

TUESDAY, 15 JULY 2014

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

Estimates Committee Members

Mr IP Rickuss (Chair)

Mr JN Costigan

Mr SV Cox

Mr S Knuth

Mrs MA Maddern

Mr MJ Trout

Mrs D Scott

In Attendance

Hon. AC Powell, Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection

Mr T Collings, Chief of Staff

Department of Environment and Heritage Protection

Mr J Black, Director-General


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

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

Ms T O'Shea, Deputy Director-General, Conservation and Sustainability Services

Mr P Philipson, Acting Assistant Director-General, Corporate Services

Committee met at 9.00 am

 **CHAIR:** I declare this meeting of the Agriculture, Resources and Environment Committee open. I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which these hearings are taking place. I am Ian Rickuss, chair of the committee. Joining me today is: Desley Scott, the member for Woodridge; 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.

We are here today to examine the proposed expenditure contained in Appropriation Bill 2014 for the Minister of Environment and Heritage Protection, the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines and the minister for agriculture, which will be happening later today. We will be examining the estimates in that order. The proceedings of today are lawful proceedings which are subject to the standing rules and orders of the parliament, and as such I remind all visitors that any person admitted to the hearing may be excluded under 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 also available here this morning. The hearing is being broadcast live via the Parliamentary Services website. We extend a warm welcome to anybody who is listening to these broadcasts. The committee has authorised the release of answers from the ministers to the prehearing questions. These will be available shortly on their websites.

The estimates process is an important part of parliament's scrutiny of the budget and the work of the departments. As laid out in the guidelines in schedule 8 at the back of the standing orders, we expect the departmental officers appearing today to provide full and honest answers to all of our questions. Anyone who is unable or unwilling to provide an answer should be prepared to state their reasons. I would also remind members that the 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 their mobile phones to 'silent'.

The first item for consideration is the estimates of the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection. Welcome, Minister Powell and your advisors. We will examine your portfolio until 12.30. For the benefit of Hansard, I ask advisors to please state your name before speaking if you are called to give an answer. Minister, the committee has granted leave for the honourable Annastacia Palaszczuk to participate in the hearings today.

I now declare the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Environment Heritage and Protection open for examination. The question before the committee is that the proposed expenditure be agreed to. Minister, would you care to make an opening statement?

Mr POWELL: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Yes, I would. I welcome you and your committee members and I also acknowledge the presence of Desley Scott, the member for Woodridge. It is lovely to have you here, Desley.

To assist the committee's hearings, I would like to introduce members of my staff and departmental representatives who are present today. To my right is Director-General Jon Black and to his right is Deputy Director-General Tamara O'Shea; to my left is my chief of staff Troy Collings, and to his left is Deputy Director-General Dean Ellwood. Also present are Deputy Director-General Tony Roberts and Peter Phillipson, acting Assistant Director-General, Corporate Services. Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to make this opening statement.

Over the past two years the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection has delivered a strong plan for a brighter future for the environment whilst supporting our four-pillar economy and increasing job opportunities. Mr Chairman, I am very proud of the efforts of my departmental staff in the environment and heritage portfolio. We have delivered a significant number of conservation and sustainability programs. We have implemented important regulatory reforms, cutting through red tape. We have implemented improved environmental management and processes, and we have conserved Queensland's built heritage.

My department's processes and policies are built on a solid platform of scientific facts, and as a result we are achieving positive outcomes. Our work with cane growers and graziers in the catchment areas of the Great Barrier Reef exemplifies the work of this government to protect the environment and support ongoing sustainable development. The Great Barrier Reef remains one of the best managed marine ecosystems in the world, and we are committed to ensuring that it is conserved to international standards for future generations.

Mr Chairman, it is a scientific fact that runoff into the Great Barrier Reef is a major contributor to crown-of-thorns starfish outbreaks. But there is good news: our efforts to improve water quality are starting to pay off. Over the past years we have worked closely with agricultural producers and major stakeholders to deliver robust research and put in place best management practice programs. These initiatives are providing the evidence and on-ground advice to landholders to help them implement better farming practices that will lead to improved economic outcomes and improved water quality in the Great Barrier Reef catchment areas.

In 2014-15 we will commit a further \$10 million for the Reef Water Quality Program to continue this very important work. Last month the World Heritage committee acknowledged the good work of both the state and federal governments while deferring a decision to list the Great Barrier Reef in danger during its meeting in Qatar. This decision was a win for logic and science rather than rhetoric and scaremongering and acknowledges that our plan to protect the Great Barrier Reef is producing positive results, creating a brighter future that Queenslanders and tourists from around the world can enjoy.

The government's ongoing conservation and sustainability efforts are significant, which is why almost half of VHP's total budget is dedicated to conservation programs. This funding will ensure that important initiatives such as our commitment to protecting more high value conservation lands and koala habitat continue to be delivered. This financial year we will invest \$26.7 million on our major land acquisition programs. We will also continue our funding for practical grassroots actions that contribute to local environmental improvements and built heritage conservation. For instance, over

the last few years we have approved 191 grants totalling \$7 million through our Everyone's Environment grants program. Mr Chairman, I am pleased to advise the committee that to date the program has supported 10,378 volunteers to plant over 94,000 native trees, weed, revegetate or rehabilitate 76,000 hectares of land—that is roughly the equivalent of 104,000 football fields, for those of you from North Queensland in particular—and remove a whopping 61,000 kilograms—or the equivalent of 870 wheelie bins—of rubbish and marine debris. This year we are putting a further \$5 million on the table to support those local grassroots projects that improve our environment and protect our heritage. These local grassroots actions have been further complemented with our commitment to revitalise our important front-line services, particularly for our wildlife officers, who are no longer stuck behind their desks but are out in the field protecting Queenslanders and protecting our wildlife.

We have also extended this philosophy to compliance. Over the past two years we have adopted an innovative outcomes based approach to environmental regulation. We have succeeded in cutting green tape without lowering environmental standards, while also delivering benefits that help Queensland businesses. In 2014-15 we will continue to reduce the administrative and regulatory burden on business and find further cost savings, while maintaining the important role of taking strong enforcement action when needed. For example, we will continue to implement our regulatory strategy, which has already made it easier to obtain environmental approvals and delivered outcome focused conditions, giving business the flexibility to design their operations in more cost-effective and innovative ways to ensure the environment is protected.

Further, as the committee will be aware, in April this year the Auditor-General released his report on the environmental regulation of the resources and waste industries. I am pleased to reiterate that the department had reached many of the same conclusions as the Auditor-General even before he began his audit and had already begun steps to address the major issues that he found. Reforms to the decades-old system of managing financial assurance for resource companies and a new IT system that will address many of our historic data management problems are well advanced and will begin to be implemented this financial year. Mr Chairman, the department accepted all of the Auditor-General's nine recommendations; three are already complete; two are anticipated to be completed by the end of this year, 2014; and the remaining four have commenced and are progressing as planned. With our completed and continuing reforms, Queensland will remain one of the most competitive states in Australia in which to do business and it will remain the nation's most biodiverse state. We are delivering what we have promised; we are going from strength to strength; and we do have a strong plan for a brighter future.

I thank you for the opportunity to make these opening statements, and I look forward to taking questions from the committee.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Minister. I might start with a couple of short questions. Can the minister please outline the election commitments that the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection will deliver in the coming financial year?

Mr POWELL: Thank you, Mr Chairman. It is probably a very fitting start to our proceedings today to talk about the election commitments that not only our government has put forward, but we in environment and heritage protection in particular have been responsible for delivering.

In all, VHP punched above its weight. We had 44 government election commitments to address: of those 44 we have already delivered 36; nine of them will be delivered in the 2013-14 financial year; six of the remaining eight commitments are scheduled to be delivered during 2014-15; and two during 2015-16, which will see us complete all of the 44 election commitments that we were tasked with. Of the six commitments that are scheduled to be delivered this year, as many of you will know we have been working with our waste generators and also the waste sector to come up with an industry driven waste reduction solution or waste strategy. It is intended that that will be delivered by 2014. A draft has been out for some time now. We have received a range of responses from the sector and from generators as well, and we have had very good feedback on that. What the government will be doing is putting that strategy out later this year and then, similar to the Queensland Plan, we will be putting out our government's response to that strategy.

Another election commitment that will be delivered this year is to replace the previous Labor government's controversial—and, as we have since discovered through the court system, flawed—wild rivers declarations on Cape York. The intent was always to do so to give locals on the cape greater control over their economic future whilst still protecting the environment. Replacement of the wild rivers declaration is now going to occur under the repeal of the Wild Rivers Act through the State

Development, Infrastructure and Planning (Red Tape Reduction) and Other Legislation Bill 2014 once the Cape York Regional Plan is completed by the Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning, and this is now expected to occur also in September of this year.

Which probably then leads me on to another election commitment which will be addressed through that same process and that is the development of the Cape York Bioregional Management Plan, as has just been raised. That has been subsumed into the work done by the Deputy Premier and his department in conjunction with my department around establishing a regional plan for the cape.

I mentioned in my opening statement the \$5 million going towards the \$12 million Everyone's Environment grant. That will see the conclusion of that election commitment, and it is probably worthy to point out that round 3 is currently open. Members, I would be encouraging you to be talking to the community groups, scouts, schools, conservation groups and wildlife carers in your part of the world about getting their applications in, which close in August. Do not forget also that that includes a heritage aspect as well.

Another one that we will be seeing completion of this year is the work that I mentioned around our best management practice programs. We have a great relationship, with Canegrowers and with AgForce kicking a lot of goals in that regard. They are anticipated to be delivered by June 2015, one for the cane, one for the grazing, and again I commend the work that the two organisations, AgForce and Canegrowers, have been doing in partnership with us.

There was also an election commitment to invest \$37.7 million for protected area state acquisitions and for the Nature Assist Program for nature refuges and that too will be delivered by June 2015. A number of properties have been secured under this commitment already, and a vast array of additional properties will be purchased or are in the process of being purchased as we speak.

As I said, that leaves two commitments that will go over into 2015-16, both of them around our koala program. That was a four-year program: firstly, \$22.5 million over four years to invest in koala habitat acquisition. We are particularly looking at habitat connectivity, and I perhaps might address some of that at a later stage during the committee's hearings today. But again a number of properties have been purchased. One has been announced, and approval was given in January of this year for the scope of the acquisition program to be extended outside of South-East Queensland local government areas. I know there are couple of members, the member for Maryborough in particular, who are very excited about that opportunity, and we are in discussions with her and a number of her constituents around that. The other one that will be finished in 2015-16 is our \$800,000 over four years for koala rescue and rehabilitation services. As you would know, we are putting money into wildlife rescue and rehab services, so that is to the hospitals as well as the koala care organisations and rescue organisations around South-East Queensland and the state. Two rounds have already been provided. An additional round will be provided this financial year and one more in 2015-16, but it is pretty exciting.

I know as a government we had something like 400 plus election commitments. In VHP we have been providing almost 10 per cent of those. As I said, 36 are ticked off, nine of them in the past 12 months and six in the coming 12 months too after that. Thank you very much, Mr Chairman.

CHAIR: You mentioned the Everyone's Environment grant program. Can you provide the committee with some achievements to date from that program? It is good to see these programs actually hitting the ground.

Mr POWELL: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to answer this question. It is a fantastic initiative. You would be very excited to know that whilst we allocated \$3 million for the first round and \$4 million for the second round, we have \$5 million available this year. It has been quite sensible to step it up as we have gone along. I think people were trying to get their heads around what the grants were ideally for. We are pushing to try to get the next generation involved—scout groups, P&Cs and therefore schools.

What we saw in the first round were some very successful grant recipients. The second round was the same again—albeit there was a bit of a shortfall which gave us the opportunity to expand into the heritage sector. It is the first time that the heritage sector has received funding for these kinds of conservation interpretation projects in at least half a decade, if not longer. They were very well received. We have kept them in for the third round. As I said, we have bumped it up to \$5 million.

There are a couple of things to note. This year it will again focus on the usual things—weeding, revegetation, pest animal control and community education. We are actually expanding in a couple of

areas this year, such as into research activities. We are really keen to see some citizen science work—perhaps a community group working with a university or the likes of Healthy Waterways to develop some programs in terms of water quality. Similarly, some research around threatened species might be the way to go.

We are looking for things such as urban wild spaces pilot projects. For those of us in South-East Queensland, how do we protect green corridors, green space within our cities and how, in particular, can we ensure we keep the species in those green corridors and green spaces?

As I mentioned in my opening statement, we have provided between \$2,000 and \$100,000 to 191 projects for a range of activities—community clean-up, pest control, weed eradication, erosion control, tree planting, as well as the heritage aspects that I spoke about. There were 74 successful applicants in round 1. In round 2 there was allocated funding to another 83 projects. That amounted to \$6.4 million all up. In addition, the heritage phase that I was talking about saw allocations totalling \$600,000. There were 34 projects involved in that.

Some of the statistics that you have heard me mention before are that nearly 10,500 volunteers are involved. That is extraordinary. That is exactly what we intended with the program. It is about getting people out of their houses into their backyards and community spaces to get involved in the environment. It is certainly how as a kid I got involved in the environment. I spent time out in it. That is why I am so passionate about it as an adult.

Some 95,000 native trees and plants have been planted on 76,000 hectares of land. We base that figure, just so you know member for Whitsunday, on a rugby league field. Some 104,000 rugby league fields have been rehabilitated, weeded and, in some cases, revegetated. As I said, 870 wheelie bins of litter and marine debris has been collected. Unfortunately, there is still too much out there. We need to do a lot more work there. We have attacked a lot of pest animals and seen several thousand pests removed from the environment as well.

You mentioned, Mr Chair, that you would like to hear a couple of examples. The member for Burnett would be pleased to know that in his part of the world \$7,720 is helping to reduce light pollution from street lights nearby the Mon Repos turtle rookery. A lot of science has gone into determining that often when hatched turtles seek the horizon and it can be obscured a bit by lighting, particularly from the Bagara area which has grown over recent years. That has been going towards that.

I mentioned marine debris. Eco Barge Clean Seas Inc. received \$512,115 for a marine litter clean-up. They have removed more than 7,600 pieces of rubbish weighting more than 1,200 kilograms. That has been removed from hot spots in the Whitsundays as part of six clean-up trips. A further 18 trips are planned before the completion of the project. We actually caught up with Libby.

Mr COSTIGAN: The great Libby.

Mr POWELL: She was very passionate and very excited. It is a great initiative. International backpackers and tourists as well as the local community go out with Libby and clean up around the Whitsunday area.

The Austinville Landcare Group undertook weed eradication and planted 2,100 trees as part of their allocation of \$35,900 to restore nine hectares of riparian vegetation. Up in my part of the world, Maroochy Waterwatch received \$100,000 to remove more than 35 wheelie bins of litter from the Maroochy and Mooloolah rivers. The project included litter and weed removal, water testing and mangrove monitoring. About 50 wheelie bins of litter have been removed and more than 600 trees planted by the Brisbane Catchments Network along the Brisbane River's lower mangroves at Murarrie. That is B4C in the member for Bulimba's electorate.

