

FRIDAY, 19 JULY 2013

ESTIMATES—AGRICULTURAL, RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE—NATURAL RESOURCES AND MINES

Estimates Committee Members

Mr IP Rickuss (Chair)
Mr JN Costigan
Mr SV Cox
Mr S Knuth
Mrs MA Maddern
Mr MJ Trout
Ms J Trad

In Attendance

Hon. AP Cripps, Minister for Natural Resources and Mines
Ms S McDonald, Chief of Staff
Department of Natural Resources and Mines
Mr D Hunt, Director-General
Mr J Skinner, Deputy Director-General, Policy and Program Support
Ms S Ryan, Deputy Director-General, Service Delivery
Mr P Harrison, Deputy Director-General, Mine Safety and Health (Acting)
Mr S Bell, Commissioner for Mine Safety and Health
Ms K Platt, Chief Financial Officer

Committee met at 9.00 am



CHAIR: I declare open the meeting of the Agriculture, Resources and Environment Committee. I start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which this hearing is taking place today. I am Ian Rickuss, the member for Lockyer and chair of the committee. Joining me are Jackie Trad, the deputy chair and member for South Brisbane; Sam Cox, the member for Thuringowa; Jason Costigan, the member for Whitsunday; Shane Knuth, the member for Dalrymple; Anne Maddern, the member for Maryborough; and Michael Trout, the member for Barron River. Today we are here to examine the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2013 for the portfolios of Natural Resources and Mines; Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry; and Environment and Heritage Protection. Of course, this part of the hearing is for the Department of Natural Resources and Mines. We will be examining the estimates in that order.

The proceedings today are lawful proceedings subject to the standing rules and orders of the parliament. As such, I remind all visitors that any person admitted to the hearing may be excluded in accordance with standing order 208. In relation to the media coverage of today's hearing, we have adopted the guidelines prepared by the Committee of the Legislative Assembly for committee hearings. These guidelines have been distributed to the parliamentary press gallery and copies are available here this morning. The hearing will be broadcast live via the Parliamentary Service website. We extend a warm welcome to everyone who is picking up the broadcast.

The estimates process is an important part of the parliamentary scrutiny of the budget and the works of the departments. As laid out in schedule 8 at the back of the standing orders, we expect all departmental officers appearing today to provide full and honest answers to our questions. Anyone who is unable or unwilling to provide an answer should be prepared to state the reason. I also remind members that the departmental officers are not here today to give expert opinion on the merits or otherwise of the policies of government. That is the role of the minister. Finally, before we begin, can everyone switch off their mobile phones.

The first item for consideration is the estimates for the Department of Natural Resources and Mines. Welcome, Minister Cripps, Assistant Minister France and advisers. We will examine the estimates for your portfolio until 1 pm. We will begin by examining the estimates for land services and water services until 11 am. For the benefit of Hansard, I ask advisers, if you are called to give an answer, to please state your name before speaking. The committee has granted leave to the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Bundamba to participate in this section of today's hearing.

I now declare open for examination the proposed expenditure of the Department of Natural Resources and Mines. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, the committee has agreed that you may make an opening statement for 2½ minutes before each segment. Would you care to make your opening statement, please?

Mr CRIPPS: Thank you, and good morning, Mr Chairman and members of the committee. Before we begin, I will briefly outline the budget and the expenditure for the natural resources portfolio within the Department of Natural Resources and Mines for the current financial year. I would like to touch on some of the important programs the department is involved in to support the sustainable and responsible use of the state's natural resources for the benefit of all Queenslanders. The first budget presented by the Newman government last year began the enormous task of addressing some of the financial difficulties that Queensland faced when the Newman government came to office. The 2013-14 state budget continues that difficult but necessary effort to address those financial difficulties and will encourage the development of Queensland's four key economic pillars, being agriculture, tourism, construction and resources.

The natural resources component of my portfolio is an important part of the development of our regional economies, particularly the agricultural sector. Last year in this estimates hearing, I committed to ensuring that Queenslanders benefitted from the productive and sustainable use of the state's natural resources. Today I am pleased to say that we have honoured that commitment and we will continue to do so through the range of valuable programs my department is delivering.

It is the Newman government's belief that the vast majority of Queensland landholders are reasonable stewards of their land. To that end, we have shown a commitment to those primary producers who provide food and fibre for Queensland, for our domestic and international markets, by overhauling the burdensome, costly and time-consuming vegetation management legislation that was brought in by the previous Labor government back in 1999 and amended frequently since that time. Our predecessors were out of touch with rural landholders and, indeed, lacked empathy for the plight of farmers and graziers. They had lost confidence in a government that was supposed to support and encourage them to grow local communities and boost local job opportunities.

The Newman government, however, recognises and supports the efforts of our landowners, and the passing of the Vegetation Management Framework Amendment Bill earlier this year removes much of the unnecessary regulation that faced landowners. We encourage the sustainable economic development of our agricultural sector and of the regional communities that that sector supports.

Further in relation to regional communities, we have made important changes to the strategic cropping land regulations. We have released water from the gulf, Great Artesian Basin and Baffle water resource plan areas for agricultural and community use, and we have streamlined and simplified guidelines for landholders to remove fallen vegetation and debris from flood affected waterways. As a North Queensland, I am familiar with how severe weather events can impact on landholders. I know that initiatives such as this have helped them in their recovery effort.

We have demonstrated our commitment to regional communities through our \$80 million funding boost for regional natural resource management groups. This funding of the state's 14 regional NRM groups will ensure they can continue their important work with landowners to control pests, weeds and feral animals, improve water quality and develop more sustainable agricultural practices.

None of this work could have been successful during the last year and in the coming year without the support of my director-general, Dan Hunt, and my assistant minister, the member for Pumicestone, or the work of my ministerial staff and the departmental officers who support me. I take this opportunity to thank all of those people for their continuing hard work and delivering results for the people of Queensland.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. I might ask Michael Trout to ask the first question.

Mr TROUT: Thank you, Mr Chair. My question relates to page 4 of the SDS which refers to the release of water from the gulf, Baffle and Surat zone of the Great Artesian Basin. Would the minister elaborate on how the releases have been conducted and what additional water may be released to stimulate development in Northern Australia?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for the question. The Queensland government is taking a strategic and progressive approach to tackling the emerging irrigation water demands, particularly in the Flinders and Gilbert river catchments in North Queensland. In May this year, new water licences were granted from unallocated water following my announcement calling for tenders at the Northern Outback Irrigators Forum last year. A total of 80,000 megalitres was granted in the Flinders River catchment and 14,220 megalitres was granted in the Gilbert River catchment out of a possible 95,000 megalitres of unallocated water held in the general reserve under the gulf water resource plan for those catchments. The volume granted was three times the volume of water already held under existing irrigation entitlements in those catchment areas, which represents a real opportunity for new development in this area. In March this year I went to a property just outside Hughenden to announce the introduction of a bill into this parliament proposing changes to Queensland's vegetation management laws. Those reforms, in conjunction with the release of these new water entitlements, will provide new business opportunities for landowners with aspirations for irrigated agriculture to grow their farm businesses.

The next step in this strategic approach is to allow for greater flexibility within existing water licences to support further development by making licences tradeable in the Flinders and Gilbert river catchments, where it is practical to do so. Shortly after the new licences were granted from the unallocated water in the general reserve, the department commenced the process to amend the Gulf Resource Operations Plan to provide for trading in the Flinders River catchment. The department is on track to deliver a trading regime in the latter part of the 2013-14 financial year.

Since becoming the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines I have met many times with local government and irrigation representatives from the gulf region, and they are keen to see the government set aside more unallocated water for irrigation. I gave a commitment that I am willing to bring forward a review of the gulf plan if there was a strong uptake of unallocated water through the tender process and if the North Queensland Irrigated Agriculture Strategy research currently being undertaken by the CSIRO and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry showed there was more water that could be sustainably allocated from the Flinders and Gilbert rivers.

The North Queensland Irrigated Agriculture Strategy is expected to be finalised in December this year. I remain committed to waiting for this science rather than commencing a process based on unfinished science. In particular, I anticipate the CSIRO work to produce new hydraulic models that will help inform decisions about water availability and the implications of additional development on the health of the area's important environmental assets. I am determined to get the balance right between providing new opportunities to grow irrigated agriculture in the Flinders and Gilbert river catchments and ensuring the rights of existing water users and the needs of the environment are supported. In the meantime, the new water licences granted from the unallocated water release process and the development of a trading regime for water licences do provide a significant opportunity for water access to support and grow irrigated agricultural precincts in those catchments in North Queensland.

Mr COSTIGAN: Minister, I refer to page 2 of the SDS where it states that the Queensland government has allocated \$80 million over five years towards natural resource management. What component of this is directed to initiatives to protect and conserve the Great Barrier Reef?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member from North Queensland for his question. It is pertinent that he raises this issue. The Newman government is delivering on its commitment to provide continued funding to Queensland's 14 regional natural resource management bodies to support their productive and sustainable encouragement of the use of natural resources throughout the state. In 2012-13, the government provided \$11 million to fund the important work of the state's 14 community based regional bodies. The government is expectantly awaiting an announcement from the Commonwealth

government on its commitment to funding for Queensland's 14 NRM bodies. We are pleased to see the Caring for Our Country program commitment renewed and we are continuing to wait for the details of that funding to come through.

Regional NRM bodies are currently preparing project applications addressing the priorities for investment outlined for projects that may deliver outcomes over two or three years in terms of the Queensland government's NRM priorities. The program aims to maximise direct investment in on-ground activities that achieve important, enduring and largely public orientated outcomes. Unless otherwise specified, regional NRM bodies are required to demonstrate, in their application, how the proposed activities will deliver measurable on-ground outcomes addressing the relevant natural resource management priorities of the Queensland government investment program. This funding enables regional bodies to focus on on-ground outcomes and undertake their valuable work through strong partnerships with landowners, community groups, rural industry groups and all levels of government.

A new \$80 million Queensland regional NRM investment program will operate from 2013 to 2018. Over this period, \$55 million will be provided to regional NRM bodies to support a strong focus on on-ground projects and \$18 million for other natural resource management projects. Since becoming minister, and in discussion with landowners and other stakeholders, I have asked that the projects submitted by these groups focus on pest and weed control, sustainable agriculture and water quality outcomes. By directing funds to these key NRM themes, it is expected that we will be able to achieve greater environmental outcomes.

A sum of \$30 million will be delivered across the reef catchments through three primary programs: the Paddock to Reef Program, which involves monitoring and modelling on a catchment-wide basis; the Queensland NRM investment in the five Queensland reef regional NRM catchments; and the Queensland Wetlands Program. The Paddock to Reef Program is a world-leading approach to evaluating the effectiveness of agricultural land management practices that have benefits for producers as well as water quality outcomes. The program integrates data and information on the uptake of improved agricultural land management practices, the effectiveness and profitability of those practices, and catchment indicators and water quality. The predominant agricultural land management practices covered by the Paddock to Reef Program are grazing and cane in the Burdekin catchment, the Wet Tropics catchment and the Mackay-Whitsunday catchment; grazing and cropping in the Fitzroy region; and cattle, cane and horticulture predominantly in the Burnett-Mary region. The aim of working with these industry groups is to facilitate the uptake of best practice to improve the quality of water entering the Great Barrier Reef lagoon.

A further \$1.8 million annually is used to support intensive pollutant loads monitoring at key catchment and subcatchment sites, and departmental modelling of water quality and on-ground practice change and associated data management. These projects support annual report cards for the reef catchments. Those report cards are required by the government to measure progress against water quality targets under the Great Barrier Reef Water Quality Protection Plan. The five reef regional NRM bodies will receive \$3.7 million in 2013-14 to support reef water quality protection initiatives, sustainable agriculture, and pest and weed management. Through these initiatives and activities the government is dedicated to preserving the Great Barrier Reef and ensuring the environmental values of the reef are protected for future generations.

Mr COSTIGAN: The government has attracted severe criticism for changes to the Vegetation Management Act and the expected impact on the environment. Would you kindly outline what environmental impacts, if any, are expected from changes to vegetation management laws via the Vegetation Management Framework Amendment Bill 2013?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for the question. The Newman government implemented common-sense and balanced reforms to the Vegetation Management Act. These reforms do not encourage nor indeed allow for indiscriminate land clearing. My department will continue to monitor vegetation management activities across the state.

In the lead-up to the amending of the Vegetation Management Act a broad range of issues were raised by conservation groups regarding the reforms through submissions to and public hearings of the State Development, Infrastructure and Industry Committee. There were five key issues identified by conservation groups in response to these reforms. They were: the need for and implications of changing the purpose of the Vegetation Management Act to include reference to

sustainable land use; the impact of removing regrowth regulations from freehold and Indigenous land on threatened species; the Great Barrier Reef and greenhouse gas emissions; the length of time provided for consultation; and the potential for broadscale clearing to result from the new high-value agriculture purpose.

Economic development is a priority for the Queensland government, but these reforms do not signal that the government is relaxing environmental standards. The Vegetation Management Act will still apply over mapped remnant vegetation and the impacts on sensitive areas such as endangered regional ecosystems, wetlands, watercourses and essential habitat for threatened species will still be assessed. The requirement of vegetation offsets will still apply. This in turn will provide opportunities for our rural communities not only to diversify their on-farm activities but also to protect the environment at the same time.

It is stressed that the removal of the high-value regrowth regulation from freehold and Indigenous land will only return levels of native regrowth regulation to a similar level that existed to 2009. Having said that, the amendments do not repeal the protection of native regrowth vegetation located within 50 metres of watercourses in the Burdekin, Mackay-Whitsunday and Wet Tropics reef catchments. Other legislation that currently applies to the environment, whether it be Commonwealth, state or local government, will also continue to apply. The amending act does not change the way that other legislation is applied or implemented.

The government has put in place a stringent set of criteria to ensure the environmental impacts associated with clearing for the new purpose of high-value agriculture and irrigated high-value agriculture clearing are minimised, both before an application is accepted and during the assessment process. The Department of Natural Resources and Mines will continue to monitor the vegetation clearing through the state-wide land cover and tree study as well as identify areas of unauthorised clearing. The reforms do not change or weaken the penalties for unauthorised clearing in the Vegetation Management Act. Rather the changes address breaches of fundamental legislative principles.

The department will continue to work with relevant stakeholders to ensure the reforms are streamlined and practical, but sufficiently rigorous to ensure key environmental values are maintained. The changes to allow clearing for high-value agriculture and irrigated high-value agriculture are not without appropriate safeguards provided for in the bill. The need to demonstrate that the land is suitable for the proposed type of agricultural development, the associated business activity is viable and that there are no alternative sites already cleared where the development could be undertaken ensure that any agricultural development is appropriately targeted and undertaken in a sustainable way. The power in the bill for the declaration of a restricted high-value agriculture area provides a further safeguard to mitigate the risk of inappropriate clearing and contain activities that may lead to environmental degradation.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, I refer to page 3 of the SDS which sets out that your department has been progressing a framework for managing mining leases on North Stradbroke Island and also your answer to non-government question on notice No. 4. Minister, what proportion of the \$294,000 spent on developing this framework was spent negotiating with the Quandamooka people and what was spent negotiating with Sibelco?

Mr CRIPPS: Mr Chairman, in the first instance I will seek your guidance in relation to the question being asked during the proceedings on the Natural Resources part of my portfolio.

CHAIR: It is more a mining question.

Mrs MILLER: It is listed here on page 3 of the SDS. You can take the pain now, Minister, or you can take it later, quite frankly. I would suggest it is better to get it over and done with.

CHAIR: We did agree this morning—

Mrs MILLER: We did agree.

CHAIR:—that this would be a free-flowing session. Minister, you will answer the question.

Mr CRIPPS: I just pointed out that you nominated in your opening statement that we would be taking natural resource questions during the current session and mines questions later. I am certainly happy to answer the question.

For the benefit of committee, last financial year the Department of Natural Resources and Mines spent \$940,000 on implementing the current Indigenous land use agreement. The Quandamooka people directly received \$690,000 of that money as part of a \$2 million capacity

development grant. A further instalment of \$580,000 will be paid to the Quandamooka people in September of this year. The capacity development grant is to be used to engage business development consultants, undertake strategic planning, purchase office equipment and meet other corporate governance requirements.

I am advised that in addition to this the Department of National Parks, Recreation, Sport and Racing has also been providing monetary grants to assist the Quandamooka people in respect of the joint management arrangements for the national parks. The Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning has given \$200,000 to the Quandamooka people to undertake land planning studies.

In addition, under the Indigenous land use agreement significant compensation benefits are provided to the Quandamooka people and the state has paid a significant amount of compensation this year. The department has sought a carryover of \$1.37 million to the 2013-14 financial year, a significant proportion of which will be spent on surveys necessary for changes to land tenures provided for under the indigenous land use agreement for the benefit of the Quandamooka people.

Mrs MILLER: I refer again to page 3 of the SDS. On the Integrity Commissioner's website it has been disclosed that the government has had meetings on eight separate dates with Sibelco in two months including a meeting involving yourself on 1 May and meetings separately with your senior adviser on 9 May, 13 May, 28 May, 29 May and 19 June. I seek leave to table the documents from the website of the Integrity Commissioner and the disclosure returns of the Electoral Commission.

CHAIR: Leave is granted.

Mrs MILLER: Minister this is an extraordinary level of access. It is a filthy, dirty, rotten deal that is going down in your government, is it not?

CHAIR: Parliamentary language please.

Mr CRIPPS: No. In response to the member for Bundamba's question, there is nothing untoward about the government's intentions in relation to its plans for the continuation of sandmining activities on North Stradbroke Island to provide for a smoother transition away from this activity that has been undertaken on the island for many decades to new economic activities that can provide jobs for people in that community.

I might point out that the LNP was extremely clear both in 2011 when the legislation was brought before the parliament by the previous government and in 2012 during the election campaign that we would be providing for a smoother transition from sandmining activities on North Stradbroke Island to alternative economic activities to ensure that there were opportunities for the community on the island to have jobs that would provide livelihoods for people on the island. Since becoming the minister I did meet, as the member for Bundamba indicated, Sibelco and I challenged them to come up with their best possible package of alternative proposals about the future of their sandmining activities on North Stradbroke Island.

They went away and did that. They did that in consultation and contact with people from my department. They did that at my request because I challenged them to come up with an alternative package of proposals for the continuation of sandmining on North Stradbroke Island for their operations to be viable, for them to be able to provide jobs for the community on North Stradbroke Island but also to improve the environmental outcomes that could be put in place and also for the benefit of the Quandamooka people on North Stradbroke Island. They went away and did that. They have come up with an alternative proposal which the government is considering.

There is no deal, as the member for Bundamba has indicated. I reject that assertion. What there was was a very clear statement from the LNP when the legislation went through the parliament in 2011 and during the election campaign in 2012 that we would be putting in place these alternative arrangements. We have undertaken a process to implement that commitment. I might also make the observation at this time and reaffirm the commitment of the Newman government to meeting all of its obligations and responsibilities under the existing ILUA that exists between the Queensland government and the Quandamooka people.

CHAIR: Member for Bundamba, to help the flow of the session I point out that this session is on land services and water services. Have you got any questions on land services and water services?

Mrs MILLER: I have questions in relation to page 3 of the SDS in relation to mining on North Stradbroke Island and other questions. In terms of the free flow of questioning, I have a couple more questions to the minister.

CHAIR: We have actually allocated an hour and a half from—

Mrs MILLER: You have now gone back on what the agreement was in the committee meeting this morning, I think, in order to protect the minister.

CHAIR: No. I am more than happy for you to ask these questions, but I think they would be more appropriately asked in the 11.30 to one time slot.

Mrs MILLER: So the minister can receive his instructions from the Premier's office, is that case?

CHAIR: No, that is not the case at all. This is about land services and water services. Have you got any questions in relation to land services and water services?

Mrs MILLER: I have questions that follow on from this. If it gives the minister time to get his instructions, I am happy for you to go to your side.

CHAIR: Come back in the mining section and I am more than happy to allow the questions. I call the member for Dalrymple.

Mr KNUTH: Minister, your government has continually bragged about boosting agricultural production and continually points to the Flinders River and Gilbert River irrigation area. A total of 80,000 megalitres was granted to development irrigators but very little to smaller irrigators. I brought this up last year. It seems that this process is going very slowly considering that there is believed to be up to four million megalitres that pours from the Flinders River and Gilbert River in the gulf each year. You speak also about amending the operation resource plan. There are conservative figures out there—and the irrigators and the present mayor know this—that at least 300,000 megalitres is available. Why is this process so slow? Do I have to wait until the next parliamentary sitting to try to get more megalitres opened up for irrigators in the Flinders River area?

Mr CRIPPS: One of the very first things I did on becoming Minister for Natural Resources and Mines was commence the process for the release of all of the water that was at that time available in the general reserve in the Gulf Resource Operations Plan for the Flinders and Gilbert rivers. That process was commenced when I announced it at the forum in Hughenden in, I believe, late July last year. We went through an open and transparent process for the release of that water, and the release of all of that water in the general reserve has already been completed.

There was a very strong response from landowners in that area with a view to getting access to the water that had been released, and that was very welcome. I do not know how many more times I have to say it, but I gave a commitment that if that process was responded to strongly by the landowners in that area and if the research that was being undertaken at the time by CSIRO and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry demonstrated that there was scope for additional water to be allocated for irrigated agriculture I would bring forward the scheduled review of the resource operations plan, which I understand is not until 2017, so that we could commence that process. I do not know how many more times I have to repeat that commitment.

I understand that we will have the results of that work being done by CSIRO and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry by the end of this year. Might I say to the member for Dalrymple that that work by CSIRO and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry is being very strongly supported by the landowners in that area. They have supported that process strongly because they believe it will result in a better understanding of the systems—not only the hydrological systems but also the agronomic systems—that face the landowners in that gulf catchment area. I am committed absolutely to providing additional opportunities for irrigated agriculture to be developed in Northern Australia, in North Queensland and particularly in North-West Queensland, in the area that we are talking about, but I will do so in a well-informed and sustainable fashion.

I respect the existing water entitlements in that area and I also respect the importance of the natural resource issues that need to be addressed in issuing additional water entitlements. I will do this in a sustainable and well-informed way. I will do that in terms of due process under the Water Act. I regret that the member for Dalrymple has consistently throughout this process, including at this forum last year, tried to be a knocker, a spoiler and a detractor from a process that is overwhelmingly supported by the people of North-West Queensland, who are grateful that they now have a government that understands that we need to deliver more opportunities for a diversification of agricultural activities in this part of the state.

Mr KNUTH: Minister, I completely disagree with that because the figures had already been done. What you are saying to them is something that they already knew from the beginning. There is enough allocation of water there to provide many irrigators in that region. Another disappointing thing about this is that three of the biggest irrigators in the region received the allocation. So if you can understand why this process needs to be sped up, because I do not want to come back at the next—

CHAIR: What is your question?

Mr KNUTH: What I am saying, Minister, is that we do not want to come back here at the next estimates asking the same question.

Mr CRIPPS: Mr Chairman, all I can do is point to some of the comments that I have already made. The process that was undertaken to release all of the water in the general reserve for the Flinders and Gilbert river catchments was transparent, it was open and it was fair and accountable. It was conducted under the supervision of a probity adviser advising the Department of Natural Resources and Mines. Everybody had an equal opportunity to secure the water entitlements that were released under the resource operations plan. There can be no question about that. Those people who were given an opportunity to secure the water entitlements that were released did so after going through an open and accountable and fair and transparent process where they all got—

Mr KNUTH: So giving it to three big companies is open and accountable?

Mr CRIPPS: No.

CHAIR: Please let the minister finish.

Mr CRIPPS: No. I could point to one of the successful proponents in the Gilbert River catchment who is not a large irrigator and is not a corporate agricultural producer and who secured a water entitlement under this process. It was done in a fair and independent and transparent way, overseen by a probity adviser. Each of the people who put in an application to secure a water entitlement did so against the criteria that was set—the same for everybody at the start of this process. They were assessed in a fair and independent way, and the results speak for themselves.

CHAIR: I call the member for South Brisbane.

Ms TRAD: Good morning, Minister.

Mr CRIPPS: Good morning.

Ms TRAD: Minister, in relation to your responsibilities as lands minister, how can you sit there and say that you have met obligations under the Quandamooka ILUA when you have met with them only once and have had multiple meetings—both you and the Premier's office—with Sibelco?

Mr CRIPPS: The process for negotiating the current ILUA between the Queensland government and the Quandamooka people is an ongoing process of negotiation between those two parties. It involves not only my Department of Natural Resources and Mines but also the Department of National Parks, Recreation, Sport and Racing. I am pleased to advise the committee that the government is well on track to implementing its election commitment to provide a more realistic end to sandmining activities on North Stradbroke Island.

Ms TRAD: You mean a longer time frame—more sandmining?

Mr CRIPPS: It may involve a longer time frame, but the principal commitment of the Newman government, that we made when this legislation was first introduced in 2011 by the previous government and during the election campaign, was that the LNP believed in providing for a smoother transition from the current sandmining activities to other economic activities that would provide jobs for people living on that island.

The arrangements that were put in place by the former government meant that sandmining activities would abruptly come to an end in a much shorter time frame, and there were grave doubts that a successful transition process could occur for the economy on the island. The jobs that exist on the island for local people, including local Indigenous people, would not be able to be sustained or successfully transitioned from those existing sandmining activities to alternative economic activities—most likely tourism. But in such a short time frame for transition, the possibility of those jobs being successfully created in that time frame was questionable. We understand that the island's economy needs time to transition away from sandmining to those other activities. There would be a loss of jobs if that successful transition did not occur.

We are taking a much more sensible approach and we are implementing our election commitment to provide that transitional pathway. All I can say to the member for South Brisbane is that the Queensland government is committed to meeting all of its obligations and responsibilities

under the current ILUA. Indeed, when I met with the Quandamooka people I agreed to their request to facilitate a better process for progressing the negotiation of the current ILUA by creating a government round table at which all of the different departments that have obligations under that process would be represented together, instead of individually progressing negotiation arrangements. So we are very committed to that process. That process is ongoing between departmental officers and the representatives of the Quandamooka people all the time, and we are continuing to try to achieve an outcome as far as meeting our obligations and responsibilities under the current ILUA is concerned.

Ms TRAD: Minister, is Sibelco an LNP donor under the QForum program?

CHAIR: I think that question has nothing to do with the Department of Natural Resources and Mines.

Ms TRAD: I think it does. The minister is a member of the QForum fundraising program as a minister of this state. He would well know whether or not Sibelco is a member of the QForum fundraising program.

CHAIR: We are examining the Service Delivery Statement for the budget of the Department of Natural Resources and Mines.

Ms TRAD: And the minister has been in negotiations with Sibelco over amendments to the North Stradbroke Island act. I think that is a reasonable question, and if the minister was to adhere to transparency—

CHAIR: I am going to rule that question out of order.

Ms TRAD: Okay. So I will ask another question. Minister, last night on the 7.30 program reference was made to a briefing note, and that briefing note suggested that crown law advice intimated that there may be problems in terms of the native title legislation should sandmining progress or be extended on North Stradbroke Island. You suggested there was alternative advice to the crown law advice. What is that alternative advice?

Mr CRIPPS: In relation to this issue, I will seek your ruling, Mr Chairman, as to whether or not a television show that went to air last night—

Ms TRAD: They were your statements, Minister, on the television program.

Mr CRIPPS:—is part of the proceedings of the budget estimates.

CHAIR: You are pushing the boundaries here, member for South Brisbane.

Ms TRAD: With all due respect, Mr Chair, it is the minister's public statement. It is about his responsibility as lands minister of this state, and I think it is incumbent on him to answer the question. What is the other form of advice you received in relation to the native title problems?

CHAIR: Excuse me, member for South Brisbane. I do not think it is about land services and water services and it is not about the Service Delivery Statement that we are examining here today.

Ms TRAD: With all due respect, Chair, it is. It actually is. It is actually about the progression of the ILUA on North Stradbroke Island, the extension of sandmining—

CHAIR: I struggle to see—

Ms TRAD: All of these are under the minister's responsibility, Mr Chair, and I am referring to public statements made. What is the other advice that you received that the native title problems could be overcome?

CHAIR: Could you please show me in the Service Delivery Statement—

Ms TRAD: Page 3 of the SDS.

CHAIR: What does it say there about—

Ms TRAD: About progressing the framework, the North Stradbroke Island framework. I suggest that resolving the native title issues—

CHAIR: You want to ask a question about ILUAs again, do you?

Ms TRAD: I just asked the question. The question was that, in relation to progressing the ILUA on North Stradbroke Island, there are concerns in relation to the crown law advice that was included in the briefing note.

CHAIR: I have not seen anything about the crown law advice in the Service Delivery Statement.

Ms TRAD: Excuse me, Mr Chair. I know that you are trying to assist the minister to avoid this question. It is a very simple question.

CHAIR: No. This question is out of order.

Ms TRAD: No, it is not out of order at all.

CHAIR: This question is out of order. That sort of question should be asked in the parliament. This is about the service delivery of the Department of Natural Resources and Mines. Your question is about a TV program, 7.30. It is nothing about this Service Delivery Statement at all, is it?

Ms TRAD: With all due respect, I think it is.

CHAIR: I struggle to see it.

Ms TRAD: Well, you are the chair. You can make the ruling, but I suggest that it is.

CHAIR: Well, I will make the ruling that it is out of order. Do you have any further questions?

Ms TRAD: No, but I think you are wrong.

CHAIR: My question relates to page 10 of the SDS and refers to the streamlining measures under the vegetation management framework, introduced to parliament in March 2013. These changes have been introduced to remove green tape and unnecessary governance over landholders. While the changes have been met with enthusiasm, some stakeholders conclude that the changes mean a reversion to broadscale tree clearing. What monitoring and compliance regimes are in place to monitor and prosecute illegal tree clearing?

Mr CRIPPS: Thank you for the question, Mr Chairman. The Newman government prefers to encourage sustainable vegetation management practices rather than focus only on punitive measures for inappropriate clearing practices.

The Vegetation Management Framework Amendment Bill that was passed by the parliament earlier this year made a number of important changes to the way that vegetation management activities are regulated by my department. These changes reflected a marked difference in approach between this government and the previous government. The previous government took more punitive action against landholders—indeed pandering to the conservation sector, which demanded more compliance activity. My department is committed to ensuring that all natural resource outcomes identified under our legislation are achieved. But this has meant working to the bigger picture of sustainable natural resource management, not just unilaterally applying prosecutions and enforcements to every non-compliant activity. The previous government increasingly used prosecutions and legal actions as a KPI or a measure of the successful work of the former departments under the Vegetation Management Act. The Newman government recognises that this style of enforcement is uneven and placed the average landholder at a disadvantage through complex and expensive legal processes, particularly the omission of Criminal Code legal defences.

In relation to breaches of illegal clearing, decisions have been determined by the courts for vegetation-clearing offences in 2009-10, 2010-11 and 2011-12, and fines totalling \$1.2 million have been imposed. The breakdown of this total is that in 2009-10 nine vegetation management matters were prosecuted for a total of 10,929 hectares of native vegetation cleared and pecuniary fines totalled approximately \$440,000. In 2010-11 five vegetation management matters were prosecuted for a total of 616 hectares of native vegetation cleared and pecuniary fines totalled approximately \$250,000. In 2011-12, 11 vegetation matters were prosecuted for a total of 1,608 hectares of native vegetation cleared and pecuniary fines totalled approximately \$520,000. In the financial year 2012-13 the department referred one vegetation management prosecution that the court has not yet reached a decision on.

Of the 791 reports to the department in the same period there are 59 matters requiring attention, one prosecution commenced, as I have already indicated, five property maps of assessable vegetation completed, two negotiated outcomes commenced, five identified as having an applicable exemption, three found not to have been offences under the VMA, seven identified as no offence detected, 16 warning letters issued about matters determined to be low priority and not considered serious enough to investigate further, and 20, 2008-09 matters which have been queued for attention with an estimate of a further 1,539 hectares to be preserved.

The department's new compliance management framework focuses on working with Queenslanders to achieve voluntary adherence to natural resource management laws but without watering down the ability to litigate against serious offences where that is necessary. The department has never been the recipient of any pecuniary fines issued by the courts, and there was no change in revenue to the department which was collected for foregone in the 2012-13 budget.

The department has officers who are authorised to undertake activity aimed at achieving outcomes consistent with the department's compliance policies and regulatory framework. Within vegetation management this equates to around 50 officers available to respond to matters across the state. The total investment in vegetation compliance is approximately \$5.7 million which includes approximately \$1.2 million invested in the Statewide Landcover and Trees Study.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Minister. That was very comprehensive.

Mrs MADDERN: Good morning, Minister. I have a follow-on question from the member for Lockyer. It is in two parts. Why is high-value regrowth being removed from regulation on freehold land? I refer to statements by the World Wildlife Fund which indicate that 700,000 hectares of endangered regrowth forest not cleared since 1989 could potentially be cleared. Is this correct?

Mr CRIPPS: It has been a long time since Queensland landowners were properly supported by their state government. Since the Newman government came to office, we have taken the opportunity to address those longstanding issues of public policy. The Newman government will be delivering on its core election promise to reduce the regulatory burden placed upon landholders by consecutive Labor governments. The Vegetation Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill in 2009 introduced long-term regulation of regrowth vegetation on agricultural and grazing leasehold land and non-urban freehold and Indigenous land through a performance based compliance code. The high-value regrowth layer has no basis in science and existed as an additional layer of mapping.

In relation to queries about why the regrowth regulations were only being removed on freehold and Indigenous land, the intention was to return the regrowth regulations to a similar level that existed prior to the 2009 reforms—that is, before the laws controlling regrowth vegetation were extended to freehold land. High-value regrowth is shown on a map as regulated areas of regrowth vegetation which are woody vegetation that is deemed to be forest quality, that has not been recleared since 31 December 1989 and that is either endangered, of concern or least concern regional ecosystem.

Committee members might ask why high-value regrowth was removed from regulation on freehold and Indigenous land. That issue relates to the fact that unmanaged regrowth turns into thick, unnatural suckers competing with each other to grow, which results in very little understorey of ground cover. We can have better environment and natural resource management outcomes where this area is properly managed for the production of food, pasture, jobs and wealth for local communities. Reduced ground cover can result in erosion and other poor soil conditions. Controls proposed by the previous government did not really enhance these outcomes at all and had some environmentally perverse outcomes in some circumstances, leaving a major potential for poor environmental outcomes where the thickening of vegetation removed the capacity for there to be a balance between vegetation and grass cover, which actually works against the objects of the Vegetation Management Act.

The reforms provided for the removal of regrowth regulations on freehold and Indigenous land but the retention of controls on regrowth control on leasehold land and in reef watercourses. The reef watercourse protections are to remain in place similar to other protections of watercourses and the areas adjacent to them. This legislation means landholders can get on with the job of providing the production of the food and fibre resources for Queensland in our international and domestic markets without being hindered by this unnecessary legislation. Reforms to Queensland's vegetation management will give landowners more control over the land and allow them to sustainably grow their farm businesses. This is very much a contribution to the Newman government's commitment of doubling agricultural production by 2040 and improving the prospects of more sustainable jobs in rural and regional Queensland.

Mrs MADDERN: Thank you, Minister. Page 10 of the SDS refers to changes to strategic cropping land legislation to reduce red tape for fossickers. Fossicking is a relatively low-impact activity, and fossickers will welcome this reduction in red tape. What other plans does the government have to review the strategic cropping land legislation and how it operates across the state?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for the question. Managing the interaction between the resource and agricultural sectors is critical to the future prosperity of Queensland, particularly regional areas of Queensland. The Newman government is committed to growing the agricultural sector and the resources sector as part of our four-pillar economy. Continuing to protect agricultural land and land uses including strategic cropping land from incompatible development is an important part of the Queensland government's agricultural strategy and vision to double agricultural production in Queensland by 2040.

The Strategic Cropping Land Act commenced on 30 January 2012 with parts of Queensland identified on the strategic cropping land trigger map as potential strategic cropping land. Following the commencement of the act, it became clear that elements of the legislation were inflexible and onerous and unnecessarily so. Certain areas have been inadvertently identified as potential strategic cropping land in the original trigger map. These areas included breaches in foreshores, lower class agricultural land such as the Gemfields of Central Queensland, existing infrastructure such as airports and dams, power stations and mine pits, and areas designated as urban in statutory regional plans since the original trigger map was developed. These areas were not highly suitable for cropping, but because they had been identified as potential strategic cropping land it could have resulted in development being unnecessarily triggered for a strategic cropping land assessment.

In accordance with the government's commitment to reduce unnecessary regulatory burdens, the strategic cropping land trigger map was amended on 21 December last year to correct these anomalies. In total an extra area of 83½ thousand hectares of land was removed from the strategic cropping land trigger map as potential strategic cropping land. This equates to approximately one per cent of the area initially identified as potential strategic cropping land in the original trigger map. The trigger map amendment was done in accordance with the requirements of the act, and a draft map showing the proposed changes was published on my department's website prior to the amendments being made by regulation. The act will also be reviewed and amended to facilitate the implementation of new regional planning outcomes around priority agricultural areas and to streamline processes to remove unintended consequences for landowners.

On 28 June this year the Deputy Premier released for public consultation the statutory regional plans for the key resource and agriculture growth regions of the Darling Downs and Central Queensland. These landmark plans outline the government's intention to protect areas of priority agricultural land uses from inappropriate resource activities and other forms of development within these regions. The plans will also articulate the co-existence criteria with resource activities, and they will need to comply in order to operate in these priority agricultural areas.

The review will examine the effectiveness of the strategic cropping land framework in achieving its original objects and how to appropriately protect priority agricultural land and resources outside of priority agricultural areas and areas that are not subject to regional plans. The review will be undertaken by the Department of Natural Resources and Mines but will be done in consultation with the Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Formal public consultation will be a key component of this legislative review, and I will soon be releasing a discussion paper about the Strategic Cropping Land Act 2011 review and seeking community stakeholder views.

CHAIR: Page 3 of the SDS states that the Commonwealth government is implementing the Murray-Darling Basin plan. Why has Queensland not signed the intergovernmental agreement on the Murray-Darling Basin plan?

Mr CRIPPS: Thank you for your question, Mr Chairman. We have not signed that plan because the Newman government is still not satisfied that there is significant and sufficient structural adjustment funding and support being offered to take account of the impacts of the federal government's plans on irrigators and the communities that they support in the Queensland section of the Murray-Darling Basin. The Newman government has asked time and again for the federal government to fund key assistance and regional adjustment measures for Queensland communities, but the response from the Commonwealth to this point in time has not been satisfactory.

The Commonwealth instigated this process, and I believe it has a moral obligation to provide adequate assistance to the communities that will be negatively affected by it. If additional water programs and industry support are good enough for South Australia's river land, and the funding has already been made available to them, why is it not good enough for the communities in the Queensland section of the Murray-Darling Basin? At the moment we have not seen a commitment from the federal government that satisfies the Queensland government that they are taking this issue seriously in Queensland.

The Newman government is continuing to participate in what is proving to be a very difficult and frustrating negotiation process with the Commonwealth in relation to a commitment by the Commonwealth to reassign funding available to Queensland under the Sustainable Rural Water Use and Infrastructure Program to the Healthy HeadWaters Water Use Efficiency program and a commitment from the Commonwealth to fund the Northern Basin Scientific Work Program over the four years from 2015 to 2016.

Furthermore, Queensland has submitted eight projects for consideration to the Murray-Darling Basin economic diversification program. Disappointingly at this point in time only two of those projects have been deemed to meet the narrow and rather inflexible criteria that the federal government has set. The Department of Natural Resources and Mines has received feedback from the industry advisory committee and individual irrigators that the current parameters of this program—that is, the Healthy Headwaters Water Use Efficiency program—restrict irrigators from relocating irrigating areas within their current enterprises. The Murray-Darling Basin plan was finalised in November last year after five years of contentious debate. The major implementation issues relate to ensuring that water recovery activities to deliver the required sustainable diversion limit outcomes are implemented in a way that is sensible and acceptable to the affected communities in the Queensland section of the basin.

In Queensland we see the Commonwealth seeking to recover from willing sellers some 220 gigalitres per annum of water entitlement from targeted surface and groundwater systems. Areas in particular focus for water recovery include the Lower Balonne region of the Condamine-Balonne catchment, the lower flood plain reaches of the Border Rivers catchment and the alluvial groundwater systems of the Upper Condamine. The Queensland government is playing its parts in investing in water planning management and reform activities across Queensland's section of the Murray-Darling Basin to support this endeavour, including working closely with key regional community interests, but getting an acceptable financial agreement in terms of how activities and accountabilities will play out in Queensland has been really frustrating over recent months.

The related intergovernmental agreement and national partnership agreement are yet to be finalised between the Commonwealth and Queensland governments. I am continuing to negotiate with the Commonwealth in good faith to try to secure an acceptable package of implementation support measures. But before Queensland is willing to sign off, more acceptable arrangements need to be agreed upon in relation to the quantum of community assistance that is made available and how that will be provided.

CHAIR: Do you know how many of the other states have actually signed that agreement?

Mr CRIPPS: Mr Chairman, we know that the Victorian and South Australian governments have significantly progressed their negotiations and agreed with the Commonwealth. It is my understanding that the New South Wales and Queensland governments have yet to reach agreement with the Commonwealth about these arrangements.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for that information.

