewood off the ground generally follows about two to three years after the completion of timber harvesting. To my knowledge there has been no recent commercial timber harvesting in the area about which the member spoke. Therefore, there is no

Chairman; Dr Steve Thomas; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Peter Watson; Mr Max Trenorden; Mr Mick Murray; Ms
Jaye Radisich; Mr J.A. McGowan

opportunity to declare an area a public firewood area. That situation could be examined. If representations are made to the district manager, perhaps a public firewood area could be allocated to supply people from the area.

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: I appreciate that. The people I am concerned about are not people such as me; they do not have combustion stoves. Many pensioners and people on the bottom of the economic ladder in the Avon Valley are desperately struggling to get firewood. There are three or four contractors in the area, and they are located at Beverly, York, Toodyay and Wandering. If they could access an area within a reasonable proximity to Avon so that the price could be kept reasonable, CALM would win a few fans in the Avon Valley.

[2.40 pm]

Mr M. McGOWAN: More than I have at the moment.

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: The minister has a few already, and we will talk about that later in the day.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I will follow up on that. I will not supply it by way of supplementary information as it is not exactly supplementary information.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I have a follow-up question to that.

Mr M. McGOWAN: In Collie as well?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Collie is very similar. I refer to the recent logging of the Palmer state forest block. After it was logged, people were not allowed into the area to collect craftwood or firewood from the ground. That is of great concern, because once the tops dry out and a fire is put through the area, a lot of that wood is wasted. It is a pointless exercise if people are not allowed into the area to collect fire wood. The same criteria apply in Collie. It is a nice cool spot in winter, as some people opposite would know. There is no access to natural gas in the area, as there is on the coast. People should be allowed into those firewood areas as soon as possible.

Mr M. McGOWAN: There is plenty of coal though!

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: And he has \$10 million!

Mr M. McGOWAN: The member always carries some coal in his pockets! I will follow up on that issue informally for both members. I do not know whether we will do it for the member for South Perth's area, but we will do it for Collie and Northam. Someone will get back to the members.

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: I appreciate that.

Mr J. McGRATH: Last year I went to the Karijini National Park and I was amazed at its beauty. I thought to myself that it was a hidden treasure of Western Australia. I know that the minister has been to the national park. I think he got there the day after some people were lost.

Mr M. McGOWAN: It was the same day.

Mr J. McGRATH: They were lost overnight. The national park is a beautiful place, but I reckon that Edmund Hillary would battle to get up and down those climbs to get to the bottom. I do not know whether the minister did the climb. Does the department see this as a great tourism opportunity; and, if so, how much money will be put into the park and what sort of arrangements will be made with Tourism WA? Is the department keen for the national park to be marketed as an international tourist destination for Western Australia?

The CHAIRMAN: Can the member refer to a page number?

Mr J. McGRATH: I am referring to the significant issues and trends listed on page 813. The fifth dot point refers to increased interstate and international recognition of Western Australia's natural attractions.

Mr M. McGOWAN: It is a magnificent place. I had a very interesting experience when I visited the national park; it was the same day that the tourists went missing. When I was there, they just happened to go missing overnight. It was colder there that night than it is in Collie. I wish I had had a bit of Mick's coal with me, because it was freezing. The member for South Perth is right; it is difficult to get up and down some of the gorges. That is an attraction for some people. People from other countries and major cities often look for rugged and difficult things; they like that sort of adventure. At the same time, however, we like to ensure that all segments of the population are properly catered for. We have a \$14.9 million capital works program for park facilities and tourism roads, and that will include \$550 000 to improve visitor facilities, access and safety in Karijini and Millstream-Chichester National Parks. I will ask Mr Sharp to elaborate on what that money will be spent on.

Mr J.R. Sharp: There has been considerable expenditure over the past few years in Karijini National Park, particularly to make safe the lookouts, which are the primary places that the majority of visitors go. There is another \$70 000 in funding this year specifically for visitor risk; that is, to improve access and safety and to add to the signage information that is already there. On promoting the Karijini National Park, it is the major tourist

Chairman; Dr Steve Thomas; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Peter Watson; Mr Max Trenorden; Mr Mick Murray; Ms
Jaye Radisich; Mr J.A. McGowan

attraction in the Pilbara and major private investment is about to commence. The Gumala Aboriginal Corporation has won the right to develop a tent camp site. In addition to the camping venues that are there, there will be a purpose-built facility that will cater for coach tours and others. That will commence, hopefully, within the next month or so.