CHAIR: They have been on the ground type projects?

Mr POWELL: Very tangible. They are getting people out in their backyards and in their communities. Mr Chair, if you can give me a couple moments more I will talk about round 1 grants and then also some heritage grants because I think there are some really exciting things there.

The Keppel Islands Conservation Community received \$15,000 to undertake marine debris removal activities and clean up five beaches in the area. The Australian Trust for Conservation Volunteers received \$100,000 to do weeding and revegetation. I actually got to join these guys down in my part of the world at Montville where they are cleaning up some of the rainforest there and planting Richmond birdwing butterfly vine and species that will attract other threatened species such as the Richmond birdwing butterfly.

The Australian Macadamia Society received \$36,150 for a biocontrol project and has to date released a total of 4,195 biocontrol infected cat's claw creeper and madeira vine. They are tackling some of those weed species.

In terms of heritage, \$40,000 went to the restumping of Kalbar's historic Wiss House to ensure the house remains safe so it can be open to the public. I think that is in the member for Beaudesert's electorate.

CHAIR: Right beside my area.

Mr POWELL: Nearly \$19,000 went to the Qantas Founders Museum out at Longreach. Some \$40,000 will improve community access to the site of the 1899 Cape Melville pearling disaster north of Cooktown, in the member for the Cook's area.

As you mentioned, these are tangible projects out on the ground. They are making a very practical difference to the environment but also generating another generation of environmental campaigners, people who are passionate about conserving the environment in a very practical and real way.

Mrs MADDERN: It is a little bit north of my area, but can you explain how the Gladstone healthy harbour partnership is ensuring open, transparent and accountable management of the Gladstone harbour?

Mr POWELL: I certainly can. It is a little bit north of your part of the world, but again I thank you for your interest in it, member for Maryborough. This is one of our real achievements in this term of government. As people know, Gladstone harbour attracted a lot of media interest and has been ongoing. I guess for the first time in a long time the community is coming along with the industry in terms of what is going on in the harbour. Most importantly, we are starting to get scientific facts and figures out to the community in a way that they will understand and appreciate.

I think I have mentioned previously at these committee hearings that the model is based on the Healthy Waterways model—the ecosystem report card here in South-East Queensland. A consortium of partners got together and undertook consistent, combined, coordinated monitoring of the waterways, whether that be the freshwater systems, the marine ecosystems, the mangroves or out in the bays. From that, they have been able to focus their attention on where repair work needs to be done and which systems need most attention. I am assuming that that will probably get asked a bit later on in terms of what we are doing in South-East Queensland.

We took that same model and we applied it to Gladstone. It is important to note that this is a partnership. This is not the government doing everything. In fact, we only put on the table \$1 million for establishment costs and then \$1.5 million in membership fees to be part of that ongoing membership. We will put another \$1½ million in in 2014-15, as our membership contribution. But it is important to note that 23 other organisations across the community, industry, government and research are matching that. They are making it a \$3 million contribution all up each and every year.

In terms of where we are at, strong progress has been made in designing the report card. A mock-up was presented to all our partners last month. The 2004 pilot report card is on track to be released by the end of this year. As mentioned, it is about presenting to the community, in an easy to understand way, all of the existing information on assessing the harbour's health. It will be used to consult with the Gladstone community about their thoughts on how effective it is at reporting the community's vision for the healthy harbour.

One slight difference from the SEQ report card is that we have really sought to capture what the community wants for that harbour. Clearly it is an industrial harbour. As I know, having a sister-in-law and her husband and a couple of nephews living up in that part of the world, it is very much their recreational backyard as well. A lot of fishing goes on. A lot of recreational boating goes on. We are trying to capture all of those uses for the harbour.

The feedback we get from the community will then go into informing the first full report card in 2015. That will include further information across environmental, social, cultural and economic indicators. Again, there is a slight difference to the ecosystem report card down here. We are trying to capture the cultural, social and economic as well as the environmental indicators.

This is one of a series of report cards. Members may know that we now have the one in South-East Queensland, we are developing the one around Gladstone, there is one already in the Fitzroy Basin and we are exploring opportunities to extend it further up the coast, in partnership with the reef report card that covers the reef catchment overall. Watch this space, particularly member for Whitsunday and member for Thuringowa. There could be a report card coming your way very shortly.

There have been some initial discussions with the councils in and around Mackay, Whitsunday, Townsville and with the North Queensland bulk ports about potentially doing one for that part of the world.

Mr COSTIGAN: Minister, you would appreciate that in Airlie Beach we like to consider ourselves the heart of the reef. I would like you to provide an update to the committee and reveal the total cost of the government's Reef Facts campaign?

Mr POWELL: Member for Whitsunday, you are always passionate about your part of the world. It is the centre of everything, is it not? It is not just the reef; it is universe.

Mr TROUT: Islands and tourism. It is the heart of the Great Barrier Reef.

Mr COSTIGAN: You should know, Minister, that we have it all.

Mr POWELL: I thank you for your passion for the reef. You mention the Reef Facts campaign. It is unfortunate that, as a government, we have had to invest in a campaign to make sure that Queenslanders and the world are aware of what is really going on in the reef. There is an incredible amount of misinformation—and, dare I say, out and out lies—when it comes to what is going on on the reef and what we as a government, alongside the federal government, are doing to protect the reef.

Many committee members would know that Reef Facts is based on scientific evidence. A lot of that is drawn from reports by the Australian Institute of Marine Science. The member for Thuringowa, in particular, is a strong advocate of John Gunn and his team up there at AIMS. They do a great lot of work.

What we have done is put together some factual information on the reef to ensure that Queenslanders, Australians and the international community can access that and really run what they are seeing and hearing on social media and through the mainstream media through that lens of scientific fact to get the real picture on the reef and what we are doing.

In terms of costs, \$310,000 in total was spent last financial year on the Reef Facts campaign. That included the preparation of online, written publications as well as advertising on TV and radio. We will continue to fund that program into this coming year. Whilst an allocation of about \$700,000 is there, it will really be a case of making sure we use taxpayers' dollars effectively in getting that message out.

We will no doubt talk a bit later on, I imagine, about the work that the World Heritage Committee and UNESCO are doing in terms of monitoring what we are doing on the reef. I think it is equally important that we inform those organisations and their member delegates in particular about the facts on the reef. Again, having recently returned from Doha in Qatar for the World Heritage Committee meeting I am alarmed at the number of decisions that are potentially being made based on lies and misinformation. They are very emotive campaigns rather than based on factual and scientific evidence.

You would think that an organisation like the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation is making decisions based on science. We will continue our work around that as we will continue our work around our reef water quality program, our best management programs, our Queensland's ports strategy, and our sensible approval decisions as we did with the Abbot Point. You know very well that people in that part of world really want to see that project go ahead. They do not want to see it have detrimental impacts on the reef.

We believe that a 3 million cubic metre project over three years as opposed to a 38 million cubic metre project over a shorter time frame is a far more environmentally sustainable approach, one with very strict conditions that ensures that dredging only occurs during a certain window of the year that is monitored by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority itself, all of which is designed to give confidence to Queenslanders and to the international community, particularly UNESCO, that we have our finger on the pulse of the reef, we know where we need to focus our attention, and we are very conscious of that. I will just conclude by saying, member for Whitsunday, my concern in all of this and why we have gone down the path of Reef Facts is that if we continue to believe the hype and hyperbole of some of the groups around the world at the moment, what we will end up doing is taking our eye off the ball when it comes to the real concerns for the reef and they are crown of thorns starfish fed by the sediment coming down from the catchments. We believe there is a way to solve that and what we have seen in our recent report cards, and the member for Dalrymple will be pleased to see it as well, is a reduction in those sediments and in that nitrogen. How have we achieved that? Through the Reef Rescue Package under Howard, working with our farmers through extension and

incentive and, more recently, through our best management practice programs where we are getting alongside our graziers and our canegrowers and encouraging them to take up practices that produce an economic win but also an environmental win as well.

CHAIR: Mr Trout, do you want to ask a question?

Mr TROUT: Thanks, Mr Chairman. As Cairns is the gateway to the Great Barrier Reef, would the minister please outline some of the success of the best management practice programs for the Great Barrier Reef and if these plans will also be extended into other areas like horticultural industries?

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for the question. I guess it follows on neatly from what we were just discussing. As I said, we have had a fantastic working relationship with both Canegrowers and AgForce in getting our best management practice programs up and running across the state. They have been rolled out during 2013 and 2014. If I focus on the grazing one initially, that is through a partnership with AgForce. I neglected to mention previously that a significant player in that, as it is a significant player in the Gladstone Healthy Harbour Partnership, is the Fitzroy Basin Association. Can I put on the record my praise and thanks to Paul Birch, their CEO, who does a fantastic job in driving both. He has actually been the chair of the Gladstone Healthy Harbour Partnership for the last 12-18 months I think it is and has been instrumental in the development of the BMP project for grazing as well. It is currently being delivered in the Burdekin and Fitzroy catchments. The member for Dalrymple would know that area very well. They developed five self-assessment modules. It is designed to create a holistic approach to managing the grazing enterprise. It does include things like environmental stewardship, ethical animal management and sustainable production and business practices. The concept is that it is not just an environmental program, it is a whole of business program and that is why it is producing great results for the farmers in terms of economic outcomes but also good results for the environment.

Development of the grazing module has been also led by DAFF, because we acknowledge that they have the best extension officers in the game. They are the ones who get out and talk to these graziers all the time. Whilst we are putting the funding in, it is DAFF that is working alongside AgForce and the Fitzroy Basin Association to work with the graziers on the ground. Those modules have been extensively reviewed by industry experts and practitioners as well as scientists involved in things like the Reef Plan Independent Science Panel and they have ensured that the content and standards are relevant and practical for on-ground application across those catchments.

The graziers can undertake the BMP self-assessment process through workshops, with one-on-one assistance or by directly accessing the BMP grazing website and completing the initial benchmarking exercise online. We are very conscious that not all graziers will have access to online facilities so we do offer workshops and one-on-one opportunities with extension officers as well.

Fantastically, to date 573 grazing enterprises are registered on the Grazing BMP program, with more than 1,600 modules delivered to date. One hundred and twenty-two graziers from the Burdekin and 37 graziers from the Fitzroy catchment have completed all modules. Member for Dalrymple, can you please pass on my sincere thanks and congratulations to those graziers in your part of the world. A lot of staunch opponents to the former model around the ERMP are now some of our best advocates for the BMP work up in that part of the world and they are firing on all cylinders and really starting to produce results in terms of economic benefit. I know it is a really tough time for them. Please let me also put that on the record.

Mr KNUTH: Where does the ERMP stand now, Minister?

Mr POWELL: Can I take that on notice and come back to it in a little bit? I will tick off on this one that the member for Barron River spoke about and then answer that one. The take up has really demonstrated the grazing industry's commitment to this. That is really fantastic. If I turn to cane, Smart Cane BMP was developed by the Canegrowers organisation. It is currently being delivered across all cane growing areas in Queensland. Whilst it is specifically targeting the priority reef catchments, it is going across the whole of the state, even down to part of the member for Maryborough's area.

CHAIR: Beenleigh?

Mr POWELL: And can be applied also in Beenleigh. As I said, it is about a win-win for the environment.

CHAIR: They are all on the coast?

Mr POWELL: Ultimately all along the coast. Ultimately the practices will produce good outcomes for the farmer as well as for the environment. Again, like the grazing one, there are multiple modules. In this case there are seven. They cover the whole farming system, things like workplace health and safety, business management, crop reduction and harvesting as well as those relevant to improving reef water quality such as nutrient and herbicide management, irrigation and drainage and natural systems management. Again they were reviewed by science and given the big tick because ultimately we need them to drive down discharge, particularly of nitrogen, into those crown of thorns starfish outbreak areas. We were very conscious that it needed to do that. As of today, 518 enterprises have registered in the Smart Cane BMP program and with support from EHP and DAFF, industry facilitators are currently rolling out workshops and assisting growers to complete self-assessment on the Smart Cane module.

So far 237 growers in the Wet Tropics, Burdekin and Mackay Whitsunday catchments have completed the nutrient, herbicide and irrigation and drainage modules. As I said, they are the modules most critical to reef health. You asked, member for Barron River, did we have plans to extend it. We do. Already we are working with the horticultural industries in the Wet Tropics area. Whilst they contribute less than six per cent of man's influence on dissolved inorganic nitrogen on the Great Barrier Reef, behind sugarcane and grazing they are the next largest. So particularly our banana farmers up in Crippsy land—sorry, Hinchinbrook land.

CHAIR: Tully?

Mr POWELL: Tully and all those places. We are now working with the Australian Banana Growers' Council in partnership with DAFF and we have started to have conversations also with Growcom, the peak representative body for Queensland horticulture currently administering farm management system program design, to identify opportunities for practice improvement. So there is potential that will take it further afield. Mr Chairman, if you like I am happy to now address the member for Dalrymple.

CHAIR: I will throw to Shane. Shane, do you want to ask a question?

Mr KNUTH: I do not want to lose a question.

CHAIR: You have plenty of time.

Mr KNUTH: Obviously with the best management practices and the ERMPs, I am wanting a bit of an understanding of where that sits. Obviously there was a big stick approach with the ERMPs. What you were saying before with best management practice, that seems to be flowing on quite well. Where do the ERMPs fit into this now?

Mr POWELL: The short way of answering that, member for Dalrymple, is that the ERMPs are on ice. We have not applied them. We have not followed through in terms of the compliance effort because we have wanted our focus to be on encouraging graziers and canegrowers in particular to take up the voluntary BMP program. We did not think having a big stick waving around whilst we were offering a carrot in terms of BMP and incentives and extension work would work. We did put them on ice on the basis that we wanted to see how effectively the BMP take up was going. It is going well. I can share with you that I have actually been approached by a couple of the organisations involved to sort of say at the end of the day there may still be one or two farmers, graziers, who do not want to do the right thing naturally, do not want to look at ways of improving their economic return or their production and so we may need a stick approach. Now, I am not in that space at the moment so I have sent them away to say well what would that look like, how would we do it. My focus is on working with graziers and canegrowers. My focus is offering them, through DAFF and AgForce or Canegrowers, the BMP program, offering them, through the Reef Trust funding, which again we can discuss in length, extension and incentive opportunities to improve their practice and get better economic outcomes. So at this stage no action is being taken under the ERMP program. It is open for further discussion.

Mr KNUTH: Minister, do you feel and see that those who do not want to participate are more or less rogues? Are they rogues or is it that they have been around a long time and they understand management and no-one is going to tell them any different?