Mr COX: My question to the minister is on land and water. Minister, I refer to page 2 of the SDS, which makes reference to delivering a preferred management strategy for the protection of the western rivers. Can you please outline the government's vision for developing an alternative framework and indicate when the government will deliver that new framework?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for the question. The Newman government is well on its way to delivering on its election commitment to deliver a new management strategy for Queensland's western rivers. We made it clear before we came into office—and many times since—that we considered the wild rivers legislation to be a blunt legislative instrument that has hindered economic development in parts of Queensland that need to grow. But they need to grow sustainably and in a way that respects the unique environmental values of this part of Queensland. Part of my charter letter responsibilities is a task to develop alternative strategies to protect these river systems while allowing sustainable development to proceed. These alternative strategies will replace wild rivers declarations for the Cooper Creek, Georgina and Diamantina river systems located in the Lake Eyre Basin. Good progress continues to be made in delivering on this task, which will involve genuine consultation between the Queensland government and the community.

In November last year I formed the Western Rivers Advisory Panel to advise me on the alternative strategies that we would be developing. The panel includes representatives from traditional owner groups, local governments, natural resource management groups, the resources sector, AgForce and the Lake Eyre Basin community and scientific advisory panels. At its first meeting I asked the panel to consider whether there was scope for small scale irrigation and to have an open mind for the expansion of the resources industry in the region. I also expressed the view that the alternative strategies should utilise existing legislative frameworks, other than the Wild Rivers Act, to strike a more appropriate balance between protecting the river systems and providing for future sustainable development in the region.

I acknowledge that there are divergent views on the protection of the river systems in the Lake Eyre Basin. I welcome the debate, but I believe that in the 21st century economic development and preservation of the environment do not need to be mutually exclusive outcomes. The advice provided to me in the panel's report on 31 May this year has guided the Department of Natural Resources and Mines in developing a range of options for alternative strategies that I am currently considering. I publicly released the WRAP report on 2 July this year. It is my intention to meet again with the panel and key stakeholders to discuss the panel's recommendations. Following this, and subsequent to cabinet's endorsement, implementation of the alternative strategies is anticipated to occur late this year or early next year.

Mr COX: I refer to the note on page 24 of the Natural Resources and Mines SDS detailing the transfer of the Office of Groundwater Impact Assessment function from the Department of Energy and Water Supply from 1 January 2013. Can the minister advise what activity your office has undertaken since the Office of Groundwater and Impact Assessment has been transferred to the department?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for the question. On 1 January this year the Queensland Water Commission was abolished in the process of changed arrangements for the delivery of wider water management functions; however, the groundwater management functions previously carried out by the QWC continue to be delivered by a new entity, the Office of Groundwater Impact Assessment. The Office of Groundwater Impact Assessment is an independent entity established under the Water Act 2000. It is housed within the Queensland Department of Natural Resources and Mines, which provides corporate and administrative support to it. The staff that carried out the groundwater management functions of the QWC have become the staff within the Office of Groundwater Impact Assessment.

When a cumulative management area is declared, the Office of Groundwater Impact Assessment is required to prepare a cumulative assessment of impacts of CSG water extraction and to develop integrated regional management arrangements. These assessments and management arrangements are to be set out in an underground water impact report. When prepared, the report is submitted to the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection for approval.

Under this process, a report has been approved for the Surat Cumulative Management Area. A regional groundwater flow model was developed which is used to predict future water level impacts in the coal seams as well as in adjacent aquifers. The model was a key tool in the development of the report. The Surat report includes: maps showing predicted water level impacts; an ongoing water monitoring strategy; a management strategy for springs that could be affected by falls in water levels; and assignment to individual CSG operators of responsibilities to carry out activities such as specific parts of the water monitoring strategy.

Continuation of water supplies for bore owners affected by CSG water extraction is a priority under the Queensland regulatory framework. If a bore supply is impaired by CSG water extraction at any time, the CSG operator has the responsibility to find a solution to the problem with the bore owner. With the Surat report now approved, the Office of Groundwater Impact Assessment has commenced research activities in collaboration with other bodies and CSG operators to further improve understanding of the groundwater flow system. The regional groundwater flow model will be periodically redeveloped to incorporate new knowledge emerging from these research activities and from monitoring data. Through this process, predictions about future impacts on water levels will be progressively refined. The general manager of the Office of Groundwater Impact Assessment will prepare annual reports on the implementation of the Surat report and update the report every three years. The next report of the Office of Groundwater Impact Assessment is due on 1 December 2015.

To complete the regional water monitoring network, an additional 396 water level monitoring points will be constructed to complete a total network of 498 monitoring points at 142 sites. Water quality will be monitored at 120 monitoring points. The monitoring works are being constructed by petroleum tenure holders. In the last 12 months the groundwater investigation and assessment team has checked some 300 bores surrounding CSG developments. These have been monitored for water levels, and 68 groundwater samples have been collected for water quality analysis. There have been no compliance breaches identified in relation to the bore monitoring program.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, I have a follow-up to a question which was raised earlier by the member for Maryborough in relation to the World Wildlife Fund's comments that the government's vegetation management reforms pave the way for the clearing of some 700,000 hectares of endangered or ecologically important forest habitat. Minister, you referred to this comment as alarmist rhetoric. Can you tell me here and now what is your figure? If it is not 700,000 hectares, what is it?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for the question. I have always maintained that the amendments to the Vegetation Management Act that were implemented by the government earlier this year will not lower environmental standards and will not create a situation where there will be significant environmental impacts as a result of the amendments. There are a number of reasons that I believe that.

In the first instance, with regard to the amendments relating to the removal of the regulation of regrowth vegetation on freehold and Indigenous land, that only takes the restrictions on the management of regrowth vegetation back to a level that existed prior to the legislation introduced by the previous government in 2009. The restrictions on the management of regrowth adjacent to watercourses in reef catchments remain, and that is something that should be taken on board by those conservation groups seeking to score political points about this government's commitment to protecting the values of the Great Barrier Reef.

In relation to the issues surrounding the new purpose of the act for sustainable land use, that is simply reintroducing a purpose of the act which existed prior to one of the amendment bills that were introduced by the previous government, and I find it extraordinary, quite frankly, that a purpose of the vegetation management legislation in this state would not be for the sustainable use of land.

Thirdly, in relation to the new exemptions provided for in the amendment bill that was passed through the parliament earlier this year, I make the point yet again that, until such time as a suitable business case is made for that exemption to be granted, the restrictions in place for the management of remnant vegetation remain in place. I outlined earlier today in my response to one of the questions asked by a member of the committee the framework that is being developed around ensuring that that exemption is granted in appropriate circumstances—where the applicant can demonstrate that there is appropriate land available, that no other land that has already been cleared is available for that activity, that they have the necessary water available if they are pursuing an irrigated high-value agriculture enterprise and, indeed, that the operation will be viable in the long term.

So we are asking them to submit a business case to demonstrate that they ought to be eligible for this exemption, and I believe that there are sufficient safeguards in place to make sure that there are no adverse impacts but that there are adequate opportunities for sustainable growth in agricultural industries across the state.

Mrs MILLER: I have a follow-up question. Minister, thank you for confirming that you have no idea how many hectares will be affected.

CHAIR: There is no need for that sort of thing.

Mrs MILLER: I refer my question now to the director-general. Director-General, has the department undertaken any modelling on the number of hectares that would be made available for clearing from the government's vegetation management reforms? If so, will you detail the advice and table it to this committee today?

CHAIR: Minister, would you like to—

Mrs MILLER: No, my question is to the director-general. Under the standing orders I am entitled to ask the director-general himself.

Mr Hunt: The department has examined the areas that would be available. I think the point of the minister's answer to the question was that the number raised by the world wildlife federation was in relation to the total sort of landscape that was available under this legislation. The point of the minister's answer was that the conditions that are placed on clearing mean that it would be almost impossible for all of that land to be cleared. Is that correct, Minister?

Mr CRIPPS: That is right.

Mrs MILLER: Mr Chair, I have asked the director-general a direct question, and I do not need an interpretation by the director-general of the minister's answer. I just want to know whether there has been any modelling done. If so, will you table it?

CHAIR: I do not think he has actually finished answering the question.

Mr Hunt: The department has looked at the estimate made by the world wildlife federation—

Ms TRAD:—fund.

Mrs MILLER:—fund.

Mr Hunt:—and that is a reasonable estimate. There are a number of ways in which that can be calculated.

Mrs MILLER: So the WWF's estimate is reasonable—

Mr Hunt:—in terms of the total area for that type of vegetation.

Mrs MILLER: Will you provide to this committee any documentation that the department has which obviously formed your view in relation to that?

Mr Hunt: We will have to take that on notice I think.

Mr COX: No need.

Mr Hunt: No need?

Mrs MILLER: Excuse me, I am asking the director-general in his role here today—

Mr Hunt: I would have to check what is available.

Mrs MILLER:—as a witness before the committee. Director-General, you can be difficult on this. Either you provide it to us or we will RTI it. I am just asking whether you will be able to provide it to this committee today.

Mr Hunt: I am suggesting that I will take that on notice and I will provide what is available.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you.

Mr COX: Minister, would there be a need for such a report on that? Going on the guidelines and the way you have expressed it, it is really an ongoing assessment. I would think there would be no need for a report such as that which the member has asked for.

Mr CRIPPS: What I would indicate to the committee and the member who has asked the question is along the lines that I have already indicated: the intention of the legislation was simply to change the regulation of regrowth vegetation back to the situation that applied prior to the amendment bill that was introduced in 2009 by the previous government. It only relates to freehold and Indigenous land. Regrowth vegetation continues to apply to leasehold land in Queensland and it continues to apply to the areas adjacent to watercourses and the three catchments in North Queensland—the Mackay-Whitsunday catchment, the Wet Tropics catchment and the Burdekin catchment.

In relation to the restrictions on the management of remnant vegetation, there has been no change except where an application is made for an exemption. I might point out to the committee that the exemptions for the clearing of remnant vegetation existed in the legislation prior to the amendment bill, particularly for community purposes. So we simply added to an existing mechanism in terms of exemptions that could be accessed for the clearing of remnant vegetation in particular situations. In terms of the exemption for high-value agriculture and high-value irrigated agriculture, they must present that business case and they must meet the criteria that is being developed for those proposals to be sustainable in the long term—and I have already outlined in my responses to the committee the framework that we have developed and are creating for the consideration of those business plans. I think that is a very prudent way forward, and it addresses a lot of those alarmist statements that were made by conservation groups in the lead-up to the debate on this piece of legislation. The fearmongering that occurred that there would be a return to broadscale clearing in Queensland because of the nature of the amendments that were being made to the legislation was just unfounded. That simply will not be the case.

Mr KNUTH: To go back to what you were saying before with regard to the water table, the Condamine alluvial area is one particular area that councils and, likewise, farmers do not want to see developed for coal seam gas because of the very shallow water table. There is a perception that this coal seam gas operation is about co-existence and not protection. We do not want to see a process put in place showing us how to co-exist when there is a great concern with regard to the lowering of the water table in that Condamine alluvial area. Is there a process in place not about co-existence but about protection?

Mr CRIPPS: In relation to the member's question, the provision whereby a company is required to make good if they have an adverse impact on a particular groundwater resource on a landowner's property is one that has been in place for a long period. I acknowledge that there are concerns about the impacts of the coal seam gas industry on groundwater resources, particularly in the Darling Downs area. It has been the work of this government since coming to office last year to try to provide more information, better understanding and better models of co-existence between the resources sector and the agricultural sector and local communities in the Darling Downs area and in Central Queensland where land use competition between these sectors is most significant.

A number of those initiatives include the release last year of the first baseline data report for groundwater in that area of the Darling Downs. So there is now a reference point for us to look at in terms of any ongoing impact of the activity of the coal seam gas industry in that area. We have also established the GasFields Commission to provide a point of contact for the local community to express their concerns and for the commission to then provide advice to the government about how the government can address the concerns of the local community and the agricultural sector in terms of co-existence with the resources sector. We have also commenced a process of developing statutory regional plans for the Darling Downs and Central Queensland.

With respect to the member's particular question relating to the Darling Downs, we are able to create certainty for the resources sector and for landowners and local communities about future land use in that area. The member would be aware of that process. He would be aware that that process is ongoing and that it has been highly consultative with stakeholder groups in those areas. I think the Newman government is doing everything possible to try to develop an appropriate level of co-existence and an appropriate future for the resources sector, the agricultural sector and local communities in these areas where there is a lot of competition between those industries and local communities. We are doing so in many respects because the previous government did not take the steps to provide for a modern regulatory framework for these industries in that area.

I think the circumstances for landowners to make their concerns heard are improving. In particular, the member might be interested in the fact that we are continuing to give consideration to the proposed changes to the land access framework in Queensland to provide more certainty and more transparency in the way that landowners and resource companies interact when projects are proposed on landowners' land.

Mr KNUTH: I have another question. Weed management, in particular prickly acacia, is a massive problem in northern Australia, and the minister mentioned funding to five regional NRM bodies operating in the Barrier Reef catchment area. How much is set aside to halt these weeds of national significance which have decimated hundreds of thousands of hectares of land?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for the question. I would indicate to him that I share his concern about the proliferation of pest weeds in Queensland. I have been very strongly of the view that it is something that needs to be taken more seriously by all levels of government.

The member for Dalrymple might be interested to know that when I became the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines and, in particular, in relation to the funding for initiatives under our natural resource management program for the 14 regional NRM groups, I changed the way in which that funding would be considered by application from those regional groups to concentrate on three areas in particular—and I mentioned this in one of my earlier responses to a question from the committee. We are concentrating on three areas, which are sustainable agricultural projects, water quality outcomes, and addressing pest weed and feral animal issues. A significant proportion of the funding through our regional NRM program is now focused on pest weeds and feral animals. I believe that if we focus on meaningful outcomes in these important areas we will have better long-term outcomes for natural resource management in these areas. So we are concentrating more funding on less specific areas of issues that arise in natural resource management.

It is interesting that the member raises the issue of the management of prickly acacia. I would encourage the member for Dalrymple to pay attention to some collaborative work that I will be highlighting today with the Desert Channels Natural Resource Management Group in terms of prickly acacia. They have been pursuing an initiative of using an unmanned drone helicopter to treat areas of very thick infestations of prickly acacia in Western Queensland, and it is a program that has been supported by the Queensland government. It is an example of the innovative ways in which those regional NRM groups are attacking these types of serious issues for local communities. I congratulate Desert Channels on the work that they have done on this very serious issue of prickly acacia.

I can indicate to the member my support for continuing to give regional NRM groups opportunities to pursue serious pest weed infestations through our program of funding. Indeed, since I became minister I have taken steps to ensure that more funding is put into programs that address what I call bread-and-butter environmental issues such as pest weeds and feral animals, improving water quality and long-term improvements in the sustainability of land management practices for agriculture.

CHAIR: To clarify for the committee, prickly acacia is from Africa and is a big bush with a very long thorn.

Mr CRIPPS: Yes. One of the issues we face with the management of prickly acacia is the longevity of its rejuvenation process. It is very difficult to control, particularly where it is not controlled for a period of time after it comes up in an area. It becomes very thick and makes areas inaccessible. Unfortunately, large areas of land are being lost for sustainable use by agriculture as a result of the proliferation of prickly acacia. It is a serious issue. I agree with the member for Dalrymple that it is an issue of concern to landowners in Queensland. All I can do, once again, is to reiterate my commitment to trying to concentrate more money that we make available through our funding programs on these types of issues. I believe that if we can funnel more money into these types of bread-and-butter issues we will have better outcomes as far as biodiversity is concerned. If we focus on pest weeds and feral animals, I believe we will have a better biodiversity outcome for the landscape and the environment. If we focus on achieving better water quality outcomes, I believe we will have better outcomes for wetlands and things like the quality of water flowing into the Great Barrier Reef. By concentrating on the basics, on the fundamentals, I believe we will have better outcomes in a landscape-wide and environment-wide perspective.

Ms TRAD: I refer to an earlier answer in relation to the penalty regime under the Vegetation Management Act as it existed before your government stripped away most of the protections. Nine months and one week ago exactly today you committed to this committee—you made an undertaking—that you would release the review conducted by crown law into the penalty regime under the previous Vegetation Management Act. Minister, you have not released that review. Why have you not released that review? What are you hiding?

Mr CRIPPS: In relation to the member's question, I happen to have here the *Hansard* record of what I said last year during the—

Ms TRAD: As do I, Minister.

Mr CRIPPS:—estimates process. The member for South Brisbane asked me a question—that is, so you will be making the review of the outcomes public? I said in response—

Absolutely. When I am satisfied with the results of the review and we have a way forward that will be made public.

Ms TRAD: No, Minister. I said 'you will be making the review and the outcomes', not the review's outcomes.

Mr CRIPPS: Mr Chairman, it does not matter what the member for South Brisbane said; it matters what I said in relation to answering her question—

Ms TRAD: And you said, 'Absolutely.'

Mr CRIPPS:—and I will reiterate that.

CHAIR: Let us hear this.

Mr CRIPPS: What I said was—

When I am satisfied with the results of the review and we have a way forward that will be made public.

That was on 12 October last year, as the member for South Brisbane indicated, during the proceedings of this estimates committee. On 1 November last year I then stood up in the parliament and made a ministerial statement outlining the results of the review of those penalties and prosecution arrangements. So that is on the *Hansard* record as well. So I made public the results of the review and the way forward that I would be pursuing, and that—

Ms TRAD: But not the review.

Mr CRIPPS:—way forward would be that it was my intention to remove section 60B from the act. So I met my commitment to the estimates committee that—

Ms TRAD: No, you did not.

Mr CRIPPS:—when I was satisfied with the results of the review and we had a way forward that would be made public, and I have made a ministerial statement about it. The member for South Brisbane then asked me a question in the parliament during question time on 27 November last year; it was largely the same question that she has asked me in relation to the estimates committee proceedings today. The member for South Brisbane tabled the *Hansard* record and I read the *Hansard* record back to her, clearly demonstrating that I had fulfilled my commitment to the estimates committee last year—that is, when I was satisfied with the results of the review and we had a way forward that I would make that public. I made a ministerial statement about it. They record ministerial statements in *Hansard*. I cannot understand why the member for South Brisbane does not think that I have made the results of that review public.

Ms TRAD: And that is a great exercise in spin, Minister, with all due respect. What I asked for, as you well know, is the release of the crown law review—not your interpretation of the review, not your interpretation of the results of the review but—

CHAIR: Why do you not—

Ms TRAD:—the crown law review. Well, it is obvious that the minister is not going to release it and it is obvious that this government is not at all transparent in its dealings. So I will then go to the director-general in relation to your response to the question asked by the member for Bundamba. In your initial response you suggested that there had been an examination of the area that would be made available for clearing under the amendments to the Vegetation Management Act and then in response to the next question you said that the department had analysed WWF's analysis—the 700,000 hectares that would be made vulnerable under the amendments to the Vegetation Management Act. Director-General, are there two examinations—what WWF has put up and what the department independently examined initially?

Mr Hunt: No. I think the department reviewed the numbers that the WWF put up.

Ms TRAD: So there was no independent analysis prior to WWF's analysis done by the department of the amount of vegetation that would be made available under the LNP's changes to the Vegetation Management Act to tree clearing?

Mr Hunt: I think we need to be clear that there is no perception from the department that that total amount of land could ever be cleared under the changes that were made to the Vegetation Management Act.

Ms TRAD: But with all due respect, Director-General—

Mr Hunt: So what I am saying is that I am not sure that was a relevant analysis to make.

Ms TRAD: With all due respect—and we can go back over *Hansard*—you did say it was a reasonable conclusion depending on the calculations you make.

Mr Hunt: Yes, that is right, and that is what I said. We went and looked at the—

Ms TRAD: But my question to you, Director-General, is: in the preparation for the amendments to the legislation, as the member for Bundamba has asked, what was the modelling? Where is the independent analysis? Where is the department's examination or analysis about the amount of vegetation that would be available to be cleared under these legislative amendments?

Mr Hunt: I am not sure that we went and did an analysis of that nature prior to the legislation being prepared.

Ms TRAD: You did no scientific analysis of the vegetation that would be made vulnerable to clearing—

Mr Hunt: An assessment was made of the likely areas of high-value agriculture that would meet the criteria, and I think that was judged to be relatively small.

Ms TRAD: So what is the definition of 'high-value agriculture'?

Mr Hunt: I will just have to check my brief. So high-value agriculture and irrigated high-value agriculture are defined as annual horticulture, which includes most vegetables; perennial horticulture, which includes most fruits; and broadacre cropping, which includes crops such as sorghum and sugar cane. It does not include plantation forestry or cattle-grazing activities. However, irrigated high-value agriculture includes irrigated pastures such as irrigated dairy pastures but not plantation forestry.

Ms TRAD: And this is a category in which remnant vegetation can now be cleared under the Vegetation Management Framework Amendment Bill?

Mr Hunt: Under certain circumstances.

Ms TRAD: Under certain circumstances. Can I say, that is a pretty broad definition. It is a very broad definition for clearing—

Mr Hunt: I will pass that one back to the minister, I think.

Ms TRAD: Yes, sure; I accept that.

Mr CRIPPS: It is not—

Ms TRAD: It is a very—

Mr CRIPPS: It is not broad.

Ms TRAD: Minister, it is a very broad definition—

Mr CRIPPS: It is not broad.

Ms TRAD:—when you are talking about clearing remnant old-growth vegetation—an extremely broad definition.

CHAIR: Have you got a question? Would you like to respond to that?

Mr CRIPPS: It is not broad, Mr Chairman. The exemption is not an as-of-right to clear remnant vegetation, and I reiterate again—for the third time in today's proceedings—that it is not an as of right to clear remnant vegetation to undertake high-value or high-value irrigated agriculture. The nature of the amendment to the legislation, which I suspect the member well knows, is that the individual applicant has to apply for an exemption to be able to pursue high-value or high-value irrigated agriculture on areas where there is currently remnant vegetation. I have already, during the proceedings of today's estimates hearing, outlined the criteria or the framework that is being developed by my department to manage and assess what business plans, when they are submitted by applicants, will be assessed against to see if they will be granted the exemption.

I could not have been any clearer early on today when I responded to an earlier question about the circumstances in which there would be an opportunity for landowners to clear remnant vegetation to pursue high-value agriculture or high-value irrigated agriculture activities. I think I have demonstrated that there are clear arrangements that will be put in place to assess these applications to ensure there are no adverse outcomes as far as the environment is concerned—and they include that the applicant demonstrates that there is suitable land available for the activity to be undertaken; that there are no alternative areas that have already been cleared for the activity to be pursued on; that there is sufficient water, if they are seeking to pursue a high-value irrigated agriculture activity, to sustain that; and that the operation would be viable in the long term. So I just say to you, Mr Chairman, and to committee members: I think that this has been dealt with substantially and adequately and that the member for South Brisbane's question really is revisiting issues that we dealt with in detail earlier today.

Ms TRAD: Minister, will you release—in total, without any redactions, without any interpretation by yourself, political interpretation by yourself—the crown law review of the penalty regime under the previous Vegetation Management Act?

Mr CRIPPS: Mr Chairman, I think the member for South Brisbane knows that crown law advice is privileged and that it has been the normal practice—

Ms TRAD: The Deputy Premier just released crown law advice about politicians' pay increases, Minister.

Mr CRIPPS: It has been the normal practice for governments not to release crown law advice that is privileged and it is not my intention to do that on this occasion.

Ms TRAD: The Deputy Premier did so recently. I think you should follow suit.

CHAIR: Thank you for the answer to that question, Minister. That is the normal process. I want to ask a supplementary question about high-value agriculture. That would also be high-risk and high-cost agriculture, too, would it not? You cannot go into high-value agriculture with minimal planning and minimal expertise, can you?

Mr CRIPPS: You would know, Mr Chairman, as a former—no, a current farmer?

CHAIR: Not really.

Mr CRIPPS: It was your profession.

CHAIR: I owned a bit of land.

Mr COSTIGAN: Give yourself a rap, Mr Chairman!

Mr CRIPPS: It was your profession previously, Mr Chairman. There are always risks in terms of agriculture, and farmers have been facing up to those risks every season since we started farming. The vagaries of the weather, the potential for pestilence and the vagaries of the market have always been challenges that landowners and farmers have faced, and so of course I think there are always risks and uncertainties faced by farmers—

CHAIR: Particularly in high-value stuff.

Mr CRIPPS: Indeed. You are talking about horticulture, I would think.

CHAIR: Cotton.

Mr CRIPPS: Yes, and broadacre cropping. I do not think anyone undertakes these types of activities lightly in Queensland. Certainly, I know that there has to be a lot of expertise and support, particularly in the 21st century, when farmers and landowners take their obligations and the potential of their businesses to be successful very seriously and engage a lot of expert advice. In relation to the process whereby they will be pursuing additional high-value or high-value irrigated agriculture activities as a result of an exemption granted under the vegetation management framework, that is the reason why, as part of the criteria against which these applications will be assessed, we will be looking to ensure that the area in which the proposed activity is taking place is suitable for their proposed activity. We want those additional areas of agricultural production to be sustainable and viable in the long term, and that is why there is such a process in place to ensure that if vegetation is going to be cleared the productive activity that will take place on that land will be sustainable and viable in the long term.

CHAIR: My next question refers to page 24 of the SDS at point 9. There appears to be a variance in the budget attributed to on-farm productivity and repair and recovery. Would the minister please elaborate how this funding will reduce the potential for failure of the Brisbane River water supply as a result of sediment that occurred earlier this year? This is very close to my heart.

Mr CRIPPS: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I can imagine why you would want to be asking this question of me. I think you would know and understand better than most that the flood events in 2011 and earlier this year highlighted the potential for such events to damage infrastructure, disrupt travel and land-use activities and affect water supply security and impact the environment of catchments. In particular, an issue was made of sediment loads on the Mount Crosby water treatment works, as noted by residents in Brisbane who receive water from that facility.

Flood events across South-East Queensland have led to calls for greater protection of catchments in this area. There has been the potential for significant benefits to be achieved from a more coordinated approach to catchment management activities across government, industry and community. The Newman government has invested \$10 million in a new program to support landowners in areas hard hit by flooding caused by ex-Tropical Cyclone Oswald. The flooding has resulted in considerable areas facing severe land management challenges due to the loss of soil from erosion-prone areas in January's record flood events.

The Queensland government's contribution matches a federal government contribution provided under the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements. This \$20 million On-farm Productivity and Riparian Recovery Program will deliver practical, on-ground solutions to repair damage and better prepare primary producers for future flood events. The initiative will fund debris clean-up and removal from farms and waterways, provide help and advice with fencing and irrigation infrastructure restoration and help to restore farmland that is affected by soil erosion and other damage to land.

The On-farm Productivity and Riparian Recovery Program will drive recovery at the local level and help flood affected communities get back on their feet as quickly as possible. The program is being led by my Department of Natural Resources and Mines but we are receiving assistance from the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. The kind of support this funding is offering includes debris removal, restoration and rehabilitation work to address soil, gully and stream bank erosion and bank slumping.

In addition, my department is also progressing the Brisbane River catchment study. The purpose of the flood study is to provide an up-to-date, consistent and agreed set of hydrological and hydraulic models and to design flood estimation for the Brisbane River catchment. These models will build on the existing work undertaken by the Brisbane River catchment councils, Seqwater and the government. The models will be used as the technical basis for the assessment of flood risk management options, strategies and action plans for the mitigation of flood damage within the flood plain as part of the development of the Brisbane River catchment flood plain management study and plan by the Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning and local councils. The Brisbane River catchment flood study is being coordinated by my department, but we are working collaboratively with other government departments and with the Brisbane City Council, the Ipswich City Council, the Somerset Regional Council and the Lockyer Valley Regional Council. Following its completion in late 2015, the study and its outputs will be available for use by local councils and will be a major tool that can be used to assess options identified during the development of the Brisbane River catchment flood plain management study and plan.

Mr TROUT: I refer to page 3 of the SBS, which states—

Progress the implementation of the Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative program.

What is the government's commitment to this program?

Mr CRIPPS: In relation to the member's question, through the Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative, which is colloquially known as GABSI, the Newman government has been working in cooperation with the Commonwealth to protect and manage the health of the Great Artesian Basin. The Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative is a highly successful joint Australian and Queensland government program to assist landholders to rehabilitate uncontrolled water bores and to replace inefficient bore drains with piped water reticulation systems.

The initiative aims to reverse the decline in pressure and flow resulting from the uncontrolled discharge of water from the Great Artesian Basin since its development in the late 1800s. Since 1999, under the Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative the Queensland government has expended more than \$56 million protecting this valuable resource. The Australian government has matched that state expenditure and participating landowners have contributed an additional \$47 million, bringing the total expenditure to date to approximately \$159 million. During the 2012-13 financial year, 26 bores were rehabilitated and 20 bore drains replaced, which were completed at a total cost of approximately \$10.9 million, saving an estimated 6,900 megalitres per annum of flow from the basin. As of 30 June 2013, the initiative will have saved an estimated 115,900 megalitres per annum of flow from the basin through the rehabilitation of 336 bores and the replacement of an estimated 10,800 kilometres of inefficient bore drains with piped water reticulation systems. When combined with the predecessor programs, an estimated 186,000 megalitres per annum of flow has been saved from the Great Artesian Basin in Queensland. This means that for each year the same amount of water required to fill over 74,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools is no longer being wasted from the basin through evaporation and seepage.

While the Queensland government has committed to this initiative continuing beyond the current end date of 30 June next year, a commitment by the Australian government is still required beyond that date. Discussions are currently underway with the Australian government on the extension of the initiative beyond this current end date. The Department of Natural Resources and Mines continues to work closely with landowners to ensure that they are aware of and can access the benefits of this initiative. The initiative, while full of technical challenges, continues to enjoy stakeholder support thanks to its successful delivery in these difficult and challenging circumstances.

Pressure improvements are already being recorded in the Great Artesian Basin and the water savings are helping to protect this resource for the future. Landowners are seeing a more efficient water distribution network on their properties while through the vast amounts of water that have been saved the wider community is seeing the protection of valuable springs and associated wetlands. The Queensland government is looking forward to the successful resolution of its negotiations with the Australian government and we hope that this excellent project will continue in the future.

Mr TROUT: On page 4 of the SDS there is reference to ongoing consultation on the Stock Route Network Management Bill. Recently, a number of local governments in western Queensland raised issues with NRM overturning the decision to disallow access for a large number of stock purchased in the Northern Territory and destined for hay in New South Wales. Minister, what are the terms that determine access for travelling stock through Queensland stock routes?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for the question. Local governments are indeed responsible for the day-to-day management and administration of Queensland's stock route network. The Department of Natural Resources and Mines supports local governments through the provision of policy and legislative advice, operational guidelines and managing asset maintenance. The provision of water by local governments is at their discretion, but local governments can enter into formal water facility agreements with neighbouring landholders for the benefit of those water facilities. Usually bores are shared between the stock route and the neighbouring landholder.

As the minister responsible for natural resources and mines, the responsibility lies with my department for the administration of those elements of the act relating to stock route management. Respective local governments are responsible for key operational elements of the stock route network including the issuing of stock travel permits. The stock route network's primary function is to provide the pastoral industry with a cost-efficient alternative to transporting stock by truck or by train. The act provides that, if land on which stock are currently located cannot sustain them because it is drought affected, part of a drought declared area or otherwise adversely affected by drought, the stock may be walked, subject to certain conditions, to non-drought declared areas under a travel permit issued by the relevant local government or temporarily agisted for up to 28 days while longer term arrangements are put in place, such as arranging for stock to travel to market, to a drought-free area or to a private agistment.

Recent media reports have drawn attention to ongoing management issues, including the competition between pastoralists using the stock route network to move travelling stock and those seeking drought relief and/or long-term grazing access and concerns that stock from interstate are depriving local stock owners of access to pasture. Under the act, an applicant for a travel or agistment permit that has been refused by a local government can apply to the department for a review of the decision. When undertaking the review the department considers both the merits and the process that the council applied in reaching its decision. The departmental decision maker is required to determine whether the decision should stand or be revoked. It is suspected that some local governments have sought the early closure of stock routes to travelling stock so that pasture is retained in the local government area for the use of local stock owners. Closure for such reasons is not provided for under the act and is inconsistent with the primary purpose of the stock route, which is, of course, travelling stock.

The department has been requested to review the following two local government decisions to date: a decision by the Winton shire, which decided to refuse two travelling permits due to insufficient feed and water—and this decision was revoked by the department following an assessment that adequate feed and water did exist on the applicable route—and a decision by the Blackall-Tambo shire, which decided to refuse an agistment permit on a reserve connected to the stock route. This decision was confirmed by the department that the reserve area was required for the operation of the network for use by travelling stock.

CHAIR: Member for Bundamba?

Mrs MILLER: I refer to page 14 of the SDS for Natural Resources and Mines. This details the state's administered land portfolio. I ask the minister: can you please advise the committee of the total value of land sales in 2012-13? Can you also provide information in relation to all land sold either below the market value or the unimproved value? Can you also advise us of the expected returns from land sales in 2013-14?

Mr CRIPPS: Mr Chairman, the information requested by the member for Bundamba is somewhat detailed in relation to the disposal of state owned land for last year and the projected—

Mrs MILLER: I am happy for you to take it on notice.

Mr CRIPPS: I am glad, member for Bundamba. I will take the matter on notice.

Mrs MILLER: That is fine.

Mr CRIPPS: And I will provide the information to the member for Bundamba at a later time.

Mrs MILLER: Yes, that is fine. I just have a quick follow-up question in relation to page 8 of the SDS where it details that Land Services staff are projected to fall from 1,278 to 1,260 this financial year. Minister, can you advise what areas within Land Services those 18 staff will be no longer employed from and whether there will be more than 18 of those staff? In other words, in the SDS it says 1,278 down to 1,260. We understand that a few weeks ago the Premier said that there will be no more cutting in the Queensland Public Service. However, we know that every day of the week people are getting the chop by your cold and callous government.

CHAIR: That is a statement now.

Mrs MILLER: What I want to know is whether there will only be 18 who will be retrenched, sacked, or whichever way you want to put it, but they certainly will not be there.

Mr CRIPPS: In relation to the member's question, in the first instance I want to say that the Land Services area within the Department of Natural Resources and Mines delivers a very strong framework for dealing in land which provides confidence and certainty to clients and to the community. Our intention is, of course, to maximise the productive use of Queensland's land resources in a sustainable way.

Staffing allocations to Land Services in the 2013-14 budget, as the member for Bundamba indicated, is projected to be reduced by 18 positions over the estimated actual for 2012-13. The reason for this has been the continued implementation of agreed Queensland government reform decisions and the cessation of projects on 30 June 2013. For example, the survey information project capture team completed work in 2012-13 and this has resulted in five temporary positions not being continued in 2013-14. Further reductions have occurred as a result of vacancy management decisions, these being that the spatial information group has had a further reduction of four vacant positions in 2013-14; the implementation of reductions for the titles registration group accounted for another two vacant positions; delivery of an online objection service and a review of priority areas for

the 2013 annual valuation of land has delivered another three vacant positions; and the focus of policy units on legislative and operational policy reforms has also delivered another three vacant positions.

So in response to the member for Bundamba's question, these are all variances, or vacancies that exist within the department and it does not involve any redundancies or retrenchments of people who work in the Department of Natural Resources and Mines within the Land Services division.

CHAIR: One quick final question, Ms Trad.

Ms TRAD: Thank you, Chair, for your indulgence. Minister, in relation to your response to question 7 on notice, the \$30 million that is delivering the three programs that you specified earlier, the Paddock to Reef—and I am very glad that you think it is a world-leading approach, it was basically initiated under the former Labor government—and the other programs, the Wetlands Program and the NRM programs—the funding to the NRM bodies—can you please detail exactly how much each of those three programs receives from the total \$30 million?

Mr CRIPPS: Thank you, Mr Chairman. In relation to the \$30 million NRM programs for the reef, that funding is provided to each of those regional NRM groups in the five reef catchments on an application basis in a competitive application process. In relation to the division of the funding between the three initiatives, that being the Paddock to Reef, the Wetlands Program and the regional NRM program, I might get the deputy director-general for operations to give those specific details in terms of those three programs; if that is possible and acceptable to the member?

Ms TRAD: Yes, thank you very much.

Ms Ryan: The \$30 million is split up over five years. In the 2013-14 budget the \$6 million has been divided up to the reef NRM bodies of \$3.575 million; Paddock to Reef \$500,000 for the monitoring, another \$500,000 for Paddock to Reef modelling; \$500,000 to the Wetlands Program; \$200,000 for spatial and scientific information management systems; and \$600,000 towards the overall administration of the reef program.

Ms TRAD: Can I ask that those figures be tabled? Is that possible?

Mr CRIPPS: I am happy to take the specific details about those figures on notice and we will provide those in table format to the member.

Ms TRAD: From my quick analysis, the Paddock to Reef program has been slashed by over \$1 million; is that right?

Ms Ryan: No. This allocation equates to what was allocated in the budget for 2012-13. The issue I think will be whether or not there is any corresponding Commonwealth money under Reef Rescue.

Ms TRAD: I think under the last budget of the former government it was over \$2 million. Now it is \$1 million.

CHAIR: That draws to a conclusion the consideration of estimates for land services and water services. The time for questions is closed. Thank you, Minister and advisers. We will now take a short break and resume at 11.30 to examine the estimates for mine safety and health services and mining and petroleum services. Thank you very much.

Proceedings suspended from 11.03 am to 11.30 am

CHAIR: Welcome back, Minister and advisers. We will now consider the estimates for mining and petroleum services and mine safety and health. Minister, would you care to make an opening statement?

Mr CRIPPS: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Thank you for the opportunity to outline the budget and expenditure for the mines portfolio within the Department of Natural Resources and Mines and to discuss some of the programs that we are committed to in the current financial year.

The Newman government is committed to the sustainable and responsible use of our mineral, petroleum and gas resources and to ensuring Queensland's world-class mine safety record is maintained. We have once again delivered on this promise for Queenslanders. As I mentioned earlier today, our first budget began the huge task of returning Queensland to a position of financial stability following being put in a very difficult financial position by the previous government. The 2013-14 state budget has also been designed to continue that financial repair task and to address Queensland's economic challenges inherited from the previous government. We are working to get Queensland back on track and we have taken huge strides, I believe, in this direction already.

A key aim of this state budget is to encourage growth in Queensland's resources sector in recognition of the critical role it plays in driving economic activity, particularly in regional areas of Queensland. Our identification of the resources sector on purpose as one of the key pillars of the state's economy—it has not just been rhetoric—and our recent budget commitments are clear evidence of that. The Department of Natural Resources and Mines is committed to ensuring all Queenslanders benefit from the sustainable use of the state's mineral and gas resources and that Queensland maintains its position as a destination of choice for local and international resource sector investment. To that end, the Newman government has allocated \$30 million to further support Queensland's resources and exploration industries. This funding will enable the Geological Survey of Queensland to lead a program of initiatives designed to support mineral and energy related exploration and make Queensland more attractive for resource investment.

A healthy exploration sector will underpin Queensland's future mining projects, jobs and community infrastructure in regional areas. I am also pleased to report that the Newman government is well on track to implementing its election commitment to provide a more realistic and staged approach to the conclusion of sandmining on North Stradbroke Island. Labor's approach, unfortunately, to this issue was to abandon the people of North Stradbroke Island in their pursuit of support from the conservation sector. The LNP will not let that happen. I can announce today that the Newman government is currently considering an alternative plan from sandmining company Sibelco, and I have urged the Quandamooka people to consider the potential economic benefits the plan presents to their people and to all of the community on North Stradbroke Island.

Of course, none of the work in my department could be accomplished without the dedication and the hard work of officers in my department and my ministerial staff, and I would like to make particular mention of the director-general, Dan Hunt, and the assistant minister, the member for Pumicestone. I would like to thank them for their continued professionalism and support. We have been and will continue to be a government that supports the people of Queensland, and I look forward to continuing our support for the resources sector and encouraging its development to provide jobs for those Queenslanders.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. I will ask the member for Bundamba to ask the first question. Of course, she comes from that well-known mining area of Ipswich.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you very much, Mr Chairman. I am also the daughter and granddaughter of coalminers of Ipswich as well. Minister, last night it was revealed that you had accepted ministerial briefing material from Sibelco, which I have here and which I will seek leave to table shortly.

CHAIR: Does it relate to the budget?

Mrs MILLER: Yes, it is in relation to page 3 of the SDS. This, combined with the level of access over the last two months and donations from Sibelco to the Premier's campaign in his electorate of Ashgrove at the last election, is very murky, Minister. In fact, some people in Queensland might think it is corrupt. Is it common practice under your government to accept advice like this directly from a mining proponent with a clear vested interest or is this the first in a cash-for-legislation scandal? I seek leave to table the documents.

CHAIR: How is this document relevant to the budget?

Mrs MILLER: It is relevant because the minister actually just referred to Sibelco in his opening statement and what he planned to do. I am requesting and seeking leave that this document be tabled in accordance with the standing orders to inform the people of Queensland about what will be happening at North Stradbroke Island.

CHAIR: Everyone is happy to table that? Leave is granted.

Mr CRIPPS: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Can I, from the outset, reject the assertions made by the member for Bundamba in her question that there is any suggestion whatsoever of any inappropriate arrangements between Sibelco and the Newman government. I think that is an unbecoming assertion for the member for Bundamba to make in these estimates processes.