Mr J. McGRATH: Can there not be a five-star hotel?

Mr J.R. Sharp: In terms of its position in that environment, this tent camp will be better than a five-star hotel, because it will be appropriate to the experience and of good quality at the same time.

Mr M. McGOWAN: It will be one of those tent resort-style arrangements that have been established at Ningaloo and Purnululu. I have stayed in the one at Purnululu. They are better than a resort. They have much more charm and they are interesting.

Ms J.A. RADISICH: People have to stay in a tent?

Mr M. McGOWAN: It is a very attractive tent, member for Swan Hills.

Mr P.B. WATSON: For the minister to lower himself to stay in a tent, it would have to be a flash one!

Mr M. McGOWAN: Members would be pleasantly surprised at how nice the tents are.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I would worry about his snoring coming through the wall!

Mr M. McGOWAN: They are two-person tents and they are very good. The Gumala Aboriginal Corporation is looking at developing the site. It has been a long process to get to this stage. The Department of Conservation and Land Management is working with Tourism WA on the proposal. Tourism WA is very keen to proceed with the resort. As members will be aware, we have our Landbank proposal, which was launched last year. That proposal is destined to get six of this style of resort up and running quickly in national parks around the state. We often find that national parks are pristine places, and a lot of the conservation movement says that we should not allow people to stay in the parks and we should not set up these sorts of establishments in them because of the nature of the parks. The fact of the matter is that people will stay in the parks anyway. If we can control and confine the areas in which people will stay, some protection will be provided for the parks. I visited the Purnululu National Park with some members of the conservation movement, and I think they saw the logic of that. That is what has been proposed for Karijini National Park.

On the issue of safety at Karijini National Park, two people have been killed in the park in the past couple of years. One was an Irish tourist who fell from one of the gorges and the other was an SES volunteer who was rescuing someone from the bottom of the gorge when a flash flood came through. It is a dangerous place. We nearly lost 11 foreign tourists on the day that I visited the park. It was a very close call. Safety is quite important, and we do have CALM staff there who are trained in all these aspects.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: The fourth dot point on page 813 refers to the increasing interaction with private industry, individuals and other government agencies to conserve flora and fauna on private and public lands. This issue has arisen in the Shire of Waroona, and there have been talks about a shared ranger. Is that still the case or will it cease? There is an overlap of land; some land is unallocated, some is CALM land and some is private land in the shire. I believe that the shire is in desperate need of a shared ranger. Some antisocial behaviour is creeping in at Lake Navarino, and all people should be represented in that case.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Unfortunately, last year or the year before, a young girl died at Lake Navarino as a consequence of a branch falling from a tree onto a tent in a camp site. It was one of those unbelievably coincidentally tragic incidents; it was just terrible. There is a camp ground at Lake Navarino. There is some community concern. I think that the Shire of Waroona has a concern that a lot of people from out of town go to the area and behave in a lawless fashion. There is a lot of drinking, trail-bike riding and unsociable activity that scares the locals away. They were hoping that a CALM ranger presence would sort that out. I understand that the land in question - I will defer in a moment - is not controlled by CALM, which puts some difficulties in the way of CALM rangers enforcing the law if CALM does not control the land. I also understand that the member was going to provide me with further information on the issue, so that we could work with both the member and the Shire of Waroona to try to resolve the issue. I am still awaiting that information from the member for Collie-Wellington.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: It is ready to be e-mailed.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Did the member for Collie-Wellington say it is in the mail?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: A draft proposal about sharing a ranger has been put forward. It is a bit disappointing that after progressing this far, CALM is walking away from it. Although the shire does not want CALM to fix

Chairman; Dr Steve Thomas; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Peter Watson; Mr Max Trenorden; Mr Mick Murray; Ms
Jaye Radisich; Mr J.A. McGowan

the whole issue - it is certainly agreeable to a shire ranger with more sweeping powers - a contribution from CALM would be most welcome.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I defer to Mr Sharp to see whether he has anything further to add to what I have outlined.
[2.50 pm]

Mr J.R. Sharp: I do not have any further information about the proposal. I would certainly need to look at it. A management plan for Waroona was developed 10 years ago between what was the Water Authority of Western Australia and CALM. That plan is still in effect. It sets the parameters for managing that area. I am not specifically aware of a plan for a shared approach.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Will there be further talks between CALM and the shire?