Mr POWELL: Member for Dalrymple, you are probably better placed to work out what the motives of those kinds of individuals are. Suffice it to say that there is always a group in any industry that do not want to adopt an industry-driven practice, whether it be waste or any industry whatsoever. Our opportunity is to work with the industries involved, so in this case AgForce and Canegrowers, to try to encourage the take up; demonstrate that by getting the industry leaders on board first, and

excitingly we have industry leaders who both jumped on board the ERMP program but more importantly were against the ERMP program are now key advocates for the BMP. If we could back that up through incentive work by showing that they get on-farm benefits, not only through the works that they are undertaking but through investment by the government and the federal government, that may bring on board a few more that we need to get. But that is why I am sort of in a wait and see approach as to whether we do need a stick approach. I am hoping we do not, but I would encourage you to be working with your graziers to take on board the BMP aspects.

Mr KNUTH: I do have to admit, Minister, that the BMPs have been more reasonable than what was presented in the past, absolutely.

Mr POWELL: I think the difference, member for Dalrymple, through you, Mr Chair, is that they are industry driven. This is not government wielding a big stick, this is government working with industry to get the right outcomes.

Mr KNUTH: Minister, my question is in regard to the Environment and Heritage Protection budget measures and service performance. Has there been any environmental assessment initiated on the impact the redevelopment of Ben Lomond mine will have on rivers such as the Burdekin, creeks, landowners and the town water supply, particularly around the Charters Towers area?

Mr POWELL: Through you, Mr Chair, I thank the member for Dalrymple for the question. I can appreciate that this is a very sensitive one for him and for his community and for the communities in and around Townsville in particular. You may recall that the government took an approach probably almost two years ago, about 18 months ago, to review our standards, our approvals processes, our processes, with regards to uranium mining in this state. We lifted the moratorium on uranium mining but in the ensuing period we wanted to make sure that we had rigorous standards, not just in my portfolio but across the board, particularly in terms of workplace health and safety and transport. There was a lot of discussion around ports and movement by either truck or train of the products from uranium mining. What I can reassure you is that already at Ben Lomond the environmental authority does require a level of care and maintenance and it does allow for exploration only. It does not allow at this stage for mining or processing of ore and I can reassure residents that there is no tailings dam on site either. We are in a care and maintenance phase at Ben Lomond. That means that the company with the EA must maintain a level of safety and environmental protection. As you would be aware, across your electorate there are a number of mines, regardless of whether they are uranium, that are on that same basis. What we would need to look at if it was to proceed is a new environmental authority—if they were to go into production—and that is what we have been looking at over the last 12 months to make sure that we have the processes and systems in place. What I am pleased to report is that environmentally we have those. From an environmental perspective, the practices required of a uranium mine are not that much different from nickel, tin, zinc, gold, silver, coal, iron—any of those properties. We do require the same outcomes: protection of the surrounding water quality, protection of the surrounding air quality, noise standards, vegetation standards and offsets, if necessary, in terms of the biodiversity in the area. So, we have a very rigorous environmental system that will allow us to assess each of these projects on their merit should they proceed, but in the meantime we will hold those companies to account around their environmental authorities in terms of care and maintenance to ensure that there are no negative impacts on the environment or, indeed, the population in and around those existing sites.

Mr KNUTH: Just to make you aware, too, that this development has already been declared unsafe and a threat to the public health by the previous state mining court.

Mr POWELL: Which is why I understand it is in care and maintenance, member for Dalrymple. I stress again, care and maintenance\exploration do not equal production. The EA that they have is not about production. They cannot produce any uranium from that site unless they come back and go through a rigorous environmental assessment.

Mr KNUTH: Thank you, Minister.

CHAIR: Any more questions, Shane?

Mr KNUTH: I have just one more question, Minister. In regards to the flying foxes in Charters Towers, I have spoken to you about this before. There are still about 20-something thousand bats. The Charters Towers Regional Council did move those bats using helicopters. There was a breach, but one of the concerns of the helicopter pilots is that it is very difficult. They would much rather be out there mustering cattle than mustering bats, especially while they are being continually filmed by, you could probably say, radicals. Everyone knows the impact those flying foxes have, particularly on families and the environment. We are in on-hold mode as a result of trying to get a permit from CASA,

but it looks like that will not eventuate. You have indicated in the past that there are alternatives, that if certain measures do fail there is the probability of looking at culling the flying foxes. I have pushed for the culling of flying foxes going back for 12 years. Had that been initiated 12 years ago with the flying foxes, we would never have this problem. We would never have this stress and we would not hear about the flying foxes in Charters Towers. Is that something that the minister can look at and communicate on with the council? What have you in place to look at these alternatives?

CHAIR: That is a very broad question, Shane.

Mr POWELL: I am happy to address it. I understand in the SDS somewhere there is a topic on flying foxes, because we have spoken about what we have done in terms of the framework to date. I will endeavour to try to address the member's question as accurately as I can, bearing in mind that some of what he raises is outside my jurisdiction, the issues around CASA, in particular. Mayor Frank Beveridge, up there in Charters Towers, is very conscious of that. He knows that, whilst we have done what we can to facilitate that extension of the damage mitigation permit, ultimately he does need to get approvals. Certainly if there are concerns being raised by the helicopter pilots, I would be conveying those to the mayor as well to ensure that he can take that on board.

What I can tell you, member for Dalrymple, through you, Mr Chair, is that our election commitment of making it easier and simpler for councils to take action, ideally before problem colonies establish but certainly if colonies have established, has proven incredibly successful; incredibly successful. In essence, we have allowed councils to make their own decisions on whether to disperse, remove or otherwise manage flying fox roosts in what are called designated urban flying fox management areas. They can do that without having to apply to my department for a permit. The as-of-right management activities are limited to non-lethal methods and they must be undertaken in accordance with a code of practice.

I can say that in 2012-13 we approved 24 damage mitigation permits for councils and private parties to conduct flying fox roost management actions. From 1 July 2013 to 29 November 2013, we issued another 14 DMPs for non-lethal actions. Following the introduction of the new framework late last year, we have issued only nine flying fox roost management permits, because there has been 34 actions taken by councils under the new as-of-right approval system. In that instance, they have to simply notify the department that they are doing something under their as-of-right approval. In that instance, there have been 15 local governments across 23 roosts. If the activities are above and beyond what the framework allows, as was the case with Charters Towers, we have a conversation around what the damage mitigation permit looks like.

In that instance we worked very closely with Charters Towers Regional Council to get what I think is a good outcome and I acknowledge there is still a level of a colony around. In the case of Charters Towers, that dispersal used helicopters, it used paintball guns and it used high-pressure water hoses. It did attract the attention, as you mentioned, of not only the media, which we know has a particular interest in your part of the world around flying foxes, but also conservationists. Although there were claims on social media that some flying fox deaths had occurred, no evidence has been provided to EHP. Again, I would be encouraging anyone out there who has those concerns if they can produce the evidence we will investigate it, but that certainly was not the case and the EHP officers on-site did not identify any breaches of the code of practice as it pertains to us; as it pertains to EHP. I stress that again.

You mentioned an alleged breach of conditions of a low-flying helicopter that CASA had issued for the dispersal. I believe action was taken, but due to privacy matters they have not disclosed that to my department so I cannot tell you in terms of what action was taken. You asked would we go further. When we put this framework in place, it was raised with me by a number of councils that they wanted a last-resort option, similar to what farmers require. I have had extensive conversations with councils over the past 12 months following the implementation of this framework and the resounding response is, 'We don't need that at this stage'. The new framework is working. No-one has come to me and suggested that we are at our last resort yet. Again, if your mayor has some concerns, I am happy to sit down and have a conversation with him around what more we can do, but that is the first I have heard that anyone is even anywhere close to being frustrated by the new system and most are incredibly happy with it, so at this stage there is no intent to go any further, but conversations can continue.

Mr KNUTH: Thanks, Minister.

CHAIR: I have a follow-up on that. I have looked at it historically, Minister. The lethal action does not appear to work anyway, does it? They used to shoot them out of the Botanical Gardens across the road here.

Mr POWELL: Were you around back then?

CHAIR: No, but I have looked it up.

Mr COSTIGAN: They had trams in Brisbane back then.

Mr POWELL: I probably do need to correct one part of the member for Dalrymple's language. You talk about culling. It is proven that a lethal means such as this is not, in essence, a cull; it is a dispersal by lethal means, because all that will happen is that the flying foxes will shift. It just becomes similar to water hoses or paintballs in that regard, as after a couple are killed the rest move on. It is not a cull; it is a dispersal. As I stress, the current system appears to be working and I have no intention of going down that path at this stage.

Mr KNUTH: It is not working in Charters Towers, then that is—

Mr POWELL: Again, that has not been raised with me by the mayor.

Mr KNUTH: It can be there for discussion?

Mr POWELL: As I have said, if a number of councils want to approach me and say they are at their wit's end because they have tried everything under the existing system, I am happy to have that conversation, but as of yet no-one has had that, including Charters Towers.

CHAIR: Twenty-thousand would only be a small number, anyway. Desley?

Mrs SCOTT: Thank you, Mr Chair. Minister, what is the whole-of-government annual spend on the Great Barrier Reef programs, first of all for this financial year and then over five years of the reef water quality program 2013?

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for the question, Mr Chair, and I welcome you to the AREC committee. It is lovely to have your presence here today.

Mrs SCOTT: Thank you.

Mr POWELL: The answer to that is that each and every year the state government expends \$35 million on the reef. Of that, \$10 million this year is being spent on reef water quality work. The reef water quality work over five years will be \$55 million, so a bit more than the average of 10 a year. Can I put that in context: whilst we as a state government put in about \$35 million, we have worked out that the federal government contribution, including through reef trusts through the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and the Australian Institute of Marine Science—so this is exclusive of any work being done by, say, research facilities or the likes—we are contributing almost \$180 million a year to the Great Barrier Reef. It was something that we impressed upon delegates at UNESCO, at the World Heritage committee meeting in Doha in Qatar, that you would be hard pressed to find a World Heritage site with that kind of investment, with the rigour around the scientific reporting, with the ongoing financial commitment and certainly the political commitment to ensure that the reef remains the wonderful reef that it is. I often say that I want my five kids to be out enjoying—perhaps not the Whitsundays, but enjoying the reef from Airlie or wherever it might be. I actually want it to be improved on what it is today. We are starting to see signs that that will be achieved, particularly through that investment in reef water quality. Through that investment and working with the farmers, we have reached a pivotal point where we are starting to see trends heading back up in the right direction. We have addressed the decline and are starting potentially to see restoration on the reef, which will be really exciting.

Mrs SCOTT: Just to be clear, the total whole-of-government spend is around \$180 million?

Mr POWELL: The total whole-of-government, state and federal, is roughly \$180 million, and that includes the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and the Australian Institute of Marine Science. That is the base funding for both of those two organisations. From the state government perspective, it is \$35 million.

Mrs SCOTT: I understand that during the previous reef plan 2009, it was \$175 million. There does not seem to be a great deal of improved finance into such an important area.

Mr POWELL: The suggestion is that we have not increased it from 175; we are at only about 180. The reality is that we are able to do more with less these days. We have demonstrated, through my opening statement, we are talking about a leaner and meaner Environment and Heritage Protection department. We started off with 1,500 staff; we are down around 1,000 now. We are doing

things better than we have ever done because of the hard work and effort of my officers, who I again commend. Any suggestion that \$180 million is not enough to ensure that we understand what is impacting on the reef, doing the work to address those impacts, I reject that premise outright. As I said, you would be hard pressed to find a site, albeit one that is the size of Italy or Japan, that is better managed, better funded and better reported than the Great Barrier Reef.

Mrs SCOTT: Thank you, Minister. Turning to non-government question on notice No. 1, in which you refuse to provide 2012-13 funding figures on reef programs, I direct you to the answers provided by the Premier, the Deputy Premier and the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines to similar questions. Why do you apply a different and weaker standard for yourself than those other ministers?

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for the question. One of the reasons that I chose not to provide that information to you is that I provided it to you previously, in previous estimates hearings. It is there on the record. It is there in response to questions asked, either on notice or at the hearing. It is quite evident. We are not hiding anything. In fact, the reality is that, if I recall correctly from the previous year to this year, we have gone up in terms of funding. Our allocations are consistent across most of the board. Correct me if I am wrong please, team, but I think it was about \$14.17 million in 2012-13 and \$14.23 million in 2013-14. Again, increased across-the-board, increased focus on all of those projects and we will continue to do so.

Mrs SCOTT: So again referring to non-government question on notice No. 1, there was a \$400,000 allocation to the Great Barrier Reef strategic assessment. Can you confirm that this is specific to the strategic assessment of the coastal zone and not the assessment of the marine park being led by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority?

Mr POWELL: That is correct.

Mrs SCOTT: So it is for the coastal zone?

Mr POWELL: That is correct. The Queensland government has had responsibility for the coastal zone component of the strategic assessment. The federal government, through the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority in particular, has been responsible for the marine element. So our focus has been on the coastal zone in partnership with the Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning and the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, and that money has gone towards the development of that strategic assessment.

Mrs SCOTT: What is the specific allocation within your department on research programs into the long-term sustainability of the reef?

Mr POWELL: The specific research component into the long-term sustainability of the reef?

Mrs SCOTT: Yes.

Mr POWELL: I will take that on notice and try to provide that information to you before the end of today's hearing. What I would say is that again our contribution to research would be one part of the overall contribution to research. As I mentioned, of the \$180 million roughly, a significant component goes to the Australian Institute of Marine Science based up there south of Townsville. There would also be a research component in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. We contribute to the reef report card, as does the federal government. So that would be where a lot of our research is focused. But we will endeavour to get you that information, member for Woodridge, before the conclusion of the hearing.

Mrs SCOTT: You have mentioned already the crown of thorns starfish. What specific allocation within the department is focused towards the eradication programs?

Mr POWELL: Which eradication programs?

Mrs SCOTT: For the crown of thorns.

Mr POWELL: That is actually provided for in the Minister for National Parks, Recreation, Sport and Racing's portfolio because it is within the marine park zone. Member for Woodridge, we just need to seek a bit of clarification on the research program.

Mrs SCOTT: That is fine.

Mr Black: Just to clarify, the question was specifically research in terms of the long-term sustainability plan, or is it general investment in the long-term sustainability plan?

Mr POWELL: In the long-term sustainable nature of the reef.

Mrs SCOTT: Of the reef. We hear a lot about degradation within the reef and so on. There would be a lot of research being done currently on that.

Mr Black: Could we be general about the actual investment in science? I think we could probably get the number around science.

Mrs SCOTT: Indeed.

Mr POWELL: Member for Woodridge, we will endeavour to have that back to you before the end of today.

Mrs SCOTT: Can I keep going?

CHAIR: One more.

Mrs SCOTT: Minister, have you had any discussions with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority or the Australian Institute of Marine Science on what cutbacks they may be making after the Abbott government reduced their funding by \$2.8 million and \$7.8 million respectively?

Mr POWELL: Mr Chair, I would actually suggest that that is a question for the federal estimates hearings, not the state estimates hearings.

Mrs SCOTT: It will impact here though, won't it?