Mrs MILLER: It's the truth.

CHAIR: Order!

Mr CRIPPS: The member for Bundamba has presented absolutely no evidence whatsoever that there is any untoward or inappropriate relationship between Sibelco and the Newman government. I think it is regrettable that the member for Bundamba has couched a question about an important issue in those terms. What I can say about this issue is that the LNP was very clear when

the previous government introduced the legislation in respect of North Stradbroke Island into the parliament in 2011, and subsequently during the state election campaign last year, that we did not support the arrangements that had been put in place by the previous government that pulled the rug out from underneath communities on North Stradbroke Island as far as the viability of the employment opportunities on that island are concerned. We made it quite clear that we did not believe that there was an appropriate period of time for there to be an adjustment in the economic fabric of the island community when sandmining came to an end and where there would be opportunities for people on North Stradbroke Island to pursue alternative economic opportunities. The commitment has always been public and very clear about the approach of the Newman government in relation to how we would pursue alternative arrangements on the island, and that is what we have been pursuing since we came to office.

I reject the assertions that have come from the member for Bundamba that there is anything secret or untoward in relation to this situation. We have always been very upfront about how we would be pursuing it—all the way back to when the previous government overrode the interests of the local community in relation to providing a viable alternative pathway for them to move from employment in the sandmining operations on North Stradbroke Island to alternative jobs.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, thank you very much for your answer to my question. I am very sure that the people of Queensland would be interested about the decoy drone down there on the Speaker's Green to try to turn their minds away from this important issue that we are discussing today.

In relation to the documents that I just tabled, it is very interesting that in those documents Sibelco was actually trying to tell you as a minister and the government which sections of the act to change, what they actually wanted in the act et cetera. Director-General, have you seen the documents in relation to Sibelco and what they particularly want in the legislation and have those documents perhaps gone on to the Parliamentary Counsel for drafting of the appropriate amendments or the appropriate bills to come? This is in relation to the SDS at page 3.

Mr Hunt: I have seen the documents. They have not gone to Parliamentary Counsel.

Mrs MILLER: Right. So, in relation to the SDS at page 3, can you please advise whether your policy and legislation branch is working on the proposals that have come from Sibelco in relation to the documents that I have tabled?

Mr Hunt: Is that a question to me?

Mrs MILLER: Yes, it is, Director-General.

Mr Hunt: We are looking at legislative options for Stradbroke Island. I am quite sure that they have a copy of the Sibelco proposal, but they will be working up their own proposals as well. It is not unusual for industry to approach government with suggestions for changes to legislation.

Mrs MILLER: Cash for legislation, Director-General.

CHAIR: Order! I ask you to withdraw that statement.

Mrs MILLER: I withdraw. I have another question for the minister. Minister, in relation to page 3 of the SDS, the Premier assured the public prior to the last election that he would not give Sibelco anything more than what they had prior to the North Stradbroke Island Act and would not extend those mining interests. Can the minister assure us that Sibelco will not be given an extension in area or time for any of the mining leases on North Stradbroke Island?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for Bundamba for the question. There are a lot of people interested, actually, in the initiatives being pursued by Desert Channels Queensland in relation to the management of prickly acacia in Western Queensland. It is not a distraction; it is part of the ongoing investment by this government in natural resource management programs. I think the interest of many people in Queensland would be highlighted by the fact that the member for Dalrymple pre-empted the announcement today in relation to his inquiry in the last session of the estimates that prickly acacia is actually a very significant issue for many landowners in Queensland. So I do not agree with your flippant assertion that today's announcement in relation to ongoing investment in natural resource management is a distraction. We do not have to be distracted by anything in relation to this issue with regard to North Stradbroke Island.

Mrs MILLER: I think you've gone back to the previous question.

Mr CRIPPS: We don't have to be distracted at all because we have had a very clear commitment since 2011 that we did not agree with the arrangements that were put in place by the previous government regarding North Stradbroke Island. We reiterated our disagreement with those

arrangements put in place by the previous government during the state election campaign in 2012. Since that time we have been going about implementing our commitments to the people of Queensland in relation to providing a smoother transitional arrangement for the community on North Stradbroke Island from sandmining to alternative economic arrangements.

We—that is, the Newman government—challenged the company to come up with an alternative package that would deliver benefits for all concerned in relation to the sandmining activities on North Stradbroke Island. I challenged Sibelco to come up with their best possible alternative arrangements and they have submitted to the government their proposed alternative arrangements. Whether or not you call it a briefing note or a submission or a suggestion to the government, industry, individuals and companies do that as a matter of routine. I receive correspondence, as the member would know, regularly outlining representations that individuals—

Mrs MILLER: And are they accompanied by cheques? Brown paper bags?

CHAIR: Order! Withdraw that. I ask the member to withdraw that comment, please.

Mrs MILLER: I withdraw it.

Mr CRIPPS: That happens all the time, in my capacity. And it does not matter what companies or individuals put forward; it only matters what the government actually implements and makes decisions about. Very clearly, what I challenged Sibelco to do was to come up with an alternative set of arrangements that would provide for that smoother transition process, that would have beneficial environmental outcomes for the island and better outcomes for the people of North Stradbroke Island, including the Indigenous people of North Stradbroke Island. They have submitted that. As the director-general has indicated, that submission from the company is now being considered by the department, but the consideration by the department does not mean that everything that is in the company's submission will be implemented. What we will be implementing is an initiative that will meet our commitment to the people of North Stradbroke Island and to Queensland to provide for those smoother transitional arrangements. I have been very clear about that this morning and, once again, when being asked questions by the member for Bundamba now and I have been clear about that publicly.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, you have claimed that leaked crown law advice did not establish a position that amending legislation to extend sandmining could potentially be invalidated because of the native title agreement. I know that you have answered, in some way, a similar question asked by the member for South Brisbane. However, Minister, I do not believe you on this. I do not trust your answer on this and neither do the people of Queensland.

CHAIR: Order, member for Bundamba!

Mrs MILLER: I am asking the minister, given the precedent of the Deputy Premier to release the crown law advice in relation to the polmie payroll debacle and given that—

CHAIR: Order! That question is out of order.

Mrs MILLER: No, it is not. I am asking the minister: would you please table the crown law advice you have received?

CHAIR: Member for Bundamba, that question is out of order. The crown law advice does not have to be tabled.

Mrs MILLER: So if the government wants to get itself out of a bit of trouble, they can pick and choose which crown law—

CHAIR: I don't think the government was getting itself out of trouble. It was in the public interest.

Mrs MILLER: The public payroll debacle was in the public interest; thank you very much.

CHAIR: Order!

Mrs MILLER: Minister, I go on to my next question. You said earlier that you had met only once with QYAC because they do not agree with the position to extend sandmining on North Stradbroke Island. Minister, a community organisation like this does not agree, clearly, with your decision, but that does not preclude you from meeting with them on a regular basis. This is clearly unacceptable. Minister, I go back to the SDS, page 3. You have listed this single meeting as an achievement and yet there is no mention at all of the numerous meetings that you have had with Sibelco. Minister, will you now provide and give your undertaking here to this committee today that in future you will offer to meet QYAC as often as the LNP donor Sibelco?

CHAIR: That is a totally inappropriate question.

Mrs MILLER: No, it is in relation to page 3 of the SDS.

CHAIR: That is a totally inappropriate question and it is hypothetical as well.

Mrs MILLER: It is not.

CHAIR: It is hypothetical.

Mrs MILLER: Chair, it is in relation to the minister's duties, the director-general's duties, the people who provide all the briefing notes to the director-general and the minister for any meetings that this minister may have with the Aboriginal people from the island. It is a simple question: will you meet them in your role as minister this financial year the same number of times as you have met with Sibelco?

CHAIR: Why—

Mrs MILLER: It is a question because it will result and it has resulted—

CHAIR: How does it relate to the service delivery statement?

Mrs MILLER:—in the funding of the department providing—

CHAIR: Order! Member for Bundamba, order, please!

Mrs MILLER: I will answer the question.

CHAIR: How does this relate to the service delivery statement?

Mrs MILLER: I understand that many people do not recognise what happens inside government departments. But for the benefit of you as chair and for this committee, whenever a minister meets with a community member or even Sibelco, say, the department is normally asked to provide briefing notes, which cost money. The director-general knows that. People in this room know that. It results in the expenditure of staff money and staff time to provide those briefing notes. Clearly it comes within the expenditure of this department, which is outlined in the service delivery statements. It is a simple question. You cannot rule me out on that, so do not bother. It is a very simple question that the minister may like to answer.

CHAIR: Minister?

Mr CRIPPS: Mr Chairman, I thank the member for Bundamba for what was possibly the most convoluted and disjointed question that I have ever heard put to anyone in an estimates committee process.

Mrs MILLER: With respect, I was answering the question that was put to me by the chair.

Mr CRIPPS: There were so many assertions made in the question, it is really hard to know what precisely the member for Bundamba is asking me to answer.

Mrs MILLER: Can I rephrase the question?

Mr CRIPPS: I will ask the member for Bundamba to rephrase the question and to ask something, rather than making a series of assertions in her question.

Mrs MILLER: It was not a series of assertions.

Mr CRIPPS: It was a series of assertions.

Mrs MILLER: No, it was not. What I was responding to was the chair asking me about whether or not my question involved expenditure of the department.

CHAIR: You are only wasting time, member for Bundamba. Can you ask your question?

Mrs MILLER: You do not need to lecture me, Chair. I am saying that it involved expenditure and I cleared that up. My question is in relation to the Quandamooka people. The issue is that you have met with Sibelco on a number of occasions. I am asking: will you meet with them an equal amount of time?

Mr CRIPPS: What I think is being distorted by the member for Bundamba in this situation is that there is some sort of suggestion that there has been unfettered access by Sibelco to myself as minister, and that is clearly not the case. I met Sibelco after the election where I issued that challenge to them to come up with an alternative package of arrangements that would be beneficial to all concerned in relation to alternative arrangements for sandmining on North Stradbroke Island being brought to a close in a more orderly fashion, to provide that smooth transitional arrangement. When I met with Sibelco, I had asked them to come up with something that would be beneficial to all

concerned, that would involve them having a viable operation on the island, that would have good environmental outcomes and they went away and worked on that. What the member for Bundamba is referring to in relation to this suggestion that there has been unfettered access is that Sibelco had been talking to departmental officers about the challenge that I set them. I have not been meeting with Sibelco every other day during that time frame.

I might also say in relation to our contact with the Quandamooka people that my department had attempted to meet with the Quandamooka people on several occasions, but we had not had agreement about meeting with the Quandamooka people if the dialogue that would occur at that time would involve an extension of sandmining on North Stradbroke Island. It is very difficult to engage with a community organisation that does not want to talk to you about the policy that your government clearly gave a commitment to implementing when the previous government implemented the arrangements to bring sandmining to a close on North Stradbroke Island in 2011 and also the commitment that you gave during the state election campaign. If that community organisation— whoever it may be; in this case it is the Quandamooka people—do not want to meet with you to talk about that particular issue, it is very difficult to engage them.

I did meet with the Quandamooka people earlier this year, in May. I indicated to them at this time that the department and I had received that package of alternative arrangements put forward by Sibelco. I did not go to that meeting and promote or advocate for the alternative arrangements that Sibelco had put together, but I did encourage the Quandamooka people to engage in a dialogue with Sibelco to discuss those alternative arrangements. On face value, those alternative arrangements provide a positive story for North Stradbroke Island and the community on North Stradbroke Island, including Indigenous people on North Stradbroke Island.

They have presented me with an alternative proposal that involves a scaled-back mining proposal consistent with extending the mine life but that provides better environmental outcomes in the long term. The proposal involves additional benefits to the Quandamooka people. I reiterate that that is a proposal that has been put forward by Sibelco for us to consider. It is not necessarily what the Queensland government will implement. I have urged, as I said previously, the Quandamooka people, represented by QYAC, to consider the potential benefits that the plan represents. If the plan that has been put forward by Sibelco is implemented, there will be an end to all sandmining on North Stradbroke Island by 2035 and the maintenance of sandmining jobs on the island until that time, including the sandmining jobs that employ Indigenous people on North Stradbroke Island. There will be extra royalties available to the native title holders, the Quandamooka people. Indeed, there will be an extra 16 years' worth of royalties from the longer operations of the Enterprise mine until that date. Importantly, there will be a reduction in the environmental footprint of sandmining operations due to the staged consolidation of sandmining to the southern end of the island, away from the major residential areas on the island, and an earlier relinquishment of mining leases by the company that will allow the land to be used for other purposes such as tourism, land for the community, for recreational or for other purposes, and for the purposes that the native title party may wish to pursue.

Regardless of the changes that we intend to make to the legislation, can I make it absolutely clear to the committee that the Newman government remains fully committed to fulfilling its obligations and responsibilities under the existing Indigenous land use agreement between the state and the Quandamooka people. We do not believe that the plan that has been put forward affects the joint management framework between the state and the Quandamooka people for the management of the national parks on the island. I can assure the committee that any amendments that we undertake to fulfil our election commitment will be in accordance with the requirements of the Commonwealth Native Title Act.

CHAIR: Minister, was the local member of parliament at that meeting with the Quandamooka people?

Mr CRIPPS: Yes. At the meeting that I had with the Quandamooka people, the local member was in attendance.

CHAIR: Who would that be?

Mr CRIPPS: The member for Cleveland, Dr Robinson.

CHAIR: He is their local representative.

Mr CRIPPS: Yes, he is their local representative.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, the meeting on 1 May involving yourself and meeting separately with your senior adviser on 9 May, 28 May, 29 May and 19 June, has the purpose of contact detailed as 'making or amendment of legislation'. Minister, are you able to table here today any draft legislation or briefing material prepared for these meetings or have you already made up your mind in relation to this legislation?

Mr CRIPPS: Mr Chairman, I have already indicated that no decisions have been made by the Queensland government in relation to how we intend to keep the commitment that we made in 2011 and during the election campaign to make sure that there is a smoother transitional arrangement for the community on North Stradbroke Island. I have confirmed that we have received a proposal from Sibelco that the government is considering. Until such time as the cabinet has an opportunity to consider those alternative proposals, I cannot pre-empt the decision of the government.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you very much. My next question is to the director-general. I have a final question to the director-general.

CHAIR: Let us make it a simple question.

Mrs MILLER: It is a simple question. Director-General, as the minister obviously has no interest in transparency, would you please be able to table—

CHAIR: Order! Withdraw that please.

Mrs MILLER: I withdraw. Director-General, would you please table any briefing material or any draft legislation, but particularly briefing material, that was done by your departmental officers in preparation for these meetings in relation to Sibelco and also in relation to Rowland, which is a known lobbying firm?

CHAIR: Before I call the minister—

Mrs MILLER: This is to the director-general.

CHAIR: Is it ministerial briefings that you are chasing because they are privileged documents?

Mrs MILLER: No, they are not.

CHAIR: They are.

Mrs MILLER: They are not. Ministerial briefings are not privileged documents.

CHAIR: The advice I am getting—

Mrs MILLER: It's wrong. What, you are listening to advice from those clowns to your right!

CHAIR: Excuse me, withdraw that.

Mrs MILLER: I withdraw. But ministerial briefings—

CHAIR: Withdraw that statement, please.

Mrs MILLER: I withdrew it. But ministerial briefings are not privileged documents.

CHAIR: They are. I am getting advice—

Mrs MILLER: No, they are not. Cabinet documents are and ministerial briefings are not.

CHAIR: I am getting advice from the executive officer that they are privileged. If you wish to challenge me, we can go and get further advice.

Mrs MILLER: I am asking the director-general.

CHAIR: I am ruling the question out of order.

Mrs MILLER: All right, I will come back to it.

CHAIR: I call the member for Dalrymple.

Mr KNUTH: I refer to 'Resources and performance' on page 2 of the SDS. What were the total royalties from coal seam gas paid to Queensland Treasury in the last financial year?

Mr CRIPPS: The Department of Natural Resources and Mines is not responsible and has no role in the collection of royalties paid by companies to the state of Queensland as a result of mining activities. Those royalties are collected by Treasury. The honourable member's question ought to be directed to the Treasurer.

Mr KNUTH: These gas companies are no doubt producing gas to make a profit to return to their shareholders. As demand for gas increases in South-East Asia and thus increases the gas price, will the minister put in place mechanisms to ensure gas is reserved for domestic supply and is sold to locals at an affordable price?

Mr CRIPPS: I have only a limited role in relation to government decision making concerning any efforts to put in place a gas reservation policy. My role in the administration of legislation regarding the gas industry in Queensland is limited to upstream in terms of the management of tenure arrangements. The responsibility for energy security arrangements and if there were to be a gas reservation policy brought forward in Queensland also lies with the Minister for Energy and Water Supply.

What I can indicate to the committee as a result of the member's question is that the Queensland government does not support a gas reservation policy in this state. There is a very good reason for that and that is that current market arrangements mean, as the member for Dalrymple has pointed out, that there is currently a focus in terms of the development of the gas industry in Queensland to satisfy demand out of Asia. Many of the customers that the companies are supplying are in that Asian market.

The fact of the matter is that gas companies do not undertake exploration or capital expenditure in terms of the development of infrastructure for their projects without the prospect of a commercial return. Although the member for Dalrymple may think that a domestic gas reserve policy may deliver, hypothetically, affordable gas for domestic users, he may find, as a result of the implementation of such a policy, that we do not have the investment in exploration and the development of production areas for gas that would result in a commercial return. The member for Dalrymple's proposal could actually result in a perverse outcome—that is, dampening investment in the development of our gas reserves in Queensland, and the people of Queensland would not benefit as a result from the employment that comes from the development of our gas reserves or the Queensland government benefit from the royalties that flow from the development of that industry.

CHAIR: I call the member for South Brisbane.

Ms TRAD: Minister, can you confirm that you have received crown law advice in relation to the expansion of sandmining on Stradbroke Island?

Mr CRIPPS: There is no proposal to expand sandmining on North Stradbroke Island. The proposal that is before the Queensland government from Sibelco does not involve any expansion of sandmining on North Stradbroke Island. In fact, as I have already indicated to the committee, it involves a contraction of sandmining activities on North Stradbroke Island and a consolidation of the footprint of sandmining activities on North Stradbroke Island into a smaller footprint on the island, moving away from residential areas in the north to the enterprise lease in the south. The member's question is erroneous in that regard. There is no proposed expansion of sandmining on North Stradbroke Island.

Ms TRAD: Is there legal advice in relation to QYAC's ability to challenge any legislative amendments to the North Stradbroke Island act? Is there any crown law advice to that effect? Is there legal advice on the alternative?

Mr CRIPPS: The department has of course considered the alternative package of proposals that have come forward from Sibelco. In advising me as minister about the implications of that we seek legal advice about what that would involve. In particular, what the legal advice says to me as minister is that we do not believe that any proposal to extend sandmining on North Stradbroke Island, in accordance with the proposal that has come from Sibelco, will impede the ability of the Queensland government to meet all of its obligations and responsibilities under the current ILUA with the Quandamooka people.

Ms TRAD: Is that advice from Sibelco or crown law?

Mr CRIPPS: No, that is the Queensland government's legal advice to me as the minister.

Ms TRAD: From crown law?

Mr CRIPPS: From crown law.

Ms TRAD: The briefing note that was tabled by the member for Bundamba suggests that crown law do believe that any changes to the North Stradbroke Island act could be challengeable by QYAC. Is that the case?

CHAIR: This is hypothetical.

Ms TRAD: It goes to a document that was tabled.

CHAIR: It is a hypothetical question. You still cannot ask hypothetical questions.

Ms TRAD: I am asking about the advice from crown law. That was not hypothetical.

CHAIR: Minister, I think this is a hypothetical question and I rule it out.

Ms TRAD: I will reword it. Did the advice from crown law suggest that amendments to the North Stradbroke Island act could be challengeable by QYAC?

Mr CRIPPS: I am struggling to understand which document the member for South Brisbane is referring to. If she could clarify that for me—

Ms TRAD: The briefing note that was tabled by the member for Bundamba.

Mr CRIPPS: And that briefing note was a document prepared by Sibelco to—

Ms TRAD: Sibelco was attached to it.

Mrs MILLER: Have a look at the back of it.

CHAIR: I will get it over to you, Minister.

Mr CRIPPS: I think it is routine for legal advice to outline the risks that are associated with any process that may be engaged in in terms of legislation. Really, the responsibility of crown law is to provide advice to the government about what the potential risks are. Our advice from crown law is that we do not believe that we will be impeded from meeting our obligations under our ILUA with the Quandamooka people, and we are committed to implementing all of our obligations and responsibilities in that regard.

CHAIR: I call the member for Whitsunday.

Mr COSTIGAN: I would be delighted to ask a question that falls within the parameters of the estimates process. Minister, I refer to page 2 of the SDS which notes the government's decision to provide \$30 million for the Geological Survey of Queensland, which you touched on, as I recall, in your second opening statement. Can you outline the government's efforts to support the new wave of mining investment in the state of Queensland?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for the question. The Queensland government does have a commitment to the junior end of the resources sector—those contractors, explorers, geologists and financiers who are the lifeblood of the resources industry in this state.

It is important to note that a mineral of marginal or non-economic value, even a few years ago, could become the next sought-after commodity for the new wave of technological innovations. For example, silicon and rare earths—minerals which have become the building blocks of new technologies—were a few years ago really not of interest at all to the industry. A sound understanding of the state's geology will keep Queensland ahead of the game when it comes to new discoveries. By investing in understanding Queensland's complex geology and by reducing non-financial barriers to entry in the resources sector, I am confident that my department is supporting a new wave of mining investment in the state.

The Newman government has just made one of the biggest single injections of funding into the resources sector from a state government. We will be investing \$30 million over three years in additional funding for the Geological Survey of Queensland under the Future Resources Program. The funding boost has been made possible by the success of the competitive cash-bidding process recently introduced for some of Queensland's most highly prospective resource tenures.

While the cash component of the competitive tendering process attracted some criticism, the Newman government maintains that this process ensures the most appropriate return for all Queenslanders from highly prospective tenures. However, the government also appreciates that industry must realise some benefits from such processes, which is why we are putting a good proportion of these funds back into the resources sector.

The Future Resources Program will start with \$10 million allocated for the first year and an additional \$10 million per year until June 2016. The key initiatives under this program include: new seismic and crustal conductivity surveys in the Cloncurry, Julia Creek and Dajarra-Boulia areas of North-West Queensland; a mineral resource assessment of Cape York using targeted geological mapping and sampling; and funding to be provided to extract valuable geochemical data in the company report archive of the Department of Natural Resources and Mines and enter it into an easily searchable, readily accessible database for industry, for government and for the public. The Geological Survey of the Queensland will convert into a digital format the department's archive in hard-copy format of the company seismic sections so they can be accessed online for the first time.

We will be continuing the funding for the collaborative drilling initiative, which provides grants of up to \$150,000 to underwrite innovative exploration and drilling costs. The department is also going to expand its storage capacity in order to preserve valuable core samples acquired from company and

government drilling. The industry will have a say about how a good proportion of this funding should be spent and approximately 25 per cent of the funding will be spent in accordance with priorities set in consultation with the industry itself.

CHAIR: I call the member for Barron River.

Mr TROUT: I refer to the opening lines of the Service Delivery Statement's strategic direction. How has the Newman government moved to assess new industries with an eye to balanced and sustainable development?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for the question. The government has acted quickly to remove obstacles to new industry looking to move to commercialisation, provided they meet the government's high expectations as far as safety and environmental sustainability are concerned. The former government certainly hamstrung sectors of Queensland's resources industry with rather arbitrary and unscientific bans, such as on uranium. The Newman government has found that there was no scientific basis for this ban and indeed the former government continued to maintain its policy despite a more reasonable approach from its federal counterparts.

Queenslanders as a result are left to imagine what jobs might have been created, particularly for the state's Indigenous communities in regional areas, if the former government's ban on uranium mining was lifted earlier. Within the space of 12 months, the Newman government has reversed the ban on uranium mining in Queensland, but the recommencement of a uranium mining industry will be with world's best practice, particularly in relation to environmental and safety standards, to unlock jobs and investment opportunities across Queensland. In particular, the recommencement of uranium mining will be, I believe, a boost for north-west Queensland. Uranium mining and export is already providing jobs, royalties and regional development for other parts of Australia, and I think it is reasonable to expect that Queensland should be allowed to share in those benefits.

The Department of Natural Resources and Mines is currently leading an interdepartmental committee that will submit a draft report to the Resources Cabinet Committee later this year on how to responsibly re-establish the uranium mining industry in Queensland. There are a number of variables that will influence the timing of uranium mining operations in Queensland. The government is working to deliver an efficient and robust approvals and compliance framework to support the re-establishment of a uranium industry. Once in place the decision by companies to pursue uranium projects will be based on a range of commercial factors. These include the price of uranium, market supply and the demand for uranium and mining costs. It is ultimately a decision for the proponents about when to commence uranium mining.

Policy certainty across all aspects of operation from exploration to production to rehabilitation is required to assist industry to address community concerns raised during consultation of the development of the uranium mining industry's implementation committee report. In February this year the government also approved the development of a commercial oil shale industry in Queensland, a policy that recognised the strategic importance of oil shale for energy security in the long term. The new oil shale policy will ensure that the state can attract the investment needed to develop the industry and provide greater certainty for the state's oil shale proponents. In the longer term it will create new jobs and economic benefits for regional communities in the broader economy and position Queensland as a technology leader in the sustainable development of a nationally and globally important new industry.

The new policy is already having an effect, with the recent announcement by Axiom Mining regarding its ongoing expansion into the energy sector. The company has lodged three applications for exploration permits over known oil shale sequences between Croydon and Julia Creek in North Queensland. I would also note that interim resources have recently concluded negotiations with global oil shale group on defining interests in its Julia Creek and Richmond tenements, which are known to host large oil shale resources.

So I think it is fair to say that the new policy has sent the right message to the investment community, but we will also be ensuring that project proponents first demonstrate that their technology will meet high environmental standards and community expectations before approvals will be granted. The policy allows for the consideration and development of projects on a case-by-case basis through a detailed environmental impact statement process to be overseen by the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection.

Where a proposed oil shale technology is unproven in Queensland, it will be assessed through a trial phase to determine whether the technology meets appropriate environmental standards. If successful, a staged approach towards commercialisation will begin. The encouragement of a

controlled oil shale industry will help position Queensland as a technology leader in sustainable resource sector development. It will also provide Australia with a new source of domestic fuel and the potential for a new export opportunity for Queensland.

Lifting the ban on the commercial oil shale industry was a decision about providing a boost to the economy and providing regional Queenslanders with job opportunities and diversifying our resources sector. We are now in a good position as a state to take advantage of the world's growing need for energy as global suppliers of crude oil diminish over time.

CHAIR: I refer to the table on page 13 of the SDS. Can the minister explain the drop in the percentage of scheduled and legislative audits, inspections and investigations completed within prescribed times outlined in the SDS?

Mr CRIPPS: Thank you, Mr Chairman. The Newman government and my department have worked hard over the last financial year to support the mining and petroleum and gas industry in Queensland. Much of this work has been done in particular to appropriately manage and regulate the mining and CSG industries as it expands its footprint through Queensland. Strong investment in the industry has protected Queensland's economy and it will also serve to protect the state from the worst of the global economic difficulties that have impacted on other countries around the world.

The Newman government supports the resources sector. The LNP made it clear that our support for the resources sector also came with a quid pro quo that the Newman government expects the CSG industry to operate in a safe and sustainable manner in line with community expectations. There are three inspectorates in my department which conduct audits, inspections and investigations against prescribed time frames. Each year my department sets a percentage target for audits, inspections and investigations completed within prescribed times. This ensures that inspectorate resources are applied to critical preventative compliance activities. The target set by the department is a general measure of efficiency across all inspectorates and the performance of the inspectorate against this target may change depending on the complexity and number of investigations conducted each year.

In 2012-13 the target for audits, inspections and investigations completed within prescribed times was not achieved. This can be partly explained by changes in the practices of the inspectorate which led to more detailed investigations of injury incidents. For example, from the beginning of 2012-13 the Petroleum and Gas Inspectorate investigated a greater number of injury incidents in an effort to reduce the frequency of these incidents in the future. This has resulted in an increase in investigation days from 452 in 2011-12 to 600 in 2012-13, which has had an impact on meeting the target for audits, inspections and investigations completed within prescribed times.

These investigations are necessarily time intensive and can skew the results of the percentage target published in the department's annual Service Delivery Statement. In fact, all inspectorates saw an increase in days completing investigations from 2011-12 to 2012-13. In the past year inspectors in mines, petroleum and gas and explosives spent a total of 2,157 days completing investigations—an increase of 676 days. Across the three inspectorates, my department also increased the days spent conducting audits and inspections. In the past year the inspectorate has increased the number of days conducting inspections and audits by 97 days to a total of 3,262 days.

In summary, the increase in time spent conducting investigations and the increase in time spent conducting audits and inspections has meant that the inspectorate has completed 80 per cent of its audits, inspections and investigations completed within prescribed times.

CHAIR: Minister, as a supplementary, was there some commitment from the inspectorate also into the mining disaster in New Zealand? Did your inspectorate office have something to do with that?

Mr CRIPPS: It is certainly true that following the Pike River disaster in New Zealand the Queensland government offered assistance to the government in New Zealand, particularly in relation to the immediate aftermath of that very tragic event and subsequently in relation to the royal commission that was conducted to find out the causes of that particular incident—very regrettable in terms of mine safety issues. We were fortunate enough to be able to support the New Zealand government in that regard by providing our Commissioner for Mine Safety and Health to be a royal commissioner. I would invite the Commissioner for Mine Safety and Health to offer an observation about those activities.

Mr Bell: Thank you, Minister. It was my privilege to represent the Queensland government on the Pike River royal commission. The report was provided finally last October and there were 16 recommendations. Twenty-nine people died there—two of them were Queenslanders and one of them was a 17-year-old boy who was spending his first day at the mine. The recommendations that

were made by the commission have some reference to Queensland, and the Queensland Mines Inspectorate, in concert with New South Wales, are looking at three areas where we think we can learn from what happened at Pike River—one to do with ventilation fans, one to do with electrical equipment and one to do with how we deal with families and loved ones after such an event. These are recommendations that are currently being worked through within the inspectorate in Queensland and also with New South Wales.

CHAIR: Thank you. I imagine it would have been quite a difficult task and very sad.

Mr Bell: It was a very difficult task.

Mr COSTIGAN: I refer to the final dot point on page 3, Minister, which refers to abandoned mines. What is the department doing to prevent further uncontrolled water releases from the open pit at the Mount Morgan Mine?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for the question. In relation to the abandoned mine at Mount Morgan, we are dealing with a very significant legacy issue and we are attempting to effectively deal with the issue by managing the abandoned mine site itself. The pit at Mount Morgan has been left over many years simply to fill with water, and the Newman government is making a real effort to reduce that level of water in the pit.

Inflows into the mine pit are extremely difficult to control. They are the result of continued seepage of freshwater run-off from the trapped northern catchments into the mine pit. This poses a significant problem in terms of managing the site. The primary mechanism to reduce the volume of water contained in the open-cut pit is a lime dosing water treatment plant and four large evaporator fans. In 2012-13 the Queensland government provided a \$1.2 million capital injection for works at the Mount Morgan Mine site for the purchase of three additional large evaporator fans which were commissioned in December last year. A smaller unit initially hired to trial the technology was also purchased. A \$477,000 upgrade of the site's water treatment plant to improve its resilience and operational efficiency was also completed in June of this year.

Further Queensland government works have been undertaken in 2012-13, and they include an independent review of the whole of the site management. The review assessed short, medium and long-term management options for the site. This assessment included a review of management strategies to minimise inflows from the northern freshwater catchments into the open-cut pit; the allocation of \$916,000 to replace the ageing main substation and to increase its capacity—this will improve the reliability of power supply for operation of the site's water management systems; and the allocation of \$125,000 for the purchase of a property identified as being at risk in the unlikely event of a catastrophic failure of the pit wall. That \$125,000 was used by the state government to finalise the purchase of one downstream property at 2 Baldwin Street in May this year. The property, as I mentioned, was identified as being at risk of inundation in the unlikely event of a failure of the pit wall or the Mundic Gully wall which is why the government acted to acquire the property.

The Department of Natural Resources and Mines has also sought expert independent advice on site management including water management and remediation, and the department is also considering actions to improve site resilience in the event of any future flood events. The state government has also indicated that it is going to pursue a number of initiatives in the near future, and these include \$100,000 to upgrade the road crossing of the Dee River to improve wet weather access to the site, including better access for delivery of lime to the water treatment plant; \$60,000 for the installation of additional hydrographic monitoring stations along the Dee River to enable more accurate indication of flow events in the Dee River and allow for improved notifications to landholders; \$20,000 for hydrographic support for management on site and Dee River water monitoring stations; and \$20,000 for water monitoring of surface water and groundwater.

Limited life funding for the operation of the water treatment plant ceased on 30 June this year, and ongoing operational costs will be supported through the Abandoned Mine Lands Program major project funding. A major cost in the operation of the water treatment plant is lime supply, which amounts to approximately \$1.1 million per year. Nevertheless we are taking steps to prevent this situation from getting worse, and the Newman government is committed to providing safe and responsible solutions to ensure the safety and health of the Mount Morgan community and the health of the Dee River.

CHAIR: Continuing with abandoned mines, I refer to dot point 9 on page 2 of the SDS. What has the abandoned mine unit of the department achieved over the last 12 months, with particular reference to the Collingwood Park mines?

Mr CRIPPS: The Newman government is committed to responsibly managing Queensland's abandoned mines to ensure the safety and health of the communities and the environment. Queensland has more than 15,000 abandoned mine sites, of which 3½ thousand are on public land which makes this a difficult issue to manage. Issues on abandoned mine sites are addressed through the Abandoned Mine Lands program, for which Mine Safety and Health within the Department of Natural Resources and Mines is responsible.

Key actions under the program include works to address health and safety risks associated with contaminated seepage, water treatment and historic mining infrastructure management. The government continues to fund priority abandoned mines projects. Mine sites with major remediation works include Mount Morgan, the Herbert Tailings Dam, Jumna, Mount Oxide, Croydon and Horn Island. These are all legacy issues which the Newman government is now working to address.

The Abandoned Mine Lands program aims to assess and reduce risks arising from these mines. Issues are addressed on a risk prioritised basis, with the program's highest priority assigned to human safety and health. Our abandoned mines management also includes management of the state's Collingwood Park mine's subsidence response. Historic coalmining subsidence at Collingwood Park is managed through the Collingwood Park State Guarantee, which is legislated under the Mineral Resources Act.

Subsidence at Collingwood Park has been handled by a discrete group dedicated to mitigating the risks associated with mine subsidence and is conducting investigations to perfect the technology that may provide a long-term solution for the suburb. The state government, in line with the recommendations of the CSIRO report, has installed additional monitoring equipment in ground above the mine voids in Collingwood Park. The response to the Collingwood Park mine subsidence event in 2008 has cost \$20 million to date, which has included the purchase of 32 properties, the demolition of 17 properties, completed repairs to 20 Collingwood Park properties damaged by mine subsidence, investigations into potential remediation options, independent structural engineer investigations and a suburb-wide building condition survey offered to up to 500 property owners.

This government will continue to respond to any subsidence related events or damage to property in Collingwood Park under the terms of the state guarantee put in place by the previous government. Under the terms of that guarantee, the government will repair any mine subsidence related damage to property or purchase that property where it is not economical to repair. Projects that will continue in Collingwood Park in 2013-14 include repairs to St Luke's Anglican Church, continuing refurbishment of purchased properties ahead of their placement on the open rental market, the ongoing monitoring and analysis of ground stability and inspections, and possible repairs under the terms of the state guarantee.

CSIRO undertakes monitoring of ground movement through seven seismic and ground-monitoring stations in Collingwood Park. CSIRO analysis of the data from these stations indicates that the ground has been stable for some time. The government will continue to monitor and analyse data collected from these stations and provide the community with feedback.

Mrs MILLER: I have a supplementary in relation to the Collingwood Park mine subsidence. Minister, there is nowhere in these budget papers that I can see where your government has committed to actually filling in the voids of the Redbank colliery and the Westfalen colliery underneath Collingwood Park. Main Roads managed to fill in these voids under the Ipswich Motorway. The people of Collingwood Park want the government—any government; they do not care whether it is Labor or your government—to fill in under Collingwood Park, yet there is not one zack in this budget. Can you tell me, please, when you are going to provide the money to fill in under Collingwood Park so that none of our residents have the fear of this again?

Mr CRIPPS: In response to the member for Bundamba's question, I might point out that the most recent subsidence event at Collingwood Park occurred in 2008 and that the previous government, of which the member for Bundamba was a member, made absolutely no attempt to pursue the filling in of areas—

Mrs MILLER: The technology was not there, Minister. Tell the truth.

Mr CRIPPS:—underneath Collingwood Park. What the previous government did was put in place a state guarantee, which I referred to in my response to the previous answer, through the Mineral Resources Act. As I have already indicated, this government is committed to maintaining that state guarantee in place. The people of Collingwood Park do not need to fear that the support that

was provided to those property owners who had their properties damaged as a result of that subsidence event will not be offered to them at a future event. Their properties will be extended the same protection as has been extended to them under the state guarantee put in place by the previous government.

We are continuing to allocate amounts of money through our abandoned mines program to address issues as they arise and will continue to do so in the same way that the previous government did.

Mrs MILLER: If Main Roads can fill underneath the Ipswich Motorway, you are basically saying to the people of Collingwood Park that cars are more important than people and their houses in relation to SDS page 2?

CHAIR: Order! That is totally irrelevant, member for Bundamba.

Mrs MILLER: It is in relation to the budget papers here. There is nothing in the budget papers that has anything to do with—

CHAIR: That question was about Main Roads and houses.

Mrs MILLER: No, the question is that there is no money—

CHAIR: I have ruled the question out of order.

Mrs MILLER: The people of Collingwood Park will never trust you, Minister—never.

Mrs MADDERN: I refer to dot point 10 on page 2 of the SDS which refers to managing the impacts of the resource industry. The underground coal gasification industry is one of those seeking a green light for commercialisation. Why is the Newman government acting cautiously before allowing proponents to proceed to full commercialisation?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for the question. On 8 July this year I released the final report of the independent scientific panel on the Queensland underground coal gasification trial projects. The Queensland government permitted Carbon Energy and Linc Energy to continue their current pilot projects. That was the recommendation contained in the report—that a planning and action process be established to demonstrate successful decommissioning of the underground cavities used as part of the underground coal gasification process and that, until such time as that was demonstrated, no commercial underground coal gasification facility be commenced until decommissioning can be demonstrated.

Work has begun to ensure this ongoing trial provides the necessary data and information to make a final decision on the future of the industry. Testing new technologies is a complex but important part of the process in the research and development of new technologies. An independent scientific panel consisting of three scientists—well-known scientists—was appointed to assist the government in the assessment of the technical viability and environmental sustainability of the trial projects. The panel has provided its final report to the government and a copy has been provided to the trial proponents to allow them the opportunity for full and proper consultation on the report and the proposed way forward for underground coal gasification.

The panel's report was peer reviewed by a panel of scientists, led by the Queensland Chief Scientist, Dr Geoff Garrett. The panel of scientists has endorsed the report's contents. The panel's report suggests that Queensland is possibly leading the world in underground coal gasification technology, development and testing. However, while both companies have demonstrated capability to commission and operate a gasifier, neither company has demonstrated that its proposed approach to decommissioning is effective and insufficient scientific or technical information, particularly relating to decommissioning, is available to reach a conclusion.

Like all emerging industries, this industry must demonstrate that it can be conducted in a manner that is environmentally safe and that it can be balanced with other resource activities. The panel's report has made a significant contribution towards the government making an informed, science based decision on the potential for a commercial underground coal gasification industry to be developed in Queensland. We are following the model that we have implemented in terms of decisions that we have made since coming to office about the re-establishment of the uranium mining industry in Queensland and allowing for technologies to be demonstrated for oil shale in Queensland. We are following the same process whereby we are asking industries to demonstrate their sustainability and viability as far as the environment and safety are concerned before they move to a commercial basis.

Mr COX: I note that in your opening statement you said that your aim is to encourage growth in the sector and that you are committed to all Queenslanders benefitting. One of the department's core responsibilities as outlined in the SDS is working to achieve a globally competitive mining, petroleum and gas industry. Can you update the committee today on the service delivery standards for the mining and petroleum sector?

Mr CRIPPS: Unlike the federal Labor government and the former government in Queensland, the Newman government is aiming to streamline regulation of the mining and petroleum sector but in a way that does not result in a diminution of safety and environmental standards. The government has actively moved to eliminate unnecessary duplication of regulation as it applies to the resources sector. In contrast, the federal government has moved to rush through amendments to the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act in an attempt to secure support from Greens and Independents in the federal parliament.

The former federal minister for the environment, Tony Burke, used coal seam gas unfortunately as a bargaining chip, with disastrous consequences for business confidence in that sector. The Newman government recognises that the resources sector is instrumental in the development of social and economic infrastructure, job creation and the delivery of a range of broader positive economic benefits to communities across Queensland. That is why the Department of Natural Resources and Mines has undertaken a range of initiatives over the last 12 months to achieve a globally competitive mining, petroleum and gas industry and to lock in strong service delivery standards.