Mr J.R. Sharp: Yes, there would need to be further discussions.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I am still waiting for the information. After I receive it, we will have further discussions.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: The fifth dot point under "Outcomes and Key Effective Indicators" on page 816 of the *Budget Statements* relates to the most recent estimates of kangaroo populations commercially harvested. The number of red kangaroos has increased. The number of grey kangaroos decreased in 2005-06 and is set to increase in 2006-07. What is the proposed number of kangaroo culls for 2006-07? Why are there no culling figures for the euro kangaroo? When was the last proper survey of euro culls that could be used as a target? It is my understanding that a survey has not been conducted since 1993.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I will defer to Mr Gordon Wyre, the director of nature conservation.

Mr G.J. Wyre: The current population of the red kangaroo is 1.08 million. The current population of the grey kangaroo is 1.47 million. The red kangaroo goes through a natural cycle in response to rain. At the moment the red kangaroo is at a low point in its cycle. We expect that the good seasonal conditions in the Pilbara and upper Gascoyne over the past six to nine months will significantly increase the red kangaroo population this year. The grey kangaroo population is at a record high as far as the surveys go. We maintained euro quotas until 2000. The commonwealth government changed the terms of the information that it requires for a euro quota. After a series of meetings with the Kangaroo Management Advisory Committee over the past two years, we put together a proposition that was sent to the commonwealth government at the end of last year. However, it knocked us back on a euro harvest quota for this year. It is not satisfied that we have an accurate population estimate of the euro in Western Australia. A meeting of the state Kangaroo Management Advisory Committee will be held next week to consider where we go from here.

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: I refer to the sixth and seventh dot points on page 814 of the *Budget Statements*. The minister has announced some changes recently. As the minister would be aware, under the old system Northam had had a CALM office for some time. However, CALM remains unrepresented in the central wheatbelt. That is a problem because a significant range of land in that area has to be looked after, and that involves private landholders. Can we get CALM representation in the central wheatbelt?

Mr M. McGOWAN: Is this a dorothy dixer, member for Avon?

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: No. I am aware of the changes. I was hoping that the minister was already onto this, because it is an issue.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I will develop more of a fan club in Northam shortly. The total number of CALM staff in the wheatbelt region is expected to increase from 46.5 full-time equivalents to 63.5 FTEs. The distribution of staff will change. CALM will open a new Northam office with 10 staff in 2006-07. Staff numbers at the Narrogin and Merredin offices will increase. Unfortunately, the number of staff at Katanning will be reduced from 12 to nine. However, as the member will be aware, in overall terms the number of CALM staff has been increased by 16 or 17 FTEs, with 10 of those being located in Northam.

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: Obviously, I can release that information locally to make sure that I nail the minister to the wall!

Mr M. McGOWAN: The member for Avon can inform his local area that he forced me into it during the parliamentary estimates hearings. I will make sure that the member for Avon is prominent during the opening of the new office.

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: I do not mind the minister releasing that information; I am happy to back him up. I appreciate the fact that there will be an office at Northam. This is important news. Many people will be interested in that announcement.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I will circulate an announcement in Northam shortly.

Chairman; Dr Steve Thomas; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Peter Watson; Mr Max Trenorden; Mr Mick Murray; Ms
Jaye Radisich; Mr J.A. McGowan

Mr M.W. TRENORDEN: I look forward to that announcement being made in Northam. I am happy to back the minister up.

Mr M. McGOWAN: We will make a wonderful tag team promoting the interests of Northam!

Ms J.A. RADISICH: I refer to “Service 4: Parks and Visitor Services” on page 822 of the *Budget Statements*. I have scanned the budget papers for the work that is due to be done at Hills Forest Discovery Centre. I understand that upgrades have been planned to service the people who use that facility, which is in my electorate. Will the minister explain what works are due to occur and how much money will be spent, because I cannot find a reference to it in the *Budget Statements*?

Mr M. McGOWAN: It is part of CALM’s capital works budget of \$14.9 million, which is referred to on page 826 of the *Budget Statements*. That money will be spent on major capital works to enhance visitor facilities, access and safety in national parks in the East Metropolitan Region. One million dollars has been allocated to complete the \$1.5 million environmental education centre in the Canning River Regional Park and \$150 000 has been allocated for improvements to the Fred Jacoby Park, which is part of the Mundaring National Park. What was the member referring to again?

Ms J.A. RADISICH: The Hills Forest Discovery Centre.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I will have to provide those details by way of supplementary information.