Mr POWELL: Again, Mr Chair, questions about funding to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and the Australian Institute of Marine Science and as to how they allocate it should be directed to the federal Minister for the Environment. What I am happy to report on, member for Woodridge, is that I have regular conversations with particularly Russell Reichelt, the CEO of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, and with John Gunn, the CEO of the Australian Institute of Marine Science, about how we can work together to get the best outcome for the reef. Russell Reichelt joined the delegation to Doha for the World Heritage Committee as one of the technical experts and did an outstanding job in explaining what it is we do on the reef and particularly how the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority undertake their work in terms of assessment such as the one at Abbot Point. They do a fantastic job. They do an extraordinarily good job.

What I would draw the member's attention to though is the \$40 million investment that the federal government has made into the Reef Trust, an investment that will help us fund research whether it be delivered by GBRMPA or AIMS or private providers or landholders themselves, not only research but actual tangible on-the-ground actions that are going to continue to help us on that upswing in terms of reducing sediment, reducing dissolved inorganic nitrogen and therefore improving the quality of the reef. But in terms of the actual detail of your question, I suggest that you seek a federal member of the parliament to ask that of the federal environment minister.

CHAIR: Do you have a supplementary question?

Mr COX: Just a quick one. I have a supplementary question to the member for Woodridge's questioning regarding possible staff changes or budgets not being up to where they were under the previous government. I just point out that you said the department's two primary objectives are balancing economic growth with environmental protection and a responsive, respected and effective Public Service. Would I be right in saying it is more results driven than money driven in terms of what your department is trying to achieve?

Mr POWELL: Very much so. Thank you, member for Thuringowa. That applies to the conservation side of my department, as it would to the federal minister's department, as it does to the regulatory side of our department. It is about being customer focused. In the case of the regulatory side, that is our industry partners who we approve and then monitor and do compliance and enforcement. In terms of conservation, our customers are the biodiversity of species in Queensland and future generations. Therefore, we take a very serious approach to ensuring that things like the reef are managed well with the resources that we have—in our case, focused resources that produce the best results. Again, I stress the work we are doing with AgForce, Canegrowers and the Fitzroy Basin Association about getting the right outcome for our agricultural producers but also for the environment.

Mr TROUT: Minister, will you please outline what the Reef Trust is aiming to achieve and the contribution by this government?

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for Barron River. I guess that flows on from the preceding question from the member for Woodridge. The Reef Trust is an innovative new funding initiative which is going to consolidate our investments in the Great Barrier Reef and its catchments and really look to disburse funds strategically. So this is about using the funds we have to maximise the outcomes that

improve the health and resilience of the reef. So instead of having little bits of funding here there and everywhere going in different directions—yes, all well intentioned—this is about putting them all in one place and strategically using them to maximise the outcomes that improve the health and resilience of the reef. It builds on but does not duplicate existing programs of both the Australian and Queensland governments.

Initially the Australian government invested \$40 million, but funds for this pool will continue to be provided from both levels of government, particularly when it comes to offset funding for major projects. By pooling the investment and applying these funds more strategically based on that scientific information we have spoken about at length already, we are going to be able to collectively deliver what really will be the transformational change needed to improve our reef health over the long term. Whilst we have turned the corner, we have a long way to go, and this strategic focus is going to help us to achieve that.

We signed a memorandum of understanding with the Australian government outlining how we are going to work together to implement the Reef Trust. The first investment strategy was also jointly released on that day and that outlines how we are going to spend the first \$15 million worth of projects from 1 July this year. We are focused on tackling the biggest issues facing the Great Barrier Reef, contrary again to the emotive hyperbole that you will hear from others. This is about actually addressing the real impacts on the reef—so that is improving coastal habitat, improving water quality and enhancing our species protection. So of the first \$15 million that Minister Hunt and I announced, \$5 million is going for the Dugong and Turtle Protection Plan; \$2 million is going for crown of thorns starfish control—and, again, to refer to the member for Woodridge's question, that is in partnership with National Parks, Recreation, Sport and Racing—\$5 million to improve water quality from run-off in the Wet Tropics region, in particular focusing on nitrogen; and \$3 million to improve grazing management practices in the Burdekin and Fitzroy regions to reduce sediment run-off.

I will just delve into those two aspects a bit more. In terms of the Wet Tropics and the water quality improvements we are looking at, one of the first projects we are going to deliver is a trial of what is called a reverse auction for nitrogen reduction in the Wet Tropics. We know that the work could potentially prevent future crown of thorns starfish outbreaks and hopefully give our coral reefs the chance to recover from other impacts such as storms and cyclones. So we are trialling that reverse auction in the Wet Tropics area. That is where we literally buy back nitrogen to stop it going into the system. Then I mentioned also the grazing management practice in the Burdekin and Fitzroy. Some of the things we are working with the federal government on there are around particularly gully erosion—how we can assist farmers actually hold on to their land rather than see it washed down the Burdekin and end up in the Burdekin Falls Dam and ultimately over the dam and into the reef. Again, it is about how can we work with the farmers to get the best outcome. So that is how we are working with the federal government around the Reef Trust. We have the memorandum of understanding in place, we have targeted the first \$15 million and we are going to start seeing results from that in the near future.

CHAIR: So it is almost like two plus two is going to equal five; it is not going to equal four.

Mr POWELL: That is right. Many of the things that we will talk about today no doubt that we have been working on in EHP over the last couple of years is to take a more strategic approach, whether it be our new single offsets program where we are able to target particular areas, corridors or direct benefit management plans. They are all about producing a far better result by maximising the investment, strategically placing it and ensuring that we get the outcomes rather than having higgledy-piggledy, patchwork quilt type solutions all around the state.

Mr COX: Minister, you said in your opening statement that half the budget was going towards conservation programs. The other half, or a lot of it, is going towards monitoring new and old developments. In the department's overview under 'Resources and performance' in the SDS, you say—

Strategic challenges for the department include balancing environmental, social and economic outcomes ...

I will not read the rest. My question is about Abbot Point, a port no less important to this state as my own Port of Townsville. Could you please outline the approvals process for any expansion of Abbot Point, especially for the monitoring and compliance programs for the project, in line with the strategic direction?

Mr POWELL: I certainly can. I thank the member for the question. It gives me a real opportunity to talk about the sensible approach both economically and environmentally that we took to Abbot Point. First of all we looked at what had previously largely been approved by state and federal

Labor around Abbot Point. The member for Whitsunday will be particularly aware that it was proposed to put nine coal berths as well as the 12-berth multicargo facility on what would have been the 1,051st island in the Great Barrier Reef adjacent to Abbot Point—economically irrational, environmentally damaging.

So what we have done is worked with North Queensland Bulk Ports, worked with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and worked with the proponents and the federal government to come up with a very sensible program of development of growth that will see three terminals built. It is also worth pointing out here what this port actually looks like. I do not think people realise. People assume it is like Gladstone, or like Townsville even, where you have these berths and ships are coming into right into the middle of town—I guess similar to what you would see in Germany or France or England or even in the US and some of those places. What we are talking about is a trestle pier with some loading berths at the end of it, and it stretches some kilometres out into the ocean to access the deeper water so that you minimise the amount of dredging required. It is not a classic port. It is literally a trestle that conveys the coal out to the berths when it is then loaded onto the ships.

We are developing that through three million cubic metres of dredging over three years—over three years—so a maximum of 1.3 million cubic metres per year. As the member for Whitsunday pointed out earlier on, that will be done in a window of April to July, which is the best time to do it where there is more appropriate but also less impact on seagrass and migrating species.

So 1.3 million cubic metres of spoil will be disposed of at sea. Seventy-five per cent of that will drop to the ocean floor 40 kilometres from the nearest offshore reef—40 kilometres away from the nearest offshore reef—where it will mix with exactly the same sand, silt and clay that is being removed from the dredging site. If you jump online—I think we have it online now on our Reef Facts website—there is actually some footage taken by the Australian Institute of Marine Science of the ocean floor at Abbot Point at the disposal site and there is no coral. It is literally sand, silt and clay. So 75 per cent will drop to the ocean floor where it will mix through the usual invertebrates that are on the ocean floor over the coming time and within a matter of months, if not years, you will not notice any difference.

Twenty-five per cent of that dredged spoil will disperse, but importantly the federal government have put a condition on the program that ensures that that 25 per cent must be offset by 150 per cent net benefit gain in the catchments of the Don and the Burdekin adjacent to Abbot Point. So what that means is, taking the science that we all know around gully erosion, revegetation and rehabilitation of creek and river banks, that we prevent the equivalent amount of sediment coming down times by 1½. That program is exciting. That is world-class. That has never been done before. That is the kind of thing that the Reef Trust is going to be able to fund through the proponents' contributions.

There are a couple of other things you mentioned. One of the things that is also a condition is that the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority will have an independent monitor on site while that dredging and disposal is underway. As I think you alluded to in your question and I think I mentioned previously, we are excitedly looking at bringing further north the successful report card systems that are operating in South-East Queensland, Gladstone Harbour and Fitzroy Basin. We want to get in ahead of the game. So we want to get the baseline information—and a lot of the baseline information is already provided to both departments as part of the approval process—and also have monitoring on site so that we can again reassure the local community and also the state, federal and international communities that we have our eye on this, that we know what the science is saying, that we are monitoring the science and that we are all on top of it.

Mr TROUT: Minister, I must commend your department on the crocodile management over the past two years. Could you outline the government's action plan to make sure that our waterways of Far North Queensland are safe from crocodiles?

Mr POWELL: I certainly can. This is one near and dear to your heart. It has pretty much gone off the boil in terms of media interest in your part of the world.

Mr TROUT: It has, yes.

Mr POWELL: I know there is a little bit of interest further north at the moment up around Port Douglas but there are ongoing conversations with the council. This, again, was another one of our election commitments: that we would put in place a management system more consistent with what the Northern Territory puts in place, a three-tier approach to crocodile removal. Let me stress from the outset that, whilst the intent is to reduce the risk to our populations in Far North Queensland, it will never completely remove the risk. I just want to stress that. There has been some misinformation out there that suggests that somehow it is all of a sudden going to be safe to swim in Far North

Queensland waters. There is always some element of risk. No matter what your program would be, I would always be saying that there are some risks. Please bear that in mind.

What I often tell people is that in Cairns—in your part of the world in particular, member for Barron River—we are talking about 160,000 people not to mention the tourists who come in on a regular basis, whether they be domestic or international tourists. For many years you have had the Barron River and Trinity Inlet right there, smack bang in town, full of crocodiles. What we have done based on that Northern Territory approach is bring in the three-tier system. We are putting in \$2.3 million over the next two years to keep that program going. That means that we are able to implement the plans through a combination of my departmental wildlife officers and private contracts. I, again, take my hat off to Dawal Wuru, who are doing a fantastic job up there monitoring that zone 2 area from Trinity Inlet up to Ellis Beach I think it is.

Mr TROUT: Yes, it is.

Mr POWELL: That \$2.3 million supplements nearly \$700,000 that we have already put into the program in previous years. There has certainly been an increase in the number of crocodiles removed from waterways in North Queensland over the last couple of years. Back in 2012-13, pre the plan coming into place, there were 13 crocodiles removed. In contrast, in the 12 months to 30 June 2014, 62 crocodiles were removed. So that is 13 compared to 62. Of that 62, 17 were removed by the private provider Dawal Wuru. I am happy to report that of the 62, 60 were placed into captivity in zoos or crocodile farms. Unfortunately, two did not survive.

We put on Dawal Wuru for a 12-month program. Their focus is on capturing and removing crocodiles of all sizes from waterways from the northern bank of Trinity Inlet, as I said, all the way through to Ellis Beach. That does include Lake Placid, downstream of the Barron River and Chinaman's Creek. Funds were also allocated to salaries and operating costs for wildlife officers. What you are seeing is more people out on the water undertaking proactive surveys and the removal of crocs when they are trapped. We are seeing crocs removed across North Queensland from Townsville up to Cairns. We have also seen them removed from the Houghton River—that was a very large one, a 4.6-meter croc, a very large crocodile—Paronella Park, North Hull River and the Johnstone River. Really excitingly, Coxy—sorry, the member for Thuringowa—

Mr COSTIGAN: Coxy is listening.

Mr POWELL: I do not think Hansard would approve of that. The member for Thuringowa was able to join me in Townsville with some of my officers where we displayed what we are calling Ikea for crocs. It is a flat-pack trap system. We scoff and we joke and I make fun of the fact that we call it Ikea for crocs, but it is a huge benefit for these guys. It is a real step forward in terms of workplace health and safety and for the humane management of the crocodile. Previously we had these huge steel traps that you would have to put on the back of a truck and transport wherever. It would mean three days travel all the way up to the top of the cape to tackle a croc up at Bamaga. We have had workplace health and safety incidents with the trap closing—the gate system. It is really cumbersome, really heavy and really unsafe. You would then have to rope the croc and remove the croc from the trap to load it into a transportation system to be taken to the zoo or the farm. What we have now is a very lightweight flat-pack system which you can literally put into the cargo hold of a plane. It can be put together within a matter of minutes, lifted quite easily onto a roll-on roll-off system on a boat. So again, there is no manual handling. The great thing also is we now have a transportation unit module that you put up against the trap and you literally can pull the crocodile through from the trap into the transportation module, attach a few sprinkler hoses to the top of it, lift it onto the back of the truck and away you go. No-one has had to come in contact with a crocodile. It is an incredibly safe and incredibly humane way to transport it to its new home.

CHAIR: Less stressful.

Mr POWELL: It is less stressful for everyone involved and a fantastic outcome. That comes from the new Public Service approach of this government. This is about allowing our employees to come up with innovative solutions, to be open to ideas from everyone from the ranger through—occasionally we let the director-general have a good idea, too! We have already had orders placed from private providers and international recognition and interest about this new system. It is one of the fantastic outcomes.

I also have to mention that, whilst we are doing this, we are also undertaking our Croc Wise Education Program. My officers have now been to over 30 schools and community centres across Queensland to ensure that we continue to educate students. Back in June we had to go up to Injinoo

to remove a crocodile that actually was quite close to the state primary school up there. We took the opportunity again to do the Croc Wise Program with the students whilst we were in town.

On an important note before I conclude, we have also bought three new boats to enhance our crocodile management and our broader wildlife response capacity. I was in Rockhampton to launch one of those boats to patrol the Fitzroy. I am pleased to acknowledge that one is heading towards Mackay-Whitsunday and another is heading to Bundaberg-Maryborough. So we are covering all ends of the state in terms of our crocodile management. That will continue to be around crocs of concern only. We think we still have one floating around the Mary River somewhere. Have there been any sightings recently, member for Maryborough?

Mrs MADDERN: There was a photo in the paper yesterday.

Mr POWELL: I think they are enjoying this. What has it been called the 'Mary Crockins'. We do take that seriously. Can I stress that message again about being croc wise, particularly in croc country? Obey crocodile warning signs. Do not swim in waters where crocodiles may live. Do not stand at the water's edge or on an overhanging log. Stand a few metres back when you are fishing or casting a net. Do not provoke, harass or feed crocodiles. Never leave food scraps, fish frames or bait at the water's edge, near a camp site or boat ramp because that attracts crocs. Please, please, please always supervise your children when you are around water in North Queensland.