One of my department's key initiatives over the last 12 months is the continued development of the web based MyMinesOnline system. Since October last year more than 85 per cent of exploration permits for minerals have been lodged online. In March this year further improvements allowed companies to report changes of address online, and that was followed in May with the ability to change names online, as well as offering online lodgements of caveats and mortgages. All these changes have now largely replaced the less-efficient paper based systems that companies had traditionally had to comply with, and they have made processing much quicker for the industry and for the government.

The next planned improvement to improve service delivery to the resources sector will be to allow for the online lodgement of renewal applications. This will in turn support a new service delivery model for the department around dedicated assessment hubs in Townsville, Rockhampton and Brisbane. To this end, all coal related tenure processes will be processed and managed in Rockhampton, minerals tenures in Townsville and petroleum tenures in Brisbane. To complete these changes, we have been harmonising similar tenure processes in the various pieces of resources legislation. There is now a common set of provisions across resources acts that reduce the number of dealings/forms administered from 30 to nine. The department is locking in a higher standard of service delivery for the resources sector in this way.

Major reforms to our service delivery model have come at a critical time. Despite difficult conditions abroad, the department has experienced a significant number of exploration permit applications, particularly coal tenures. During 2010-11, over a thousand exploration permit applications were lodged with the Department of Natural Resources and Mines, followed by over 800 in 2011-12 and 270 in 2012-13. During 2011-12 some exploration companies had begun lodging bulk applications—in excess of 250 applications per proponent—with the intention of securing ground for marketing to potential investors. The assessment of these bulk applications fell into the 2012-13 reporting period. Inadequate information being provided in these bulk applications by proponents resulted in significant delays in the assessment of these applications. The department has acted strategically and prohibited any new applications being lodged for coal exploration using the restricted area provisions in the Mineral Resources Act. I am pleased to say the department is well on the way to meeting its assessment targets for the coming financial year.

Mrs MILLER: Director-General, the Integrity Commissioner has disclosed that a senior adviser to the Premier attended a meeting on 1 May this year, and the minister was present at that meeting. Rowland have declared that departmental officials attended meetings with Sibelco also on 1 May this year and also that departmental officials—I am just putting this to you—may have also been at these meetings on 9 May, 28 May, 29 May and 19 June. You might wish to take this on notice, Director-General, but the committee and I would like to know if you could tell us which departmental officers were at these particular meetings and briefings and at what cost.

CHAIR: It is a very detailed question.

Mrs MILLER: Yes, I know. I know it is detailed, but I think it should be taken on notice.

Mr TROUT: It is irrelevant.

Mrs MILLER: No, it is not irrelevant. Any departmental officer who does any work at all costs this government and the people of Queensland money. It is not irrelevant.

Mr Hunt: We do not routinely cost the attendance of individual staff members at meetings.

Mrs MILLER: Can you give me a global cost? You can do that. It is not a hypothetical. These people attended these meetings. You are hiding something. I would like the costs.

CHAIR: It is in the public domain that these people have attended these meetings.

Mrs MILLER: You tell me where it is in the public domain then, Chair.

CHAIR: You have just brought it out in the public domain.

Mrs MILLER: I am asking for the costs in accordance with SDS, pages 2 and 3. I understand that it might take some time or a little while to get this information, but I am asking for the costs to be broken down. You can cost that, Director-General. You are a Director-General.

CHAIR: The bureaucracy is at a cost, of course. The bureaucracy which is sitting here in this room is a cost.

Mrs MILLER: Yes, look at all of them here to help the minister. I am asking for the cost, Director-General. You should be able to provide that.

Mr Hunt: I will take direction from the chair.

CHAIR: If you could take that on notice and give us some sort of a reply. Minister, do you agree to take that on notice?

Mr CRIPPS: Yes, we will take it on notice. It is extraordinary that the member for Bundamba is asking the department to amortise or to detail the individual cost of the attendance of departmental officers at meetings. It is extraordinary.

Mr TROUT: The rest of the committee is not online with this questioning at all.

Mrs MILLER: But the minister has accepted that it will be tabled. You are out of line.

Mr TROUT: It is not from the committee at all.

Mr CRIPPS: We will do our best to provide an answer to the member's question.

Mrs MILLER: I am a member of this committee for this particular session. Minister, in the last financial year expected coal royalties were written down by \$548 million in this year's budget with jobs being lost throughout Queensland, despite an attempt at hiking royalties for that financial year of \$200.82 million as set out in last year's budget paper No. 4. Do you accept the LNP's attempted revenue grab was a monumental failure which has not only cost Queensland's economy, but also cost mining jobs which are very important to this state?

CHAIR: Minister, I do not know whether that question is asked of the right portfolio.

Mrs MILLER: Is the minister not the mines minister?

CHAIR: Would you like to respond to the revenue—

Mr CRIPPS: The member's question follows on from a question that was asked of me about royalties paid by the gas industry earlier in the proceedings today. Mr Chairman, the rates of royalties, decisions about royalties and the collection of royalties are the responsibility of the Treasurer, and the member for Bundamba may wish to direct that question about royalties to the Treasurer.

Mrs MILLER: What about mining jobs? As the mines minister, are you not responsible for mining jobs as well? Or are you not responsible for anything except getting Sibelco through?

CHAIR: Order! You are referring back to the fact of royalties, which is not under the—

Mrs MILLER: Yes, I also asked in relation to Queensland mining jobs. It is up to the minister whether he wants to comment on that.

CHAIR: But it was subject to the royalties. I feel it is hypothetical because it is asked of the wrong minister, but—

Mrs MILLER: It is about mining jobs. Gee, you are getting testy over there, aren't you? I love it. If you do not want to answer it, that is fine. The mining minister does not want to answer a question on mining jobs.

Mr CRIPPS: What is the question? It seems to be about royalties—

Mrs MILLER: That is all right. I am happy to move on. The mining minister does not want to answer a question about mining jobs. The CFMEU know that that is the case.

Minister, at page 3 of the SDS it states that your agency will implement amendments to the Coal Mining Safety and Health Act 1999 and the Mining and Quarrying Safety and Health Regulation 1999 to improve mine safety and health, which is something very close to my heart. Minister, will you undertake to consult with the CFMEU Mining and Energy Division on this legislation at the same time as the mining industry?

Mr CRIPPS: Mr Chairman, the national mine safety reform is, as the committee would be aware, one of 27 of the Council of Australian Governments' regulatory reforms. One of the strategies under the national mine safety reforms is to develop a nationally consistent legislative framework, and the consultation regulatory impact statement details the impact of the changes. The major mining states of Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia have been collaborating to achieve a high level of consistency between the states. Queensland has participated in this process on the basis that there will be no weakening of its current high standards. Other states and territories with less significant and less complex mining industries chose to regulate mine safety under their general workplace health and safety legislation.

Queensland's current position is that we will be retaining most of our mine safety legislation unchanged. The changes proposed are intended to achieve greater consistency with those two states that share with us a significant mining industry. Queensland has a world-class mine safety health record when measured in terms of the number and frequency of accidents causing injury to workers. Whilst recognised as having one of the best legislative frameworks and safest mining industries in the world, we are always striving to achieve zero harm in the mining workplace.

Last year I told this committee that the number and frequency of injuries to mining industry workers had unfortunately increased over the past 12 months to 30 June 2012. I told last year's hearing that there were still some substantial challenges for mine safety in Queensland. Last year I made the commitment to maintain the number of positions in my department's safety and health inspectorate, and I confirm that my department has fulfilled this commitment. In fact, the total number of inspectorate positions across all inspectorates has increased by four positions to 99 due to an additional four inspectors being appointed in the petroleum and gas inspectorate.

On preliminary numbers, the lost time injury frequency rate in mining as at the end of June this year was 3.7, which was down from 3.9 injuries per million hours worked in the previous year. My department is working towards the development of mine safety legislation as part of the national mine safety program. As I mentioned before, our current position is that we will be retaining most of our safety legislation.

The safety and health of employees in the industry is a priority for this government, and the proposed changes to legislation will only be made if they strengthen the already high standards of safety and health in Queensland mines. It is not my intention at all to play politics with mine safety. I am aware that the industry and the unions have divergent views on some aspects of Queensland's mine safety legislation. I have been listening to all of the arguments because that is part of the process of considering reforms to mine safety legislation. My department has received a range of submissions relating to proposed amendments to Queensland's mine safety legislation. No decisions have been made, and there will be further consultation with all of the stakeholders following the release of the regulatory impact statement. All stakeholders in the industry will have an equal opportunity to respond to the regulatory impact statement before we make any decisions about any changes to Queensland's mine safety legislation.

Ms TRAD: Minister, in relation to the Santos spill near Cooper Creek—and I note in the SDS there is a reference to the western rivers—what has happened as a result of that spill and has this actually changed your opinion in relation to economic development so close to these Wild Rivers that feed into the Lake Eyre?

Mr CRIPPS: Mr Chairman, I am happy to make some initial remarks about the issue that the member for South Brisbane is referring to, and then I will give an opportunity to the Deputy Director-General for Mine Safety and Health to make some observations about the response to that particular issue.

What I can say about that particular issue is that in response to it there was a very swift notification of the incident to our department and to the inspectorate.

Ms TRAD: I thought they were five days late. I did not think that they notified you for five days.

Mr CRIPPS: No, not at all. Notification from the company was very swift after the incident occurred. The member for South Brisbane, and I am sure all of the members of the committee, would appreciate how isolated the site is. In fact, our inspectors had to achieve transport access to the site via Adelaide, such is the remoteness of the location where it occurred. I was kept up to date through my department as a result of the response from our inspectorate to the incident, and I was satisfied with the updates and the advice that I was getting in relation to those issues.

My understanding is that in relation to safety issues, we were satisfied with the response from Santos that the site was made safe as far as workers and people responding to the incident were concerned. As far as any environmental issues were concerned, those matters are dealt with under the environmental authority issued to the company for its operations there. That issue is probably better addressed by the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection. But what I will do is give the Deputy Director-General for Mine Safety and Health an opportunity to provide any more details about the response to that issue as far as mine safety and health is concerned.

Mr Harrison: The safety aspects of that incident were immediately responded to. I think we had people there on the ground the next day. The most priority was given to safety concerns and the fact that you could not actually access the well until all of the safety concerns were addressed. That was done in a very rigorous, professional manner. The risk was assessed as required under the Petroleum and Gas (Production and Safety) Regulation. It was back under control within a few days. It is actually back online as of last week. We have seized documents from Santos because the incident is under investigation, so there are still issues that may need to be addressed down the track.

Mr TROUT: Can the minister explain the role of industry in negotiating an acceptable resolution to overlapping tenure issues in Queensland?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for the question. There is a great deal of interest throughout Australia in the coal seam gas industry, especially in Queensland, where the industry has experienced significant expansion over the last decade. The former government in Queensland failed to manage the significant growth of this sector and failed to develop an adequate regulatory framework, despite approving the rapid expansion of the industry. Since coming to office the Newman government has spent a great deal of time focusing on reforms to modernise Queensland's mining and petroleum and gas regulation to reflect landmark changes that have occurred in the industry. A key element of this reform is modernising Queensland's legislative framework for managing overlapping coal and CSG tenure. The importance of the industry should not be underestimated, but the importance of dealing with this issue for the industry should not be underestimated either.

Since the current legislative framework for managing overlapping coal and CSG tenure was introduced in 2004 there have been substantial developments in the nature and the scope of these industries in Queensland. Indeed, overlapping tenure issues were rapidly becoming a priority issue for mining companies because security of tenure and access to mineral and energy resources are at the core of business certainty for this sector. The rapid growth of the CSG industry has placed pressure on the overlapping tenure regime and presented a number of regulatory challenges for the department and the industry.

I am very pleased to say that the Queensland government and both the coal and CSG industries have been working closely together to resolve outstanding issues on overlapping tenure for the coal and CSG industries. I want to acknowledge the hard work and effort of both the coal and CSG industries to resolve these longstanding issues. In particular, I would like to thank the QRC and its Chief Executive Officer, Michael Roche, for facilitating the complex policy discussions in this area amongst industry participants. In particular, I thank the BHP Billiton Mitsubishi Alliance President, Steve Dumble, and Arrow Energy Chief Executive Officer, Andrew Faulkner, for their leadership and hard work on this particular issue. My department is keen to maintain this working relationship as we turn this hard work into a new policy framework for overlapping coal and CSG tenures in Queensland. I cannot state loudly enough how important agreement amongst industry operators is in the issue of overlapping tenures as it relates to certainty and investment in the resources sector in Queensland, which ultimately provides jobs and livelihoods for people, particularly in regional and rural areas of Queensland.

CHAIR: That brings questions to a conclusion. I thank the minister and his advisers.

Mr CRIPPS: If I may, we are able to table the response to the question taken on notice by the member for South Brisbane in relation to funding for the three NRM reef investment programs. I seek leave to table that document.

CHAIR: Is leave granted? Leave is granted. I remind you that the time frames in which you can provide answers to questions taken on notice and any further clarifying information to assist our work have been set. The deadline is 5 pm on 22 July. We will now take a short break and resume at 2 pm with the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Proceedings suspended from 1.03 pm to 2.00 pm

ESTIMATES—AGRICULTURAL, RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE—AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FORESTRY

In Attendance

Hon. JJ McVeigh, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Mr B Mills, Chief of Staff

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Mr J Noye, Director-General

Dr B Woods, Deputy Director-General

Ms L Brown, Finance and Asset Management

Agri-Science Queensland

Mr J Chapman, Managing Director

Biosecurity Queensland

Mr J Thompson

 **CHAIR:** I declare this meeting of the Agriculture, Resources and Environment Committee open. I am Ian Rickuss, the member for Lockyer and chair of the committee. Joining me on the committee today are: the member for Thuringowa, Sam Cox; Jason Costigan, member for Whitsunday; Shane Knuth, member for Dalrymple; Anne Maddern, member for Maryborough; and Michael Trout, member for Barron River.

The proceedings today are lawful proceedings subject to the standing rules and orders of the parliament. As such, I remind all visitors that any person admitted to this hearing may be excluded in accordance with standing order 208. In relation to media coverage of today's hearing, we have adopted the guidelines prepared by the Committee of the Legislative Assembly for committee hearings. These guidelines have been distributed to the parliamentary press gallery and copies are also available here today. The hearing is being broadcast live via the Parliamentary Service's website. We extend a warm welcome to everyone who is picking up these broadcasts.

As laid out in the new schedule 8 at the back of the standing orders, we expect all departmental officers appearing today to provide full and honest answers to our questions. Anyone who is unable or unwilling to provide an answer should be prepared to state their reasons. I also remind members that departmental officers are not here today to give expert opinions on the merits or otherwise of the policies of the government; that is the role of ministers. Finally, before we begin, can everyone switch off their mobile phone or switch them to silent?

For the next three hours we will examine the estimates of the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, beginning with the estimates for the service area of Agriculture. Please note that members may ask questions about Agri-Science Queensland, Agricultural College Corporation, QRAA or Biosecurity Queensland during this segment. In the next segment we will deal with Fisheries and Forestry. Welcome, Minister and advisers. We will examine estimates for this area until 3.30 pm. For the benefit of Hansard, I ask advisors who are called to give an answer to please state their name before speaking. Minister, the committee has granted leave to the member for Mackay and the member for Rockhampton to participate in this section of today's hearing. I now declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, the committee has agreed that you may make an opening statement of 2½ minutes before each segment. Would you care to make your opening statement?

Mr McVEIGH: Thank you, Mr Chairman, and I thank all members and certainly staff for their attendance here this afternoon. Before the estimates questions begin, I wish to make a statement to provide the committee with an overview of the highlights of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry budget and key issues across the department. May I suggest that I make that opening statement for all of the issues up front, if the committee grants me that request, and move on from there?

CHAIR: Yes.

Mr McVEIGH: The state government, through my department, continues to work hand in hand with industry to ensure that initiatives are delivered to assist producers. The Newman government recognises agriculture as one of the four pillars of our economy, and this is evident in the Premier's attendance at a number of announcements on which we have delivered over the past 12 months. A highlight of our election commitment was the establishment of a stand-alone department. The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry is a customer service department that plans for the future. We will ensure that an efficient, innovative, resilient and profitable sector is driven by our department that is a department that is very much focused on economic development of industry.

The start to this year has included flood, bushfires and drought coupled with various biosecurity issues. Even under such adversity, our primary producers across Queensland have proven their resilience. My department continues to engage with, assist and further the foundation of each of those industry sectors. My department is, for example, assisting canegrowers through additional investment in sugar research, development and extension. Grain growers are assisted through access to barley breeding capabilities in Queensland, boosting yields and profits. The beef industry has been supported through the arrangements to follow up on Bovine Johne's disease assistance. Under an LNP government, fishers are considered a very important industry and they are engaging with government on various reforms. The forestry industry has a clear direction through engagement on a multi-use forestry industry plan.

The 2013-14 budget features a strong capital expenditure program of almost \$20 million. This will allow for \$4.5 million to continue upgrading the department's research and operating facilities, \$2 million to continue the upgrade of Spyglass Beef Research Facility north of Charters Towers; \$1.5 million to further enhance existing biosecurity laboratory facilities at the Health and Food Sciences Precinct at Coopers Plains as part of the agriculture strategy; \$1.5 million to continue the Fisheries/boat equipment replacement program for research and patrols; and \$1 million for new and replacement heavy plant and equipment including trucks, tractors and other necessary machinery. In addition, there is \$3 million for farm robotics to assist raising productivity and reducing inputs to assist beef producers impacted by Bovine Johne's disease, \$2 million in seed funding and a \$3 million loan to be matched dollar for dollar by cattle producers through a voluntary industry levy, a total of 10 front-line positions in the region including two new beef extension officers imbedded in a beef partnership with private enterprise to ensure our largest farm export industry increases its productivity, a whole-of-government drought relief package worth up to \$11.2 million and mental health workshops to assist impacted producers across the regions at a cost of \$165,000. There is also fire ant funding of an additional \$3 million above our national funding shared contribution of \$1.4 million and continuation of the \$9 million inshore net buyback program and seven-year \$20 million barley breeding transition plan.

We have certainly delivered on our election commitments, including the release of a 30-year strategic plan for agriculture after extensive consultation with stakeholders across the state; the provision of \$3 million to the North Queensland irrigators strategy to assist producers on the Flinders and Gilbert rivers; 15 new front-line officers to help combat ticks, weeds and feral pests; and of course the release of agricultural land audits.

I would like to mention a couple of key issues regarding BJD. From the 170 properties initially under quarantine due to the current outbreak, I am happy to advise that there are now fewer than 50, and the department continues to work very closely with those producers. We recognise as a government that it has been a particularly difficult time for those producers, many of whom have also dealt with drought, loss of access to the Indonesian live cattle export trade and widespread bushfires earlier this year. Of course on top of that BJD has occurred.

The issue of fire ants continues to be a challenge for our state, but changes have been made in the management of the fire ant program. The national agreement on eradication is in place until at least 2014-15 and this year Queensland will be providing an additional \$3 million.

We have received a lot of input and requests for assistance given the current drought conditions. Our drought package that we announced some months ago is now being followed up with an announcement finally on the Farm Finance package with the assistance of the federal government. The whole-of-government drought relief package here in Queensland provides land rent relief, animal welfare help through grazing in national parks on a limited basis and fencing of sensitive areas within those parks. Freight subsidies for fodder and water and a rebate for installation of new water infrastructure are also going a long way to assist affected producers.

As an organisation, QRAA continues to successfully administer the assistance program for eligible applicants affected by this drought and by other conditions faced by our state including recent floods.

Whilst the department is responsible for animal welfare in Queensland, it was an enormous disappointment to me as minister that we lost a number of cattle at the Swans Lagoon research property earlier this year. A full inquiry was conducted by the police Stock Squad. Following the finding handed to me in recent days that no criminal charges will be laid, disciplinary actions have been taken against those responsible for negligence and there have certainly been changes to management procedures.

Another key area of focus for us has been righting the mess left by the former government in relation to our agricultural colleges. The independent review of management of those colleges has resulted in significant changes to stop the waste and refocus those activities on providing industry specific courses in a cost-effective manner.

Finally, red-tape reduction is a big focus for our government. We are ensuring that primary producers are able to do their business more easily. Under this initiative we have included simplification of and a reduction in the number of statutory forms, reducing debt recovery costs in Fisheries, for example. We have negotiated access arrangements for Queensland fruit and vegetables entering Victoria and implemented new guidelines for wild dog baiting to reduce cost and red tape associated with the supply of baits.

The biosecurity bill due to be introduced to the House this year will significantly reduce the amount of legislation and make for ease of biosecurity issues when they arise whilst still providing the necessary protection for our state. Long-term planning and action through our four priority pathways of securing and increasing resource availability, driving productivity across the supply chain, securing and increasing market access, and minimising the costs of production will enable us to achieve significant progress towards our ultimate objective of doubling food production, agricultural production, in this state by 2040. Mr Chair, I thank you for the opportunity to provide that opening statement. I now welcome questioning from my parliamentary colleagues and look forward to providing comprehensive answers.

CHAIR: I will start the questions. You mentioned some biosecurity issues. Can you please outline to the committee what measures you have put in place and resources you have allocated in your quest to make Queensland the most foot-and-mouth disease ready state in Australia?

Mr McVEIGH: The spectre of foot and mouth disease, or FMD, for the state of Queensland, let alone Australia—and I might mention New Zealand as well—is quite significant. I learnt very early in the piece in my appointment as Minister for Agriculture that that concern and that level of significance is shared by all other states of Australia and most certainly by New Zealand colleagues as well. We are committed to ensuring that not only is Queensland prepared for foot and mouth disease but, in order to measure that progress, we have set the objective of being the most prepared state in Australia. Quite obviously, the department has lead responsibility for management of an FMD outbreak in Queensland.

The *Australian Veterinary Emergency Plan, AUSVETPLAN: Disease Strategy—Foot-and-mouth disease* sets out nationally agreed government and industry policy principles and guidelines for responding to an FMD incident. The Matthews report released by the Commonwealth government in October 2011, *A review of Australia's preparedness for the threat of foot-and-mouth disease*, raised some serious questions about Australia's capacity to respond to such an outbreak. Since the report's release and in conjunction with the development and implementation of a national FMD action plan, my department has developed a Queensland specific plan outlining the state's ability to manage such a response. Good progress has been made on that against many of the national and state initiatives that would benefit Queensland in that instance.

As part of the national working group, Queensland has identified its capacity and capability to respond to such an outbreak. Recognising the limitations of resource availability across the nation, Queensland is working, as I said, with our national, interstate and—in terms of New Zealand—international partners to develop and implement training programs to assist in the management of any outbreak. We contribute staff to a national response team. Of course, a Queensland based first response unit can very quickly deploy trained staff to support the establishment and management of any response.

Training is being provided to those team members and continues to be provided, and that is in the context of them understanding contemporary emergency response management practices certainly within Queensland but also interjurisdictional networking across the country. We will be a

key participant in developing and implementing a national livestock standstill exercise to improve readiness, and as the state with the largest cattle population in the country that obviously not only is particularly important to us but also means that we do have a lot to offer to our national colleagues. Because any mass animal disposal can slow FMD eradication activities, we have had our officers contribute to a national agreement on carcass disposal in that worst-case scenario and working with the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection and the waste industry sector to ensure our readiness for having to resort to that if necessary at any time in the future. Swill feeding, as many of you would appreciate, is well documented as a significant risk factor for the introduction of several emergency or concerning animal diseases, including FMD, so we have worked with other jurisdictions to harmonise swill feeding legislation so that everyone has a very clear understanding amongst particularly pig owners for example and the general public of the restrictions that apply. So under good government FMD preparedness will continue to improve at a state and national level, and I think all Queenslanders in particular would agree with that focus.

CHAIR: On the same biosecurity level—this actually occurred around Ipswich and Tarampa just recently with some Hendra virus—how is the Queensland government helping to protect vets who deal with suspect cases of Hendra virus in horses?

Mr McVEIGH: Thank you for the question. An election commitment of our government was to put in place a personal protective equipment subsidy program, or a PPE program, and that has been adopted by industry and very clearly outlined to veterinary officers and practitioners in particular. That includes \$1 million over four years that allows such veterinarians to claim a rebate for PPE used in the testing of suspect Hendra virus cases. So with that and very strict infection control procedures promoted by our department, including the use of such equipment, we encourage all vets to protect themselves and others against the risk of virus infection.

We have had Queensland horse vets therefore being able to apply for a one-off start-up rebate of up to \$250 for the eligible equipment purchased since 24 March 2012. Under the start-up rebate, they are eligible for a rebate of up to \$250 for each eligible veterinarian employed or engaged in a practice. We have in addition to that an allowance for veterinarians who submit samples for Hendra virus testing through Biosecurity Queensland to apply for a \$250 replenishment rebate. I am pleased to advise that, as of 30 June 2013, there were 185 PPE rebates provided to veterinarians across the state, equating to just over \$39,000 in funding already allocated. Through that initiative we will continue to raise awareness with the profession about the risks and we have actively been promoting that scheme with key equine industry stakeholders including the Australian Veterinary Association, the Equine Veterinary Association and we have written to every veterinarian registered with the Queensland Veterinary Surgeons Board to advise them of this scheme's availability.

Can I just take the opportunity to commend the RNA for its stance in relation to Hendra and its requirement for horses entered in the Ekka this year to be vaccinated. That recommendation that all horse owners consider vaccination with their vets is something that my department has been very much focused on. Can I also advise in closing that the PPE rebate program has certainly been managed well by QRAA, the Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority.

Mr COSTIGAN: Afternoon, Minister. Minister, could you outline your department's response to helping the sugar industry combat yellow canopy syndrome and what direct funding has your department contributed to these efforts?

Mr McVEIGH: I thank the member for the question, and sugar research in general has certainly been a priority for our government given, as the member would certainly recognise, as would other members of the committee, that the sugar industry is one of our key agricultural industries in the state. The yellow canopy syndrome issue that we speak of was first detected at large, if you like, in early 2012 when several crops of cane in the Mulgrave mill area showed obvious yellowing of the leaf, and we had seen reports by 2013 in the Herbert and Burdekin regions as well. To address that, I refer initially to the additional \$4.6 million over four years to BSES that we have committed to help sugarcane research in general and of course to help boost yields and importantly now, as we are able to tailor that investment and our assistance to BSES, to identify and find solutions to production risks with the yellow canopy syndrome.

In coordination with the Sugar Research and Development Corporation and BSES, we have backed the Solving the Yellow Canopy Syndrome project to the tune of specifically \$276,000 which will help in continuing what is a fairly methodical and scientific approach to gain accurate insight into this particular condition. As committee members could well imagine, there have been all sorts of theories raised in industry from nutrition through to weather events. But that project will involve large

scale monitoring, sampling and data collection activities in the affected regions, enabling a fairly comprehensive study so we can get right down to the cause. We have fortunately in the department very valuable expertise in remote sensing applications that will assist us in this instance in the sugarcane industry to look at, for example, yield variability, and that assists us in any normal case to look at yield predictions at a regional and field scale. It is now assisting us to look at the impact of this particular syndrome and its spread, if you like, if that can be identified.

The BSES as a lead research provider in the industry is leading the program. They have not yet, with our assistance and others, been able to target down to the probable cause. Entomologists, pathologists, agronomists and staff from the Mulgrave and Herbert cane productivity services groups have been involved in crop inspections, soil testing, leaf analysis and even, for example, possible herbicide drift considerations. It is yet to be classified as a specific disease but we do know thus far that it is known to affect plant cane, replant cane and ratoons in a number of varieties, so that is obviously of concern. With this year's crush obviously getting underway, research into that particular issue that has just cropped up in our industry over the last season or two is quite timely and I suggest to the committee that all of us should be rest assured that solving the riddle is one of our government's, one of my department's, certainly BSES's, the industry's and SRDC's key priorities.

Mrs MADDERN: Minister, can you please advise the steps being taken by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry to partner with Queensland sugar producers and industry to ensure research, development and extension undertaken will lead to improved investment in the sugarcane industry?

Mr McVEIGH: I thank the member for the question. Sugar research, as I outlined in response to the previous question, is a key priority of our government for a number of reasons, none the least of which is the value that the industry presents to the Queensland economy. Not far behind the other predominant industry of livestock—beef in particular—obviously comes our sugar industry. As the member and other members would be aware, that industry is very significant for our regional industries. The Premier and I late last year announced our research funding at BSES at a field day at Mackay, and that was warmly welcomed by the industry. But the challenge is ongoing in terms of making sure our efforts are supportive of industry and certainly tailored in with the development of Sugar Research Australia, SRA, which has been a significant industry program developed over recent years. Our commitment for research, development and extension that the Premier and I did announce to the level of \$16 million over four years includes an amount of \$3.85 million in 2012-13 to BSES for such research. Going into 2013-14 there is a similar level of funding of \$3.95 million to continue to fund projects to be delivered through SRA, Sugar Research Australia, the new organisation developed based on significant industry consideration over the last couple of years. That funding that I have outlined there complements the industry's own \$21 million annual investment and certainly helps provide certainty as the industry continues to plan its RD&E activities going forward.

As I said, the sugar industry representing some \$1.14 billion for our economy is significant and worthy of that sort of consideration and investment from our government, and if I can just mention in finalising the answer to your question some of the areas that that investment will particularly target. They include better parental selection systems for improved output results for new variety development such that I have seen at BSES field days, and anyone could imagine and appreciate that it is critical to not only stop a decline in yield in some areas but increase yield as the sugar industry is so keen to do in line with our government's agriculture strategy to 2014. Nutrient, disease and weed management technologies are a key aspect that we are focusing on and ensuring that they are integrated into farming systems to pursue that productivity. Earlier I mentioned the yellow canopy syndrome and any other biosecurity threat. Of course, in-field sucrose losses and determining possible systems to reduce that loss are something we are considering along with the nutrient and farm management activities that I mentioned. It is important that we continue that research. That is a focus. As I said, it is an important industry. It is important in the regions and therefore important to a lot of regional Queenslanders.

Mr TROUT: Having noted your remarks earlier, Minister, could you please outline the assistance measures available to Queensland cattle producers impacted by Bovine Johne's Disease?

Mr McVEIGH: I thank the member for the question, and BJD is a significant challenge for the industry. I note the question is specifically in relation to the assistance being provided, so I will not go back through the history of this particular outbreak. Suffice to say that I have been advised by the Cattle Council of Australia that not only is this the biggest outbreak in Queensland's history but the biggest according to them in Australia's history. As we commenced the response late last year, I certainly want to acknowledge the bipartisan support and recognition of the challenges for the

industry shown and explained to me by both the member for Mackay and the member for Rockhampton as we kicked this process off. In January of this year the Premier and I based on significant feedback I had sought from industry through the likes of AgForce, the Cattle Council of Australia, the Australian Veterinary Association, Animal Health Australia and stock organisations such as the Australian Brahman Breeders Association announced at Gracemere an assistance package.

That involves \$2 million that was allocated for 2012-13 to the new Queensland Cattle Industry Biosecurity Fund. That fund, as the name suggests, is a cattle industry biosecurity fund. So it is intended to be not only BJD but certainly one that needs to grapple with the necessary assistance that is required by industry given the BJD outbreak. It is modelled somewhat on existing schemes in other states, particularly South Australia and to a certain extent Western Australia. That \$2 million is an upfront cash contribution that was made available immediately.

It has another component of a \$3 million allocation from the government in 2013-14 to continue to support the fund through an interest-free loan. That loan is dependent on a voluntary industry levy being put in place, the concept of which has been developed with industry assistance and input and advice and, I must say, critique from time to time, as should be the case. The program consists of two components under which producers can apply for funding: a direct market assistance program for those who are finding that they have needed to slaughter cattle to get a diagnosis and a supply chain pathway assistance program to assist those who are looking at ways available to them through continuing to trade where possible in their businesses to get through this particular impost on their businesses should they have been quarantined by way of movement restriction.

I would stress that this assistance is not full compensation for losses that may be incurred. Based on an industry committee that has provided me with significant advice on how we might structure the program and how we might ensure that the program does provide the maximum assistance possible to potential affected producers, we will be capping the payments in the first year to \$50,000. There are many producers who have been affected immediately to a greater amount than \$50,000. This is very much a way of ensuring that we are in a position to spread the available assistance, which is the \$2 million placed on the table by the government upfront, across as many affected producers as possible. The industry advisory group that will manage the scheme and advise me on managing that scheme going forward is very hopeful that further assistance of up to \$200,000 over four years is proposed to individual affected producers if it can be funded by the industry levy. So we are pursuing maximum assistance as we move forward. Whilst not providing, nor intended to provide, full compensation, it is very much about assisting the industry to come together with a scheme where the industry can contribute to its own fund for this BJD outbreak and any biosecurity threat going forward that that industry committee decides and elects to deem appropriate for assistance through this fund in the years to come. Compared to other available schemes, such as the National BJD Financial and Non-Financial Scheme run by the Cattle Council and Animal Health Australia, this is reasonably significant given that that scheme is at present capped at \$11,000 per property.

The levy rate for the biosecurity fund is something that industry has considered in great detail. It has taken some time to land at a rate that industry is considering, through broader consultation at present, that the committee and those consulted thought would be appropriate. I will be the first to admit that much earlier in this calendar year, having announced the \$2 million contribution and the \$3 million interest-free loan to follow that up on behalf of the government, that I was very anxious to move forward and make the scheme operational and available to those affected since this BJD outbreak identified in late November last year. But I was requested by the industry to allow them to take some time to work through these mechanics. Of course, full consultation does take time—and that is frustrating, no doubt, for some who wish to move on to seek assistance immediately. The levy proposed is between 50c and 70c per head and the concept is that that would be collected on all cattle transactions in Queensland starting in mid-2014.

This is a great opportunity for industry to get behind a funding scheme that will provide long-term benefits, such as already exists through schemes—and I mentioned examples in South Australia and Western Australia earlier in my answer. The idea is that it is essentially an industry funded insurance scheme, if you like, supporting others in the industry affected during biosecurity incidents such as this one that affect the entire cattle supply chain. The concept is very much about individuals not being left to handle the full brunt of that on their own but being able to seek at least some assistance.

It is important to note that producers who would not want to participate in the scheme would be able to seek and receive a refund. Obviously, they would not be able to claim benefits from the fund if they seek a refund on their levy should they be impacted by a disease situation in the future. But it is in that sense a voluntary scheme. That is what the industry insisted and, of course, from a constitutional perspective, as a state government that is all that we can assist them in putting in place.

In May I released a consultation paper to seek further feedback about how that voluntary levy would operate. Feedback has been rolling in and I certainly look forward to the industry's continuing support for this particular initiative. My department, which I would have to say has learned a lot of lessons in dealing with this BJD outbreak—lessons that mean something to us from a broader biosecurity perspective in such responses—will continue to work with industry, continue to assist those affected by this outbreak and certainly continue to look at putting this levy in place to meet industry needs and requirements.

Mr KNUTH: From your opening statement and right through you have mentioned research and extension to combat foot and mouth and biosecurity funding for tick and pest and feral animals. Can the minister give a guarantee that the government will not sell the Glengarry tick research property on the Darling Downs?

Mr McVEIGH: The Glengarry tick research property that you refer to on the Darling Downs is not for sale. It is a property that remains under a research status, if you like, or designation. The property, as you may be aware, located just east of Dalby is one that obviously is designed for tick fever research. I make the point, though, that the department, as any contemporary department should, remains very much focused on flexibility going forward. As we found, both as a department under our government and I note under initiatives that I have inherited from the previous government, decisions are made from time to time in line with available technology, research progress and, of course, industry requirements to move research priorities. That does involve research properties from time to time, hence the development, and I stress kicked off under the former government and I note the former minister's involvement in the Spyglass research property north of Charters Towers, which to my understanding is in your own electorate—a very significant property and one that will be the focus of research for our department for industry and other collaborators such as CSIRO going forward.

Mr KNUTH: You have been talking about that. That is why I expressed concern about the Glengarry research station. You did sell the agricultural colleges at Dalby and Burdekin and likewise Townsville and Toowoomba. You were focusing very heavily on combating foot-and-mouth and biosecurity. What were the cost benefits of selling the agricultural colleges at Dalby and Burdekin and likewise the Townsville and Toowoomba biosecurity?

Mr McVEIGH: I thank the member for the question. I need to clarify a few statements that the member has made. The old Dalby agricultural college that you have referred to was, in fact, transferred by the former government—or sold by the former government—in a transaction to the education department and that campus is now an arm, if you like, of the Dalby State High School. Much of the farming property around the old Dalby agricultural college campus that you refer to was also sold off by the former government. There is not a whole lot to be gained by me passing judgement on that decision, because what is done is done, but as a Darling Downs boy myself and with many cousins still farming in that district and some cousins who attended that agricultural college, I personally think that that was a very sad decision and it in itself was a decision that we were most mindful of when we have gone about the process of saving what was left of the agricultural colleges in our state. I refer in particular to Emerald and Longreach.

You commented secondly about the agricultural college at Burdekin. That was an agricultural college, again under a transfer arrangement by the former government—so before we came to power—to a particular educational institution out of Townsville called Shalom college. Again, I do not think that there is a whole lot to be gained from me going into the history of what has happened with that transaction, but sadly Shalom college and its parent organisation did go, as I understand it, into administration. That was in its own right quite a sad development. So we as a government have, therefore, continued with the plans established by the former government for the eventual sale of that college land. That has been progressing. I would stress that, as minister, one of my first jobs was to visit that particular campus at Burdekin. On that particular day at Clare I met with cane industry representatives who said to me that the college, unfortunately, no longer met their needs. For example, one of them had sons and daughters who they would prefer to send to the University of Queensland Gatton campus. Some were pursuing other educational opportunities. As I have discussed as recently as earlier this year with local council representatives in the Burdekin, including

the mayor, it simply was not possible to retain that college or to turn around plans that had been put in place because, one, the industry advised me that the college was no longer meeting their needs—being a residential college for the sugar cane industry in particular and that industry based education programs through more locations available rather than through a residential format in the likes of Mareeba, Mackay and Bundaberg et cetera were what was preferred—and, two, to fund the necessary retention of the Emerald and Longreach agricultural residential colleges we needed to secure that funding from a college at Burdekin that was no longer meeting industry requirements.

The third and fourth ones—and I suspect this may not be the way the member meant to couch the question, so I seek guidance on this—you referred to as agricultural colleges in Toowoomba and Townsville. I suspect you meant—

Mr KNUTH: Biosecurity.

Mr McVEIGH: I suspect you meant laboratories in Toowoomba and Townsville. The laboratories in Toowoomba and Townsville are a separate issue obviously to agricultural colleges that you have just mentioned. Should the committee wish I am happy to talk at length about what we are doing in the agricultural college sector. To come back to the member's direct question, I have as minister both answered at the previous estimates session last year and, of course, to industry since in relation to our plans for biosecurity services and, in this case, laboratory services going forward.

The decision to close the Townsville and Toowoomba laboratories was a very difficult decision to make. There is no doubt about that. In the case of the Toowoomba laboratory, as I explained at estimates last year, it was an ageing facility, located, from a state-wide perspective, reasonably close to the state-of-the-art facility that the former government had commenced at Coopers Plains and, of course, the Townsville veterinary laboratory, it must be recognised, was located on a parcel of land at Oonoonba that had been sold off by the former government for residential development. I know that I have often been accused during my term as minister of closing the Townsville laboratory. I make the point very clearly that it had been sold by the former government, that site, for residential development. I acknowledge the former government had announced a plan to establish or to assist James Cook University in the establishment of new facilities in Townsville and, as I have explained to this committee and many others since, we found that simply funds were not left allocated for that purpose—or insufficient funds were allocated for that purpose.

What we have focused on in consultation with our national colleagues, our interstate colleagues, is the continued pursuit of state-of-the-art biosecurity laboratory services for the entire state of Queensland. If I come back to the Toowoomba example, again making the obvious point that that is my home town, I acknowledge that for some producers—some horse owners, for example—having a local laboratory was a handy arrangement for them, but I have got to keep in mind producers, horse owners and others who are living in and around Mackay, for example, living in and around Longreach or Charleville or Mount Isa or Port Douglas where one of the latest Hendra virus identifications was made last year, or last season. So, it is a matter of ensuring that we have got a state-of-the-art service for the entire state and that is entirely consistent with what has happened at the Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute at Camden in Sydney and entirely consistent with what is happening with similar services in Victoria.

I also make the point, as I have done previously, that our biosecurity laboratories have a very significant cooperative relationship with our interstate colleagues and in touring the EMAI facility in Sydney and in further visits that I will be following up at the Australian Animal Health Laboratory at Geelong, I am very much endorsing and supporting and continuing to investigate ways for us all to work together, as has been happening now over a number of years, for state-of-the-art services for the entire state, irrespective of where a producer or, using the Hendra example, a horse owner, might live.

Mr KNUTH: I have a supplementary question. Going from the first question, you mentioned in regard to funding for ticks, pests and feral animals. I think this is important. It is whether you have got a breakdown of this. I relate this to all you have mentioned: pests, feral animals, ticks, wild dogs. That is important. Just with the issue in relation to the feral cat, I don't know how much you are putting in there, whether there is a breakdown with the department, whether I have to put a question on notice to get that information, but the feral cat is causing much more problems than it has in the past, killing the birds and native wildlife. Obviously when the birds are being killed the mammals are being killed, then there is a lot of pressure on the wild dogs to kill calves and sheep because there is not that native wildlife around.