The CHAIRMAN: What is it that the minister will provide by way of supplementary information?

Mr M. McGOWAN: I will provide information about the Hills Forest Discovery Centre.

[*Supplementary Information No A63.*]

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I refer to the growing threats to the state’s biodiversity from pest animals, weeds, dieback etc, which are referred to in the second dot point on page 813 of the *Budget Statements*. The other night when I was travelling home a deer ran across the road, which was quite an experience. When I travelled along the same road the next day, I saw that the deer did not make it back, because it was dead on the side of the road. Some animals, such as pigs, are adapting to their surroundings and thriving. The same can be said about some caged birds - I do not refer to starlings - that have been released. Broadly, what is being done to eradicate the problem of pest animals, including the cane toad and the fish that were referred to in *The West Australian* the other day? How much has been budgeted to address this problem?

[3.00 pm]

Mr M. McGOWAN: The threat from feral animals is something I intend to focus on as Minister for the Environment. The introduction of feral animals and exotic flora, and what it has done to native creatures in a lot of places around the state and the country, is tragic. Their spread continues. I recently received a letter from the commonwealth government about the potential introduction of bumblebees into Australia. The state government’s advice was sought on the introduction of bumblebees into Western Australia. The scientific name is *Bombus terrestris*. Apparently they are quite helpful in the pollination of tomato crops, and apparently some tomato growers would like these bumblebees to be introduced in Western Australia. The potential impact of these bumblebees is dire. The reason I say that is that in other jurisdictions where they have been introduced, they have destroyed local native bee populations. They enhance the survival of weeds and other introduced flora in that they apparently assist in the pollination of those sorts of plants, which is, of course, very bad for native species, because the introduced plants drive out native flora. The bumblebees have the potential to be very damaging to a range of other species around Western Australia, including native birds such as honeyeaters. I have written back to the commonwealth government saying that we are vigorously opposed to the introduction of a new form of bumblebee in Australia and particularly in Western Australia, and that we want our opposition to be registered. I would have thought that we had learnt to not do this sort of stuff anymore, but apparently some people have not learnt that lesson. We will continue that campaign. They tell me that these bees could have impacts on all sorts of other creatures, including our magnificent forest black cockatoos, because they damage the habitat upon which they rely. We will not support the introduction of bumblebees here.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I refer to the fifth dot point on page 817 and the Good Neighbour Policy. The policy is of concern to some people. I use as an example the Yalgorup National Park next to the golf course at Preston Beach. I have counted nearly 200 kangaroos on the golf course fairway and have not been able to get a cull done. This is a problem that occurs up and down the coastline, and not only at Preston Beach. I have a weekend there, and every week there are dead kangaroos on the side of the road. The cost to the local community in car crashes is becoming a mess. People are really starting to get a bit cheesed off with it. My concern is that sooner or later, probably around this time of the year, a young kid will go to grab a golf ball from under a tree and he will suffer damage - big damage. Some of those older kangaroos just do not hop away. I

Chairman; Dr Steve Thomas; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Peter Watson; Mr Max Trenorden; Mr Mick Murray; Ms
Jaye Radisich; Mr J.A. McGowan

have heard the same in Capel and other places in the area. It is something that has to be looked at. Is there any intention to do that, because the current system does not seem to be working? They had a referendum in Preston Beach and of 200 people that returned the form, three were against the cull. That shows the extent of the issue. The people there do not want them wiped out, but they want them brought back to at least a reasonable number. To walk around the golf course and have to spray yourself because of the number of ticks is becoming unbearable.

The CHAIRMAN: Member, if that was a quick question, I would like to see a long one.

Mr J.A. McGOWAN: I invite Mr Keiran McNamara to provide you with some information.

Mr K.J. McNamara: Western Australia has devised the most flexible system in Australia for the control of kangaroos in the numbers that the member has referred to. We have a commercial kangaroo harvesting sector, which was referred to in an earlier question. That is subject to a quota ceiling that is set by the federal Minister for the Environment. In addition to the commercial harvest, there is access to open season arrangements through much of the south west, under which landowners can take control of kangaroo numbers on their own properties through shooting. In areas where there is not an open season arrangement, there are damage licence arrangements. I know that we issue many of these licences in the sorts of locations the member is referring to, including golf courses. Those avenues are available to landowners and land managers. It is not our role to carry out kangaroo culls.

The appropriation was recommended.