Our croc plans are in place till January 2016 when they will be reviewed. I know there are a couple of other areas interested. The conversation was always with Douglas shire that, if they did deamalgamate from Cairns, all it would take would be a letter or, ideally, a motion passed by resolution of the council that they want us to have a conversation with them. My officers have been talking to council officers, but I am yet to receive any formal indication from the council that they want us to proceed. It is in their hands is the short answer. It is over to the mayor and the councillors. I would like a letter from the mayor at a minimum, if not, a resolution of council saying that they would want us to look at expanding our croc management plan. I think I have covered your question.

CHAIR: Mrs Maddern has this rogue croc.

Mrs MADDERN: We have very recalcitrant crocs in our area. Minister, you have the croc management plan for the North Queensland area, but Maryborough sits outside of that area. Can you tell me what the department's approach is to managing crocs that do not see the boundaries that they should see?

Mr POWELL: Perhaps it is us who do not see the boundaries that they see.

Mrs MADDERN: I would suggest that is probably true because the history of the area is that the crocs have been around for a very long time.

Mr POWELL: That is exactly right. I like to mention the fact that we have got photographic evidence of crocs being pulled out of the Nerang and Logan rivers. In fact, if you go to the Tiaro pub—

Mrs MADDERN: The Bauple Museum has the skin of one of the crocs.

Mr POWELL: But the Tiaro pub has the photo of the croc, and it is a monster.

Mr COSTIGAN: Bragging rights.

Mr POWELL: Tiaro is how many kilometres upstream on the Mary River?

Mrs MADDERN: Thirty or 40.

Mr POWELL: It is thirty or 40 kilometres upstream on the Mary River. Whilst we have grown used to the fact that crocs do not tend to come further south than the Boyne River, they have been known to head as far south as the Gold Coast. It is in their range. With the conclusion of previous practices, we are starting to see their population expand again.

That then leads to your question about how we manage crocs outside of that crocodile management plan zone of Townsville to Cairns. Basically, everywhere else is a zone 3, which means that our objective is to remove crocs of concern. So that applies to crocs that are showing aggressive behaviour or, in the case of the Mary River in particular, where the population is just not used to being around crocs and, therefore, they become a crocodile of concern. So we have crocodile urban management areas at Rockhampton, Gladstone and Mackay where crocs greater than two meters in length that occur in those defined urban areas are regarded as a crocodile of concern regardless of whether they are moving through or using the area as a habitat. Then we also address, as I said, issues in the Mary River and the Fitzroy River in particular.

I stress again the importance of getting members of the public to report any sightings to my department. The number is 1300130372. It is important that they are timely as well. Do not wait two days before you make the notification; let us know as soon as you see a crocodile because we can get officers out now as soon as practical to chase it up.

I am pleased to report that in the Mary River we were able to remove a 3.1-meter crocodile. That has since been transferred to Koorana Crocodile Farm where it is being used for breeding purposes. The most recent report we had of your 'Mary Crockins' was on Friday, 20 June. As I said, it was well south of its usual range, so it is being targeted for removal. We currently have three croc traps set to catch it: one at Brothers Island and two at Saltwater. There are a further two traps with starter baits only. We use a starter bait to try to tempt the croc initially and then we put in a full bait. So we have a further two with starter baits at Rocky Point and Walkers Point. All systems are on the go to try to remove that croc. It is very timid and does not want to—

Mrs MADDERN: It is sneaky.

Mr POWELL: It is very sneaky. They are your words, not mine, member for Maryborough. I might just take this opportunity to address also the area around Rockhampton. Back in January 2013, a group called the Fitzroy River Users Group was formed. The intent of that group is to have closer rapport between my staff and the community regarding croc management in the Fitzroy River around Rockhampton. It consists of a number of groups that engage in water based activity such as rowing, paddle boarding and waterskiing within a 25-kilometre length of the 60-kilometre freshwater section of the Fitzroy River above the barrage. Anyone who knows Rockhampton would know it is a freshwater system. That group includes Rockhampton Fitzroy Rowing Club, Rockhampton Water Ski Club, the Emu Park Surf Lifesaving Club and the Rockhampton Grammar School Rowing Club. There has been a lot of concern about the number of crocs in that freshwater area known as the recreation area. Whilst the Rockhampton crocodile urban management area does target the removal of crocs over two meters, it does not include the majority of the recreation area. There has been a request for us to extend the crocodile urban management area. It has not been granted at this stage because there are some concerns about the practicalities of that. We are being proactive in assessing this waterway. As I said, we launched a new boat there recently. That boat will be used for surveys. Ironically, it takes six nights to do the spotlighting on that 60-kilometre stretch of the Fitzroy River because it is so long. So we will continue to do that and we will continue to keep the community apprised of our activities there. Again, we are very much working with the communities to come up with the best solutions as they fit across the region.

CHAIR: We will take a short break for morning tea and resume at 11 o'clock.

Proceedings suspended from 10.30 am to 10.59 am



CHAIR: Welcome back, Minister and advisers.

Mr POWELL: Mr Chair, if I may, I have a response to that question I took on notice from the member for Woodridge. If you are happy, I might respond to that directly now. Member for Woodridge, the science investment for the Great Barrier Reef from the EHP is \$3.16 million per year each and every year into the forward estimates.

Mrs SCOTT: My first question is to the director-general. Have you ever had any conversations, sited any documents or received or given instructions relating to the unauthorised release of personal information of a public sector employee?

CHAIR: How does that relate?

Mr POWELL: Mr Chair, that does not relate to the SDS at all.

CHAIR: It does not relate to the bill.

Mrs SCOTT: Okay, back to the minister. Minister, given that two of the greatest threats to the reef are warmer ocean temperatures and ocean acidification, which are both being exacerbated by man-made climate change, does the Newman government have any programs to address climate change?

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for the question. First of all, I would like to go to the intent of the question. Given the almost Damascus experience of the Labor Party as we were talking before about Abbot Point, our proposal for Abbot Point and for coal being exported from Abbot Point is for three terminals expansion. Their plan was for nine terminals. Two and a half years ago the Australian Labor Party was very much in favour of seeing our coal industry, our resources industry, grow in this state and all of a sudden it has decided that it is no longer worthy of support—and might I stress

support in a way that is above and beyond any other jurisdiction in terms of the environmental responsibilities that our resource industry must undertake. I find it ironic that we are now tackling a question of this nature given in 2009 the then Premier, Anna Bligh, and in 2011 the Premier and the then Treasurer, Andrew Fraser, were extolling the virtues of the superport at Abbot Point, as I said, one that would have seen 38 million cubic metres of dredging undertaken adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef and disposed of to form an additional island. I find that rather hypocritical, I am sorry, Mr Chair.

In terms of our work around climate change, I am pleased to report that consistent with the original understanding and COAG agreement between Julia Gillard and Campbell Newman that was subsequently translated to the Standing Council on Environment and Water—initially it was climate change but we merged that into environment and water under Tony Burke, myself and my other state colleagues—there is a division of responsibility around addressing climate change. The mitigation responsibilities sit with the federal government. There was a commitment at that COAG meeting to remove any duplication of mitigation effort, hence us basically shutting down our Office of Climate Change upon coming into government. We do not want taxpayers paying twice for mitigation efforts. Particularly under the former federal Labor government's approach around carbon tax not only were they paying the price they were probably paying two, three, four or five times. Every time they filled up a tank of petrol, every time they turned on a light bulb and every time they got a load of groceries they were paying for that carbon tax. With your discretion, Mr Chair, I will comment on the fact that I am looking forward to that being removed this week when I understand my federal member might be assisting the government to achieve that outcome.

CHAIR: We will not hold that against you.

Mr POWELL: Please don't. I would stress that the federal coalition government has a strong plan around direct action when it comes to climate change. At the state level we are supporting Minister Hunt in a number of the initiatives. We are working with him around the Emissions Reduction Fund and funding of programs here in this state to ensure that we not only get the benefit in terms of emissions reduction but we get biodiversity improvement as well. We are working particularly around some of the reef catchments in regard to that.

As per that COAG agreement with Julia Gillard, we are focusing on adaptation. Our work is particularly with councils around ensuring that they are prepared for the potential implications of a change in climate. We continue the pilot project, particularly with Townsville City Council. They did a fantastic job looking at the coastal hazards that might be coming their way. That work is being picked up by a range of other councils. I spoke as recently as last week with Greg Hoffman and the LGAQ and their climate change action team about working with them on their adaptation work.

We also invest in Green Cross Australia's business adaptation network. I recently went to Townsville where they held a hypothetical. The local member, the mayor, a range of emergency service respondents and media were involved in a hypothetical direct strike on Townsville of a category 5 cyclone and how the council is prepared in conjunction with the state for the initial response but also the recovery to such an event and if there is anything at all they can do to prepare better for such.

We are also a gold sponsor this year of the National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility's 2014 conference, which is promoting a proactive approach to addressing climate change. We are heavily involved in the adaptation sphere. Minister Crisafulli recently put out a resilience strategy for the state. There are elements in that that have come from my department. We are also working on an adaptation strategy for the state as well and looking forward to consulting more broadly with the community and with other stakeholders as we progress that.

Mrs SCOTT: I have a few questions for the director-general, and this is to do with the Reef Facts website. How many staff were involved in its creation and what were the titles of the staff who were involved in that?

Mr Black: I will get those precise details to you. There were policy people obviously advising communications people in the development of the response to make sure that we convey the facts about the reef. I will have to take it on notice rather than delay the committee.

Mrs SCOTT: That is fine. How long ago did work begin on that site?

Mr Black: Over eight months ago.

CHAIR: Can you confirm that, too?

Mr Black: Yes, I can confirm that, too, and get the precise date.

Mrs SCOTT: That is fine. When did the department receive direction to develop the website? How was this direction received? For example, was it as the result of a cabinet decision, a ministerial decision or was the idea developed internally?

Mr Black: I think a combination of all of the comments you have made. The department raised concerns with the minister's office regarding the information that was being conveyed by various parties, and we were very keen to correct the facts to ensure that science was underpinning all the facts that we could convey about the reef.

Mrs SCOTT: Back to you, Minister. Did the Queensland Resources Council approach you for permission to use the Reef Facts website in their advertisements?

Mr POWELL: There was a discussion, member for Woodridge, around the use of the website link in a potential advertising campaign by QRC.

Mrs SCOTT: When was the first contact between you and QRC about the Reef Facts website?

Mr POWELL: Member for Woodridge, I am failing to understand how this relates to the budget, but I am happy to report to you that I meet with QRC on a very regular basis and a quick survey of my diary, which I point out is made public and is available on the internet, would show you the times which I have discussed or met with QRC on a range of matters including discussing matters related to the reef.

Mrs SCOTT: Was the QRC aware of the Reef Facts website before it was announced by you on 2 March?

Mr POWELL: That is a question for them. I do not understand. Look, can I make these comments? I think I understand what the member for Woodridge is trying to get to here. The reality is that there are a number of interested parties around this state and around this nation who are concerned, as the director-general said, that a lot of information is being put out on the reef that is simply not true. There is a lot of information on social media, in particular, which has no element of truth whatsoever—suggestions that channels are being dredged through the outer reef when in fact they are showing a picture of Hardy's Channel, which is a natural channel. There are pictures of dredging machines that operate in very shallow environments—pictures actually taken in the Persian Gulf around places such as Qatar where I visited that just do not operate in our part of the world. There are statistics on the impacts of shipping and of ports on the Great Barrier Reef which are just farcical. They are not supported by science at all. So there are a number of organisations, the government included, as the director-general said, that are concerned that people are hearing this misinformation and lies and want to make sure that it is corrected. They want to make sure that Queenslanders understand what the real facts are around the reef and want to ensure that our decision making as a government and our decision making as a community is based on the facts.

The investment we have made—I think I mentioned some \$310,000 to date on the Reef Facts program—is miniscule when you compare it to the investment that the reef brings in each and every year for its natural beauty through our tourism industry: more than \$6 billion and more than 67,000 jobs. I am very happy to be spending \$300,000 today on ensuring that the reputation of our reef continues to be promoted. But to cut to the quick, you are suggesting that there is some collusion between QRC and me as to their advertising campaign. I reject that outright. I can quite frankly tell you I was very disappointed in the QRC ad and expressed as much to QRC. It was a very negative ad in terms of portraying some of the impacts on the reef, mainly those we know—cyclones and storms, crown-of-thorns starfish and so on. The reality is our reef has been very resilient. It is in good shape in a lot of the reef. What we want to continue to do is to promote to the international community that the reef is still a natural wonder of the world, still a tourism icon not only of Queensland but of Australia, that our tourism industry is open for business and they are welcome to come out and sample some of the enjoyment that that brings through places like Airlie, Whitsunday, Townsville, Cairns and the like. I reject outright any suggestion that the member for Woodridge is trying to make through her line of questioning.

Mrs SCOTT: Minister, I turn to waste management and page 10 of the SDS. Why are there no performance measures for waste management?

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for the question. Can I clarify it is page 10 of the SDS you are referring to?

Mrs SCOTT: Yes.

Mr POWELL: The member will recall that in my opening comments there was some discussion about the fact that we are in a very interesting period of time when it comes to developing our waste

strategy. Contrary to the previous government whose solution I guess of Labor governments at both the federal and state level seem to be a tax, whether it be a tax on carbon or a tax on waste, what we undertook was to repeal that waste tax which we did shortly on forming government and instead sit down and work with the waste generators and the waste sector to come up with an industry-led waste strategy. That is in draft form. It was out for consultation. We are currently considering the responses to finalise that strategy and, as I said, have that out by September. It is the government's intent to put our response out shortly after that. It would be premature for us to put significant performance measures in our SDS based on a strategy that is not finalised. I will reassure the member that in future years once that strategy is finalised we will ensure that we are contributing to the implementation of that strategy. One of the ways we will do that is by looking at our performance measures.

But it is worth pointing out that a range of other measures in here particularly around our environmental regulation, our compliance and monitoring, do relate to the waste sector as much as any other sector. For the member's benefit, in the financial year 2013-14 we have undertaken a range of compliance activities. The ongoing program meant that 11 unlicensed operators are now licensed, 302 warning letters were issued, 12 penalty infringement notices or PINs were issued, and 303 show cause and/or education letters were also issued.

In 2013-14 we identified that liquid waste management was a target area for compliance. So two of our top four receivers of trackable liquid waste in South-East Queensland and one of the top four receivers of trackable liquid waste in North Queensland were selected using intelligence methods for unannounced site audits. The program focused on identification of high-risk waste management activities, ensuring the correct classification and reporting of waste movement by all waste handlers, ensuring waste receivers are accepting waste in accordance with their environmental authority conditions, and increasing the detection of non-compliant activity and reducing the risk of environmental harm as well as the timely identification and management of unlicensed transporters so action can be taken to bring the transporters into compliance. I reassure the member that a number of these measures talk about our focus on our regulatory strategy. As I have said, that applies as much to the waste sector as it does any other.