CHAIR: What is your question?

Mr KNUTH: This is the question: is the government and the department putting a lot of focus in combatting the feral cat?

Mr McVEIGH: Thank you. Through you, Mr Chairman, I thank the member for the question. It is a question that I think is an important question and a question that I agree needs ongoing focus, and that has certainly been the case under our government. In terms of funding allocations, I will take that question on notice and come back with a breakdown in whichever way you wish. You mentioned feral cats in particular. I am on record as minister, and certainly encouraged by the support of the Premier as early as Beef 2012 in Rockhampton when we were talking about the wild dog problem, for example—so I am talking about feral pests in general to start with if the member doesn't mind—that these are issues that have certainly ramped up for agriculture right across our state and, in fact, in some urban and particularly peri-urban areas across the state as well following drought conditions and, as we all know, a couple of good seasons that have encouraged many feral pests to flourish. If we look at the dog issue, no longer is that, as I am sure the member would be aware given his experience and knowledge, an issue that used to just affect the sheep industry for example. Increasingly, as you would be aware, it is affecting livestock in general, particularly cattle.

The feral cat problem is something, as a matter of interest, I have been discussing at length with my colleague, the Hon. Steve Dickson, the Minister for National Parks, given his and the government's responsibilities to manage feral pests on government land that we look after on behalf of the taxpayers of Queensland. So I agree very much it is a particular focus. We have a State Land Pest Management Committee that is focused, amongst other things, on cooperation between our departments, and that is the reason that I do mention my colleague, the Hon. Steve Dickson, in relation to that, but it helps me focus on issues right across the board. There is both feral animal pests and weed pests as well.

With that in mind, and to answer the question about the sort of focus that we are taking as a government, we held, with the support of the relevant departments, Minister Dickson's department, of course, and Environment and Heritage Protection under the Hon. Andrew Powell as well, the state's inaugural Feral Animal Summit at Highfields just north of Toowoomba on 27 June. That involved from right across the state, and I am pleased to say some interstate visitors as well, key government and non-government organisational input. That particular meeting has, given that it was completed just a few weeks ago, its findings being written up and finalised at the moment—the input of all of those present in terms of the sort of focus that we should take going forward. I would be very pleased to ensure that the member gets a copy of that document as it is finalised over its drafting et cetera in the recent weeks since that summit.

But there is always a test: community and industry support and recognition as to whether or not we are on the right track. I am very pleased to have had the input of the likes of AgForce at that particular summit, certainly all of the relevant NRM bodies across the state, represented as they were through their peak body, and I give the example of even local environmental groups in my own home town of Toowoomba, such as HOPE Inc. of Toowoomba—Householders' Options to Protect the Environment—recognising that we, as a government, and all of those government and non-government bodies that were involved in that particular summit, kicked a goal in kicking that process off, to use the words of Mr Frank Ondrus, the president of that organisation who, I can share with you, at a local level is not usually supportive of me, but certainly recognises that particular activity.

So, I think that is the coordinated government, non-government, apolitical approach we need to address this significant challenge across the state, should it be dogs, should it be weeds, should it be feral cats. So that priority is very high.

Mr MULHERIN: Minister, can you outline the cost sharing arrangements for the red imported fire ant eradication program, in particular Queensland's contribution under the national cost sharing arrangement? As part of that agreement, does Queensland have to provide additional funding in this fight to eradicate the red imported fire ant?

Mr McVEIGH: Thank you, through you, Mr Chairman, to the member for the question. I would like to spend just a bit of time talking about the nature of that cost sharing agreement, where we are up to and, in particular, where we have come from in the last 12 months, because it is a significant issue that has required significant attention. Specifically in relation to the national program and the national cost sharing that the member asks about, can I just step back and talk about the funding that has been contributed since fire ants were first discovered in Brisbane in 2001. The total investment in the eradication of the pest to 30 June 2013 has been in the order of \$274 million. So, in 2012-13 the program's operational budget was up to \$17.9 million. That was \$15 million in national cost shared

funding, with Queensland providing up to \$2.9 million in additional funding over and above its national cost shared commitment. The total Queensland investment in the fire ant program in 2012-13 is up to \$4.3 million.

Mr MULHERIN: What year was that, Minister?

Mr McVEIGH: 2012-13. Despite that additional investment by Queensland the program has continued under a far more closely monitored budget situation. The 2013-14 figure that we will see is \$15 million in national cost shared funding, and that is what has been approved by the Standing Council on Primary Industries. Queensland's share of that, as approved by the SCoPI, is \$1.41 million. The Queensland government will provide up to \$3 million in additional funding in 2013-14 over and above its share of the national funding to supplement that national program.

Mr MULHERIN: Minister, in 2010-11 the previous government, on top of the national cost sharing arrangements, contributed an additional \$6 million, I understand; in 2011-12 a further \$6 million. What did you say was the government's contribution in 2012-13 in addition to the national cost sharing arrangement?

Mr McVEIGH: The figure that I mentioned there, just to be straight, to be consistent, was—

Mr MULHERIN: \$1.25 million?

Mr McVEIGH: The 2012-13 or 2013-14 figure?

Mr MULHERIN: 2012-13.

Mr McVEIGH: The 2012-13 figure was \$4.3 million.

Mr MULHERIN: Is that including the state's contribution to the national cost sharing arrangement?

Mr McVEIGH: That includes.

Mr MULHERIN: That includes. So, in effect, it was \$1.25 million in additional money to what was required under the national cost sharing arrangements?

Mr McVEIGH: In terms of that arrangement, yes, in that order.

Mr MULHERIN: Minister, I thought that under the national cost sharing arrangements the other states and the Commonwealth would only contribute if Queensland continued to fund the additional \$6 million per annum. Has that agreement been changed? What is going on there?

Mr McVEIGH: Again I thank the member for the question. I guess, as we jump around with figures—and I am keen to address that question—it is very important to put the history of national cost-share arrangement discussions into context, if I may. With your agreement, Mr Chairman, I will just go back over some of that history.

Upon becoming appointed minister last year, I was expected at and certainly did attend a Standing Council on Primary Industries meeting in, I believe, May last year to discuss this issue and others between state ministers for agriculture and our then federal colleague, Senator Joe Ludwig. At that first meeting I found my interstate and national colleagues were quite critical about how the program had been managed over some time in Queensland. In fact, what I encountered was very strong talk of the national program being disbanded and Queensland—

Mr MULHERIN: Never mind Victoria.

Mr McVEIGH:—having to move to management and, of course, with Queensland just having to live with the problem.

Mr MULHERIN: It sounds like nothing has changed.

CHAIR: Order, please.

Mr McVEIGH: I had to ask myself, Mr Chair, as I thankfully was successful in obtaining support in that meeting, why the program and the national perception of management of fire ants in Queensland had got to that state of disarray and had got to that state of lack of any real confidence from any other states or, particularly, Senator Joe Ludwig. So I immediately commenced a process of very significant investigation when I returned to Brisbane after that Adelaide meeting very early in my term. I sought and received numerous emails, letters and calls about concerns, making it clear to me that many believed the program had been very poorly managed. Some of those concerns were in line with what some of my interstate colleagues were suggesting. That included very serious allegations of nepotism, coverups, misreporting, staff bludging—I might put it—and, on the whole, being run by a PR staff for the minister for his own personal promotion on the 6 pm news as often as possible. Those are the sorts of allegations that were made to me.

Mr MULHERIN: It is laughable.

Mr McVEIGH: So that became an important part of my investigations, along with what my interstate colleagues were telling me. I took on board those concerns and, in particular, I looked at the scientific and financial reviews, some 13 of them since the program was commenced following the first detection in 2001, and most particularly those reviews that my predecessor as agriculture spokesman for the LNP, Andrew Cripps, noted as then shadow minister would be particularly relevant. The 2012 technical review was run by an independent scientific advisory panel. We had the financial audit in mid-2012 of the National Fire Ant Eradication Program conducted by Deloitte and, of course, the efficiency audit also conducted by Deloitte and provided to us early this calendar year. That enabled me to understand some of the concerns and some of the efficiencies that could be pursued. I make no apology that management changes in Biosecurity Queensland were made and that we took the opportunity to particularly focus on the technology and the efficiencies that would provide us with the big-picture global view that we needed to manage red imported fire ants now in South-East Queensland.

I fast forward very quickly, if I can, to the decision made at the Standing Committee on Primary Industries meeting in Sydney in May of this year to fund the fire ant program under the national fund sharing agreement. For the benefit of the member, if appropriate, I am certainly happy to provide the details of that agreement, because it is an agreement signed by the federal minister and the state ministers, so I can assure the member that there is nothing untoward in that agreement. We are not breaking any agreement.

The fact that we were able to secure and confirm a national fund sharing agreement for 2013-14, as I mentioned earlier, of some \$15 million in the month of May was the first time ever—the first time ever—I am advised and to my understanding, that Queensland had been in receipt of confirmation of its funding for the red imported fire ant program in advance of the financial year. In other words, previously Queensland never knew what it was going to get until the financial year had started. I would suggest to you that, on Queensland's behalf, that was another example of probably shoddy management and certainly not appropriate financial management. From a financial perspective, the scheme is being run now very tightly with a focus on the figures and a focus on the technology that will provide us with the best outcome—and I am happy to talk about that in great detail—as confirmed between Queensland, our interstate colleagues and, of course, our national colleague, the federal Minister for Agriculture.

Mr MULHERIN: Minister, it looks like nothing much has changed within the policy context of dealing with the red imported fire ants. Previously, there have been a number of reviews. It is probably one of the most reviewed and audited national cost sharing scheme that the state has entered into. It would appear that the level of additional contribution from the state has declined, but I acknowledge that you will be spending an additional \$3 million. One of the issues that the state always confronts is the southern states such as Victoria, that I refer to as being a bit like Saint Thomas the Doubter, have never had full confidence that this red imported fire ant outbreak can be eradicated. Is it still the view of your southern colleagues that this cannot be eradicated or are you of the belief that, with the use of remote sensing—and no doubt the Dorothy Dixer from your side of the estimates committee will outline the progress that is being made there. Is it your contention that some of your colleagues in departments in other states still doubt the ability of the state of Queensland to eradicate?

CHAIR: I do not want to make the question any longer, Minister, but before we get on to it I would ask the member for Mackay if he wants the document tabled?

Mr MULHERIN: I will talk to the minister afterwards about further briefing.

CHAIR: The previous document, do you want it tabled?

Mr MULHERIN: No, I take him on face value.

Mr McVEIGH: I appreciate the member taking me on face value. I assure him that he can always do so. I thank him for that, because as he stated there are always 'Doubting Thomases' and we know where they invariably end up, as history would show. My interstate colleagues, as I have mentioned just a few moments ago, were quite critical of how the program was being managed when I attended my first SCoPI meeting just over 12 months ago. I received and continue to receive, as would be obvious, very strong support from my New South Wales colleague Minister Katrina Hodgkinson. Anyone would appreciate why in Queensland we would receive significant—

Mr MULHERIN: It is in New South Wales's interests, isn't it, Minister?

Mr McVEIGH: Exactly. Of course, one would imagine that those states further afield are going to be looking at how this program continues with a very critical eye. Having secured, and again I stress, for the first time before the end of the financial year or before the commencement of the relevant financial year funding contributions under that national partnership agreement from my interstate colleagues, I would suggest to you that that is evidence in writing, backed up by dollars, that they continue to support the program. My technical advice is—and that advice has been backed up by numerous technical reviews, as the member has just highlighted—that the program remains on track for eradication. I make the point, in stark contrast—and I reject the assertion in the member's question that nothing has changed—with respect—

Mr MULHERIN: Or less money.

Mr McVEIGH: With respect, Mr Chairman, there is significant change in the way in which this program has been managed. With your indulgence, Mr Chairman, I am happy to talk about how the program is being managed and how it will continue to be as we work on this problem.

CHAIR: It is an important issue in the Lockyer at the moment.

Mr McVEIGH: It is an important issue, I acknowledge, for all of us and certainly for you as the member for Lockyer. I add that not just as Minister for Agriculture, but also recognising that the Lockyer is one of our predominant agricultural regions in the state as is the neighbouring seat of Toowoomba South, straddled as it is between the significant agricultural production area of the Lockyer Valley and my home territory of the Darling Downs. So any impact from red imported fire ant is something that we all dearly wish to guard against. That is why we have focused on the program that I have certainly finetuned since becoming minister.

The change: let me talk about how we are going and what we are focused on now. As the member asking the previous question highlighted just a moment ago, certainly we have focused on remote sensing technology. There is no doubt about that. That latest infrared technology helps find the nests and, therefore, directs far more intelligently, specifically and in a targeted fashion the response. We have simplified reporting and classification. Very importantly, we are now more than ever encouraging locals to report nests and, importantly, we have given them the ability to treat nests. That in itself is a very significant change, because previously only fire ant staff from Biosecurity Queensland were permitted to treat nests. For everyone else it was hands off. That was an overly bureaucratic approach. It was an archaic approach. It resulted quite clearly, as I found, in a massive backlog of response to identified nests that needed treatment. Now, landholders actually join in the fight. If they find nests, they can report them to Biosecurity Queensland's control centre and they can treat them immediately with readily available chemical products. That is a far more simple, a far more effective and a far more responsive and responsible approach. Instead of reporting and then waiting for staff to come out and treat nests, which in some cases could obviously run the risk of colonies spreading, landholders can join in the fight and treat nests immediately.

The other big difference I want to highlight is that Biosecurity Queensland, as I said, is not only employing the remote sensing technology, but also continuing to finetune that technology in this particular application. That infrared and thermal camera system mounted on helicopters pinpointing fire ant nests over large areas quickly and far more efficiently than having teams of staff traipse across farmland, forests, housing and industrial estates and parklands, simply sticking sticks in holes, enables us to get a big-picture view on where the problem may be at any one point in time. In using that world-first technology in terms of a fire ant detection application, we are simply stepping up the fight against fire ants. These helicopters fly at roughly 150 metres, causing minimal disruption to residents, pets and livestock. The advantages of that process are that they can check otherwise totally inaccessible areas for possible ant colonies; it is quicker, safer and much more cost effective and efficient to conduct surveillance that way rather than on foot; and it provides a comprehensive understanding of where fire ants are located—in other words, the global big-picture view that I suggested before.

Capturing multispectrum image data is done using sensors mounted under the helicopters. These sensors detect reflected energy in three distinct frequency bands—visible, near infrared and thermal. What you find if you sit down with our expert technicians is that the fire ant mounds reveal a distinct signature in that imagery that is captured due to thermal or heat characteristics detected by that near infrared technology. This technology is state of the art; it is leading edge. There are always in these applications bugs to iron out, and I am the first to admit that. The simple fact of the matter is that we are now covering more territory and interestingly enough we are doing it at less cost. That comes back to the budgetary and targeting decisions that I mentioned.

In 2011-12, for example, \$21.6 million allowed an operational area of 89½ thousand hectares to be covered in both treatment and surveillance. In 2012-13, through our operational efficiency and increased use of the remote sensing that I am talking about, \$17.9 million has allowed 105,000 hectares to be covered. In short, we have covered 15½ thousand hectares more in 2012-13 for \$3.7 million less. Using the old methods that the former government had in place, to achieve ground surveillance of 100,000 hectare it would cost an estimated \$32 million and would require 480 full-time equivalent positions, FTEs. We can now achieve that same surveillance outcome over 100,000 hectares using remote sensing and follow-up on-ground surveillance—we target where it is and do the follow-up on-ground surveillances—for \$7.225 million with 77 FTEs. So the same area is covered for 22 per cent of the budget and 16 per cent of the FTEs. In anyone's eyes that is a huge improvement in efficiency in the program.

I have taken some time in answering that question because I think it is a critical issue. It was simply a case of taking on what was, I believe, a program that was mismanaged—as seen by our interstate and national colleagues—seeking independent professional advice and adopting world's best practice and technologies to get the nationally funded program back on track and to do what it is supposed to do and that is to achieve the best value for taxpayers and ensure that we are on top of outbreaks, that we can identify outbreaks—and that is what we have seen—and maintain the fight against fire ants as we progress towards eradication.

Mr MULHERIN: So minister that technology was first commissioned by the previous government and used. At the end of the discussion around red imported fire ants you believe that technology will eventually help us win the war, but it will take time?

Mr McVEIGH: The member has summarised that quite nicely. But I believe that it means we have to remain very responsible for a well managed and financially responsible program. Again I make the point, under our government and the programs that we have implemented per 100,000 hectares of ground surveilled we can do it for 22 per cent of the budget and 16 per cent of the FTEs of the former government.

Mr MULHERIN: Because of technology.

Mr McVEIGH: It is far more targeted program. It is a far more financially responsible program. Our interstate and national colleagues have taken that on board.

CHAIR: I call the member for Barron River.

Mr TROUT: Minister, can you please outline what research has been undertaken to ensure that Queensland cattle producers have access to world-class genetics to help them maintain herd profitability?

Mr McVEIGH: I thank the member for the question. I know he has a keen interest in the beef industry and agriculture in general. It is quite an important question.

As all members of this committee would well know, the cattle industry is the largest agricultural industry in the state of Queensland and we have the largest herd in Australia. That means it is particularly important for us to focus on herd profitability and certainly productivity, but for me, as a minister for agriculture, focused at the end of day, as I am and as is our department with the support of my ministerial colleagues and the Premier, on the economic development of the agriculture pillar of our economy, it is very much about profitability for our producers.

In 2011-12 the beef industry, as the committee would be aware, contributed some \$4.8 billion in gross value to the state's economy. Our exports have grown since 1991 at a rate of 1.3 per cent annually compared with the domestic consumption growth rate of only 0.35 per cent. So the industry is very well positioned for continued growth. That is well and truly in line with plans at a federal, state and regional level right across our country for the development of northern Australia into an international and certainly national food bowl.

Recent natural and market driven events have highlighted a number of fundamental issues that certainly mean that we need to address a few things as we embrace the future. So there is most definitely a clear role for cattle research, development and extension to assist Queensland beef enterprises to become more resilient to climate variability, and we all know that is an issue now and in recent times; market fluctuations, we all know that is a significant issue at present; workforce shortages, we all know that is an issue in the industry; and, of course, the need to continue to gain a broader social licence to operate. In Queensland we know, as do our colleagues in the Northern Territory and Western Australia involved in the live cattle export trade, that that is a significant issue as well.

Beef RD&E is continuing to be developed under our government and in my department to better investigate and particularly integrate innovation in animal and pasture sciences with technology, with decision support tools and a very modern, contemporary industry extension service right across the state. Some of our activities to address that need and to highlight the response to the member's question in turn highlight our involvement across a whole range of disciplines. In particular they are in partnership with various other industry and multiagency cooperators.

Let me rattle through a couple of examples to provide some detail for my response to the question. We know pasture legumes are an effective option for long-term productivity gains. However, there has been little systematic effort in evaluating new varieties since the 1990s. Meat & Livestock Australia has recently awarded our department a five-year \$1.2 million project to evaluate 32 promising lines from 16 legumes and grasses on properties across Central Queensland and North Queensland. Plant establishment, persistence, biomass, feed quality, profitability for finishing and breeding operations are the sorts of issues that will be assessed in that research.

Results from the beef CRC in the 2000s—and I note for the committee's interest that there are industry discussions between myself and my northern Australia colleagues in the territory and WA about another beef or at least agriculture CRC for our northern states—showed genetic improvement in cattle reproduction would obviously trigger significant gains in herd efficiency and lead to improved business profitability. Again, that is what it is about for us as a department—profitability of producers. The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry is negotiating a five-year project with MLA to continue the research components of that discontinued CRC work, irrespective of the broader discussions I have just referred to.

In May this year, Agri-Science Queensland purchased 163 highly regarded Brahman cattle from CSIRO which has ended its lease of the Belmont research station in Central Queensland from AgForce. That strategic purchase in its own right will allow the department to accelerate its genetic research program conducted in partnership with QAAFI at the University of Queensland, CSIRO and the University of New England.

The grazing best management practices program was launched in Rockhampton on 21 January this year by me, my colleague Andrew Powell, the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection, and Ian Burnett, the general president of AgForce. We were joined by the NRM body on that occasion as well. The development of BMP for the grazing industry in that broader catchment in Central Queensland and elsewhere in the state links grazing to other primary industries in Queensland that have successfully established BMP programs such as the cotton and grain industries, the industries from which I come. The grazing BMP program focuses on the economic rationale for adopting best management guidelines. It is very much about productivity for the cattle industry, in this case. As we know BMP produces other advantages such as environmental sensitivities as well.

The ongoing labour shortages in the beef industry present an opportunity and make it necessary to demonstrate innovative ways to use information and communication technologies in large scale, broadscale cattle properties. So the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry is therefore collaborating with CSIRO, James Cook University and the University of Queensland through the digital homestead project, which I acknowledge has been underway for a number of years, to develop sensor networks that track animals within property boundaries to estimate parameters, such as location, grazing time, behaviour, cow-calf relationships and simple animal health measures. Those sorts of initiatives, and there are many more examples that I could rattle through, are all about research, development and extension activity that present, irrespective of the level of technology involved, quite exciting developments to meet the need to deliver real benefits for producers, their productivity and ultimately their profitability.

CHAIR: We might have to be a bit briefer, Minister. I call the member for Thuringowa.

Mr COX: In your opening statement you said you are working hand in hand with the agriculture industry and your focus is on economic development. Can you please outline the key points in the Queensland agricultural strategy that will assist our producers in industries to boost production through to 2040?

CHAIR: You have a couple of minutes, Minister.

Mr McVEIGH: I thank the member for the question. It is a very important to talk about the future of Queensland's agricultural industries and our vision for those industries out to 2040. I must stress for the benefit of the committee that that vision, and the elements that I will explain in just a moment, has been developed with very significant industry consultation over the last 12 months.

What we have been able to achieve is industry input that has allowed us to finalise a vision that is very much focused on our agricultural industries in Queensland—and this does stand for fisheries and forestry as well—being efficient, innovative, resilient and, as I was saying in response to the previous question, profitable. Based on industry feedback, consultation and numerous workshops and certainly under the leadership of my director-general and my deputy director-general, who are sitting with me in the hearing today, the department has developed four key pathways to capture the focus that we as a state, both government and most importantly industry, support and have to keep in mind.

We are focused in this strategy on securing and increasing resource availability in the first instance. That means, for the benefit of the member and in answer to his question, land, water, labour and capital resources necessary for the future of agriculture in this state. Our vision is very much about doubling agricultural production, as that is interpreted by various industries, by 2040.

We have pursued that particular pathway, that access to resources, through various initiatives already such as the Queensland agricultural land audit; the fact that we have been successful as a department in lobbying state government colleagues in ensuring that agriculture is represented as a state interest in statutory regional plans; and through the delivery of secure and defined water entitlements for agriculture both now and in the future. As I would expect, this committee would have been able to query my colleague the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines on those sorts of issues given the enormous amount of effort and success that he has achieved to date, with more to come.

The second pathway is that of driving productivity growth right across the supply chain. Productivity growth is what leads to profitability that I spoke of previously, and it is what we are pursuing in beef research, as I detailed in response to a previous question as an example. So our research, development and extension plan right across the state for various industry sectors in various regions is what is being developed in a clear sense to develop the targets for transformation in particular industry sectors to drive that productivity. Mr Chairman, you have asked me to be a little more brief, so I relate to the example I gave just before of beef research.

The third pathway is that of securing and increasing market access, whether that is with our negotiations with our Victorian colleagues to allow better access and increased access for Queensland fruit and vegetables into the domestic market in Victoria—given fruit fly concerns of the past, we have been successful already in achieving that long-held objective of industry—or, as an international instance, by working very hard on the live cattle export trade not only into Indonesia, where we have been receiving some very positive commentary in recent days and weeks, but also into China and other destinations.

The last pathway is that of reducing costs of production in agriculture across the state, whether that is what we have already been able to achieve in the interim in terms of caps on electricity prices, particularly those who are holding agricultural produce, be it in cold rooms, or most particularly those who are in an irrigation situation where they have to deal with both electricity and water prices. My focus there is very much in unison with my colleague, Mark McArdle, the Minister for Energy and Water Supply, as he overhauls that particular system, and my interest is obviously agriculture. Finally, I note, in an attempt to drive down costs we have a focus on transport initiatives for agriculture right across the state. I am working very closely with my colleague Scott Emerson, the Minister for Transport, on initiatives such as the extra passes we will now secure for grain out of southern Queensland down the Toowoomba range into the Port of Brisbane, given the \$50 million investment on extra passing loops on the existing rail lines.

CHAIR: I will have to get you to wind up there, thank you.

Mr McVEIGH: So that strategy involves those four key pathways that I have explained, and I stress above all else that it is focused on efficient, innovative, resilient and profitable agribusinesses across our state. I am very pleased to have received the input of industry, and I must acknowledge the support that we have received since releasing the strategy from the likes of AgForce, the Queensland Farmers Federation, Growcom and others who we will continue to engage with as we implement this strategy out to 2040.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister, and your advisers. We will now take a short break and resume at 4 pm to examine the rest of the portfolio.

Proceedings suspended from 3.34 pm to 4.00 pm

CHAIR: Welcome back, Minister and advisers. I would also like to welcome Colin Holden, the Chief Executive Officer of QRAA. The committee will continue to examine the estimates of the service areas of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Please note that members may ask questions about

Agri-Science Queensland, the Australian Agricultural College Corporation, QRAA or Biosecurity Queensland during this segment. Leave has been granted to the member for Mackay to participate in today's hearings. Minister, you wanted to make a brief statement about something from the previous session.

Mr McVEIGH: Mr Chairman, I seek your guidance. Are you waiting for the member for Rockhampton or not?

CHAIR: No. We have a quorum.

Mr McVEIGH: I just want to follow up on a query from the member for Dalrymple in relation to feral cats to provide a little further advice and check his requirements going forward. In terms of the query from the member about the breakdown in funding and identifying that for feral cats, we took that question on notice and the department has been able to advise me that we certainly have in 2013 a budget of some \$4 million to support the management of a variety of feral animals in Queensland. However, because invasive plants and animals is an integrated program, we are unable at this stage to give a breakdown of a specific amount for feral cats. Let me just reiterate, or emphasise I should say, that feral cats, as I am sure the member knows full well, significantly impact on native wildlife and biodiversity. For that reason they are certainly a class 2 pest in this state.

Central to the management of feral cats, from the perspective of my department, obviously is the control right across the state of owned and stray cat populations that provide a source of cats capable of moving into the feral cat population. I did mention the Feral Animal Summit, which was held before our inaugural summit, the papers and findings from which are being drafted at present. So through you, Mr Chairman, I seek the member's guidance if the member is happy that I do proceed, as promised before, to provide a copy of that to the member as soon as they are available. I am happy to engage in further discussions about feral cats.

I share for the committee's interest, just to underline the concern that I am sure we all share, that I was speaking to the Minister for National Parks very briefly during the break, and he explained to me that he spoke to someone from the west earlier today—anecdotal though as this may be—who shared with him that, according to this person, it is interesting to note that kangaroos found dead on the side of roads are often seen now with cats lying beside them and that is for one reason: the cats are waiting for the birds to come down and the cat will jump and grab the bird. Anecdotal as that information may be, it just goes to show how clever, how cunning and what a challenge the feral cat population presents for us. I share the member's concern and will provide that information.

CHAIR: One of the executive officers here looked up snipers shooting cats at Birdsville. Army snipers were sent out there and shot over 400 cats in the Birdsville vicinity in the early nineties. So they have been a problem for a long time.

Mr McVEIGH: They are a real challenge.

CHAIR: I call the member for Mackay.

Mr MULHERIN: My question is to the director-general. Director-General, can you confirm that the tropical rock lobster program at the Northern Fisheries Centre has closed down and, if so, when?

Mr Noye: Yes, I can confirm that it closed. As to the exact time, it was several months back. It was last financial year and the staff have left. However, we are at the moment negotiating with an international crab company—

Mr MULHERIN: A crab company or a lobster company?

Mr Noye: A lobster company; you are right, sorry—to perhaps pick up from where the research left off. One of our previous employees is working for that company.

Mr MULHERIN: Or is it true that this world-leading research that was conducted there will no doubt end up in South-East Asia and we will be importing tropical rock lobster from South-East Asia?

Mr Noye: I do not know. However, I understand that there were others in South-East Asia doing the same research as we were. If you would like some more specifics, I am happy to ask the managing director.

Mr MULHERIN: He can provide that. What is currently happening to the facility?

Mr Noye: The tropical rock lobster facility?

Mr MULHERIN: The Northern Fisheries Centre.

Mr Noye: At the Northern Fisheries Centre we have extended the life of the marine finfish research for another three months till the end of September, whilst we continue to negotiate with the private sector on taking it over. We had been out for an expression of interest in the previous financial

year. We identified a firm as the successful commercial partner through a tender process. At the end of the financial year when things were expected or were supposed to change with the firm taking over the research that did not occur. I extended it until the end of September to help to secure investors. We are still negotiating with a number of interested parties.

Mr MULHERIN: What will happen to the giant grouper stock breed?

Mr Noye: I understand that they will be released back. I can get the managing director to confirm that.

Mr MULHERIN: Where will farmers in North Queensland who have relied on the facility to provide them with fingerlings source the fingerlings for their fish farms or are you abandoning these North Queensland fish farmers?

Mr Noye: The reason why we extended the period of time is so they could source fingerlings from other areas, particularly with the coral trout which is more available. The grouper will not be.

Mr MULHERIN: Are you across this, Director-General, or should someone else answer?

Mr Noye: I can get someone else to answer in more detail. I am reasonably across—

Mr MULHERIN: I think you are struggling.

Mr Noye: Thank you, Mr Mulherin.

CHAIR: Would the minister like to—

Mr MULHERIN: No. I would like a departmental person—

Mr McVEIGH: I would like the opportunity to add to the answer.

Mr MULHERIN: My question is to—

Mr McVEIGH: Chairman, you have asked me a question and I am answering your question. Yes, I would like the opportunity to assist in answering the question. As the director-general was about to do, I would also welcome the input of the managing director of fisheries should the committee wish.

CHAIR: This is your department, Minister.

Mr MULHERIN: With all due respect, Chair, aren't I entitled to ask departmental officers?

CHAIR: But you asked the department.

Mr MULHERIN: Yes.

CHAIR: You asked the department and then you—

Mr MULHERIN: And I have said to the DG would he like to defer to—

CHAIR: That is right.

Mr MULHERIN: And that is where we are at.

Mr Noye: My managing director is right here.

Mr Chapman: To answer some of the questions from the member for Mackay, if worst came to worst and we had to dispose of the grouper, which of course is a protected species—and some of them originally came out the gulf—we would go through a process of making it available to established aquaculture operators, making sure they were well looked after in tanks. There is quite a bit of interest in them if they became available. We are hoping that it will be an orderly transition to commercial operators, so we look forward to that occurring. Certainly this program had reached its research life and is ready to go to private enterprise now. A lot of negotiations are going on out there and we hope they will be successful.

Mr MULHERIN: In relation to coral trout fingerlings, where are other centres where farmers can source the fingerlings from if it is not from this facility?

Mr Chapman: We are not providing coral trout anymore, just the three grouper species. They are already out with private enterprise.

Mr MULHERIN: So is it fair to say that you are abandoning all aquaculture research in North Queensland?

Mr Chapman: At present if we wound the process up the only aquaculture research would be out of James Cook. Clive Jones, from the tropical rock lobster program, has taken up a position with them.

Mr MULHERIN: Could you elaborate a bit more on that partnership?

Mr Chapman: He is a well-respected tropical rock lobster scientist. So James Cook took the opportunity to take him on. He has the funding and the expertise. We are now hoping that an international company will take up further research at Cairns. It will not be run by us; it will be totally with them.

Mr MULHERIN: At the Northern Fisheries Centre?

Mr Chapman: Yes. Again, negotiations are going on with them as we speak.

Mr MULHERIN: It just appears that the department or the government is abandoning aquaculture research and focusing all its research, what, at Bribie Island?

Mr Chapman: Bribie would be our main centre going forward.

Mr McVEIGH: Mr Chairman, I would like to take up your invitation to add to the answer.

Mr COX: I have a supplementary question. Again I refer to the Minister's opening comments about working hand in hand with agriculture and the focus on economic development, and I ask the minister for his views on what is happening with aquaculture and fingerling supplies going forward?

Mr McVEIGH: I thank the member for the question and I will also address part of the question asked by the member for Mackay in the previous instance. I think it is very important to look at the way in which the department manages the interests of the taxpayers in Queensland in relation to agriculture, and in this case aquaculture, development and research. By that I mean the importance is very much reflected on in the Commission of Audit report that this government has based many of its strategies on going forward. For the benefit of both members in those questions, I reflect on the fact that the Commission of Audit recommended the ways in which the government, through departments—in this case my Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry—look at improving the quality and quantity of front-line services but also the need to make better use of skills, capability and, most particularly, innovation of the private sector, the government sector obviously and the not-for-profit sector.

With that in mind, the decisions that have been made in relation to aquaculture research—and I stress research in this instance in the Northern Fisheries Centre—are very much based on the ability of industry to take up that research. In fact, the last thing that I want to see as minister is the government continuing to compete with private sector interests, whether it is aquaculture research, whether it is beef breeding services, whether it is waterway barrier works that my department has stepped back from over the last 12 months, whether it is post-quarantine services, whether it is other areas of research.

The examples that I have just mentioned involve in each and every instance either current and/or former staff being involved in new commercial ventures with other investors to launch, in strict commercial competition with other parties, beef breeding, fish barrier works, post-quarantine services and in this case aquaculture research as well. That is exactly the role that government should be playing once industry is ready, willing and able to take up the ongoing challenge of innovation development. I reflect, finally, on the fact that the former government recognised this as well in backing out of wheat research which was passed on to the private sector and of course the commercialisation of RND in mangoes as well. The former government made decisions about what research it needed to be in and what it did not need to be in. I did not agree with those decisions, but I make the point that decisions about what research industry is best to take up and what research government needs to continue to support is a challenge to always consider.

Mr COX: So it is being addressed.

Mr MULHERIN: People living outside of South-East Queensland would see that all of this world-class research was happening outside of Brisbane, outside of the south-east corner. This government seems to be Brisbane centric. Don't you think there is a perception that that is the case regarding the closure of this facility?

Mr McVEIGH: Through you, Mr Chair—

Mr MULHERIN: I hope you can get private sector involvement.

Mr McVEIGH: Through you, Mr Chair—

Mr MULHERIN: But if you do not, you will close it down.

Mr McVEIGH: Through you, Mr Chair, do you wish me to answer the question?

CHAIR: Yes.

Mr McVEIGH: Thank you, Mr Chair. I thank the member for his supplementary question, I guess. The question, I would suggest, shows an absolute lack of knowledge and absolute ignorance of the Northern Beef Research Alliance, for example. It shows a lack of memory in relation to Spyglass research station, if I use the beef industry example of which the member for Mackay would be fully aware given his previous involvement in that establishment. Research in the grain industry that he seemed to be so keen on running down is now focused very much through not only collaboration with the Grains Research and Development Corporation, but also the Grains Research Foundation, the University of Queensland at Gatton and their efforts through the likes of other research activities with Blue Ribbon Seeds, for example, in the Flinders catchment in North Queensland and ongoing research in the Burdekin. As I mentioned earlier very clearly, as part of its implementation, our Queensland agriculture strategy has specific research, development and extension plans by sector and by region; hence, my collaboration and explanation to regional mayors right across the country, whether it is mayors in the north such as Andrew Daniels in Cloncurry or Fred Pascoe at Carpentaria Shire Council right through to mayors across the south in grain industries, fruit and vegetables et cetera. To ignore the fact that our department is focused more than ever before on not only front-line roles—15 new biosecurity based regional roles last year and another 10 positions this year—is I think showing total ignorance of those facts.

Mr KNUTH: I put this question to you and I also want to clarify the situation regarding timber processors and the five-year lease. I am aware that the minister reopened access to state forests. Regarding that five-year lease, in order for those timber processors looking to invest further in the operation to obtain loans from a bank, they will have to show why the bank should give them money to invest in timber harvesting. Is there a way around this that can support these timber harvesters expanding without falling into the problem of that five-year licence?

Mr McVEIGH: I thank the member for the question. The fortunes and future of the timber industry in Queensland are something that our government has focused on to a great degree since we came to power earlier last year. In fact, in terms of a strategic plan for an industry, the timber industry plan that we kicked off not long after the election last year was, in fact, our first industry strategic planning exercise. Of course, that was very much managed and led by the Timber Queensland organisation and delivered to us as a government late last calendar year. My ministerial colleagues and I are finalising the government's response to that plan and also the complementary multi-use policy for forests right across the state.

The issue that the member quite rightly highlights is that of security of access to the resource. Again, I highlight that that is one of the four key pathways within our broader agriculture strategy: producers having access to the resource, be it land, water, capital or labour. In the timber industry context it is obviously having access to timber, hence your reference to those five-year contracts. The response to the timber industry plan that I have just outlined that the government is considering will be released in the near future. However, I am pleased to share with you that it outlines a vision for sustained business growth and innovation in the industry. What I mean by that is you cannot sustain growth and you cannot be willing to innovate unless you have some security and ability to go to the bank and say, 'I have a real opportunity to have access to the resource over a reasonable period.' The complementary policy statement to that government response to the multi-use tenure that I referred to will set out the government's intention in that regard. I do not want to pre-empt a lot of that detail until it is released.

As the member would be aware, I have certainly approved areas of state forest across the state that were excluded from timber production by the former state government. That amounts to about half of Queensland's three million hectares of state forest being once again available for timber harvesting. The industry has significant challenges. Access to resource, which we further outlined in the government's response as well as in that multi-use tenure policy to be released in the near future, which I alluded to, is what is going to be critical to their ability to continue their businesses.

CHAIR: Do you have another follow-up question?

Mr KNUTH: No, I do not have a follow-up question. I just want to add something, and I put this question last year. I believe there was funding that was removed or cut back from the recreational fish stocking associations. What is the position in the budget this year?

Mr McVEIGH: I can certainly remember the member asking that question last year. The stocked impoundment scheme is one that allows opportunities for stocking in regional areas for those to enjoy continued recreational fishing. The scheme is something that certainly continues under our government. We have a scheme that allows us to continue to provide funding through that SIPS

process. So users of regional water impoundments used for fishing purposes can pay a fee and, therefore, add to the continuing sustainability of that experience in those particular catchments. Then, of course, there is the recreational use fee, which we continue to use as a source for assisting recreational fishing initiatives.

When I talk about the Stocked Impoundment Permit Scheme, I would draw the member's attention to a recent announcement of mine—unless the member was already aware of it—that, as a result of the continuation of that scheme, we have been able to allocate some \$903,000 this financial year to community stocking groups specifically for the purchase of fingerlings for example. That is something that rolls out across the state for various areas. I am very happy to provide the breakdown of the areas and the local fish stocking groups that are enjoying the benefits of that. I made that announcement a couple of weeks ago.

Mr MULHERIN: What is the current estimated production volume of hardwood sawmilling in Queensland?

Mr McVEIGH: I thank the member for the question. I can get the detail on that for you and table it in due course.

Mr MULHERIN: What sort of yield are you looking at per year out of the 1½ million hectares of state forest that you are returning to the timber industry?

Mr McVEIGH: The member is clearly intent on asking very detailed questions, and I appreciate that and I thank him for the questions. If he wants detail on specific areas—if we talk yield—

Mr MULHERIN: That is the next question.

Mr McVEIGH:—that is quite complex in terms of providing you with a summary figure, given the geographical differences between so many forests across the state. I can ask Mr Geoff Kent from our Forestry section to furnish some of that information if you wish.

Mr MULHERIN: I will take that on notice.

CHAIR: Are you happy to supply that on notice?

Mr McVEIGH: I am happy to supply that information on notice.

Mr MULHERIN: You provided us with a response to a question on notice.

Mr McVEIGH: That is right. That was at morning tea.

Mr MULHERIN: You have included attachment 1, which names a whole lot of state forests. Will some forestry activity occur in every one of those forests?

Mr McVEIGH: That is where it is expected that we would see some activity.

Mr MULHERIN: Could we get the per annum yield that you expect? Also, of course, some of these forests have been logged before.

Mr McVEIGH: That is correct.

Mr MULHERIN: Will they be on a second or third rotation? Finally, on that, what science are you relying on to calculate the yield?

Mr McVEIGH: There were a couple of points to the member's question. I have just been looking at the list included in the attachment to the response to the member's question on notice. I do not have total numbers on that list. To save the committee time, I do not wish to count them for you now. I am estimating that at least 100 forests are referred to. I will stand corrected if one wants to count them. I take it that the member is asking for the detailed information on each of those, which we are more than happy to respond to.

In terms of the science being used, as I said a moment ago, we can provide a summary overview for you now. I would encourage the committee to understand that that is only a summary, given the numbers of different forests that we could refer to. I guess the science, the standards and the practice that the department takes into account include practices obviously that are environmentally responsible, as you would fully appreciate.

Mr MULHERIN: So we are not going to see a repeat of the seventies such as we saw with Kalpowar?