CHAIR: Could I ask a supplementary to that? Are you having a good response to the draft policy that is out there? Are you getting a lot of submissions into it?

Mr POWELL: Contrary to the waste tax, it has actually been very well received because it has been written by the industry and by the sector. I guess there is a broad agreement as to the vision of where we want to take waste in this state. There is broad support that there is a lot of waste that actually should be perceived for what it is: it is a resource. We have often joked about one man's trash being another man's treasure. Well, in the waste sector that is very much the case. There is a lot of waste that is currently heading to landfill or other disposal means that could be recycled or reused and that is a key component of the draft strategy that is out at the moment. I guess the biggest disagreement is around how we actually achieve that. There are still proponents for levies and taxes. They believe that the cost incentive will drive that kind of practice. There are a number of others who believe a more partnership approach, as we have got around things like product stewardship, would achieve a better outcome, as we have got around our recycling efforts, rolling out of recycling yellow bins in public areas around the state and those kinds of initiatives. So there is a bit of disagreement as to how we achieve it and that is what we are currently working through.

As I said, the government will respond as to what we think we can best contribute to and towards. We anticipate that other elements of the sector will also. But I do want to at this point acknowledge the fantastic work undertaken by all of the partners in the development of that strategy, but also in terms of my waste policy team that will help drive that, led by Tony Roberts here today. I mentioned those compliance efforts. That is an outstanding effort based on previous iterations of this department and again a real testament to Dean Ellwood and his team who are out there doing that work.

Mrs SCOTT: Minister, now focusing on the State of Waste and Recycling in Queensland 2013 report and the 2012 report and some information provided in questions on notice 372 and 405 of this year, is it accurate to say that the amount of contaminated and landfill soil is up by over 100,000 tonnes since 2011-12?

Mr POWELL: You have me at a disadvantage, member for Woodridge, in that I do not have those specific figures in front of me, but it would not surprise me if that is about right. But you have to be careful about using actual percentages. If you look at the actual figures, what may have been a

very small starting point may have actually gone to an equally small ending point. So the idea of scaring the general populace of Queensland to think that we are receiving contaminated waste or so on from other sources and it is going through the roof like that is really not helpful. What I would say is if it is a regulated waste it is tracked according to our high environmental standards, that it is monitored, that anyone who receives it has to have a higher level of environmental authority. We are implementing the Queensland Waste Data System to ensure that we are collecting state-wide waste data from councils and industry. It is a secure online facility so increasingly we are getting better information. The first online surveys using that new system will open on 1 July and that will be data for the 2013-14 year. What we are endeavouring to do is use that online system to get greater clarity around the kind of figures you mentioned and look at the trends in terms of what is coming in. Again a couple of things: there is a lot of, I think the word used by the Premier is, 'scary music' around waste. As I said, often it is the case that waste is a resource. The suggestion that waste coming from other states is somehow not good, well, under the Australian Constitution we cannot stop waste coming from other jurisdictions. In fact, we ourselves have sent waste from Queensland to other jurisdictions because those jurisdictions have the facilities designed to deal with that kind of waste. I think, if I recall correctly, one report showed that we actually transport a certain type of waste all the way to Tasmania because they are the ones that have the facility to deal with that kind of waste. So, cross-border trade in waste, cross-border trade in regulated waste, is constitutionally permitted—in fact, encouraged—and any attempts to stop it would be unconstitutional. It is heavily regulated. It is heavily monitored.

With our new industry led waste strategy that will launch later this year, we will have greater focus, greater effort, on ensuring our waste resource sector is of the highest standard in the world and that we are doing everything that we can to ensure that waste is managed in an environmentally and community responsible way.

CHAIR: Just as a supplementary to that, I have some very big dumps down in Ebenezer in my area. Thiess dump there.

Mr POWELL: There are a couple of empty holes that they are filling, aren't there.

CHAIR: One of them is actually generating electricity as well. Correct me if I am wrong, I think they have always brought waste up to those from Northern New South Wales. Hasn't that always been the case?

Mr POWELL: Yes, and at the end of the day whilst a number of landfill sites in particular are council owned and operated, many are owned and operated by the private sector and as long as these businesses are operating in accordance with their environmental authorities and the conditions imposed on that, we are quite relaxed and comfortable about it. I do want to point out, member for Woodridge, in terms of the data you are using, with the data that we are starting to capture through our new waste data it is literally going to be impossible to compare that to the information, the data, that you collected as the previous government quite simply because that information was not collected. We are in a brave new world where our new data system is actually going to be collecting data that has never been collected before so please be careful in forming comparisons across a number of years.

Mrs SCOTT: It does look as though there has been an increase by a third or so. Minister, you have not put your name to the State of Waste and Recycling Report 2013 as you did in 2012. I am just wondering about that. But also, you may be able to provide the committee with a list of all the grants to private companies for waste management strategies, the reason for each grant and the amount of funding provided for each grant.

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for the question. In terms of the first question, I reject any premise that you are trying to make that I am abdicating my responsibilities around waste. I take them very seriously—incredibly seriously. But I come back to what I have been saying from the word go and what is written in the SDS and that is that we have been focused over the last 18 months on a collaborative effort with the broader industry. The process, the strategy, the reporting has been an industry driven, industry owned approach and we are all partners in that, the government being one of those. So we are heavily focused on working in collaboration to address waste in this state. Can you repeat the second half of the question, sorry, member for Woodridge?

Mrs SCOTT: Will you provide to the committee a list of all grants to private companies for waste management strategies and the reason for each grant and the amount of funding provided for each grant?

CHAIR: He would nearly have to take that on notice.

Mrs SCOTT: I realise that.

Mr POWELL: The reason I asked for it to be repeated is that I think the member is referring to previous programs funded under the waste levy/waste tax that the previous government had. When we removed the waste tax we removed the grant schemes that sat underneath it. So there are no grants that I am aware of, and I am happy to be corrected by my officials if that is the case. As the director-general just pointed out, we do make a contribution to the Australian Packaging Covenant, but that is consistent with the Queensland government's contribution for as long as I can recall, but it is not a grant, it is a contribution to part of a national scheme.

Mrs SCOTT: Do I recall there was something to KFC last year?

Mr POWELL: No, and this is where I think there is some confusion. We provide funding to the Australian Packaging Covenant, along with a range of other partners, and then decisions are made by the board of the Australian Packaging Covenant as to how that funding is allocated. A decision was made by the Australian Packaging Covenant board to allocate funding to a range of outlets, including the one the member is referring to, but I would point out that that occurred under the previous government's approach, too, where they made a contribution to the Australian Packaging Covenant and that Australian Packaging Covenant rolled out initiatives in Stocklands, in a range of other arenas, sporting facilities, Suncorp Stadium, a whole lot of sites. Again, we are continuing a practice that was long upheld by the previous government of contributing to the Australian Packaging Covenant and supporting them in their initiatives to drive up recycling in particular throughout our public spaces and our restaurants and food chains. Thank you to the official who has just notified me that we do provide a grant to the Garage Sale Trail, a wonderful initiative that occurs every year. It started off in the eastern suburbs of Sydney where, again, one man's trash is another man's treasure. It is a great form of recycling. I was actually up in Maryborough for last year's Garage Sale Trail and picked up a few things for my kids, including a bicycle helmet and I think a whole pack of army men and tanks and things. It was very good. We provide a small contribution, I think it's in the tens of thousands, to Garage Sale Trail to undertake that initiative in partnership with local governments around the state. Just to be clear, \$90,000 to Garage Sale Trail.

Mr KNUTH: Obviously budget measures are put in place with regard to environmental initiatives, especially protecting the Great Barrier Reef, and there is also federal government funding as well. You mentioned that the crown of thorns starfish is a big issue, likewise reef run-off, but you also talked about the impact of storms and cyclones. Looking at the environmental side effects of this, what is the comparison in regards to the reef run-off, the crown of thorns and the impact of storms? In relation to the funding side of it, what is going to crown of thorns and reef run-off and trying to assess this impact of storms and cyclones?

Mr POWELL: Member for Dalrymple, the Australian Institute of Marine Science undertook a longitudinal study over about three decades of impacts on the reef. What it found was that 48 per cent of the impact on the reef was from storms and cyclones. That is basically from direct hits of the storm surge and the waves on the reef. There are some pretty amazing sights that divers have witnessed, even after Ita this year, where huge brain corals have been literally picked up and deposited quite a significant distance from where they were originally and that is from the wave and wind action of the cyclones. Forty-two per cent is crown of thorns, so it is quite a considerable contribution. And do not forget that they are kind of interlinked. If you have a storm or a cyclone, you are increasing rainfall, you are increasing heavy rainfall in short periods of time, and therefore you are increasing often sediment and nutrient run-off into the catchment at the same time. So 42 per cent. And then nine per cent is coral bleaching, so where the water does get warmer and the coral does not respond too well. That makes up 99 per cent out of a hundred and I haven't mentioned ports or anything like that yet so you can imagine the impacts of everything else fit within the one per cent. I cannot stop storms—I have tried. I have not really been successful. As I have said, what I can do is work with you and with your graziers in particular to lessen the impacts of those storms on loss of property through erosion primarily. One of the key projects that we spoke about before through Reef Trust was \$3 million going towards working with graziers around erosion control—that is, putting vegetation back along some of those gullies to protect them so that we are not losing the precious soil that you guys need to support the grass to support the cattle. They are the kinds of things where we can work hand in hand, both addressing the impacts of the storms and cyclones but also preventing the outbreaks of crown of thorns starfish.

Mr KNUTH: Basically, in regard to the reef run-off and working with graziers, when you look at the impact there is from storms and cyclones it is massively far greater than the impact there is from possibly the reef run-off.

Mr POWELL: I would not say 'massively'; 48 per cent to 42 per cent is not massively and the reality is, as I said, I really struggle to address the 48 per cent. I have not had much control over storms and cyclones. I do not have much control over my five kids, let alone storms and cyclones. That means that we need to focus on the 42 per cent which is the next biggest contributor which is the crown-of-thorns starfish, and the science does show us that it is kicked off particularly with dissolved inorganic nitrogen—and I accept that a lot of that is coming from the cane areas and the Wet Tropics areas—but it benefits from the sediments that are coming down the likes of the Burdekin and other catchments. What we have seen on an average year—and it goes back to what we were talking about at Abbot Point—is that you probably get about 17 million or 18 million cubic metres of sediment coming down the catchments into the reef. On a bad year—a cyclone year—you might get 40 million and we have to stop that. I encourage you to jump on a website. The Bureau of Meteorology has formed a partnership with the Great Barrier Reef Foundation and have a program called eReefs where you can now monitor the sediment plumes coming out of each catchment, and it might surprise you. We often thought it was the Russell and the Mulgrave catchments that are kicking off the crown-of-thorns starfish, but what it shows is you can actually see the sediment plumes from the Fitzroy and the Don moving up with the currents up the coast and surging backwards and forwards—very helpful. I do not say this to pinpoint the graziers in the Burdekin or anything like that, because we are here to work with them and I hope our efforts, particularly through the best management practice program, have shown that. I think there is a win-win for them and for us. There is improved economic benefits by looking at new practices that happen to have an environmental benefit as well, and I think everyone wins as a result.

Mr KNUTH: Thanks, Minister.

Mr COSTIGAN: Just on that, Minister, I commend you on your leadership in relation to the BMP Smartcane Program. It was terrific to see that program launched in my electorate some time ago. As you can appreciate, the dry season is upon us now, Minister, and there are a lot of kangaroos on the hop, so to speak, in our part of the world and other places. On that note, I want to ask about macropod damage mitigation permits. How many have been issued in the last financial year specifically and how does your department work with our landholders impacted by increases in those numbers?

Mr POWELL: This is a very important issue and one that I, again, had AgForce in my office just as recently as last week trying to work through. What my officers and I do is we first of all undertake a survey each and every year of macropods—so the two common grey and red kangaroos and then the common wallaroo—and we do that across three regions and set our quota based on that overall population and we then issue damage mitigation permits based on that quota. What I can inform you is that not since I have been the minister have we come within cooee of that quota. Between 1 July and 31 July last year there were 168 DMPs—damage mitigation permits—issued for nearly 110,000 macropods to be killed. From 1 January to 30 June this year, a further 141 DMPs were issued for just over 101,000 macropods. I stress for the calendar year 2014 that only constitutes some 29 per cent of the allowable quota, so we are well short, and that is assuming that each of the individuals or organisations that receive that DMP actually follow through and use it. We have made a number of changes to try to assist landholders in particular. We made some regulatory changes to now allow those lethal DMPs to be for 12 months rather than six so that the landholder does not have to come back every six months to get a new one. We have removed the need for an on-site inspection during this drought declared period. It goes without saying that we are in a woeful situation, particularly out west. To suggest we would need an on-site inspection is just ludicrous. Our annual surveys are showing very high densities of macropods and on-ground inspections where we do have officers out on site have shown that depasturing and crop damaging is occurring at a rate that we have not seen for some time.

The Toowoomba office of my wildlife management unit has put macropod DMPs as their No. 1 issue and priority. We have assigned additional staff, too, so that we are now turning those DMP requests around in seven days whereas previously I think it took about six weeks. I do want to stress at this stage that landholders, if they do complete a DMP within that 12-month period, can come back and apply for another one. Contrary to some advice, they can ask a third party to undertake the DMP activity on their behalf; we just ask that that individual or third party be listed on the DMP. So if they want to form a partnership with Sporting Shooters or with a private contractor that is fine, just as long as they are included in the DMP request. So that is working in that regard. We have given some funding—I do not know if it was us or another department—to Sporting Shooters to try to do some work, but basically we are freeing up the legislative burden on landholders so that they can access

the DMPs more quickly and use them more effectively and address what is not only an economic challenge for them as landholders but also a humane issue for the macropods. If the conditions continue, we are going to see a repeat of those really devastating images that we saw during the last drought where macropods were dying in their hundreds and thousands. So we have an overabundance of them at the moment and we are working with landholders to address that.

CHAIR: Just as a supplementary to that, Minister, and I realise I might be outside your area, have you heard any further how the export of the macropods is going?

Mr POWELL: It is outside my area, Mr Chair. That is the responsibility of Minister McVeigh in DAFF and I think it is a cause of some frustration for him. For reasons outside of our control, one of our largest markets over in Russia withdrew and he is working very hard to try to restore it. What we would find is if there was a commercial market for our roo meat those quotas would be more closely being achieved because the commercial harvesters would be out there doing what they are doing. I know he is trying to pull out all stops to achieve that, but at the moment I do not know if there is more beef or chicken or something else on the market but we are having trouble marketing the roo.

CHAIR: As you are aware, I have a periurban type electorate which covers Logan and Flinders-Karawatha. Can you outline the assistance the government provides to councils regarding the relocation of koalas whose habitat might be under threat?