Mr McVEIGH: The demonstrated independent certification of the department's forest management system under the Australian Forestry Standard is what we have in mind. That is approved by Standards Australia and sets out nine criteria for forest production from environmental, social, cultural and economic perspectives. Those criteria include requirements for sustaining

biodiversity obviously in those environments, soil and water protection and, as I just alluded to a moment ago, safeguarding cultural heritage. That is the case whether or not they are forests in the south such as those on the western Darling Downs that I am familiar with or whether they are those such as in Crediton that the member may be familiar with given its proximity to his part of the world in Mackay.

Mr MULHERIN: I have another question, this time to the director-general. Director-general, what is the final wash-up of redundancies in your department, both voluntary and non-voluntary, since the election of the Newman government back in March last year?

Mr Noye: I will take a few moments to gather that information.

Mr MULHERIN: While you are gathering that, I will ask a supplementary. Have you recruited anyone over that period and, if so, how many?

Mr Noye: I will take that on notice and get you that information, too.

Mr MULHERIN: What is the average age of your workforce?

CHAIR: He can take that on notice, too.

Mr Noye: I will have to take that on notice, too.

Mr MULHERIN: We have heard the minister outline a number of initiatives that his government is pursuing within agriculture, forestry and fisheries. What level of workforce planning have you undertaken? What are the skill sets you will need going forward for Biosecurity and so on? Have you done any of that work?

Mr Noye: We have done some work on that, but we are continuing with it. We are particularly looking at the skill sets in regional areas with Biosecurity—veterinary officers, agronomists and things like that. So we are still working through that level of workforce planning.

Mr MULHERIN: So you have not done—

Mr Noye: We have not finalised it; we have been doing it. I can get my director of Corporate to walk you through that if you like. We have done a fair bit of that but it is continuing.

Mr MULHERIN: What are the sorts of skill sets in Biosecurity that you will need in the future?

Mr Noye: As I mentioned, more veterinary officers.

Mr MULHERIN: What about epidemiologists? Has it gone down to that level of detail?

Mr Noye: I will get the head of Biosecurity to come and talk you through that, if you like.

Mr MULHERIN: I would not mind.

Mr McVEIGH: While Jim is coming up I will take the opportunity to clarify one point. A moment ago I provided a response to the member for Dalrymple about our SIPS funding. I believe I said that the amount of money being invested this year was \$903,000. That is the amount of money raised. Thus far we have distributed an amount of \$690,000 for that purpose from that scheme.

Mr Thompson: We have embarked on quite a range of reforms in Biosecurity Queensland. Obviously we have changed issues around labs, operational issues and staffing in a number of areas. There are a number of gaps, I guess, in Biosecurity Queensland in terms of the skills we need. We are certainly after a range of different scientists to fully accommodate the new laboratory at Coopers Plains. We are after technical officers, specialists in virology, parasitology and a range of other disciplines that we are recruiting for at the moment. Epidemiology is a critical part of our business, whether it is the plant world or the animal world, and we are looking for people who have those skills. We do have quite a few still within the organisation. A lot of our vets have strong epidemiological skills. They are areas in which we will be recruiting in the future. It is a different business we are in. We are trying to do things differently. We are still on the ground, though, of course. We have huge numbers of incidents that we respond to every year, as you are well aware. We need those people on the ground that can handle that, but we certainly need people in the planning and science areas and we will be looking at recruiting into those into the future. It will be a changed workforce from what we have now in some areas.

Mr McVEIGH: I will make a follow-up point, to pull together a few of the threads raised by the member in that question. In relation to voluntary redundancies, of course they have happened—and the committee would be aware of that—as has been the case across government, given our pursuit of savings that were necessary. The member asked about whether there have been appointments. Of course there have, and they are in key areas across the state, particularly those regional roles that I

discussed last year at estimates and again this year, so they are necessary to support our front-line services and this focus we have on the regions, rather than the former government's focus on head office. I am happy to take an updated percentage, but my recollection is that the focus has been such that in the order of 75 per cent of our reductions have come out of head office or Brisbane based roles over the period.

In relation to the query about the average age of employees in the department, I do not have that figure at hand. I am sure that is something we could table should the member wish. I simply make the observation that I myself worked in the department just over 20 years ago, when I left university. Over the last 12 months or so it has been my privilege to join with a number of staff who have reached retirement age—people I knew when I worked in the department and who I continue to have great regard for. At the same time, we see new graduates coming into the department. I am sure everyone would agree about the essential nature of that renewal and about the need to continue to build our workforce in all areas of discipline, such as what was just explained in relation to Biosecurity.

What ties in with that is education, not only for industry. Equally, as Minister for Agriculture in this state I need to ensure good education for the purposes of drawing people through the system—be that in the gateway schools program in our schools, in our agricultural colleges, in the broader TAFE system, if I can put it that way, or in university undergraduate studies, which I always encourage, quite obviously. That goes right through to the scientists that we need for the future of our department, be they entomologists, agronomists, soil scientists or whatever. It is absolutely essential that we maintain renewal, so encouraging education for anyone in agriculture, including those who want to work in our department, is essential.

CHAIR: There is a fair bit of grey hair in the room!

Mr McVEIGH: Any advice and experience is welcome.

Mr COSTIGAN: Minister, could you please advise of the progress the Queensland government has made with the east coast inshore net fishery licence buyback to help improve sustainable fishing in Queensland?

Mr McVEIGH: I thank the member for the question. I know that the future sustainable management of fisheries right across the state is as important to him, as member for Whitsunday, as it is to any other regional, particularly coastal, member of parliament.

The government has, as the member and the committee would be aware, a range of significant election commitments designed to deliver strong, viable, healthy and sustainable commercial and rec fishing industries in Queensland. But the key commitment was that to which the member referred—the east coast inshore fishery licence buyback. That commitment was to undertake a \$9 million targeted but voluntary buyback of commercial netting licences. Delivery of this buyback is on track, with 35 licences removed so far and more fishing authorisations expected to be removed in the next two months.

The government has also started to invest up to \$1 million on a range of sustainability measures including enhanced monitoring of recreational fisheries on a regional basis. That enhanced monitoring will provide accurate and detailed information at a regional level on recreational fishing in Queensland and very valuable information highlighting economically sustainable recreational fishing opportunities throughout Queensland.

The other important election commitment that goes alongside that on which my department has commenced work and which I do want to share with the committee is ensuring that the trawl plan review of the east coast commercial trawl industry is completed in a timely manner—some of these reviews in the industry were dragging on under the former government, causing significant industry concern; working with line fishers to help promote economic viability; and making sure that we are adopting and ensuring at all times a science based approach to fisheries management.

All of that contributes to our wider strategy to deliver on the government's vision for fisheries in Queensland. Both commercial fishing industry operators and those involved in the recreational fishing sector are significant economic contributors to our state. To ensure that they can continue and deliver their benefits to the state of Queensland, we need to make sure we are developing systems—in this case, amongst other things, that buyback—that will get the balance right for commercial fishermen, for recreational fishermen and for the environment. That is not without its challenges. This committee, and I suspect almost every member of this parliament, would recognise that the debates about and between the recreational sector and the commercial sector are often very loud and long, but wading through those challenges is exactly what our government is very much focused on.

Mr COX: Minister, something one of the members on the far left may know something about, and in line with what my constituents in Thuringowa ask me: can you outline to the committee what strategic direction you and your department are taking with Queensland fisheries? And what steps are being taken, more importantly, to finish sector reviews that were left to drag on unfinished for years by the previous government?

Mr McVEIGH: Thank you for the question. It enables me to continue the theme I just raised in terms of some of these reviews that were in fact dragging on. Again, I acknowledge the importance that the fishing industry has in the member's electorate of Thuringowa, given its coastal location in North Queensland.

What we have seen is reviews on crab, trawl and freshwater fisheries unfortunately left as unfinished business by the former government. Our Queensland crab fisheries are quite significantly economically important for many regional communities. To ensure that those fisheries can continue to deliver benefits for those regional communities—the employment and associated economic multiplier benefits—we need to get on with the job of completing reviews and putting in place management arrangements to ensure we have—I make no apology for reiterating these words—efficient, innovative and profitable businesses right across the state.

The Queensland crab fishery, which targets mud crab and blue swimmer crab, is an important fishery for all of those reasons—both commercially and recreationally. It in fact generates about \$30 million in annual gross value of production. The review there is a priority task for the government. It is being run in conjunction with the east coast net fishery buyback that I talked about in response to an earlier question. That is simply to ensure that the changing arrangements in both fisheries can be considered together and holistically to make sure we have the best overall outcome—that there is not a spillover in effort, if you like, between both fisheries. A working group comprising stakeholders and scientists has already been able to provide advice to the review and has identified a number of options to change existing management arrangements. It is those options that I am discussing with industry and with my colleagues.

Let me talk about the trawl review. In 2012 Queensland's east coast trawl fishery harvested about 6½ thousand tonnes of seafood, worth approximately \$83 million. The key species that we saw harvested there included prawns, scallops, the good old Moreton Bay bug and of course squid. The review of this fishery is, thankfully, currently underway. Once complete, it will again give the industry the certainty it needs to move forward. Again I make the point about our overall strategy being to ensure profitable businesses—efficient, innovative et cetera—by providing access to resource. In many cases that means simply certainty of access to resource—in this case trawl fishery, as the committee would acknowledge in answer to previous questions, and in other cases access to forestry resources, for example.

Many in the industry in relation to this trawl review have given me a clear message that to return to profitability fishing effort must be reduced so that existing catch can be shared between fewer participants fishing for shorter periods during the year, so I will continue to take industry input as we continue the review. Improvements may also be needed in the responsiveness of management arrangements to enable better, faster decision making on the management of the fishery itself—again, better certainty for operators, for fishers, in these industries so that they can pursue better catches. So it is delivering on those sorts of changes that does take time. You have got to get on with the job—that is why I have been keen to pick up on these reviews—and they may hold significant cost implications for industry, for government and hence for the taxpayers of Queensland. So it is for that reason that we need to be considering very comprehensively all of the options that can be and are being developed in the review, what is affordable in these tough times and in the future, and what will ultimately deliver results. Once we have got results that are confirmed by industry to be fair and affordable we will continue to consult with the public about future visions for the industry.

I want to just touch very quickly before I wrap up on this particular answer on freshwater fishery issues, largely recreational obviously, the taking of iconic species such as barramundi, Australian bass, golden perch, silver perch, Murray cod, sooty grunter and redclaw crayfish. We are certainly currently progressing a review of freshwater fishery to, amongst other things, remove unnecessary regulation; create the basis of an enjoyable recreational fishing experience, which in turn is the basis of a sound and robust recreational fishing economy and how that plays out in various regions; and of course to reduce the unintended impacts of fishing on various species around the state. Stakeholder based working groups have been providing advice on those future management options for, in this case, the freshwater fisheries as I have mentioned. Those options, as the committee could well imagine I guess, may include issues such as bag and size limits for fish, including, I must note, those

caught for private aquariums perhaps; where protection could be afforded through potential closures; where bait should be allowed to be used and should not be allowed to be used to ensure diseases are not introduced or spread between various river systems; how fishers can reduce the catch of protected species and of course ultimately protect that such as turtles, lungfish and platypus; and what species should be available for stocking and where they should be allowed to be stocked, and of course that is relevant and particular in relation to my former answer to the member for Dalrymple in relation to the stocked impoundment permit scheme.

So an enormous amount of work is being done in reviews. An enormous amount of work needs to be done. It was left as unfinished business. I have picked that up and we are giving it a fair bit of effort at present.

Mrs MADDERN: Minister, you are very well aware that the timber industry in my electorate is a fairly important component of our economic base and the industry generally appears to be in fairly tough times. I know we have already touched on several points about the timber industry, but I am just wondering if you could give me basically a broad view of where you see the industry at the moment and what your vision or view of the industry in the future may be.

Mr McVEIGH: I thank the member for the question, and I agree that the industry has a number of challenges that it is confronting at present and I know through previous work and continuing work with the member in her very own electorate that there is a lot to be addressed and considered going forward. It is for that reason that we have consulted with industry and we continue to, and I referred earlier to the timber industry plan—the first strategic initiative that I got underway with once being appointed minister just over 12 months ago. In terms of broad direction, it has been about access to resource—I touched on that briefly in the earlier question from the member for Dalrymple—in whatever context that might be, whether that is hardwood or whether it is some of the cypress industry operators et cetera right across the state. It is also about the industry recognising the opportunity, as has been outlined in that industry plan—and, again, I make the point that the government has been considering its response and I am looking forward to releasing that in the near future—in terms of promoting the features of the industry.

I think the very clear point made to me by industry leaders just over 12 months ago is that if we just stepped back for a moment and considered the ideal building material—if we considered a building material that is renewable; a building material that provides significant regional jobs, provided access is granted; a building material that is aesthetically very pleasing and can be crafted in many different ways to meet consumer requirements and trends, both now and in the future—one would conjure up a material I suspect that is just like the timber industry. The fact that it is renewable, it is manageable and it is a resource that is therefore ecologically sustainable is something that I note has been reflected upon by the likes of the well-known international environmental commentator David Suzuki, who supports the industry very strongly in that regard.

What future do I see? I see a need to get through the current challenges that the industry does face. It suffered from a lack of government focus and support and recognition of the benefits that it can bring to so many regional communities across the state—whether that is regional communities even within the south-east corner or elsewhere across the rest of the state—and it is an industry that needs some surety of access to resource, and so it has been our plan to do just that. We have got cypress industry agreements that have been welcomed by the industry and celebrated by them. We have got state forest access opened up again for the interests of the timber industry—the timber harvesters—and I take the opportunity to mention as well grazing permits where appropriate and beekeeping where appropriate. Fancy that beekeeping was ruled out by the former government in forests. That is the sort of approach that we are taking and the sort of opportunity for the industry going forward and the sorts of challenges that I want to work through with them as will be revealed in our response to the industry plan put to us and the multiuse policy that I referred to earlier.

Mr COSTIGAN: Given that our commercial fishing industry plays a critical role economically, especially in regional Queensland, what impact will the federal government's plan to expand marine parks have on our regional fishing communities up and down the coast?

Mr McVEIGH: I thank the member for the question. It will have a significant impact, and we have been on record as a government, together with other state governments throughout the nation, expressing significant concern about the proclamation by the Australian government late last year—in November last year—regarding the Coral Sea marine reserve covering, in our case, some 980,000 square kilometres. Despite protestations from our government and the commercial fishing industry and representations to the Australian government to reduce the impact, it is estimated that the proclaimed area will cost our seafood industry at least \$500,000 gross value of production—that is

half a million dollars a year—based on previous catches. So while it is a decision of the Australian government—and I need to respect that as a state minister—the Queensland government is very much focused on assisting where it can the industry by working with the Australian government despite our concerns with their move to ensure that those ultimately affected by the Coral Sea marine reserve can demonstrate their losses properly and receive adequate compensation and adjustment from the Australian government.

The new zoning arrangements will come into effect in July 2014—in roughly 12 months time. Until such a time as the Australian government has put transitional arrangement details on the table, it is very difficult to understand what the actual final impact on industry will be, but they will be significant. Fisheries management arrangements in the Coral Sea that existed prior to the proclamation will continue to apply up until July next year. That means that, whilst we do not have all of the final details yet, the reality is that in little over a year's time Queensland fishing businesses that have been working in that fishery in that Coral Sea area on a sustainable and profitable basis for many, many years will be either forced to go and fish elsewhere—with the enormous displacement effort and pressure that we should all understand that that would mean in those other locations—or otherwise simply close down. That impact on Queensland businesses is the driving force certainly that I have got in mind behind the Queensland government's decision to assist industry and the Australian government to determine what appropriate compensation and adjustment programs need to be. I do not like the decision; it is not an appropriate decision. It will severely impact our industry. I can continue, as I will, to protest about that and make representations, but at the same time I have to sit down and make sure that the Australian government is fair dinkum about appropriate compensation adjustment programs. So that is our focus and that is the nature of the impacts that I am quite concerned about.

Mr TROUT: Minister, on another private enterprise issue, can you provide an update on what steps the state government has taken to restore access for beekeepers to sites in our native forests for honey production?

Mr McVEIGH: I thank the member for the question. It again picks up on a theme that I just mentioned a few moments ago in terms of access to our state forests. I know that I have been pleased to see my department develop, and certainly I have had the opportunity to develop myself, a cooperative relationship with Queensland Beekeepers. It is really handy, as any member in the room might appreciate, when they have meetings in your own electorate on a Friday night. It just makes it far more convenient, as has been the occasion when I have caught up with Queensland Beekeepers in various instances over the last 12 months. Unlike the former government, which appeared to not have much appreciation, I would suggest, to the industry but in many regards also made life very difficult for their long-term commercial survival, the LNP government is working to ensure that beekeepers do have access to native forest floral resources of state forests, because this access is critical to both those beekeepers and is a natural circumstance in most cases anyway.

Former temporary apiary sites in state forests in the western hardwoods region have now been made available again in the context of being made permanent sites. Further to that, my department is working with beekeepers to identify and establish further apiary sites at suitable locations in other native state forests throughout the state. There are about 4,600 sites in state forests, with about 2,500 held under permit in any one year. In Queensland we are making changes to the setting of permit fees to ensure that beekeepers pay fair rates for use of our state forests. I have also rectified a problem in our charging of apiary permit fees for beekeepers that has arisen from the federal Labor government's actions.

Previously the federal government published an index of prices for honey received by producers which was the basis for setting state permit fees on a three-year rolling average. This index allowed the state and beekeepers to share the benefits of the value of our floral resources fairly. The federal government no longer puts as much priority on having information on our agricultural industries and only has an index for all spreads, including honey, at a retail level, not producer level, which is of no use to our commercial honey industry and unfortunately of no benefit to our department in following up on our assistance to industry. But we are fixing things. In consultation with the Queensland industry we have developed a new index based on using a public pricing schedule which will be implemented from July 2014. It is an example of the LNP government recognising the contribution the commercial apiary industry makes to agriculture in Queensland, not just in honey production obviously but also in the vital pollination role for our horticulture and other pollination-dependant crops, which is the way that Mother Nature intended it.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. That concludes the consideration of estimates for Fisheries and Forestry. Thank you, Minister, and your advisers. With regard to the time frames we have set for answers to questions taken on notice or if you want to provide any further detail or clarification, the deadline is 5 pm on Monday, 22 July.

Mr McVEIGH: Mr Chairman, I can provide a little information further to those questions taken on notice, should the committee wish. The planned yield from state owned native forests for the year 2013-14, as was requested in an earlier question, is some 220,000 cubic metres. If I can add to that, total removals for 2013 were some 224,277 cubic metres against a target of 205,000 cubic metres. Of course, as the committee should appreciate, variation depends on weather, fire salvage and other issues. I think my director-general may have another piece of follow-up information for the benefit of the committee.

Mr Noye: In response to Mr Mulherin, the voluntary redundancies in 2012-13 were 335; retrenched in the same time was two. The average age of staff is 44 and the appointments in 2012-13 were 278.

CHAIR: Younger than you, Tim.

Mr MULHERIN: Much younger!

CHAIR: All right. Thank you very much. We will take a short break now and resume at 5.30 with the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection.

Mr McVEIGH: I just wanted to take the opportunity to also share that, unfortunately, that average age means that I am slightly over it as well. So there you go. I did really want to take the opportunity to thank you, Mr Chairman, for the opportunity to present here in front of this committee. I thank the members of the committee and I acknowledge their efforts in preparing questions for me to consider and in affording me this opportunity. I thank my senior officers: my Director-General, Jack Noye; my Deputy Director-General, Beth Woods; my Deputy Director-General, Corporate, Marcia Hoffmann; and our chief financial officer, Leith Brown. I take the opportunity as well to thank my Chief of Staff, Mr Bruce Mills, and staff from my ministerial office, together with all departmental staff, for their tremendous assistance in helping me to prepare for this estimates preparation. I again thank all members for the nature of the questions and for the spotlight which you quite rightly put on our department. Thank you very much.

CHAIR: Thank you very much.

Proceedings suspended from 5.03 pm to 5.27 pm

ESTIMATES—AGRICULTURAL, RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE—ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE PROTECTION

In Attendance

Hon. AC Powell, Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection

Mr T Collings, Chief of Staff

Department of Environment and Heritage Protection

Mr A Chesterman, Director-General

Mr D Ellwood, Deputy Director-General, Environmental Services and Regulation

Mr T Roberts, Deputy Director-General, Environmental Policy and Planning

Ms Tamara O'Shea, Deputy Director-General, Conservation and Sustainability Services

Ms D Anderson, Deputy Director-General, Corporate Services

 **CHAIR:** I declare this meeting of the Agriculture, Resources and Environment Committee open. I am Ian Rickuss, the member for Lockyer and chair of the committee. Joining me on the committee are the deputy chair, the member for South Brisbane, Jackie Trad; Sam Cox, the member for Thuringowa; Jason Costigan, the member for Whitsunday; Shane Knuth, the member for Dalrymple; Anne Maddern, the member for Maryborough; and Michael Trout, the member for Barron River.

The proceedings today are lawful proceedings subject to the standing rules and orders of the parliament. As such I remind all visitors that any person admitted to the hearing may be excluded in accordance with standing 208. In relation to media coverage of today's hearing, we have adapted the guidelines prepared by the Committee of the Legislative Assembly for committee hearings. These guidelines have been distributed to the parliamentary press gallery and copies are also available here today. The hearing is being broadcast live via the Parliamentary Service website. We extend a warm welcome to everyone who is picking up this broadcast.

As laid out in new schedule 8 at the back of the standing orders, we expect all departmental staff appearing today to provide full and honest answers to our questions. Anyone who is unable or unwilling to provide an answer should be prepared to state their reasons. I also remind members and departmental officers that departmental officers are not here today to give an expert opinion on the merits or otherwise of the policy of the government. That is the role of the minister.

Finally, before we begin, can everyone please switch off their mobile phones or switch them to silent. For the next 2½ hours we will examine the estimates for the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection. I welcome the minister and advisers. For the benefit of Hansard, I ask advisers, if you are called to give an answer, to please state your name before you speak. Minister, the committee has granted leave to the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Rockhampton today to participate in sections of today's hearing. I now declare the proposed expenditure open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, would you care to make a brief opening statement?

Mr POWELL: Yes, I would. Mr Chairman, I thank you and your committee for the opportunity to provide these opening comments for this final part of today's estimates hearing and for the opportunity to brief members on this year's budget as it pertains to environment and heritage protection. Before we get started and to assist the committee, I would like to introduce my executive management team—those who are here at the front table with me this evening. To my right is Director-General Andrew Chesterman; Deputy Director-General for Environmental Policy and Planning, Tony Roberts; Deputy Director-General for Conservation and Sustainability Services, Tamara O'Shea. To my left is my chief of staff, Troy Collings; Deputy Director-General, Environmental Services and Regulation, Dean Ellwood; and Deputy Director-General, Corporate Services, Danielle Anderson.

As the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection, my focus is on helping to grow the economy whilst ensuring that the state's environment is protected and maintained. In the coming financial year my department will have an operating budget of \$171.1 million and a capital budget of

\$30.1 million. Specifically, \$78.6 million of that operating budget is allocated towards conservation efforts, just to distinguish from the division within the department of conservation services. This year we will continue to do more with less. By redirecting funding to practical, common-sense programs that provide positive outcomes we will not only maintain Queensland's natural and built environment but also deliver front-line services and continue to act as a strong environmental regulator supporting long-term economic growth.

We have committed \$10 million to the reef protection program, which is part of the Newman government's \$35 million per year commitment to the Great Barrier Reef—a project aimed at ensuring the reef continues to be among the best managed protected areas in the world. In particular, the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection is funding extension activities and scientific projects to support the development and uptake of cane and beef industry best management practice programs. From beef to reef these practices will not only reduce the regulatory burden on the cane and grazing industries but also enhance agricultural productivity and deliver on important water-quality targets.

We have put an extra \$1 million on the table for the second round of Everyone's Environment grants, with a total of \$4 million set aside to fund projects in communities across the state. We have dedicated \$10.7 million for protected land acquisitions, which support the government's Investing in Our Environment for the Future commitment. We have committed \$11.7 million to continue to increase available koala habitat through the acquisition of suitable land under the Koala Habitat Program. This significant funding commitment is part of our overall commitment of \$26.5 million to protect the future of koalas. It follows this year's funding announcement of \$3.2 million in research grants to investigate koala diseases and other preventable causes of death, injury and illness. This year, we have also started the rollout of our \$800,000 koala rescue and rehabilitation service funding to grassroots carers on the front line collecting our injured and sick koalas, making sure that they are rehabilitated and returned to the wild. Through this ongoing funding commitment the Newman government is providing real and practical outcomes to conserve Queensland's koala population by securing koala habitat, addressing disease and improving our recovery and rehabilitation efforts.

We have also invested \$3.7 million for the regulation of the coal seam gas industry, with a particular focus on water management outcomes. In North Queensland, as a number of committee members would be aware, we have committed \$1.5 million over four years for the development and implementation of a new crocodile management plan for the Cairns, Cassowary Coast, Townsville and Hinchinbrook local government areas. We have announced \$2.5 million as part of a two-year \$4 million commitment to the Gladstone Healthy Harbour Partnership to maintain and continuously improve harbour health. I look to the other partners in that partnership, particularly industry and the Gladstone Ports Corporation, to match that funding so that we can continue to ensure rigorous scientific monitoring of the harbour and clear communication of the information to the community. We will spend \$2 million per year for four years for water quality improvement projects in South-East Queensland aimed at building resilience. These initiatives recognise that people are passionate about improving their local environment. They are committed to protecting our creeks, our rivers and our ecosystems and they demand high standards.

By working together we are ensuring that Queensland remains a great state with great opportunities. As the environment minister, my focus is on helping grow the economy by cutting burdensome green tape and making way for business to create jobs whilst ensuring the state's environment is protected and maintained not just now but into the future. With some \$18 billion worth of projects under assessment by the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection, it is vital that we get the approval settings right. That is why we introduced green tape reduction legislation that has made it easier and cheaper for business and industry to obtain environmental approvals without diluting environmental protections or lowering environmental standards. These include the deletion of some 20 environmentally relevant activity thresholds from the environmental protection regulation, which will save almost 10,000 businesses over \$6.5 million in annual fees. We have repealed the waste levy and we are actively working with industry to develop an industry-led waste strategy that will seek to encourage investment in the state's recycled waste industry.

We have also delivered the pilot program to release legacy mine water in the Fitzroy River system in accordance with strict environmental authority conditions. Independently assessed, this pilot will improve our understanding of the Fitzroy River system and provide a basis to develop a long-term solution for the management of mine water. We will continue our work on reviewing burdensome administration, such as the protected plants legislation, which will potentially save business and industry some \$50 million per year.

This year, my department will work to further streamline approvals of 19 licence activities and reduce the time taken to get a licence from months to weeks, even to days. Model conditions will be developed for specific categories of activities such as intensive animal feedlotting, poultry farming, chemical manufacturing, tyre manufacturing, bottling and canning, meat processing, service coating and sewage treatment plants, which will further reduce the time taken to get these licences and increase certainty and consistency for our clients. By streamlining the application process, by cutting green tape, the administrative role of environmental officers has been reduced, allowing the department to focus more strongly on better compliance, to focus more strongly on front-line service delivery, to better ensure that high environmental standards are met. With my officers increasingly out from behind their desks and on the ground monitoring and checking for compliance against those high environmental standards we will continue to ensure that this state is protected well into the future.

In 2013-14 the department's budget is focused on protecting the Great Barrier Reef, on helping community groups protect and enhance the environment, on streamlining and removing green tape, on working with industries that do the right thing, but taking a hard line against those who fail to meet their responsibilities. I thank the committee for the opportunity to set the scene regarding the operation of my department in 2013-14 as a prelude to tonight's estimates hearing.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Can the minister outline what sections of the department will be impacted by the further reduction in full-time staff employee equivalents?

Mr POWELL: Thank you, Mr Chair, and I thank you for pointing out what is clearly something worth considering in our SDS. As is shown in it, this year our staff numbers will be decreasing by a small per cent—some three per cent; from 1,010 to 980. I think it is important in answering this that I set the scene—and perhaps other ministers have done so earlier this evening as well. I need to separate out what was a fiscal repair task last year. Members will readily see that the department has decreased some 24 per cent from what we started with when we split from DERM as part of the machinery-of-government changes and became Environment and Heritage Protection. That was the fiscal repair task consistent with the approach that the government took last year.

What we are seeing this year in the SDS, and particularly in terms of the staffing numbers in the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection, is what is going to be a business-as-normal approach for our department and other departments well into the future. The Treasurer has often pointed out a wonderful graph that demonstrates that, over the last decade prior to this year, public sector growth was in the order of about 8.9 per cent on average each and every year. That reflected in the number of staff in each of the departments and in the increases in staff in each of the departments. This year, that public sector growth is one per cent and that is whilst we continue to invest heavily in our front-line service delivery in terms of police, in terms of health professionals, in terms of teachers. So what that means is that, for a department such as mine, in light of the Commission of Audit in particular and the responsibility on us as a government to look at what we do, how we do it, why we do it, whether we should be doing it, or whether there is a better way that we can do it, we believe that there is an ability for us to accommodate a further reduction of some 30 staff. Discussions have commenced as to where those staff reductions will occur. Some of them will be through vacancy management. No decisions have been made as of yet. Those discussions will continue into the short-term future.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Member for Thuringowa.

Mr COX: Can the minister please explain how the new framework for flying fox management will balance community wellbeing with wildlife conservation, which is something that is not only true in my part of the state but also across the whole state.

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for Thuringowa for his question and I also thank him for the advocacy that he has undertaken on behalf of not only his community but communities across North Queensland that are facing this issue. Let me from the outset make it clear that we in EHP, we in the Queensland government—the Newman government—are determined to put the health and wellbeing consideration of Queensland communities as our highest priority when it comes to managing wildlife issues. When it comes to the management of flying fox roosts, this means acknowledging that they can cause significant impacts for community members, especially if they are in inappropriate locations.

Prior to the election, we went with two commitments. One was to streamline the approvals processes for councils so that they could take quicker, faster, appropriate action to remove and relocate problem flying fox colonies in urban environments in particular, but across the state as a

whole. We also gave a commitment to reintroduce limited lethal damage mitigation permits for farmers and orchardists who have demonstrated their ability to implement non-lethal methods but such that they are still finding that there is an economic cost to their production. We have implemented both and we are continuing to roll out in particular that first election commitment.

The government's new approach will give councils an as-of-right authority to manage roosts in designated urban areas. This simply means that councils will not need to apply to my department for a permit to manage roosts in these areas. It is basically making it simpler, as I said, to deal with these urban based flying fox communities through the designation of urban areas, recognising that it is in our built-up environments that flying fox roosts are most likely to pose a challenge. It is in these areas that conflict and the health and wellbeing issues this raises is most commonly experienced and it is here that responsive and empathetic management action may be necessary.

On this note, I would like to point out that I have visited a number of electorates and I have met with a number of constituents within those electorates and witnessed firsthand those health and particularly the wellbeing aspects of having colonies adjacent to their residences. I recall vividly visiting a family in Bargara in the electorate of Burnett. I was there on dusk and heard even in a rain environment the noise and the smell of that community right next door. What this new approach means is that councils will be able to take immediate action before those colonies become of a size that they would be considered a nuisance or a challenge for the wellbeing issues of those adjacent to them.

Local governments have traditionally been the managers of flying fox roosts on behalf of their communities, and the vast majority of permit applications reviewed by EHP are from councils. A typical assessment of a permit application by EHP seeks to determine whether the applicant is a fit and proper person to be issued the permit or licence. The new approach will acknowledge that councils are indeed fit and proper organisations to be authorised to manage flying foxes on behalf of their communities. I am sure I will be getting several other questions on the management of flying foxes throughout the evening so I might limit my answer there, but I am very pleased, through the discussion paper that we have put out, through the responses we have received from a range of stakeholders, particularly from local governments, particularly who are supportive of this streamlined approach, and I think it will go a long way to continue to deliver on those election commitments we made around addressing problem urban flying fox communities.

CHAIR: Another important issue in South-East Queensland is what measures has the government introduced to protect koala populations, particularly in South-East Queensland?

Mr POWELL: Thank you, Mr Chair, and I know your part of the world is certainly taking a lot of interest in this issue this year and we have welcomed a number of applications, particularly for our Koala Habitat Program, from your part of the world. As I mentioned in my opening comments, we have taken an holistic approach to managing and preserving and protecting and enhancing the koala population, particularly in South-East Queensland. There are a number of things that we have done. As part of our overall 'investing to protect our koalas' election commitment we are providing \$26.5 million in three specific programs. There is the Koala Habitat Program. That is \$22.5 million over three years to purchase and manage properties that enhance connectivity and/or that can be effectively rehabilitated to bushland in South-East Queensland. Properties will only be considered for purchase if they meet a number of criteria. Whilst we had an extraordinary number of applications—161 expressions of interest were received from across South-East Queensland—they must meet these high criteria, things such as connectivity to existing secure koala habitat, the level of manageable threats on and around the property and ongoing management considerations. Once purchased properties will, as required, undergo extensive rehabilitation and may be gazetted as national park, as nature refuge or as a reserve for community purpose and properties will be available for recreational purposes wherever possible. As I said, there were 161 expressions of interest. We have gone through them thoroughly. There is now basically an order of merit and we have commenced discussions with a number of property owners about the purchase of their properties.

Alongside this we also have the Koala Nature Refuges Program. It is in addition to that \$26.5 million. What it does is offer financial support for landholders to provide for revegetation for koala habitat and other activities such as weed control, koala friendly fencing and maintenance of revegetated areas. 2012-13 saw us add 17 new and existing nature refuges through the provision of \$1.125 million. The funding provided for the restoration of 100 hectares of koala habitat with 48,105, to be exact, koala habitat trees, almost doubling the number of koala habitat trees funded under the

program to nearly 103,000. An additional 958 hectares were protected under 20 new or extended koala nature refuges as part of our relationship with the Sunshine Coast and the Logan City councils and it is pleasing that we have wonderful relationships with those councils to achieve those outcomes.

We also recognise that the threats to the wellbeing of koalas are far broader than just habitat. That is why we have invested \$4 million into two other programs: \$3.2 million into our research and koala disease mitigation programs to prevent and counter those preventable causes of death, injury and illness. With this level of investment it is not surprising that we had 29 applications received from some of Australia's leading academics in the field of koala research. These grants are designed to build capacity and to help fill gaps in the koala research field by supporting and stimulating research into preventable causes of death, injury and illness. It was great to be out at my old alma mater, the University of Queensland, to announce the successful recipient of this funding.

The third initiative was the Koala Rescue and Rehabilitation Grant Program. That is \$800,000 over four years available to eligible front-line organisations that provide an invaluable service to the community through their work with sick, injured and orphaned koalas in Queensland. Round 1 of this program saw almost \$280,000 funded to those groups for 11 projects and these projects are now underway and include a variety of activities, from establishing eucalypt plantations to purchasing koala rescue gear and medical equipment. Overall, that program is aimed at building the capacity of our koala conservation groups, many of whom I have met and who I know put in a sterling effort to enhance their ability to effectively deliver rescue and rehabilitation services now and into the future. Round 2 of that program will soon be available. So those in the south-east corner, let your groups know that again we will be putting funding out to them to help those sick, injured and orphaned koalas.

Mr TROUT: Can the minister please outline the scientific evidence behind assessing mine water releases?

Mr POWELL: Thank you very much, member for Barron River. This is a very topical issue, one that certainly has consumed a lot of the attention, and rightly so, of myself and my department, particularly over the last wet season. Like many things, we have been left a legacy. We have been left a legacy by the previous government that was incapable of dealing with an issue around water entering and then having to be removed from mines throughout the state. I think it is important, in addressing your question around the scientific evidence, that I explain more broadly what we are doing when it comes to dealing with this issue. It needs short-term, it needs medium-term and it needs long-term solutions. Certainly the short-term solution is to ensure that new mines are not approved with water management conditions similar to those that were approved historically, and particularly by the previous Labor government. What we do need is mines that understand the importance of water management, that ensure that they do not in particular channel water into their pits. There are a number of activities that mines can easily do to ensure that groundwater flow is directed into the relevant creeks, streams and dry gullies within the property and not into the pits. It is our expectation that new mines will certainly be meeting those higher standards. We also have the expectation in the medium-term that existing mines also meet those higher standards and we are progressively working with all mines throughout Queensland, primarily through an element known as a transitional environmental plan, a TEP, to work with those mines to lift their game and improve their water management practices. A couple of other things: as a result of the Floods Commission of Inquiry and at their direction we have implemented a new tool, a temporary emissions licence. It applies broadly across the whole spectrum of industry, but it does also work for the mining industry as well and that is in the instance where a very quick decision needs to be made to prevent significant environmental harm an industry can work with my department to get an approval within a 24-hour period to ensure that greater disasters are not achieved. It was a very effective tool in a range of industries particularly over the last wet season, particularly with the impacts of ex-Tropical Cyclone Oswald, and I am happy to discuss a number of those particular instances in more detail later on.

The remaining aspects are around the trial that we undertook in the Fitzroy Basin with four BMA mines. This was a trial to determine putting aside responsibilities to meet strict environmental guidelines around the water quality objectives, and they are readily available on the internet in our new model mine conditions that specifically list the triggers that we will be notified if a mine fails to meet and we will take action, and we can again talk a bit later about that action. That is scientifically rigorous targets—triggers—that we have implemented based on Australian standards and they are consistent across the nation and, indeed, across other nations as well.

We then come to the matter of the salinity, and recent reports have demonstrated that higher levels of salinity can be accommodated within the system and so what then becomes important is that we look at the other intrinsic receptors or sensitive receptors within an environment to ensure that that trial program met the expectations of those sensitive receptors. Sensitive receptors would be landholders who undertake agriculture pursuits downstream from a mine discharge point, but most important in the Fitzroy Basin is the Rockhampton water intake. What we did, using the skills of both the staff within EHP and the skills of the scientists that sit within DSITIA, Minister Ian Walker's department, is determine trigger points or trigger values downstream of the Isaac and Mackenzie that gave us some certainty to stop mine water releases so that the important receptor of the Rockhampton water intake did not exceed what would normally be considered natural rates of salinity. What was significantly demonstrated during the last wet season is that the only mines that went forward in terms of releasing that legacy water were the mines that were part of that trial. They had significant increases. What it also demonstrated is that the science did stack up very rigorously, that the EC levels at Rockhampton did not go anywhere near the expected or anticipated triggers, that the amount of water flowing past Rockhampton at that time meant that it was only some 0.36 of a per cent of mine water that actually flowed past Rockhampton. It puts it into context and again gives assurances to the people of Rockhampton and the other people in the Fitzroy Basin that the science is rigorous and the science works. To make doubly sure, we had this independently assessed by a company called Gilbert and Sutherland and what they have shown is that all the releases from those trial sites met those high environmental standards that I spoke about and achieved the outcomes that we anticipated. That report is readily available on the internet, as is all the information on the trial, as is all the information on the water releases that occurred over the wet season. People can even log on in real time if they want and check out the gauging stations throughout the Fitzroy Basin to determine what river flows and so on are. I am very confident that the science has stacked up. The exciting thing is that Gilbert and Sutherland believe, and we are working towards, expanding the pilot program. But let me give you this reassurance, and the Deputy Premier was explicit in his statements as well, that only those mines that are showing a commitment to lift their game when it comes to mine water management will be eligible to be considered for the pilot expansion. This is not a free kick. This is part of an holistic approach to dealing with what is a challenging legacy left to us by the previous government.

Mrs MADDERN: Minister, can you please give us an update on the government's Everyone's Environment grants program?

Mr POWELL: With pleasure, member for Maryborough, and I thank you for the question. Now in its second round, the Everyone's Environment grants program is continuing to help communities throughout Queensland to clean up, rehabilitate and protect their local environment. As the member would be well aware, these grants range from \$2,000 through to \$100,000 and they are supporting projects such as community clean-up activities, restoration of wetlands, coastal dunes and river or stream banks, water quality monitoring and improvement, pest control and weeds eradication, actions that build connectivity and improve the resilience of threatened and priority species habitat, native tree planting and water quality monitoring. We allocated \$12 million over three years. In the last round 74 projects were successful in receiving \$3 million. I am really pleased to share with you tonight a couple of the success stories from this first round: 1,000 trees have been planted and one hectare has been weeded by the Friends of the Pasture Reserve who received \$7,720 to help reduce light pollution from street and building lights to the nearby Mon Repos turtle rookery. Over 7,600 pieces of rubbish, equating to 1,260 kilograms of litter and marine debris, have been removed from hotspots in the Whitsundays during six clean-up trips by Eco Barge. I know the member for Whitsunday is particularly pleased about this one. Has the member had the opportunity to get out there on the Eco Barge yet? I look forward to the opportunity in the near future.

Mr COSTIGAN: I have been combing the beaches, Minister.