Mr POWELL: If I could just pause for one moment, if I can. The director-general has the response to the member for Woodridge's question about which staff and their involvement in the development of the Reef Facts.

Mr Black: Member for Woodridge, I will probably best read out the detail. There were a total of nine staff involved in the Reef Facts website. Their titles and respective total time allocation are as follows: executive director of corporate communications, three days; director of communication services, two weeks; director of strategic policy services, two weeks; manager of web services, three days; business analyst, two hours; web developer, three days; systems administrator, two hours; principal communications officer, six days; and a graphic designer, two weeks.

Mr POWELL: Just before I ask you to repeat that question again, I am going to go back and just take that question that you put, member for Woodridge, on the grants to waste groups on notice. I need to clarify. I said \$90,000 to Garage Sale Trail. It is \$45,000 a year for two years, but just to be doubly accurate we are going to take it on notice and we will make sure that we have covered off every base for you. Sorry, Mr Chair, but could I trouble you to ask that question again?

CHAIR: Yes. As you are aware, I have a periurban electorate that runs down to Logan and those sorts of areas near the Flinders-Karawatha reserve. Can the minister outline what assistance the government provides to councils regarding the relocation of koalas whose habitat is under threat?

Mr POWELL: This is something that is particularly relevant at the moment in that we have a couple of instances—one out in the Pine Rivers area—where we are assisting a council. At the end of the day, the capacity to relocate koalas, particularly healthy animals, is not really encouraged by the current legislation and policy. It potentially has adverse impacts not only on those animals being relocated but also the impacts on the colonies of koalas where they are being released. We have increasing examples where the options for koalas to move away from development impact in South-East Queensland really do not exist, so we are reviewing the situation and we have a couple of projects underway to get some better science around the relocation of koalas—one down at Coomera and the other involved around the Moreton Bay rail link project. In the meantime, EHP is working with councils and project proponents in using its existing approval powers to really optimise outcomes. As I mentioned, one of the projects is around Moreton Bay rail link where through a scientific purpose permit we are relocating koalas away from the corridor further than what is currently legislatively allowed but through the scientific permit it allows us to monitor and track those koalas and get information on how they are faring in their new location. Part of me is concerned that if we do leave them in those existing locations or apply the existing legislation we are not really giving them a fighting chance whereas if we look at this translocation/relocation option we are. So that is why it is important to get the science right. We do a number of things to ensure that we get that right—most importantly the monitoring aspect of it, and that will inform further policy development.

Again, I come back to what we are doing more broadly on koalas. Overall we made a \$26½ million project as an election commitment, with \$22½ million towards the Koala Habitat Program acquisition programs. We also have our landholder partnership with the Koala Nature Refuges Program. We have \$800,000 over four years for rescue and rehabilitation grants and we have our \$3.2 million going to the Koala Research Grant Program, and I am really excited about that

one. I am looking forward to getting the results on some of that research, particularly trying to address the disease that appears to be fairly rampant particularly in our South-East Queensland koala population. We have smaller populations in other jurisdictions, but they just do not have the prevalence of these diseases such as chlamydia and retrovirus. So that \$3.2 million has gone to our university sector to really drive some improvements around understanding those diseases and hopefully coming up with a vaccination so that we can prevent them.

We support koala protection management through a number of other means: provision of information through the Daisy Hill Koala Centre through its website and brochure material, and I think that is down your way, member for Woodridge; providing authorisation through issues of rehabilitation licence to individuals and groups, including councils; provision of an ambulance service to collect sick and injured animals during working hours; provision of the veterinarian rehabilitation services by the Moggill Koala Hospital; and we can provide general advice on habitat and animal management issues. So we do a lot of that. As I said, there is currently a situation afoot where we are working with the Moreton Bay Regional Council on a project that was approved long before the koala legislation that we currently have in place was enacted. Again it is all about us taking a very scientific approach to everything that we do and we apply that as much to the conservation of our threatened species like koalas as we do to the reef.

Mrs MADDERN: Just to follow on from that about koalas, can you, Minister, outline the support for wildlife carers—obviously ones looking after koalas but I presume you might like that extend that to other wildlife carers as well?

Mr POWELL: I certainly can. As I mentioned, \$800,000 is being targeted over four years particularly for our koala rescue and rehabilitation services. We have had two rounds of that. Some of that has gone to the very large establishments like Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary's animal hospital, the Australia Zoo Wildlife Warriors hospital and the RSPCA facility at Wacol, but it also goes to the smaller groups—the wildlife volunteers and rescuers around the state. We really have been relying on this wonderful network of wildlife carer volunteers across the state for many years now, and they look after our sick and our injured and our orphaned wildlife. The commitment of these volunteers has seen thousands—literally thousands—of wild animals rehabilitated and returned to the wild.

Under the Nature Conservation Act we have a licensing system for the rehabilitation of sick, injured or orphaned protected animals so that these animals can be returned, and we process and issue those licences to qualified and experienced wildlife carers upon application. To be a carer you have to hold not only that permit but you have to meet our code of practice, and that is the code of practice for the care of sick, injured or orphaned protected animals in Queensland. There are also a number of wildlife care groups in Queensland and the Queensland Wildlife Rehabilitation Council can provide information on these groups. We work with the RSPCA. We have a special partnership with them to enhance protected wildlife rescue, care and rehabilitation in Queensland, so now all calls relating to sick, injured or orphaned animals, along with marine animal strikes or strandings, are handled through the RSPCA Queensland 1300ANIMAL number—that is, 1300264625. As I said, we specifically commit money to the koala and rescue rehabilitation organisations but many of those cross over into more broader wildlife management in care. I know it is an area that we need to continue to focus on. I have had a lot of comments from carers who are not trained to look after koalas that also want to have access to that. I know a number of councils step up and have an input into those kinds of areas and we are currently exploring ways that we can broaden our assistance to wildlife in general rather than koalas specifically.

Mr COX: In relation to some of the acquisitions that the department makes, could you provide an update on the Investing in Our Environment for the Future program, including the number of the protected area estates acquired and coverage since the election?

Mr POWELL: Thank you very much, member for Thuringowa. It is a particular interest of mine. I must confess and I think my departmental staff have worked it out that this is one of the babies that I am taking a personal interest in, largely because of what I studied at university and what I undertook in terms of biogeography and connectivity particularly of our protected areas. So we have taken a bit of a step back. I am very conscious that we have carried forward money now for the last two years in our capital budget for the acquisition of protected area and for the acquisition of koala habitat as well. We have done that quite deliberately. We went back to the terms of reference really and had another look at our protected area estate acquisition program.

Previously, the Labor government took a five per cent approach. They were clearly focused on reaching that magical number of five per cent across the state of protected area. What that meant,

though, was that we were picking up land that potentially was not the best, was not easy to manage, was remote, really had very little benefit because the reality was, in a lot of cases, the landholder was looking after it quite well, anyway. Let me be clear: we still look for properties to the west and to the north-west and to the north that offer good conservation outcomes, but what we have done is looked at the resilience of our species, both flora and fauna, and worked out ways that we can best achieve good outcomes for them as well in terms of resilience as they adapt to a changing climate.

So what we are now doing is focusing our acquisitions on connectivity and expanding existing areas. So here are a couple of benefits. One is that it gives you a buffer for some of our most threatened and endangered species. Secondly, when we hand over management of those protected areas to the Minister for National Parks, it improves outcomes for him in terms of perhaps amalgamating or joining up areas of protection, providing him with abilities to manage that in a more sensible way. So we have recast it and we are currently in the process of purchasing a range of properties.

What I can share with you is that we have two buckets of funds. One is Investing in Our Environment for the Future: \$17.2 million and \$7.4 million were allocated for both the protected area and our Nature Assist programs. So that is a bit over \$24 million. The acquisition of new protected areas under this initiative has commenced. Since taking office in March 2012 we have purchased a number of properties of high conservation significance covering nearly 200,000 hectares for a total of just under \$5.6 million. Where they are we will be announcing once those sales have settled and we have cleared all encumbrances. We have investigations underway, as I said, in a number of other what we call aggregations, where we are trying to expand existing protected areas, and we will be able to announce those once the purchases have gone through.

In terms of our Nature Assist program, we have secured another 527,202 on 16 new or extended nature refuges at a cost of \$2.42 million. Nature Assist is really a great program. It is delivered state-wide. Currently, you negotiate further nature refuge agreements with private landholders in areas targeted for their recognised ability to support species and ecosystems in the future. We are going to invest all up \$4 million to procure conservation works on those proposed nature refuges. This is really a good outcome, where we recognise exactly what I said, that sometimes having the protected area estate owned by the public is not the best outcome. Keeping it in private hands and giving incentives and assistance to the private landholder to conserve that whilst producing an economic benefit in terms of running sheep, cattle or agricultural pursuits produces a win-win. They often provide better protection. So a lot of work is going on. A lot of research is going on. The guys are busy out now approaching property owners to purchase and there will be a range of announcements in the coming months around where we have purchased those properties and what they will do to enhance our existing protected area estate.

Mr COX: Thank you.

Mr COSTIGAN: Obviously, you just touched on looking ahead in relation to increased coverage of the Nature Refuges program. Can you quantify what has been achieved since 24 March 2012 in your department, please?

Mr POWELL: So another really good program—and I am happy to acknowledge that it commenced under the previous government. We have invested a lot of time and energy into the Nature Refuges program. We are increasingly doing that with a range of partners—councils in part but also the likes of SEQ Catchments. We work with AgForce and we also work with Queensland Trust for Nature in terms of expanding our Nature Refuges program and bringing on board more properties where the ownership is kept in private hands and they give a commitment to conserve and enhance and protect that land. We talked about Nature Assist. In terms of the Koala Nature Refuges Program, along with the allocation of acquiring land, we also have invested \$6 million under the koala Nature Refuges Program through what was the state government's Supported Community Infrastructure Koala Conservation Policy fund—so, again, purchasing some strategic properties and working with private landholders to achieve that.

Since taking office in March 2012, we have added a net nature refuge gain of 971,479 hectares. So we are not far off the magic million since coming to office. That is a huge amount in just two years. I will repeat that: 971,479 hectares. We will continue to work with property owners. Again, we have a particular targeted program to try to connect up existing areas of protected area or private ownership protected area and we will keep taking that across the state.

I talked about the koala nature refuges program. One thing that I would like to mention in particular was a program that was a partnership that we announced in February of this year where

969 hectares at the Stewartdale Nature Refuge in South Ripley, down in your part of the world, Mr Chair. This is a great partnership, believe it or not, with the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia. They have a fantastic facility down there and they are looking to restore that site for koala habitat. They are going to rehabilitate some 200 hectares. You mentioned before the Flinders-Karawatha corridor. They abut right on to that. This will be a huge benefit for that.

Again, I am really pleased that our strategic approach to all of these programs, be it the protected area estate acquisition, the Nature Assist program, the Nature Refuges program, or the koala nature refuges on our acquisition program are all producing such great outcomes and, again, looking to build on existing protected areas and enhance the ability for these threatened species, including koalas and others, to really benefit.

CHAIR: That is right. It is leveraging off stuff that communities are already interested in as well. So I think it is a great result.

Mr TROUT: Minister, in your regulatory framework could you please explain the department's approach to all of industry in Queensland?

Mr POWELL: Thank you member for Barron River. That is a really good question. We have, I guess you could say, turned environmental management and regulation on its ear in this state. The previous government would have you believe that the approach of tying businesses up in knots of red tape and having the officers within the department stuck behind a desk doing assessment after assessment after assessment is the way that you protect the environment. We strongly disagree. We have set the goal not only to revitalise the Public Service overall but particularly in EHP to become the best environmental protection agency across the nation. I scared the director-general the other day but saying that, once we have tackled the nation, we are going to take on the world. We have looked at other jurisdictions around what they do, in particular in environmental approvals, management processes and then the regulatory system of compliance monitoring and enforcement and we have picked the best bits and put them together in a very innovative and forward-thinking strategy for this state. What it means is a couple things. Firstly, we are making it quicker for industry to get their environmental approvals by balancing the level of regulation with the environmental risk posed by the activity. So we are not sweating the small stuff. The motor vehicle workshop in industrial estates, they do not require an ERA anymore—environmentally relevant activity—because there are some standard activities that they know that they need to do in terms of their tyres and their oils and so on. They can be done and they can be monitored and checked for that, but the need for them to get an annual environmental approval is not necessary. What it means is that we focus our efforts on those activities that have the highest risk to the environment to ensure that we get the approvals and the conditions right for them. We increased our inspections of licensed sites to make sure that industry understands and complies with the acceptable standards of performance. The third part is that, where necessary, we take swift and strong action to enforce the law. So what this does is that it basically gets my officers out from behind their desks and it gets them out working with industry, checking on industry to make sure that they are complying with the conditions and their environmental authority.

One of the things that we have done is move to outcome based conditions. You would previously talk to an organisation and they would have several hundred conditions on their approval. But it would not just be about what you want to achieve in terms of water quality, or air quality, or noise or so on; it would be not only what you want them to achieve but how they should achieve it—'To achieve that water quality you must use widget X Y times a day and report on it every E hours to one of my officers.' What we have found is that that produces some really perverse outcomes, incredibly perverse outcomes, and some of them are actually creating more environmental harm. So what we now do is we set the outcome. If I can use an example. When I came into this role we used to explain to operations that were using contaminated land or land taken from the sea floor that had high PH levels—acid sulfate soils—not only what PH level they had to restore that soil to before it could be used but we tell them how they had to achieve that, what they had to use to achieve it and exactly how many kilograms of lime they had to use to do it. Yet these days, there is a range of other products available that are far cheaper that produce the outcome in half the time and have a better environmental impact than lime. So what we now say is, 'When you do that kind of work this is the PH level that we expect. How you achieve it is over to you.' That drives a whole lot of innovation, it drives costs down for businesses, but it increases the environmental benefits, because the company has a complete understanding around what our expectations are when it comes to water quality, air quality, biodiversity and the like.

What that then does is allows, as I said, my officers to get out from behind their desks. So they get out on the road. They go and have a look at the industries that we have approved, make sure that

they are in compliance and, where necessary, take enforcement action. That might be a warning letter. It might be a penalty infringement notice or it might be off to court. There are any number of examples that we have underway at the moment that demonstrate that we take that very seriously. We take now compliance as seriously as the previous government took approvals and we still take approvals very seriously. So it is a great outcome for the environment, it is a great outcome for industry as well.

There is a range of other things that we are doing to improve that. We will always build on that. We have a great strategy that is being led by Dean Ellwood and being rolled out around the state at the moment. Importantly, we recently undertook our latest workplace employee survey and I pleased to see that we went ahead in every area including in our regulatory area, which means that the workers—the officers, the front-line officers—are rising to the challenge and enjoying the challenge and getting greater role clarity as part of that as well. So it is an exciting time in EHP. We actually had South Australia ring us the other day and say, 'We heard you doing X, Y and Z. Can you send us a copy?' So we are starting to edge ahead in terms of some of the other jurisdictions. Director-general, when we become the best in the nation, remember, we have to become the best in the world.