Mr POWELL: That is good to hear. Eco Barge Clean Seas received \$52,115 for those activities. They have a further 18 trips planned over the remainder of the project, so 24 trips, which is fantastic. Weed eradication and the planting of 2,100 trees have been undertaken by Austinville Landcare, which received \$35,900 to restore nine hectares of riparian vegetation through weed eradication and tree planting. From 1 July 2013, boats are now on the Brisbane River five days a week, up from one and a half days, under the Healthy Waterways Clean Up Program, which received \$100,000 from the project. That is a great initiative. Again, it is taking the Eco Barge model and using it here on the Brisbane River. The equivalent of over 35 wheelie bins of litter have been removed from the Maroochy and Mooloolah rivers by Maroochy Waterwatch, which is particularly close to my heart

being in my part of the world. They received \$100,000. About 50 wheelie bins of litter have been removed and over 600 trees planted by the Brisbane Catchments Network along the Brisbane River's lower mangroves at Murarrie. I was pleased to announce the first round at this project. It is great to see that kicking on.

Two hectares have been weeded by the Peregrine Beach Community Association along David Low Way in Noosa following receipt of \$87,224 to undertake weed control and removal, plant trees and measure water quality over three years. Six thousand trees have been planted and 1.25 hectares have been weeded by Trees for the Evelyn and Atherton Tablelands. I believe that is in your patch, member for Dalrymple. That group secured just over \$29,000 to re-establish habitat linkage between Curtain Fig National Park and Lake Eacham of Crater Lakes National Park through weed removal and tree planting. Two hundred and four kilograms of litter was removed from 2.3 kilometres of coastline around Moreton Bay, both underwater and on land, by Reef Check Australia. They received nearly \$40,000. Over 1,500 trees have been planted, 0.6 per cent of a hectare rehabilitated and bird surveys conducted from funding secured by the Bremer River Fund Committee, totalling \$50,000. Spraying has been undertaken over 850 hectares to control weeds of national significance in the Fanning River area by the Fanning River Landcare Group, which received \$16,500 for those activities.

Progress reports are still coming in, but early figures suggest that over 2,200 volunteers have been engaged in these and other round 1 projects to date. That demonstrates the importance of this initiative. We all know that everyone wants to take care of their backyards when it comes to the environment. That extraordinary figure is indicative of how seriously Queenslanders are taking this. A sum of \$4 million is available for projects under round 2. We have received 119 applications totalling \$5.36 million. We are again having to undertake significant assessment by representatives from my department, along with key technical experts and representatives from four peak non-government environmental groups. It is anticipated that successful recipients will be announced later this year.

CHAIR: I call the member for Dalrymple.

Mr KNUTH: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I commend the minister in relation to 'the talk'. The talk sounds more positive in regards to flying fox management. With the language that he has been using, there could be a possibility that one day communities may be flying fox free. That is commendable, Minister. I have a question and probably a supplementary to ask after this, but I refer to your response to a question on notice from government members about flying fox roost management. It states—

Non-lethal dispersal or modification of flying-fox roosts has proven to be an effective method of relieving wellbeing impacts from flying-foxes. Examples can be found in recent successful dispersals at Warwick and Pittsworth.

Minister, were these removals undertaken under the new code or the old one? How many flying fox colonies have been removed from urban areas under the new code?

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for the question. I thank you for your preamble, too. I thank you for acknowledging the work that we in the EHP and the Newman government are doing to address what is a significant issue. The short answer to your question is that the new code has not been finalised yet, so the answer is none. All successful dispersals to date are under our existing regime, but again that demonstrate how seriously we are taking this and how importantly we are addressing these issues in the community. It is our anticipation that the new code will come into effect around September, possibly a little bit later, but definitely by the end of this year. The reason for that is that we are still finalising the extensive consultation that we have undertaken with local government, community groups, conservation groups, the RSPCA, et cetera.

You mentioned a couple of specific successes in Pittsworth and Warwick. I think Pittsworth is one example worth mentioning again. In this instance it was not actually the council that sought the damage mitigation permit. We were asked by the community to come and address them on what was a problem roost within their township. Officers of my department arrived on the Friday and discussed with the community group how a damage mitigation permit under the existing regime has to operate. They talked them through it. If I recall correctly, the group submitted the DMP on the Monday and it was approved on the Tuesday. We will confirm that for you. It was an absolute wonderful outcome in terms of how, even within the existing conditions, the existing legislative structure, the existing regulation, my officers are addressing these issues throughout the state. We can confirm that the actual dispersal was conducted in early April this year. It was conducted by the community and it was successful.

Similarly in Warwick, it was brought to our attention that there were hundreds of thousands of little red flying foxes in a school environment in Warwick. In that instance, we worked with the council, again very proactively. The council operated over roughly two weeks between 4 and 18 March and

again achieved a successful outcome. Again I point out to the member that was under the existing code under the existing regulation under the existing legislation. I anticipate that it will be even more beneficial to councils under the new system when that is implemented by the end of this year, as they will not even need to come to us for those approvals because they will have that as-of-right approval. I will stress, though, that community groups will still need to come to my department and ensure that they have the relevant legislative support and permits to undertake dispersals. Councils and community groups outside of designated urban areas can also come to us to seek a damage mitigation permit to relocate flying fox communities.

Member for Dalrymple, it shows that there has been a significant culture shift from the old DERM days to the new EHP days. We are putting people first, we are making speedier decisions and we are making it easier for councils and communities to address problem flying fox roosts in urban environments and elsewhere throughout the state.

Mr KNUTH: Minister, I want to ensure that I am not hoodwinked and you are not hoodwinked. I ask this question through the chair. I will read this article published two weeks ago in Charters Towers' *Northern Miner* in regards to the council. The headline reads 'Bat support queried'. I will table this article. Basically, this is a question. It states—

The Charters Towers Regional Council has questioned the degree to which the State Government is prepared to solve the bat problem.

Council planning and sustainable development director Ramon Jayo said the Government discussion paper on managing flying-fox roosts showed there were virtually no changes to the existing methods of management for councils.

Under the proposed requirements in the new Code of Practice, councils will still be limited to using "non-lethal deterrence methods of smoke, noise, light and foggers only"—

And other ways—

to manage the bats.

The article further states—

The management actions must immediately cease, and the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (EHP) be immediately notified if flying-foxes appear to have been killed or injured.

Councils can only begin fogging or smoking flying foxes from roosting trees "prior to dusk 'fly-out' at a roost or when flying-foxes start returning to the roost from foraging activities, and continue for no longer than three consecutive hours per day ...

I could go on. They are saying that under this new code—and we must understand that it may be different with the code in the Cairns area where you have the bats concentrated in the middle—there are restrictions in trying to disperse flying foxes out of town.

CHAIR: Ask your question, please.

Mr KNUTH: Minister, I would like to ask a supplementary question to this, but my question is: do you believe that what you have put in place here in regards to non-lethal methods for removing flying foxes will get rid of the bats in Charters Towers, if the council applies this?

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for his question. Mr Chair, through you, I think he has answered the question: 'If the council applies for this'. What the member is referring to is a discussion paper that was put out to councils. There are a number of suggestions around a code of practice that we believe gives the rigorous legislative backing to a council under their as-of-right approval to relocate colonies within an urban environment. There were a number of questions and there are a number of suggestions that we put. We have received feedback from a range of councils throughout the state regarding the suggestions that we have put. We are currently considering that feedback. To suggest that there is a new code already is a bit premature. It is not there yet.

I can guarantee you that communities will get better results from this new code, whatever shape or form it takes, because they will be able to respond quicker. When a community such as Charters Towers—that, yes, has a permanent population of flying foxes at the moment—starts to see a sudden increase in the flying fox population or an environment where there are no flying foxes and a colony starts to establish, the council can take quicker and easier action before the colony reaches problem levels. That is what is really going to drive significant change within urban environments such as Charters Towers throughout the state.

I know of a colony in an area in Moreton Bay. Had the council had this as-of-right approval when 1,000 flying foxes turned up on the first night and 2,000 the second night, potentially it could have taken action immediately before the colony became something like 50,000. Similarly in Warwick,

when we saw the little red flying foxes coming in. There were millions in the end. By the time we got the approvals through the existing system, it meant that there were millions there and that is why it took a full two weeks to disperse the colony. Under this system, Warwick could have taken action as soon as the flying fox community started to take up residence adjacent to that school. That is the key component of this. As I have said, certainly councils in the north have provided feedback on that discussion paper and, as I have said, we are currently considering that feedback prior to finalising the new code of practice.

Mr KNUTH: That is good, Minister. Basically what the council is saying categorically is that, having regard to 10 years of experience, the traditional methods currently recommended simply have not worked. The councils says that simply rehashing the conditions stated on an approved damage mitigation permit and calling it a code of practice is not the answer. Minister, you can go to the council and discuss this. In my legislation I said that if councils are sympathetic to the flying foxes and they are not taking action and doing something, the government will step in and do it. Would you be prepared to work with me if the council is not doing its job and not meeting its responsibilities? Are you prepared to more or less accept that there must be further ways of relaxing the restrictions on the code, so that the council can get rid of those bats using whatever means are necessary?

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for Dalrymple for the question. I think it is important to note that we have here one instance where a council is claiming that non-lethal methods are not successful and yet I have just listed a whole range of sites where they have proved extremely successful—Warwick, Pittsworth, Bargara, Laidley and the list goes on. I will accept that your council has found it challenging, but that was under a previous department under the current legislation. As I have said, there has been a significant culture shift. With the new as-of-right approval I am confident that a good outcome can be achieved for places such as Charters Towers.

You ask what I will do if the council does not take action. I encourage the member and the community to do what a place like Pittsworth did. A community group can come to me. A resident from Yungaburra came to us and we have facilitated damage mitigation permit approvals. Those community groups and residents will not get an as-of-right approval as per a council because they need to demonstrate that they are fit and proper to undertake that damage mitigation permit. But as I have demonstrated in Pittsworth and in Yungaburra, we are willing to work with whoever it takes to ensure a successful outcome for those communities.

I want to confirm the timings of that Pittsworth approval. We received the application on 18 March. It was not quite the next day, but it was 22 March, when we approved it. That is still an extraordinarily fast turnaround. I acknowledge the hard work of the staff within EHP who not only went out on the ground but also considered the damage mitigation permit, approved it and assisted the community in achieving a successful outcome.

Mr KNUTH: Thank you very much. I reiterate that the talk sounds more positive. However, we must ensure that the permits are there for councils to remove the bats. I do not want to say they should do it by whatever means necessary, but obviously if it is restricted to morning and afternoon then it will be difficult to push those bats out 20 kilometres. We must be able to move the bats.

CHAIR: We have other questions to get through, member for Dalrymple. I call the member for South Brisbane.

Ms TRAD: Good evening, Minister, and good evening to your team. We are here again on another Friday night. Maybe one day they will trust you to come to estimates a little bit earlier.

Mr POWELL: Are you able to tweet the cricket scores while we go?

Ms TRAD: No, unfortunately I am not. In relation to your response to a previous question to a government member in relation to mine water releases and your government's responsibility in terms of administering the Environmental Protection Act, specifically environmental authorities, temporary emissions licences and temporary emissions permits, can you please advise the committee whether your department approved the release of millions of litres of mine water from Callide mine into the water system upstream from the Callide Dam which, I understand, is the drinking water supply of the Banana shire?

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for the question. I will endeavour to get the specifics around Callide as I answer the question. We have been completely transparent in terms of all of the work we have done around mine water releases, as I have said. We have made sure that you and your colleague the member for Rockhampton have been briefed on this matter. We have ensured that all of the documents related to the—

Ms TRAD: Just generally, not on the Callide Dam—

Mr POWELL: I hear you.

Ms TRAD: For the benefit of the committee.

Mr POWELL: As I was saying, we also put all of the information up on the website as well. There were a number of unauthorised releases around the Fitzroy Basin and Bowen Basin. We have investigated those. I will ascertain and get back to you whether Callide was authorised or unauthorised.

I acknowledge the local council, Banana council, the LGAQ and AgForce have found that the information being up on the website has not been sufficient. What we are undertaking to do between now and the next wet seasons, which is coming very shortly, is set up an email subscription service so councils, particularly council officers who have an interest in water and water management, can subscribe to that service. Landholders and farmers can subscribe to that service. When our website is updated with that information that I was talking about they will receive an email regarding those updates so they can jump online and check it. The specifics around whether we approved that, I will get before we conclude this evening.

Ms TRAD: Minister, it was reported, based on the information put on your department's website, that over half a million litres of contaminated mine water from Callide mine entered the upstream water system going into the Callide Dam. This was a big story. This was a big issue and you are sitting here telling me that you do not know whether or not your department authorised it.

Mr POWELL: It is a big story, it is a big issue because members such as you, member for South Brisbane, beat it up into something that it was not. You have used the word 'contaminated'. Mine water is not contaminated. Let me go back to what I was talking about before.

Ms TRAD: No. Do not have a generic answer.

Mr POWELL: Because clearly, member for South Brisbane, you have not heard what I have said previously so it may need to be reiterated.

CHAIR: Let the minister answer the question.

Ms TRAD: I know that you are extending your protection to your government—

CHAIR: Let the minister answer the question.

Ms TRAD: All right. He is not answering the question. He is avoiding the question. He does not know whether or not his department approved a release of all this water.

CHAIR: Order, please.

Ms TRAD: It is outrageous.

Mr POWELL: Let me go back to what I was specifically saying. You used the word 'contaminated'—

Ms TRAD: Yes.

Mr POWELL:—and that is inflammatory. What I said before is that mine water conditions set very clearly the standards that are expected. They are scientific standards, they are Australian standards around what is contained in that water. To suggest that basically what is salty water is contaminated is not correct and it is—

Ms TRAD: Are you telling me there were no trace heavy metals in that water?

Mr POWELL: Within the standard—

Ms TRAD: Can you guarantee that there were no trace metals in that water?

CHAIR: Order! Do you want one question answered at a time? Let us deal with one question at a time then you can ask the next question, thank you very much, member.

Mr POWELL: As I have said, we expect each mine to ensure that the water that is being released is monitored and that it meets those standards. To make doubly sure, we have extra monitoring sites and we have invested in extra monitoring sites to address this issue of legacy water to make sure that the water in the systems meets those standards. What I have undertaken is to get back to you to be sure that I am giving you the correct information as to whether it was an authorised approval under an existing TEP, under an existing EA or under a TEL. I will get that information to you before we conclude this evening.

Ms TRAD: Thank you, minister, I appreciate that. I will clarify a few more points in relation to the answer I am seeking. Yes, I want information in relation to whether it was a TEL or a TEP. I would like the total volume of water released and over the length of time, when the application was submitted and time it took to approve. That is just in relation to the response back to me.

CHAIR: That is a fairly detailed response. Minister, do you want to take that on notice?

Ms TRAD: I am very happy for the minister to take it on notice.

Mr POWELL: We will endeavour to get the information the member for South Brisbane has requested. If it is possible for me to do that before we conclude this evening I will. If I am unable to get the specifics I will ensure that we take it as a question on notice before we conclude this evening and I will make sure the member gets the information.

I want to be clear that the Newman government, I and the Deputy Premier have been completely and utterly transparent with this entire issue which is more than can be said for the previous government. The previous government somehow thinks that the instance of unauthorised mine water releases is something new. What I can tell you is that the number of unauthorised mine water releases in the last wet seasons was extraordinarily fewer than occurred under the previous Labor government. In one wet season alone there were more than 50 non-compliant mine water releases. Has the member for Rockhampton told his community that? Has the member for South Brisbane told the communities in the Fitzroy Basin that in one season alone under the previous Labor government there were more than 50 non-complaint water releases in that basin.

I can tell members that in the last wet seasons—as of 30 June 2013—there were 25 non-complaint mine water releases from 12 mine sites. That is 25 from 12 mine sites. These non-complaint releases are associated with breaches of conditions related to flow requirements or those water quality limits that I spoke of. Most of these occurred during high-stream flows, were small scale and did not adversely impact on the in-stream water quality. The majority of these potential compliance issues have been investigated and enforcement measures implemented. Others are currently being investigated with enforcement measures to be determined and undertaken in a timely manner.

Currently there are no coalmines releasing in the Fitzroy Basin. There is currently around 250,000 megalitres of legacy water in Fitzroy Basin coalmines as assessed by Gilbert and Sutherland. Those enforcement actions since 1 January that I spoke about include 24 penalty infringement notices issued regarding non-complaint mine water releases and three warning letters issued regarding non-complaint mine water releases, both of which occurred in the Fitzroy Basin.

I think members of the opposition need to be as completely transparent as we as a government have been over what occurred during their term in government. They did not address this issue. Because they did not address this issue, the number of non-complaint mine water releases in the Fitzroy Basin was far higher than in the last wet season. Might I add, the conditions in the last wet season were extreme compared to some of the previous wet seasons.

I believe—and the science backs it up—that the new approach is achieving the right outcomes for mines in terms of dealing with legacy water, for the environment in terms of its protection and for the people of the Fitzroy Basin when it comes to their drinking water standards.

Ms TRAD: Minister, thank you very much for your response. Just in relation to notification, did you notify the mayor of Banana shire that water was going into the catchments going into the Callide Dam which may in fact need treatment before Banana shire residents drank it?

Mr POWELL: Did I personally, no.

Ms TRAD: Did you personally advise the Deputy Premier that Callide Dam was releasing water?

CHAIR: How is this relevant?

Ms TRAD: Excuse me, Chair—

CHAIR: Excuse me.

Ms TRAD: No, can you—

CHAIR: Order!

Ms TRAD:—stop your biased chairing.

CHAIR: Order! How is this relevant to the—

Ms TRAD: It was about the notification process and the minister has talked about an email alert system that is a notification—

CHAIR: How does that relate to the budgetary process?

Ms TRAD: I am responding to the minister's answers to some of these questions, Chair, and I am entitled to ask questions based on his responses to other questions.

CHAIR: There is no relevance in it.

Ms TRAD: No, there is relevance. Did you advise the Deputy Premier, Minister?

Mr POWELL: I will answer this briefly. The requirements to notify certain parties are set in the conditions for mines. That has been the longstanding practice, including under the member's own party when they were in government. As I have said, we are taking the extra step this coming wet season to ensure that those who have an interest are fully notified at the time of those releases which is something the previous government never even considered doing.

Government committee members interjected.

Ms TRAD: Chair, do you want to manage the commentary from the other side.

CHAIR: Order!

Ms TRAD: No, you are not doing that.

CHAIR: It would be a lot easier—

Ms TRAD: You are not doing that, are you? No.

CHAIR: It would be a lot easier if the commentary from this side also managed itself.

Ms TRAD: Well, you manage the commentary from that side.

CHAIR: I will.

Ms TRAD: No, you are not.

CHAIR: We will have some order. Excuse me, you are being recalcitrant now, aren't you? Thank you very much.

Ms TRAD: And you are being very intimidatory.

CHAIR: Have you finished, Minister?

Mr POWELL: I was going to say, as part of that we are setting up an email subscription service, as I discussed, so interested parties, including those that manage the water in the Banana Shire Council, can access that information. As I said, it was there already. It was available on the website. That information is available on the website and it is updated regularly. We are completely and utterly transparent and any suggestion we are not is false and misleading.

Ms TRAD: Many organisations and retailers have subscription notification processes. Is that how it works? So you just get a subscription to it? With Facebook, for example, you get an email alert. You will get an email alert when mine water is being released into water systems, is that how it works?

Mr POWELL: I believe, member for South Brisbane, that it is as simple as that. Again, my question would be: if it is that simple, why didn't the Labor Party do it when they were in charge for 20 years?

Ms TRAD: Minister—

Mr POWELL: They are perhaps technologically challenged, as we know, from their inability to manage our Health payroll system and a few other things, so the idea of setting up an email subscription system—

Mr BYRNE: How is this relevant?

Ms TRAD: Don't worry. Let the bias chairing continue. Minister, just in relation to that email subscription, I seem to recall that many of the mayors have said that this is simply not enough, that having a one-on-one conversation at the time that approvals are being considered is a much better way of alerting responsible authorities who treat drinking supply water that mine water releases are occurring in their community.

Mr POWELL: Member for South Brisbane, again, I find this hypocritical given that under your government none of this was even considered. It is under a range of tools that interested parties have, and will now be added to, that they will be notified when mine releases occur. It is in conditions of environmental authorities, it is in conditions of TEPs and it is in conditions of TELs to notify relevant parties. That information is put on a website, and we are adding the additional aspect of an email

subscription to make doubly sure that interested parties receive the information they need. In many instances the mines themselves have a working relationship with councils downstream from their discharge points, and they, too, make significant efforts to notify the relevant councils.

Ms TRAD: Minister, mayors have said that this approach is insufficient. While we are talking about the website, Minister, can you advise the committee where Professor Barry Hart's report has gone? It used to be on the Fitzroy water website and it is now no longer there.

Mr POWELL: It is actually a website maintained by the Department of Natural Resources and Mines. So I suspect the member probably should have directed that question to the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines.

Ms TRAD: Okay. You have some sort of lead responsibility in relation to this issue. So do you know where the report has gone? Is it on your website?

Mr POWELL: I think I have answered the question, Chair.

CHAIR: So you have another question?

Ms TRAD: I have lots of questions, Chair. Minister, you referred before to the Gilbert and Sutherland report quite extensively. The report on page 12 details the fact that at the time of writing the report the complete set of the data was not available. Minister, given that this report did not have all of the complete data analyses and sampling information, wouldn't you think it prudent for Gilbert and Sutherland to go back and revisit the evaluation based on all of the data rather than some of the data?

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for the question. She is accurate in her reflection of page 12 of the report. But we are talking about an independent company that stake their professional credibility on their ability to make an assessment on the data that they have and on the data that they are awaiting. What I will point out is that, as part of the executive summary of the same report, they state—

Review of the monitoring information to date indicates:

1. Mine operators' managed releases within all required regulatory flow and water quality limits; and—
again, I talked about the flow and the water quality limits—
2. There were no measured effects on salinity levels from downstream of Isaac/Connors confluence.

Ms TRAD: Yes, I understand that, Minister. I have read the report. My question is: don't you think it would be prudent to have an evaluation based on all of the collection samples, all of the data, all of the analysis and not just some of it?

Mr POWELL: Like all scientific approaches, it is a case of continuous improvement. We will continue to ensure that data is made available to bodies such as Gilbert and Sutherland, as it will be made available to the members opposite, as it will be made available to the councils in question, as it will be made available to Queenslanders more broadly.

CHAIR: Minister, I might ask a question now. Can you outline the achievements and the upcoming projects for Queensland's new Heritage Council?

Mr POWELL: Thank you very much, Mr Chair. It is very exciting to be not only the environment minister but also the heritage minister. I acknowledge that it is the first time in quite a lot of years that there is a minister with a portfolio responsibility that includes heritage.

One of the first things that we did was we ensured that the Queensland Heritage Council underwent a process of refreshment and renewal in 2012. We have some really exciting new members appointed and that is great to see. They cover the length and the breadth of the state and they cover a whole range of groups. I know the member for Maryborough is very happy that one of her local councillors, George Seymour, has a position on that council. George has a very great passion for heritage buildings and I guess being a councillor representing Maryborough you have to. Is there anything in Maryborough not heritage listed or that does not have heritage value? So it is rather appropriate. But we also have a cane grower from up the member for Whitsunday's way and have also recently appointed a mine electrician out at Mount Isa which is just superb. Of course John Cotter continues his role—this time as the deputy chair.

CHAIR: Great man.

Mr POWELL: Yes, a great man. He represents the rural and regional aspect. So we really have a great feel and flavour to the Queensland Heritage Council. The new Heritage Council members, with the exception of the one from Mount Isa, commenced on 1 January, again under the leadership of Professor Peter Coaldrake.

The council continues to be very active. Major recent events include the Australian Heritage Week celebrations that occurred during 13 to 21 April. I think there were some of those celebrations up your way again, member for Maryborough. I do not know what it is about Maryborough! It also had involvement in the National Trust of Queensland Heritage Festival. The council has been energetic in its engagement with local governments and has visited both Maryborough and Ipswich so far. I do not know if the member for Lockyer got into that Ipswich meeting, but maybe next time we will have to extend him an invitation. It supports both the Brisbane Open House and the Maryborough Open House and both these events have had huge success. This year the Heritage Council is also supporting the Toowoomba Open House.

The Heritage Council will continue to assist my department with two important initiatives this year. The first is the review of the Queensland Heritage Strategy, which is planned for release during Australian Heritage Week next year. The strategy explains the importance of Queensland's cultural heritage and its contribution to our identity. It outlines how our heritage is managed. It identifies the main issues of concern and establishes five key directions. Each key direction is supported by a number of priorities and actions and, while there has been significant progress since the strategy was released, there is now an opportunity for the strategy to respond to the government's new priorities.

The second important initiative is to investigate funding opportunities. One of the key messages I get every time I visit a heritage property is the dollars.

CHAIR: Show us the money.

Mr POWELL: There is no question about it. Owning and maintaining a heritage facility, a heritage property, takes money. We saw a great initiative again in Maryborough, if I may. The house of the author of *Mary Poppins* has now been converted into a shop, but clearly the expense and money that has been put into that property is extraordinary. So the Queensland Heritage Council is investigating funding opportunities. It is looking at identifying appropriate financial incentives or promoting a culture of corporate philanthropy. So they are key aspects that the council is looking at.

The economic value of our heritage should be understood, and the ad hoc approach taken in the past to fund its conservation has shown not to work effectively in the long term. So now is the opportunity to ensure that we realise the full economic, environmental and social benefits of Queensland's heritage.

There is a range of other successes particularly from the past year. The Heritage Register came into being with the commencement of the act back in 1992 and it identifies the important value that these places hold for us. This year 19 new state heritage places have been entered into the register, bringing the total number to 1,665. These new places are located across the state from the westernmost corner of the state, north to Charter Towers and to Cardwell, to Bundaberg and the South Burnett region, as well as in Brisbane's CBD.

EHP has also fulfilled its statutory role in processing 32 heritage applications which were ultimately decided by the council. Substantial updates in 15 existing entries in the Heritage Register have also been agreed to between the owners and the council this year. So there is work going on around the state. I commend the work of Professor Peter Coaldrake, I commend the work of the council members and I commend the work of the Queensland Heritage Council.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. I call the member for Maryborough.

Mrs MADDERN: Minister, can you please outline the government's new approach to managing dingoes on Fraser Island?

Mr POWELL: I certainly can, and I thank the member for her question and for her interest in this matter, probably second only to the member for Hervey Bay, I imagine—

Mrs MADDERN: Definitely second to the member for Hervey Bay!

Mr POWELL:—who is a very active participant in the conversations we have around dingo management on Fraser Island. It was my pleasure with my ministerial colleague Minister Steve Dickson, the Minister for National Parks, Recreation, Sport and Racing, to recently release the Fraser Island Dingo Conservation and Risk Management Strategy. It really does provide a new direction for dingo management on the island.

The dingo is an iconic and sometimes dangerous native animal, and I think that is a message that we need to make very clear each and every time. The suggestion that these are domesticated animals is not true. If you go to the United States and go into Yellowstone National Park, you do not take the wolves for granted. If you go to Africa, you do not treat the lions with contempt. You need to

take these matters seriously. The same goes for the dingo on Fraser Island. But it is important that we also manage the conservation and the welfare of wild dingoes on Fraser Island. It is a complex and challenging job.

Conserving wild dingoes, ensuring their welfare and safeguarding people are three important outcomes of that new strategy that I mentioned. Importantly it is drawing again on independent scientific research and review. So one of the commitments we made in opposition was to undertake an independent scientific peer review of the dingo strategy. We enlisted Ecosure to undertake that review. Then we appointed an external review steering committee, chaired by eminent Professor Hugh Possingham from the University of Queensland's School of Biological Sciences.

Ecosure's job was to ensure that a scientific assessment and evaluation of the previous strategy was undertaken and that it provided recommendations around improving visitor safety, dingo welfare and maintaining a sustainable wild dingo population on the island. The public was afforded fantastic opportunities to participate in that, and I know Ecosure received a wide range of responses. Based on the recommendations from the independent and scientific review, this new strategy retained some of the actions of the previous strategy but includes improvements and innovations to that management approach. Strategies have also been written in plain English, which is a big step forward, and we have taken the step of also adding in a number of graphics so that it is easily understood and gives a short summary of the science behind the dingo management.

The focus is on four main objectives. The first is to ensure the conservation of a sustainable dingo population on Fraser Island. I think we would all agree that is important. It is certainly one of the reasons tourists go to the island. I will never forget when I was there with my son. He turned 10 and decided that it was part of his manhood initiation that I should take my father, father-in-law and son over to the island. We spent the first night up in one of the enclosed camping areas but the second night down on the beach. We cooked up a feed of sausages and down trotted a dingo. It was fantastic to see but it was also important that my son was educated in what to do in that instance.

The second objective is to reduce the adverse animal welfare impacts on the dingo. The third—and, as I said, this is where my son comes into it—is to minimise the risk posed to people by dingoes on Fraser Island, and the fourth is to provide people on Fraser Island with a safe, enjoyable opportunity to see these dingoes. These objectives have been achieved through programs on risk intervention, communication and education, research, and evaluation and review. I would like to point out the research and evaluation aspects. I think it is the first time that we have really acknowledged the need to, again, invest in rigorous science around understanding that dingo population and how we need to interact with it.

A couple of things we also announced was around the welfare of dingoes. Some of these were implemented immediately upon receiving Ecosure's report. In particular, the practice of hazing of dingoes was suspended and dingoes weighing less than around 10 kilos will now not be targeted for ear tagging. There was considerable feedback from conservation groups in particular on those aspects.

We have also announced an additional set of actions to be delivered around the new strategy. Minister Dickson announced \$350,000 for a new dingo fence at Cathedral Beach which was well received by the lessees up there at Cathedral Beach. There will also be \$84,000 invested in new and renewed dingo safety signage. The number of rangers on the island during peak school holiday periods and long weekends will be increased. I think that is a very sensible outcome. Efforts in delivering dingo safety information and education will be enhanced, including the development of new materials and diversified modern methods of delivery. That is a project my department is working on, and we have put some money on the table to achieve that.

There is a pilot Friends of Parks program where campground hosts who work and live on site will help visitors to understand and adopt dingo safe approaches. Again, that is a great merger of two election commitments: the Friends of Parks initiative and our commitment to the dingo strategy. As I said, my department is investing \$50,000 towards the development of a science based research program to ensure that the future decisions regarding the welfare and management of dingos are based on that scientific evidence.

In conclusion, while the government remains dedicated to achieving the best outcomes for dingo management, the ultimate success of this new strategy relies on a commitment by all parties to deliver on a future where wild dingos and humans can co-exist in harmony on Fraser Island.

Mr COX: Minister, unfortunately some members on both sides of government and the local member himself were unable to attend, but we paid a recent visit to Dalby to look at the CSG industry firsthand so we could talk to all stakeholders. While I do not believe this was raised as an issue by anyone in particular, I would like to ask you to outline what steps the government has taken to ensure strong regulation of the Queensland CSG industry?

Mr POWELL: I heard good reports of your committee's visit to the Surat Basin. I hope it was very educational. It was freezing? I can understand how cold it must have been for you Northern Queenslanders. You have to come down here a bit more often and experience cooler climates. I commend the committee on taking that option of getting out in the gas fields and experiencing them. I encourage Queenslanders in general to do that. Many, if not all, of the companies would welcome the involvement of their communities and would actively encourage them to come out and see it for themselves. Having said that, we are committed to ensuring the CSG industry is well regulated. Their activities must be carried out to high environmental standards to safeguard our environment, particularly our land and water resources. Potential impacts on underground water resources are being anticipated and managed—and I think you would have seen that in your trip out there—and the rights of water users protected, and that is important as well.

It has been a real pleasure of mine to see that the department has been able to produce a new CSG water management policy. At this point I have to commend the work undertaken by not only my officers, but also the GasFields Commission. They did an outstanding job in ensuring the views of all the disparate stakeholders in the Surat Basin in particular were considered when preparing that new water management policy. That water policy emphasises and encourages management solutions that achieve beneficial purposes to protect the environment but also to maximise the use of the water as a valuable resource. We have the benefit of a significant piece of scientific work, and I keep using that word 'science'. We are making our decisions based on science. We have the underground water impact report prepared by the Queensland Water Commission. It has established responsibilities for petroleum tenure holders and will ensure measures and programs are in place to respond to impacts on underground water. That is a piece of work that should have started far sooner under the previous government. I am pleased it is here now because it certainly gives us a lot more confidence.

You asked about our rigorous scrutiny of the industry. I mentioned that we have invested \$3.7 million towards CSG regulation. We certainly enforce stringent environmental conditions. The effectiveness of environmental conditions and control is continually monitored and changes implemented as required. In accordance with our annual compliance plan for last year, we undertook 131 proactive compliance inspections. That encompassed both the CSG activities in the basins themselves as well as the LNG activities occurring in Gladstone and in the pipelines in between. We do that in concert with the Department of Natural Resources and Mines' CSG Engagement and Compliance Plan 2013. Again, I stress not only are we doing it based on science, not only are we being proactive but we are also working in partnership with our sister departments.

We have also recently released our regulatory strategy that has been designed to assist industry to improve its compliance practices. In accordance with the strategy, the department has set clear expectations around acceptable standards of environmental performance for the industry. Information has also been published to assist the industry to better understand its responsibilities in achieving those good environmental practices and to give operators every opportunity to know what they need to know to meet their obligations. Those industry members—like in any industry—who choose not to comply with their obligations will find that the department will be consistent in taking prompt and strong enforcement action. The Department of Environment and Heritage Protection will also continue to fulfil its commitment to maintain a high level of transparency around that regulation of the CSG industry. A wide range of information, as in the mine instance, is also available on our website including, might I add, full copies of the environmental authorities for the CSG-LNG industry. The public also has the opportunity to provide feedback on high-risk, site-specific environmental authority applications and this information is taken into consideration by my department during the assessment process. I commend again the member for getting out there and having a look. I look forward to receiving any other feedback he or other members of the committee might have garnered from that trip.

Mr COX: Sure, although you have it covered by the sounds of it.

Mr TROUT: I would like to also commend you on the job you are doing for Environment and Heritage Protection. Can you outline the action that the government is taking to manage crocodiles in North Queensland and the Mary River?

Mr POWELL: Why am I not surprised that the member for Barron River is asking a question about crocodile management? I think he was only just pipped at the post by the member for Maryborough. I must admit at the outset that it baffles me that we can capture and remove some 16 crocodiles from North Queensland but one jolly crocodile that has now morphed into two in the Mary River continue to elude our rangers. Perhaps they are a bit less timid up in the north.

At the outset I acknowledge the member because he has taken a personal interest and an interest on behalf of his constituents in an effective crocodile management policy for Far North Queensland but specifically for Cairns. I commend you on the work you have done, member for Barron River. Again, we made an election commitment around introducing a new policy when it comes to crocodile management—and I guess it is consistent with our approaches around wildlife management in particular—and that is to readdress the balance of the health, safety and wellbeing of our human population with our, and my personal, ongoing responsibilities around the conservation of protected species and native species. We have dedicated \$1.46 million in 2013-14 in addition to the \$1½ million previously committed over four years from 2012-13. This funding will implement that crocodile management policy consistent with the Northern Territory's successful three-tiered approach. We have rolled out crocodile management plans and pilot programs—and I stress pilot programs—for Cairns, Townsville, Hinchinbrook and Cassowary Coast. These pilot areas—and it might be important to point this out for the members for Whitsunday and Rockhampton—were selected on the basis that they experience a higher proportion of potential crocodile-human interaction than other habitats. That is not to say that we do not have plans in place for those other areas; we continue to undertake work in both Mackay and Rockhampton. However, we selected those four local government areas because of that high incidence of interaction between humans and crocodiles. They are living documents and they are available on our website. They are currently being actioned under a phased approach that will see the plans continue to evolve as the policy is put in place. As I said, since coming to office we have removed 16, but in the last financial year there were 13. Seven of those have been since March this year in the Cairns and Cassowary Coast regional council areas as part of that phased implementation. So any suggestions that we are not taking this seriously or we are not delivering are just not true.

While no natural waterway can be entirely risk free, under the pilot program, areas are managed for exclusion in which the aim is to prevent crocodiles from entering an area so that the level of risk is low enough to recommend safe swimming and water activities. To date there has only been one and that is in the Townsville plan, upstream from the Aplins Weir. That is in the dry season only at this stage, but we are monitoring it to see if there is potential across the year. Zero tolerance is the second tier. That is where efforts are made to significantly reduce the risk of attack by removing any crocodiles that enter, for example, around boat ramps and marinas in risk areas, and the third area is removal of crocodiles anywhere if the animal exhibits unprovoked aggressive behaviour towards humans. We are seeking partnerships for public education and communication, and this is important. In each of those four instances each council raised the importance of an ongoing education and awareness program. We are really kicking that into second gear now. We are modernising it, too; we are bringing it into the current century. We are using things such as YouTube clips and mobile device applications to communicate information. Importantly—and again I acknowledge the efforts of the member for Barron River in this—recently we extended the zero tolerance zone for the Cairns council area to include the Barron River and Ellis Beach, but the delivery of that is beyond the abilities of my department. So we are looking at an innovative partnership with the private sector, with potentially zoos, farms or any interested party—a conservation group, if they are suitably qualified and experienced, could apply for that as well—to undertake work in that Cairns area. An invitation to offer will shortly be provided.

The other good news is to oversee this work alongside the scientific and technical committee that has been longstanding. We have set up a new North Queensland community advisory group on crocodile management. It was great to sit around that table the other day with council members, representatives of the industry and my officers as well. I do not know, member for Barron River, but I would suggest that it was a very positive meeting with some great outcomes.

Mr TROUT: A hundred per cent! It was the first time a minister has ever listened; that is what they said.

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for those comments. Whilst that work continues to be phased in, wildlife rangers remain vigilant in responding to circumstances. As I said, that goes across the state and includes the Mary River. I have to pull up the member for Maryborough for a moment if the chair will allow me. There were suggestions from some of her constituents whom I met today at

another activity. They were actually excited about this. Please do not take this seriously, Deputy Director-General, but we joked about the fact that they might actually be feeding these crocodiles to keep them there, which is why they will not take the bait in our traps and therefore then be removed. It was purely in jest; there was no seriousness behind it. We will endeavour to remove those crocodiles from the Mary River.

I will outline a couple of other key aspects about our crocodile program. Ten new rangers have been employed and they are based in Townsville, Innisfail and Cairns. That increased capacity means that for the first time ever there is a crocodile team working on weekends in North Queensland. That is demonstrating how committed we are to this. As I said, we are also developing our partnership with those councils. Cairns has received \$20,000 to evaluate if there are areas that can be excluded so that they can become exclusion zones, and I trust Cairns City Council is undertaking that work. We have also given Cassowary, Hinchinbrook and Townsville \$80,000, \$80,000 and \$40,000 respectively to improve the surveillance and awareness of crocodile management within these local government areas, particularly around things like stinger nets in those swimming zones.

In conclusion, one of the other key partnerships that we have as part of this new approach is with Surf Life Saving Queensland. It is great to have a rep of that body on our North Queensland group. We offered them a grant of \$40,000 which has gone towards purchasing two new IRBs so that when carnivals are held there can be supervision of their nippers in particular, which is a great outcome. I look forward to ongoing work in North Queensland, in southern Queensland and in Central Queensland around our crocodile management—and also in Mackay-Whitsunday.

Mr COSTIGAN: We certainly do have plenty of crocodiles, koalas, dingos and dolphins in Mackay and Whitsunday. My question is in relation to something dear to me and many others no doubt, and that is the Great Barrier Reef. What progress has the government made in addressing the recommendations made by UNESCO regarding the protection of the reef?

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for the question. I know that this is very near and dear to his heart. What is the term you use for your part of the world? You use many words, so I am—

Mr COSTIGAN: This happens when you are the member for paradise, Minister.

Mr POWELL: Apparently. I would question that; I would say it is the Sunshine Coast hinterland. We digress. There is no doubt that the Great Barrier Reef is an extraordinary jewel in the crown of our state—not only our state but also the nation and the world. I want to assure all members, the Queensland community, the Australian community and the international community that we remain committed to its management and its protection. Any suggestion otherwise is just false and misleading. It is also hysterical, to be honest.

The Queensland government has made very good progress in addressing the UNESCO World Heritage Committee's recommendations. We are doing that in partnership with the federal government. The great news is that that was actually acknowledged in the most recent decision of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee when it met in Cambodia just recently. We continue to work with the Australian government around the Great Barrier Reef strategic assessment and the reef plan, for which the progress to date was welcomed, as I said. The Queensland government is committed to protecting the outstanding universal values of the reef. The science is telling us that catchment water quality is the major contributing factor to the decline in the reef.

I will pause there. The recommendations from UNESCO and some of the hysteria we are hearing from extreme green groups would have Queenslanders and the international community think that it is port development and shipping that are the major challenges for the reef. They are not. There is no scientific evidence to support that. All of the science—by the Australian Institute of Marine Science, by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority; by any scientists—continues to show that the major threats to the reef are, in fact, extreme weather events, sediment and the crown-of-thorns. They make up more than 80 per cent of the challenges for the reef—80 per cent. Any conservation group, any extreme green group or any individual who wants to acquaint themselves with the reef needs to acquaint themselves particularly with the Australian Institute of Marine Science report, because it sets it straight.

In addition to addressing those specific conditions, I will list a few other things we are doing. There is \$35 million annually spent on the reef. My department makes a significant contribution towards this—around \$10 million. I recently met with my federal ministerial colleague, the new

Minister for the Environment, the Hon. Mark Butler. We endorsed the reef plan 2013. This is a five-year plan that sets the targets for water quality in the reef. They are ambitious targets, around sediment in particular, but you have to set those targets.

On the same day we also released the third reef report card. One of the issues we had with UNESCO was that they require us to submit a state party report some six months before they actually debate it. So it had to be submitted late last year, if I recall correctly. We were a bit frustrated that the federal government had dragged the chain when it came to releasing the second report card, because we knew what the second report card would say: that working with farmers in particular in an extension way is producing significant results. That second report card came out. Fortunately, UNESCO gave us an opportunity to address the committee, and the significant progress we are making was acknowledged.

The third report card showed, again, that the long-term trend is positive, particularly around the work we are doing with the agricultural industries. Unfortunately, the third report was for 2011. Queenslanders will know that 2011 was the year of Cyclone Yasi. As I said before, the biggest impact on the reef continues to be extreme weather events, and the report card from 2011 shows that, because we see what Cyclone Yasi did to it—not only the direct impact on the reef but also in terms of the substantial amounts of water that flowed out to the reef from the rainfall.

I will outline a couple of other things we are doing. We are investing \$4 million over two years to get the Gladstone Healthy Harbour Partnership going. That includes \$1 million in start-up costs and \$1½ million over the next two years in operational funding. That is to set up the comprehensive monitoring program, largely using a lot of monitoring that is already going on there, and, importantly, publishing a water quality report card similar to what we get in South-East Queensland. The member for Lockyer in particular would know of the ecosystem report card we get each year. It is graded A to F. It is easy to understand. We are going to give the Gladstone community the same certainty. That is being overseen by an independent scientific panel.

We are working with the agricultural industries, particularly the cane and grazing industries, and we are doing it through voluntary best management practice programs. We are doing it by working together. We are not hitting the farmers; we are working with them. We are working alongside them. We have nearly \$5.5 million committed to cattle and cane best management practice development and an extra \$4 million for related reef catchment agricultural extension projects.

To address the World Heritage Committee's concerns about port development, we have prepared a draft Great Barrier Reef Ports Strategy. The full report will be out in the near future. That draft report has limited the impact of port development on the reef. The government has committed to restricting significant port development within and adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage area to existing port limits until 2022.

I conclude by also pointing out that we have addressed the crazy plans the previous Bligh government had for Abbot Point—a multicargo facility that would have seen tens of millions of tonnes of dredge spoil produced. Our much more environmentally responsible and economically responsible plan will see that reduced to some three million. I think that is the proposal that is currently sitting before my federal colleague. We take this very seriously—clearly more seriously than the previous Labor government, given that crazy plan they had for Abbot Point.

Mrs MADDERN: Minister, this is a little outside my patch, but not too far. Can you please outline the work this government has done to monitor and improve water quality in Gladstone harbour?

Mr POWELL: It is only a little bit out of your patch! It is still a great place to visit. I continue to be amazed every time I visit Gladstone. It is such a thriving port but it still has such a fantastic environment, both socially and environmentally.

As I started to mention, we are doing a number of things around Gladstone harbour. Following on from a number of floods but including the 2013 flood, my department, with the assistance of DSITIA, continues to monitor the impact of floods on water quality in Gladstone. These monitoring reports are available on our website.

Following concerns raised by commercial fishers over the health of fish in Gladstone waterways, the Queensland government undertook the Gladstone Harbour Integrated Aquatic Investigation Program. This program's finding shows that no single cause could be determined or identified for all fish health issues and that seafood available through retail outlets is from regulated and wide-ranging sources and continues to be safe to purchase and eat. It is anticipated that the final report will be released on my department's website later this month. Again, it is completely open, completely transparent and based on science.

Looking to the future, I mentioned that we have invested \$4 million to kick-start the Gladstone Healthy Harbour Partnership. I think it is really important that people understand that this is potentially the most monitored harbour in the world. There is so much monitoring going on. Unfortunately, a lot of it is actually duplicated and it becomes confusing. It is potentially confusing to a scientist, it is definitely confusing to an MP and it is very confusing not only to the people of Gladstone but also to the people of Queensland and those overseas.

So what we want to do is remove that duplication, ensure data quality, ensure transparency and improve that information sharing and target so that not only can we inform Queenslanders of what is going on in Gladstone harbour but also, if remedial action is required, we can target it in the same way we do here in South-East Queensland. Our ecosystem report card each year tells us where we need to focus our attention. It tells us which river systems are failing or which river systems have gone backwards. It can assist in telling us why. Therefore, we can focus our funding on those projects. Similarly, the partnership will use that report card methodology so that the Gladstone community, the Queensland community and the international community can have confidence in that scientific data and we can focus our attention on where it is most needed.

Beyond gaining that greater efficiency and effectiveness from our collective monitoring and reporting systems, there is a need for everyone in the Gladstone community to feel that they can place their trust in the organisations and institutions that do the testing and the reporting. This is the primary job in the Gladstone Healthy Harbour Partnership. It is why we have set up an independent scientific body to oversee that work. We will endeavour, every step of the way, to ensure the Gladstone community is confident in the water quality in their harbour and the surrounding catchment and that we are taking appropriate action where it is needed.

CHAIR: I call the member for South Brisbane. I remind the member that the hearing is about the Service Delivery Statement.

Ms TRAD: I do not need reminding, Chair. I refer the minister to page 10 of the SDS which outlines the work by his agency on changes to the EIS requirements. I also refer to page 1 of the social impact assessment guidelines that were only just released this week by the Deputy Premier. It sets out on page 1 that the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection has worked with the Coordinator-General on developing these guidelines. Minister, at page 5 of these guidelines it states that for projects proceeding under the Environmental Protection Act your department delegate cannot set conditions relating to social impacts and can only draw issues to the attention of the office of the Coordinator-General. For social impact conditions on the same page it states—

Emphasis will be given to direct impacts assessed as having a high probability and significant to severe consequence or impact.

Minister, why are only high-risk impacts now being considered in these guidelines?

Mr POWELL: What the member is alluding to has been the case for many, many years. The Environmental Protection Act does not give my delegates a head of power to assess social impacts. That is addressed under the State Development and Public Works Organisation Act, which is administered by the Deputy Premier and implemented and approved by the Coordinator-General. The social impact assessment report that the member is referring to is accurate. At best, we can refer social impact suggestions to the Coordinator-General for his consideration.

Having said that, the environmental impact statements related to projects that are approved under the Environmental Protection Act will continue to be applied rigorously. The environmental assessment process will continue to be applied rigorously. I have great confidence that the new streamlined system will produce good outcomes for the businesses in less red tape and less cost but great outcomes for the environment in terms of the continuing high environmental standards that we have.

Ms TRAD: Minister, appendix 4 of these guidelines actually outlines that proponents will not need to act on a minor social impact or a significant social impact unless it is likely to occur. These significant social impacts are defined as medium-term recoverable changes to social characteristics and values of the communities of interest.

CHAIR: Excuse me, member for South Brisbane. The minister has just explained that that is under the Deputy Premier's portfolio.

Ms TRAD: No, he talked about the powers under the EPA.

CHAIR: You are asking questions about things that are released by the Deputy Premier.

Ms TRAD: The Department of Environment and Heritage Protection has responsibilities under the EPA in relation to social impact assessment.

Mr POWELL: No, I do not.

Ms TRAD: Yes, you do.

Mr POWELL: I have just said that I do not. My delegates cannot make assessments on social impact because there is no head of power under the Environmental Protection Act. That sits under the SDPWO Act, which is administered by the Deputy Premier. The member for South Brisbane has to direct her questions to the Deputy Premier.

Ms TRAD: Unfortunately, the Deputy Premier chose to release that news at the end of his estimates appearance to avoid questions on it. Minister, I now refer you to your response to question on notice No. 8 and your statement in that response that the Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning now has assessment responsibility for high-impact developments that involve earthworks that could damage wetlands of high ecological significance in catchments of the Great Barrier Reef. You said in the response that previously that responsibility resided with the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection. Minister, are you advising that under the new SARA arrangements your department plays no role in the assessment of projects of this nature that represent very significant environmental consequences?

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for the question. The answer is, no, my officers continue to play a role in those assessments, and the member or other members of the opposition may have had an opportunity to ask the Deputy Premier questions about the new SARA system and the single state planning policy. What we have done is consolidated all of the state's interests when it comes to state planning policies into one single state planning policy and that is now being assessed through a single referral agency that is housed within the Deputy Premier's portfolio. Having said that, where technical advice is required on impacts pertinent to other legislation, including the legislation that sits under my agency, that advice will be provided. There is literally a panel of technical experts that sit within my department who will be assisting the SARA delegate—the director-general of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning—in making those assessments. So we will continue to have an active role in ensuring that the environment is protected.

I need to make clear that that new process will not diminish the level of protection for these important Great Barrier Reef wetlands that you spoke about, as the assessable development triggers have not changed. There is still a trigger, and the Great Barrier Reef wetlands are defined as matters of state environmental significance under the proposed state planning policy. The new state planning policy requires that any development that may significantly impact on matters of state environmental significance, including the Great Barrier Reef wetlands, is to be avoided or, where that is not possible, they are to be mitigated and any residual impact offset. Upon commencement of the government's new state planning policies, a high level of protection will be afforded to these wetlands that the member referred to and all other matters of state environmental significance, and my officers will continue to assist the Deputy Premier's department in making those assessments.

Ms TRAD: Thank you, Minister. I am trying to get sense, I think, of whether or not there has been any change in terms of the responsibilities of your agency in relation to some of these assessments. Is your agency a concurrent agency in terms of setting conditions around these assessments, or do you merely play an advisory role under the now SARA arrangements?

Mr POWELL: The simple answer is a technical advisory role to the new SARA.

Ms TRAD: Okay. So has that changed?

Mr POWELL: Yes.

Ms TRAD: So previously you were a concurrent agency—

Mr POWELL: That is correct.

Ms TRAD:—setting conditions around assessments and EISs and now the department plays a technically advisory role?

Mr POWELL: No. I need to be clear.

Ms TRAD: Please do.

Mr POWELL: We are talking about assessments under the Sustainable Planning Act and not under the Environmental Protection Act and the EIS process—you used the term EIS there—unless it is an EIS of a project being considered under the SDPWO Act, in which case it is still the Deputy Premier. We are no longer a concurrence agency; we provide technical advice to SARA. I cannot make it any clearer than that.

Ms TRAD: No, I appreciate that.

Mr POWELL: For any other questions around the operation of SARA, I encourage the member to direct her questions to the Deputy Premier.

Ms TRAD: I am trying, as you can appreciate, to gauge what your responsibilities are in terms of not only your statutory responsibilities but also your department's responsibilities in relation to this new arrangement. I am sure you can appreciate that there are answers that you can provide in relation to that.

Mr POWELL: And I believe I have.

Ms TRAD: You have, yes; thank you very much. The Deputy Premier earlier this week advised that the Sustainable Planning Act would be heavily amended and that a new act would be brought in. Are you part of that review of the Sustainable Planning Act, Minister?

Mr POWELL: Of course.

Ms TRAD: Okay. So do you envisage that the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection will continue to be a concurrent agency in that?

Mr POWELL: No, I have just explained that we are not a concurrent agency. Under the new SARA—

Ms TRAD: Well, under the Sustainable Planning Act?

Mr POWELL:—we provide technical advice.

Ms TRAD: Okay. So you have gone from setting conditions to merely advising?

Mr POWELL: I cannot make it any clearer than what I have said. Again, if she wants a detailed explanation of how SARA is going to operate, I can provide it. But the reality is it sits under the Deputy Premier's portfolio and I believe these questions should be directed to him.

Ms TRAD: Minister, just in relation to your earlier comments and the figures contained in the SDS in relation to job losses, you mentioned previously that it was 30 full-time effective positions that would go in this coming financial year. I think, Minister, you made reference to the fact that this was a small number. While I appreciate that 30 might seem small compared to 14,000, that is 30 Queensland families who will not have a breadwinner—

CHAIR: Do you have a question?

Ms TRAD: Yes, I do actually, Chair, so if you could just stop butting in that would be really appreciated.

CHAIR: Use appropriate parliamentary language.

Ms TRAD: So, Minister, just in relation to the 30 positions, the three per cent, is that an efficiency dividend or is that just a cut?

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for the question. I am happy to reiterate what I said before. With regard to the 30 positions, I acknowledge that behind each of those positions is an individual and a family. Anyone who suggests that losing staff is an enjoyable process or that there are not challenges involved has clearly not been involved in that process themselves.

Ms TRAD: I did not suggest that, Minister.

Mr POWELL: So to suggest that I do not have empathy—and I think that is what the member was trying to allude to—is just callous. I again reiterate that what we are seeing is a new business-as-normal approach for the Newman government. Business as normal no longer means nine per cent public sector growth. Business as normal means looking at how you do business, what business you do, should you be doing that business, are there other ways to do it, are there better ways to do it, are there cheaper ways to do it, are there other parties that could do it? All of this is in the Commission of Audit and as the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection I have a responsibility to look at everything we do.

Can I give you just one example. As we look at green tape and as we look at reducing the amount of paperwork that not only industry has to fill in but that my officers have to review, we make savings—savings in time, savings in approvals, savings in dollars—and that produces an outcome. Many of those outcomes mean that we can invest more dollars in practical, on-the-ground conservation outcomes. Many of them mean that we can continue to invest heavily in our front-line service delivery. So we will be looking at that and we have started a renewal committee within our own department to look at what we do and why we do it and how we do it to see if we could do it

better. We have already seen a couple of examples where we believe industry could do it more efficiently than we have, and one of those was the ecoBiz program. I am very pleased that there is a partnership between Commerce Queensland and the University of Southern Queensland who are now delivering that program for us. That is business as normal now for my department and for this government. So we will look at all of our work and we will determine where those 30 positions can be found. As I said, some of them will be vacancy management. But I can assure you that we will continue to maintain high environmental standards, we will continue to deliver on environmental approvals and we will make sure that the environment is managed and protected.

Mr Chair, I undertook to give some information on the Callide mine issue that the member raised earlier. Callide mine has been authorised under its environmental authority to release into Callide Dam since 2009. So let me just repeat that: Callide mine has been authorised under its environmental authority to release into Callide Dam since 2009. That places it firmly back within the previous government. During the 2012-13 wet season, there have been some non-compliant releases from the Callide mine. The non-compliant releases were not authorised under any tool; they were due to exceptional rainfall in the catchment, and I do not think anyone disputes that that occurred. BHP has issued four PINs for these non-compliant releases.

The total volume of water released into the dam was 500 megalitres of water through two separate releases that occurred between 25 January 2013 and 21 April 2013. That is 0.3 of a per cent of the total volume of the Callide Dam—let me stress that again: 500 megalitres and 0.3 of a per cent of the total volume of the Callide Dam—under an authority put in place by the previous government. Not all mine water releases from Callide mine, though, end up in the Callide Dam. The remainder of releases were downstream into Callide Creek. Only those releases from Dunn Creek Dam end up in the dam itself. In relation to the volume of non-compliant releases, it is very difficult to calculate but only a small portion of the volume was noncompliant—only a small portion. The Callide Dam holds around 136,000 megalitres, so, as I said, 0.3 of a per cent. It is important to note that during the 2010-11 wet season—so, again, before I took on this role and before the Newman government came into power—more than 4,000 megalitres was released into the Callide Dam and the previous government did not inform the council due to the high dilution factor. The EA conditions have not changed to allow any additional releases. So again we see the hypocrisy of the members opposite in that activities that we are undertaking are consistent, if not better, than the activities undertaken by the previous Labor government.

CHAIR: Thank you for that information.

Ms TRAD: Thank you, Minister, for that response. So what proportion of the 500 megalitres were noncompliant?

Mr POWELL: As I said, we cannot ascertain the exact proportion, but it is a small percentage of the 500 megalitres.

Ms TRAD: Okay. As I understand, what you are saying is they were non-conforming releases at that time from—

Mr POWELL: Not all.

Ms TRAD: All right. Minister, I refer you to your response to question on notice No. 10—I think it was from a government member; it was an unidentified government member on the committee—in relation to the waste policy and programs under consideration by your government. Minister, was the banning of plastic bags considered by the stakeholder steering committee formed by you earlier this year and did it make recommendations or representations to you in relation to a potential state-wide ban on plastic bags?

Mr POWELL: The short answer is yes, but let me be very clear. The Newman government was elected on a mandate of decreasing costs of living—driving down the costs of living. One of the first activities that I undertook as the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection was to remove the waste levy—a cost that, whilst put in the terms of being passed on to business only and not residential properties, was going to be felt by every consumer throughout Queensland when they went to a restaurant, when they went to any industry or commerce that had a waste collection service. That was a cost in the case of restaurants of about \$3,500, and to think that that would not have been passed on to each of the consumers is just ridiculous.

Recent media reports indicated that the Queensland government was considering a ban on plastic shopping bags. The Queensland government was not. The Queensland government had made no decision. The Queensland government does not support a ban on plastic shopping bags. There was a national investigation into options to reduce the environmental impacts of plastic bags,

including a ban, undertaken in 2007. Information from the cost-benefit analysis undertaken at that time determined that the cost of a national ban would be in the order of \$78 million per year, or around \$5 per person. The RIS—the regulation impact statement—also assessed the costs to business if a ban were implemented, and this included claims by the retail sector that there would be around \$42 million per year in costs associated with shoplifting and thefts—costs that would also be passed on to the consumer at the checkout. Currently, the cost of a plastic bag is incorporated into the cost of products. The cost of a single-use plastic bag is estimated to be less than 0.02c per bag, reusable green bags have an average cost of around \$1 while biodegradable bags cost between 10c and 20c. The previous government's position on this issue was that a plastic bag ban would not be supported because of the cost imposts on consumers until there was a suitable and viable alternative. Biodegradable bags could be seen as a viable replacement. However, the cost is significantly greater than for a plastic bag.

The government is currently working with waste generators—and this is where the reports came from—local governments and the waste sector on a new industry-led waste strategy for Queensland. The government will continue to encourage and facilitate recycling opportunities, but this will not involve introducing a new cost for consumers of plastic bags. We will continue to consult with the community and with interested parties around initiatives to reduce waste generation and litter and to improve recycling results. A draft waste strategy is anticipated for release in November this year and we welcome comments on proposals in this strategy. Let me just correct the record: I think I said 0.02c per plastic bag; I should have said 2c.

Ms TRAD: In relation to that, I appreciate you have the previous government's position on everything there, but I am actually more interested in your position. From the briefing note reported in the media report that you alluded to, there was a claim that you had handwritten on a briefing note that you agreed with moving towards a state-wide ban on plastic bags. So—

Mr POWELL: No, let me—

Ms TRAD: Hold on. So either the media report has it wrong—what a surprise—or, in fact, you wanted to progress something and the Premier decided to squash it as soon as it received oxygen.

CHAIR: This is going into the realms of hypothetical.

Ms TRAD: No, it is not, Ian. Listen.

CHAIR: You are starting to get into the realms of hypotheticals.

Ms TRAD: You actually need to watch yourself because, quite frankly, the way in which you are chairing this committee is an absolute disgrace, Ian.

CHAIR: I find that quite offensive and I ask you to withdraw.

Ms TRAD: Yes, and I am finding—

CHAIR: I find that quite offensive and I ask you to withdraw.

Ms TRAD: I am withdrawing and you need to watch your behaviour. In relation to the state-wide ban on plastic bags or the proposal to investigate a state-wide ban on plastic bags, did you even attempt to convince the Premier to think about this because you had brought together representatives from stakeholder groups who were interested in pursuing this under a waste strategy?

Mr POWELL: To answer the member's question simply, the media reports were inaccurate. What I can explain to the member is that the proposed action in the brief referred to by the media reports suggested the investigation and assessment of a range of options for the management of single-use plastic shopping bags in Queensland as part of the development of the industry-led waste strategy and to preparing a discussion paper for further ministerial and government consideration with a view to releasing a consultation paper either as part of the review of the current waste strategy or separately. That is what I agreed to. I did not agree to a ban on plastic bags. Therefore, there was no need to convince the Premier. The government's position is clear. We are not going to impose an extra cost on consumers. I cannot put it more simply than that.

Ms TRAD: Minister, the media report also suggested that you had contacted them and had expressed—

CHAIR: What relevance has this to the Service Delivery Statements?

Ms TRAD: It is the response to the minister.

CHAIR: This is a media report. Where does this come out of the Service Delivery Statements?

Ms TRAD: Because it is documentary—

CHAIR: It is a newspaper—

Ms TRAD: No, it is information to support my line of questioning, Mr Chair, and it is in response to a question on notice from a government member. I am actually entitled—

CHAIR: I will listen to the question but it is a very tenuous link, I think.

Ms TRAD: No, it is not a tenuous link at all. Minister, in relation to the government's waste strategy, it was reported in the *Courier-Mail* that you had contacted that media outlet and suggested that the government would be looking at a state-wide ban. Is that inaccurate? Did the *Courier-Mail* also get that wrong? Did they verbal you?

Mr POWELL: Let me reiterate the words: investigate and assess a range of options for the management of single-use plastic shopping bags.

Ms TRAD: Right. Minister, I refer to page 2 of your Service Delivery Statements and your department's responsibility to deliver on the government's priority by supporting the sustainability and productivity of the resources industry—one of your government's economic four pillars. Minister, can you advise of your role and that of your department's in considering the recommendations arising from the uranium implementation committee report into the recommencement of uranium mining in Queensland?

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for the question and for her interest in the renewal of our uranium mining industry here in Queensland. What I am pleased to say in summary, before I talk a bit more in detail about my department's interest in this matter, is that what the implementation committee determined was that Queensland does have effective regulations for the environmental management of a future uranium mining industry here in the state. There are a couple of things in particular. Financial assurance will be held by the Queensland government to ensure compliance and rehabilitation of uranium mines as we do with other every mine—something the previous government was a bit lax on in a number of ways. Approvals for uranium mines will be outcomes focused and backed up by strong compliance measures as per all the other activities that we undertake as well.

On 30 October last year we did announce the establishment of an independent uranium mining implementation committee to examine and report on a best practice policy framework for a Queensland uranium mining and export industry. The committee concluded that Queensland's existing framework for the regulation of mining and radiation safety is generally appropriate for the recommencement of uranium mining in Queensland and that a new legislative framework is not required. In relation to environmental regulation, the committee found that Queensland has effective mining regulations that incorporate best practice environmental management to minimise and manage the environmental risks associated with uranium mining. These regulations include, as I said, the ability for us to hold financial assurance to ensure that rehabilitation is carried out progressively during and at the completion of mining and that we also can hold a residual risk payment to address any residual environmental risk following rehabilitation. Through the introduction of outcomes focused approvals, which is applying more broadly to the resources sector, government resources will be directed to focus on compliance, monitoring and responding to the performance of uranium mines. Compliance monitoring will be further enhanced by the introduction of a system of third-party auditors.

The Department of Environment and Heritage Protection has a new regulatory strategy, as mentioned before, that is underpinned by strong legislative tools in the Environmental Protection Act 1994. When noncompliance is found, EHP will take firm but fair enforcement action to assure the community that failing to meet environmental obligations will not be tolerated. Let me reiterate. That does not just apply to a future uranium mining industry; that applies to any mining industry, that applies to any industry that I have a responsible for approving under the Environmental Protection Act. We are committed to a stronger environmental management of any future uranium mining in a manner that facilitates economic and environmentally sustainable development.

What I can reassure the member for South Brisbane is that EHP was extensively consulted by that committee. We, in fact, had an officer as a support project officer seconded to that committee. I want to again reassure the member that it is mining, like most other mining, and therefore, as the implementation committee found, our existing regulatory framework is robust enough to accommodate a future uranium mining industry.

Ms TRAD: Minister, in relation to the implementation committee report, at chapter 5-5 of the committee report it states—

Many streams and waterways in areas likely for uranium mining have ephemeral flow regimes. The ephemeral nature of waterways can exacerbate the effects of incidental or deliberate discharges to waterways.

I have heard you talk about the assessment and monitoring regime. Can you guarantee that there will be no such incidental discharges into waterways flowing into the Great Artesian Basin with uranium mining operating in Queensland?

CHAIR: Member for South Brisbane, that is a hypothetical question. It is purely hypothetical. There is no—

Ms TRAD: Let me rephrase that. Minister, given that currently there are non-compliant discharges from mines and they are ones that you can come to estimates and not have any idea about, obviously the government cannot mitigate the concerns articulated in the uranium implementation report regarding contamination of the Great Artesian Basin; is that not correct?

Mr POWELL: I think I have answered the question, Mr Chair. Through the implementation committee they looked at our regulatory framework. They determined that it was significantly robust. I can assure the member that our assessments of this industry, as per every other industry, will be rigorous and our expectations will be consistent with all other—

Ms TRAD: So a committee of yes people sat around saying, 'Yes, yes, yes.' That is essentially what happened?

Mr POWELL: I would love for the member to direct those comments directly at some of those members of the committee, given that I think they are upstanding—

Ms TRAD: I have no qualms about that.

Mr POWELL:—citizens in a range of fields who would be quite offended at the tone she has taken.

CHAIR: I call Jason Costigan.

Mr COSTIGAN: Minister, I would like to go back to some of your earlier remarks in relation to a response regarding the Great Barrier Reef. As has been noted, the government has scaled back the proposed plans for the Abbot Point Coal Terminal—a place that I know pretty well. I used to report on the shipping movements there in the late 1980s. There have been a few ships come through since then, no doubt. What other work has EHP taken to limit port development impacts on the reef?

Mr POWELL: Thank you very much, member for Whitsunday. Can I just pause for one moment. I need to correct the record again. It just goes back to something that we were discussing, but please hold that thought. I mentioned earlier that we have removed 16 crocodiles since the election. It was actually 16 to 30 June. We have removed one since. So it is actually 17. So that is a positive for you, member for Barron River.

Coming back to Abbot Point, I mentioned before a range of activities that we are undertaking, particularly in response to the UNESCO World Heritage committee and their recommendations—things like the strategic assessment, things like the Gladstone Healthy Harbour Partnership, the work that we are doing around curtailing those crazy plans for Abbot Point, as you heard. One of the biggest and most significant aspects that we are undertaking is our draft Great Barrier Reef ports strategy. As I said, under that draft port strategy we talked about limiting to existing port limits development for the next decade. We have put that out for comment. We have received extensive feedback. We are currently considering that and a final Great Barrier Reef ports strategy will be released before the end of the year. But suffice to say it does not only make environmental sense; it makes economic sense to focus your investment, focus your attention on the existing infrastructure rather than opening up greenfield sites. So I look forward to that piece of work being finalised before the end of the year.

For Abbot Point, what we have done is assess the dredging, the tidal work proposals and provided advice in relation to the effective proposed activities on marine habitats and cultural heritage and a land use approval in a state development area for terminal 3. So that piece of work is now sitting, as I said, with my federal colleague the Hon. Mark Butler. I certainly encourage him. I notice he has extended his time frame for the assessment of that project by a month. I am pleased to hear that he is consulting, but we encourage him to meet that time frame now and deliver an outcome on that project and give it the tick that it deserves after the rigorous assessment by our state.

This does give me another opportunity to just quickly list some of the other things we are doing. We have put out that new reef plan 2013 for the next five years. It has set ambitious targets around sediment, nutrient, pesticide runoff. It builds on the work that we have been doing with our cane and grazing industries and I have had good feedback from your local cane industries, too, talking about

best management practice, talking about the economic benefits and the environmental benefits that come from applying world's best practice to industries such as cane and grazing. I am excited that that is rolling out. I am excited that we are seeing some really fantastic outcomes already.

It was great that we were able to recognise a canegrower as the winner of the Rural Award for the Premier's Sustainability Awards, Vince and Rita Papale.

Mr COSTIGAN: Great Burdekin people.

Mr POWELL: Burdekin people—in the electorate of the member for Burdekin. I had a real opportunity not long after that to get out on the farm with them and see what they have done. These are people who took what was really marginal farming land—it constantly flooded when the Burdekin flooded; it was always wet. They were losing money because their tractors were getting bogged. The old practice was to just keep farming it, because you never know in a good year you might get that little extra bit of tonnage for the mill. But what the Papales worked out is that it just did not make economic sense. They kept wasting money on having to pull their gear out and do all of this sort of stuff. So they have built a string of wetlands where that area used to be that ultimately will end up back in the Burdekin. They have replanted native vegetation. They get schoolkids out there to do science projects. They have taken water tests recently and we are starting to find freshwater creatures that only exist in healthy marine freshwater environments. So they are a real success story of a canefarmer who is getting an economic benefit but delivering for the environment as well. I know there are farmers out there just itching to work with this government to take up the best management practice program and deliver for not only themselves but also the reef.

Mr COSTIGAN: Minister, well said, and well done the Papale family.

Mr TROUT: Minister, what is the status of Queensland's wild rivers declarations and what work is being undertaken by the government to review these?

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for the question. Again up in his part of the world I know there is a lot of interest in this. We had a couple of election commitments when it comes to the wild rivers declarations. I am pleased to report that both are on track. Whilst the act sits within my portfolio responsibilities there are discrete pieces of work being done by two of my ministerial colleagues. We are committed to working with communities and not against them to deliver better outcomes and approaches to managing some of Queensland's best river systems. That is why the Department of Natural Resources and Mines is consulting with the Western Rivers Advisory Panel to develop alternative strategies for the wild rivers in the Lake Eyre Basin.

We are also working, through our Cape York Regional Plan, to come up with an alternative for the cape declarations. It is important to note that I have already made some amendments to the Lake Eyre Basin wild rivers declarations to improve safety and efficiency for remote workers whilst maintaining environmental standards within those river systems. This government will deliver a protection of Queensland's most natural river systems while delivering on economic and development opportunities for remote communities. We are committed to removing this complex and onerous red tape approach that wild rivers applies to those communities. On Cape York the government is on track to deliver. The wild rivers declarations over the Wenlock, the Stewart, the Archer and the Lockhart River basins will be replaced by the Cape York Regional Plan. The draft Cape York Regional Plan being led by the Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning will be released for public consultation later this year. The regional plan will be supported by a framework being developed in collaboration with EHP. That will include innovative approaches to ensuring areas of high environmental value are protected. This approach in Cape York will ensure a balance between the economic development of the region, something again I know the member for Barron River is very passionate about alongside his neighbour the member for Cook, but it will balance that in a way that protects our pristine waterways up there. As I said, that draft Cape York Regional Plan will be informed by the results of earlier consultation processes including what we initiated under the Cape York Bioregion Management Plan Scoping Paper, as well as consideration of the myriad of strategies, plans and documents produced for the cape.

In regards to Lake Eyre, we are working with the communities out there not against them. We are looking at replacing wild river declarations for Cooper Creek, Georgina and Diamantina rivers with alternative approaches to managing these important river systems. My colleague Andrew Cripps, the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines, is working in consultation with the Western Rivers Advisory Panel to develop a fresh approach out there. The panel has broad representation of people who live and work out in the country, including members that represent Indigenous interests, local government, graziers, the resource sector as well as natural resource management bodies.

Processes are designed to ensure a more practical, less onerous framework that will preserve environmental values and support agricultural and resource pillars of the community in Western Queensland.

As I said, as the minister with overarching portfolio responsibilities for these areas I have already had to make some changes to the declarations. These changes were approved by Governor-in-Council on 9 May this year and they will lead to improved safety for remote workers and provide greater efficiencies for petroleum and gas companies whilst maintaining those high environmental standards. The changes allowed for safer remote work camps closer to the location of operation and this removed risk created by travelling distances over those remote roads. It enabled petroleum and gas operators to co-locate wells in one area leading to reduced footprints and greater efficiencies. As members who went out to the Surat Basin know, there is ability now to consolidate well sites to reduce the overall footprint by having multiple well sites elsewhere.

All of these changes, however, do not increase risk to the system. We are still responsible for ensuring that all activities meet the requirements of the EPA. And this is applied consistently throughout Queensland. So, in short, I can reassure the member that we are tracking along nicely on those initiatives and the outcomes are going to get that balance right between the economic development aspects of our government and ensuring ongoing high environmental protection of those natural river systems.

CHAIR: What savings have been made by removing duplication of climate change programs?

Mr POWELL: I thank the chair for his question and it is a good question. I might pre-empt this by just raising something that seems to be missed a lot in the media reports. COAG sat down early in our term of government and came up with complementarity principles. It basically said that the federal government is responsible for mitigation when it comes to climate change, the state government is responsible for adaptation. It went further to say that state governments should not duplicate the mitigation efforts of the federal government. So we are ensuring that Queenslanders do not pay twice for climate change mitigation programs, but instead that the funds are directed into improving front-line services, not only in my own department but across the government. What we have done, the \$430 million Queensland Climate Change Fund, which provided support to a range of climate projects, was terminated in 2012 saving \$30 million per year. Approximately \$5.3 million was saved in 2012-13 from the closure of the policy and programs branch of the Office of Climate Change. The ClimateSmart Home Service completed its final service to residential customers on 6 August 2012, with \$11.3 million in savings to date. A further return of up to \$7 million from the ClimateSmart Home Service is anticipated when the warranty period for products and services expires and a final acquittal of the program is completed in November 2013. So just in those alone: \$30 million a year from termination of the Queensland Climate Change Fund; \$5.3 in shutting down the policy and programs branch of the Office of Climate Change; \$11.3 initially upfront from ceasing the ClimateSmart Home Service; and \$7 million anticipated once ClimateSmart has finally acquitted all of its warranty periods and service expiry dates.

We have also terminated, as a government, the Queensland Sustainable Energy and Innovation Fund saving \$1.7 million in 2012-13 and \$1.1 million per year ongoing. As I said, we have looked at ecoBiz and determined that it is better delivered externally. It was set up at a time when government led the charge in terms of sustainable business practice, but now there are a range of private companies and consortia that can deliver this work and so we put this out to the market. I am pleased to advise that the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland together with the Australian Centre for Sustainable Business and Development at the University of Southern Queensland have been selected to deliver ecoBiz. We are committed to this successful program which helped businesses save on costs and helped them to remain competitive while delivering multiple environmental benefits in terms of reduced energy, water and waste.

An investment of \$3 million is being made over three years to maintain ecoBiz but the decision to deliver it through an industry collaboration saved approximately \$860,000 in the last financial year and will save \$1.62 million per year over the term of the partnership. This new program delivery arrangement will continue to drive innovation and offer better value for money for Queensland taxpayers. So while making significant savings from the removal of duplication of climate change mitigation programs, the Queensland government is also delivering on its commitment to make Queenslanders and our industries better prepared and more resilient to future climate related natural hazards through the interrelated agendas of climate adaptation and community recovery and resilience. I have already had conversations with my ministerial colleague the Hon. David Crisafulli on

that. Embedding current and future climate change into Queensland's resilience agenda aligns strongly with many of the Queensland government's current commitments and I look forward to continuing that piece of work.

Mrs MADDERN: Minister, as you are well aware, my electorate was surrounded by various other electorates that were pretty severely damaged in the recent flood natural disasters, and there were other areas in Queensland too. I ask: what is the government doing to improve resilience in our natural environment following those very serious disasters?

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for the question. I am pleased to report that we—EHP—have lead agency role around the environmental recovery aspects following those natural disasters. My director-general actually heads up that program. There are a number of initiatives that we are rolling out, I think a combination of some \$20 million in all, between the natural resource and agricultural sectors and our own environmental sector, distributed through Natural Resources and Mines, to target those specific resilience projects. There is an important component going in on the ground in catchments like the Lockyer, catchments like the Burnett and the Mary, where we are targeting specific works to ensure the environment can rebound and respond. A couple of other things that I have already mentioned: we are working around the reef catchment—\$35 million from government, \$10 million from our department around cane and grazing. We have got that \$4 million in the Gladstone Healthy Harbour Partnership. I spoke before about the \$8 million over four years for the South-East Queensland Healthy Waterways Program. That is going to some really good specific projects again in those key catchments down around the Bremer and up my way around the Pumicestone Passage catchments where we are working with farmers in particular to look at ways to make them more resilient and make sure that the environment can be more resilient around them.

That is what our government is all about: it is working with councils, it is working with the agricultural industry, it is working with all of the industries to make sure that they have resilience, make sure they have economic benefit from the work that they do, but as a result we get the environmental benefit as well. Things like the koala program I spoke about before all add to the resilience because we are increasing habitats, we are improving and regenerating habitats. We have got our Protected Area Acquisition Program, we have got our Nature Assist Program, we have got our Indigenous Land and Sea Ranger Program, all of which are out there on the ground building resilience in our environment. It is great to be a part of and I commend the director-general and his team, and the other directors-general who are particularly involved in that disaster recovery work, for the work that they are doing?

Ms TRAD: Minister, how many damage mitigation permits has your department approved since coming into government and changing the legislation?

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for the question. As I said, consistent with our election commitments we are looking at implementing both election commitments, one around lethal damage mitigation permits and the other around a streamlined approval process. Can I just be clear, is the member asking for non-lethal damage mitigation permits to councils and community groups to move on flying fox communities or lethal damage mitigation permits?

Ms TRAD: Lethal. Actually, if you could give both that would be appreciated.

Mr POWELL: Damage mitigation permits for crop protection, 10 permits have been issued for lethal take, four refused and five withdrawn. Damage mitigation permits for non-lethal dispersal of flying foxes, 12 issued for complete roost dispersal, five issued for partial dispersal—that is usually in the buffer—and two applications have been withdrawn. The lethal take statistics to date, going back to those 10 permits that have been approved of the 19 that have been submitted, of the black flying fox yearly quota of 3,500 the actual allocation has been 278 or 7.9 per cent of the allocation, so 278. This is the allocation, it doesn't necessarily mean that it has been achieved through the practices of the farmer. In terms of little red flying foxes, the yearly quota is 4,000. The actual allocation to date is 62, or 1.5 per cent. In terms of the grey headed flying fox none. In terms of the spectacled flying fox, none.

What I need to also be clear is that we also do issue a number of other damage mitigation permits for species beyond flying foxes. In 2012-13 we issued 738 DMPs which covered multiple wildlife species other than flying fox. 235 of these were for lethal action to be taken to control 78 species. Two of these permits were also provided for non-lethal take. A further 503 permits were solely for non-lethal actions to be taken to control 54 species other than flying fox and all of these permits are issued to minimise the conflict of native animals on human health or wellbeing or to reduce economic impacts. I think, to give you some instance of the species that that would apply to,

kangaroos is a classic. In terms of lethal action, some of the species have been Torresian crows, the Australian white ibis, the rainbow lorikeet and the eastern grey kangaroo. An example of lethal permit approval is instances where mitigation against damage caused by kangaroos to grazing crop is required. Another example is where airports have to obtain permits against crows in order to prevent bird strikes on aeroplanes. The remaining 503 permits issued were for non-lethal actions on 54 species other than the flying fox, again to minimise the conflict of native animals on human habitat. Some of those species involved are common brushtail possums, the Australian brush turkey and Torresian crows. Another example of a non-lethal take is when a permit is issued to a wildlife re-locator employed to remove a possum from a roof in a residential house or, I believe, in a recent example even a 5.4 metre python in a Lifeline store in Ingham.

Mr COSTIGAN: It was St Vinnies, Minister.

Mr POWELL: One moment, Mr Chair, while I just make sure. It is all good.

CHAIR: While you are waiting for that information, is a Torresian crow our standard crow?

Mr POWELL: It is a crow.

Ms TRAD: While that is being clarified—

Mr POWELL: It is clarified, just to be clear.

Ms TRAD: The five withdrawals that you talked about, were they withdrawn by the applicants or by the department?

Mr POWELL: By the applicants. There were four refusals and five applicants withdrew.

Ms TRAD: But there are 10 currently in force; is that right?

Mr POWELL: That is correct.

Mr COX: Mr Chair, on a matter of clarification, can I ask the minister for a yes or no answer? Minister, you were talking before about the Callide mine releases that have been authorised under an EA into the Callide Dam since 2009, under the previous government. Minister, I thought you said that, remarkably, during the 2010-11 wet season more than 4,000 megalitres was released into the Callide Dam and that the previous government did not inform the council due to the high dilution factor. Can you confirm that, please.

Mr POWELL: Yes.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister and advisers. That brings our hearing to a close. I remind you of the time frames we have set for answers to questions taken on notice or if you want to provide any further clarifying information to assist our work. The deadline is 5 pm on Monday 22.

Mr POWELL: Mr Chair, if I can just take one moment, I specifically want to thank all of the team in the EHP. I start by thanking the committee for their questions. It has been a very productive session. I have enjoyed the ability to respond to the questions you have provided. I acknowledge the great team that I have around me: The DG Andrew Chesterman and my deputy directors-general Tony, Tamara, Dean and Danielle; the estimates team of David, Arnae and Ken, who is probably watching on TV at the moment; our corporate services staff Peter, Brad and Dale who do fantastic work around our finance and HR; the executive directors present Geoff Clare and Scott; and the DDG directed staff Lisa, Jenny, Michael; and my CLLO, Elise. From the office of the DG and the DDGs we have Steve, Benton, Michelle, Brad, Julie, Ang and Clair. I thank all of the authors of all of the work that has been done. I need to quickly clarify that the lethal DMPs for flying foxes are not necessarily still in force. Their periods of application may have lapsed.

CHAIR: Thank you. Thank you, everybody. Thank you, Hansard. Thank you to the people in the gallery, who made it even more interesting. Thank you, Rob, and the executive assistants.

Committee adjourned at 8.02 pm