Mrs SCOTT: Minister, I have a couple of questions regarding Auditor-General's report No. 18 of 2013-14. I refer to page 3 of Auditor-General's report No. 18 to parliament relating to monitoring and performance reporting in the state government. Here the Auditor-General concludes that 72 per cent of the state budget is lacking proper measures and standards of efficiency and effectiveness. What has the minister done to improve this monitoring and performance in your department as a result of the report?

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for the question. Again, it is one of those Auditor-General reports where we are really being told what we kind of already knew. I had a former career as a public servant, and one of my largest frustrations was I would often be asked to input into a Service Delivery Statement around performance measures and often the performance measures we were putting in there were not really measurable and possibly did not give us anything that was measurable in relation to what we were trying to achieve as an agency.

What happened in the Auditor-General's report that the member for Woodridge is referring to is that he assessed the current measures in our performance against the criteria he recommends should be adopted. So he had a criteria for creating measures that he believes should be adopted and he benchmarked it against what we currently do. We developed our service standards in partnership and to meet the requirements set by DPC and Treasury. What we have found is the two systems are not the same. He certainly encouraged the government to look at our systems of developing these measures and made some recommendations. It came out, unfortunately, after the development of this budget and these SDS papers. I am happy to report that we will actively engage with DPC and Treasury to ensure that we continue to have public documents that list not only what we have achieved but how we have achieved it and how we are demonstrating that we have achieved it. I want all of the world to know that we are doing a fantastic job in EHP of protecting our environment, of getting our businesses going and getting our economy going but protecting our environment. So I am very supportive of any initiative to ensure our performance measures explain that to the world.

Mrs SCOTT: So you are actually measuring in a different way?

Mr POWELL: What I think the Auditor-General is ultimately asking us for is to change the way we structure our current measures. I think we are quite comfortable with that. We have done a lot of that work internally, as I just mentioned, in terms of our regulatory strategy about ensuring the conditions we impose on a project are outcome based. If I read the Auditor-General rightly, he is basically asking us to have outcome based performance measures. One of the challenges we face is that in many instances we are still relying on old historical data and legacy IT systems. The other Auditor-General's report that I addressed in my opening comments was referring largely to our inability to present a lot of the data and, as I mentioned to you earlier, member for Woodridge, a lot of data around the waste area was never kept. We have a number of programs underway in our compliance renewal plan that will address all of the issues the Auditor-General raises. I know there will be a conversation had between my department, DPC and Treasury around how we report that in our SDS in future years.

Mrs SCOTT: There was also on page 2 a statement that said widespread lack of service standards and targets for efficiency of services is of particular concern. Is this a similar case to what you are talking about?

Mr POWELL: Yes, it is. I again reflect that this is a system that has been in place long before we came to government, and he is suggesting, quite rightly, that where we previously measured inputs we need to be measuring outputs and outcomes. As I said, I had frustration as a former public servant. It is something that I have drilled into my team each and every year. We are on a path to try to improve those. If anything, the Auditor-General has given us a very clear path on how we can achieve that in a very short period of time based on some of the criteria he set. I know we will be working with DPC and Treasury to address that.

Mrs SCOTT: Minister, to give you due credit, it is nice to see that the department is back to reporting on 12 performance targets. I think you cut that soon after being elected. Minister, why did you remove the performance measures of the annual increase in hectares of land for nature conservation and national parks, an increase in the area I think of a million hectares of high conservation quality land gazetted as nature refuge in 2012 only to replace them with percentage measures reporting on exactly the same things in 2013-14?

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for the question. I think I largely answered it in an earlier question from the member for Thuringowa about our protected area of state acquisition. The previous government—and I guess it came over in earlier forms of our SDS as well—had a focus on increasing the number of hectares. Really it was not about conservation at all; it was about meeting an arbitrary target of five per cent or so on. What we want to do is grow each year the protected area estate but do it in a responsible way based on science. I again draw my comments back to what I provided to the member for Thuringowa in terms of the resilience program we are doing and the acquisitions we are undertaking. We are less concerned with meeting a target that says we have added this many hectares, although it is exciting that we have almost hit the million for the last two years in nature refuges. It is about making sure that what we are protecting is worth protecting. It has that highest conservation value and I make no excuses for that.

Mrs SCOTT: Minister, when did you return from the World Heritage Committee meeting in Doha?

Mr POWELL: I think Friday. Again, I can provide my diary. I am sure this month's will be up there. Friday, 20 June.

Mr COX: Can I ask about the relevance of this?

Mr POWELL: It is all right. I am quite happy to answer the question because it will be made available in my diary anyway but I think it was Friday, 20 June following the World Heritage Committee's decision on the Wednesday. If their subsequent question is, 'Will we see a report,' you certainly will. That is an expectation of all of us who travel overseas.

Mrs SCOTT: And how many staff and the cost of the trip?

Mr POWELL: It was just me and the director-general. We travelled extremely light.

Mrs SCOTT: Okay.

Mrs MADDERN: Minister, I would like to draw your attention to the second part of your portfolio, which is heritage. There has been a lot of emphasis on environment but heritage is also important, particularly for my area. Could you outline the reasons for a review of the Queensland Heritage Act, which I understand will be undertaken this financial year?

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for the question. It is a good question. Like a lot of things, we have taken the opportunity of a reformist government to have a look at all our legislation to make sure it is up to date, it is modern and it is meeting the needs as per its original design. We are applying that to the heritage act as much as to any other act that we have already looked at, whether it be through the Environmental Protection Act and green tape reduction that we did there.

A couple of things that we are aiming to do through the review is to modernise it, streamline some of the processes and reduce unnecessary regulatory burden. Let me stress there that there is some regulatory burden that is very necessary, particularly when you are talking about conserving the best of our best on the state heritage list. We want to strengthen some of the protections for Queensland's heritage places. Importantly, we want to emphasise the role of local government in looking after its own local heritage places. I could not think of a better member to ask a question like this—it might explain your interest—than yourself given Maryborough in particular and the Fraser Coast Regional Council's extraordinary efforts to protect not only the state heritage list but also its own local heritage list.

The review was stimulated initially by some feedback we received from the Queensland Heritage Council—the independent arm that makes the decisions around whether a place should be listed. Professor Coaldrake and his council believe there are a number of improvements that could be made, particularly around their processes and the regulatory burden that they felt was a bit unnecessary. We also received a number of letters, one in particular from the Brisbane City Council seeking similar powers to what we have to enforce maintenance and care activities on heritage properties that are on the local register not on the state register. So that gave us an opportunity to ask a few questions.

A couple of areas that I was also keen to explore was we consider but we do not possibly consider as much as we should the role of local government in whether a property should be on the list. We also have a really challenging question in that a lot of nominations for registering a property are anonymous and the question of whether they should remain anonymous is a really perplexing issue. Again, we got some mixed feedback on that. Again, it was useful putting this out to the community to get responses.

There is a range of things we are doing in terms of the heritage act review. As I said, the consultation period only recently closed. We are currently assessing those. We will have ongoing conversations with the Queensland Heritage Council, and any legislative changes will go off to cabinet for approval before introduction to the parliament. Again, my anticipation is that your committee would be able to have a look at that, but I want to reassure you at the outset we have done broad consultation already. We posed it in the form of questions rather than answers because we are keen to hear what people actually think about a range of these matters. At the end of the day this is about ensuring we have a register that protects the best of our heritage here in this state and ensures that it is maintained and cared for in a way that is fitting of that level of protection. That is the ultimate goal.

CHAIR: Minister, as you are well aware, in 2011 and 2013 South-East Queensland had some quite heavy floods and this affected the quality of water. I think in 2013 Brisbane was within half a day of running out of water. Can you explain how the allocation of \$2 million to Healthy Waterways will continue to deliver improved outcomes for South-East Queensland?

Mr POWELL: Thank you, Mr Chair. I know this is a good question for you in your part of the world. We are trying to assist you and your landholders, in particular, from a number of avenues to address that. As per our election commitment, we kick in \$2 million each year to Healthy Waterways to do a range of work around healthy waterways. A couple of things that we are doing: in 2014-15 we will be providing \$600,000 to support SEQ catchments as part of their two-year healthy country project in the Upper Warrell and Pumicestone catchment areas in my part of the world. The ecosystem report cards over the last couple of years have identified that they are in particular producing some challenges. The Upper Warrell is the source of a lot of the sediment and erosion that we are seeing so how can we assist up there? In the case of the Pumicestone, as much as I love my strawberry and pineapple farmers there are some practices that we need to work with them on to improve what is coming off their properties and into the Pumicestone passage. There is \$600,000 again this year to do that. We are restoring some wetlands in the Pumicestone passage catchment in particular to trap some of that sediment and process it naturally. We also have \$285,000 going to the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. They are working in the Pumicestone passage but also in the Fassifern and Lockyer valleys to improve on-farm nutrient management and improve the farm resilience to flooding—specifically what you mentioned. We have great relationships with both organisations. I am really pleased that we can continue that.

We are also putting a bit of money towards Healthy Waterways to work with local governments on erosion control at the time of development. We all know we have to build houses. We all know there are conditions on those developers, whether they be a mum or dad or a large organisation. They have a responsibility to prevent any of that soil eroding into waterways. Healthy Waterways is getting \$300,000 towards working on that erosion control with a number of local governments so they can look at a range of enforcement activities.

There are a couple of other exciting opportunities in the South-East Queensland area, particularly in your patch, member for Lockyer. We are being more flexible around how licensees can achieve their environmental outcomes—again, taking an outcome based approach. I would like to draw your attention to a piece of work that we announced with Queensland Urban Utilities in the member for Beaudesert's area. The Beaudesert sewage treatment plant needed to be upgraded a couple of days a year, as with its increased population it was not reaching its outcomes. What they

could have spent was \$10 million on a hard engineering infrastructure outcome to achieve those improvements in those couple of days.

The alternative was to partner with QUU and SEQ Catchments and spend about \$1 million on repairing 500 metres of the Logan River. I went and checked this out. It is extraordinary. The banks are 10 metres high. Each and every time it rains, you lose about 10 or 11 truckloads of soil and all the nutrients attached to them. By looking at the outcome and saying, 'Righto, what is it that the SDP is putting into the system each year on those three or four days where it exceeds their outcome, could it be met by preventing those 11 or 12 truckloads of sediment and nutrient coming off the banks?' What we are trialling with QUU is a \$1 million program in restoring that 500-metre section of the Logan River and then monitoring to make sure that we are achieving the same outcome as we would had they spent \$10 million and upgraded their facility; again, a bit of flexibility.

I am about to sit down with the Council of Mayors. They are setting up a task force to specifically address the matter you raised around how we prevent a lot of that good topsoil ending up in our riverways and in the Mount Crosby water treatment system and costing us a motza to try to remove. We have a couple of innovative ways that we will discuss with them. I look forward to getting some better results. Again, it is about being smarter about how we use existing money in the system, rather than necessarily finding new money. QUU was going to have to spend \$10 million; they have spent \$1 million and got a great result.

Mr Chair, I took on notice a question about waste grants. I have some information that I can provide to the member for Woodridge. Keep Queensland Beautiful received \$50,000 for a litter app from the litter and illegal dumping program in 2012-13. They received \$55,000 for an adopt-a-road program under the Everyone's Environment grants round 1.

Mrs SCOTT: The adopt a—

Mr POWELL: Adopt a road, with the councils and scout groups. Again that was in 2012-13. The garage sale trial: \$30,000 in 2013-14, \$45,000 in 2014-15 and \$45,000 in 2015-16.

Mr COX: Minister, in prehearing question No. 3—I am not sure which member asked it; it was not me but I am glad it was asked—it refers to the Compliance Renewal Program. In one of your other answers regarding the Auditor-General's report, you mentioned gathering of information is important to the department, as it helps make decisions and helps, I guess, look at the performance, and especially high risks to the environment. My question is this: could you explain the \$8.7 million for the Compliance Renewal Program in particular?

Mr POWELL: I certainly can and I thank the member for the question. This is something that we are particularly excited about and I think probably the director-general more so than me. No, we share that excitement, because it is taking the department to that place we want to be and that is No. 1 in the nation and then, ultimately, the world. Our Compliance Renewal Program is about simplifying and streamlining the way the department discharges its role as Queensland's environmental regulator. I guess there are three key projects that will reshape and really simplify our processes: in relation to the application and assessment process, in relation to a new compliance framework involving the use of a certifier framework and a new compliance methodology. They are the three projects.

The cornerstone project is one called Project Unify. We talked about the Auditor-General's report before. We will be replacing a significantly at-risk application known as EcoTrack with a new IT platform. It is going to transition us to a new technology model. I think it goes from a DOS operated system to a web based system that will give us a lot of freedom and bring us into the 21st century. It is cloud based as well. It will enable us to work with our customers to really use that emerging technology and improve our service delivery. It has been approved and funded internally by the department, so again we are looking at how we cut our cloth and find ways to fund these things. We have funded it internally. It is also an improved ICT project by the director-general's council of the Queensland government ICT investment review framework. We are not going to be making mistakes of the past like payroll debacles. We are very conscious that we have the systems in place to ensure that we do this right. It aligns with the guiding principles, policies and key objectives of the ICT strategy and it recognises the recommendations, as I said, not only of the Commission of Audit final report but also the Auditor-General's report.

The \$8.7 million you mentioned, member for Thuringowa, will be over three years. That will be for the replacement of the IT system by 2016. Capital expenses total 4.7 over those three years and they relate to the professional services provided by an external software vendor, as well as departmental staff costs directly related to the system development. That is that component. The cost

of the program in year 1, 2013-14, was \$1.57 million and was funded through internal departmental funds. Year 2, 2014-15, and year 2015-16 will be \$3.82 million and \$3.31 million respectively. The budget estimate for 2014-15 also includes employee related expenses for a total of 18 staff, so that will include specialist IT roles under Project Unify and a dedicated business transition leader, again assisting the department to go from the old system to the new system.

When it is released to the public, customers will be able to lodge applications for licences and permits online and they will be able to track and manage their applications themselves. Project Unify will deliver instant standard approvals, providing reductions in the cost and time of doing business in Queensland. QCA, the Queensland Competition Authority, recently found that each day's delay in obtaining an environmental approval can cost a large resource project in the order of \$300,000; that is each and every day, \$300,000. The department's efforts to improve our customer service in this area will directly go to contributing to our growth as an economy. As well as making dealing with the department easier for customers, the IT solution will improve our data quality, as we have discussed on a number of occasions, and enable much better processing and analysis of information received by the department. In addition to Project Unify, I mention the certifier/auditor framework and the compliance framework. The certifier/auditor project is investigating a framework for introducing contestability and the harnessing of private sector expertise working alongside the department to deliver environmental compliance functions. That is where we look at third party auditors, I guess, of activities and, therefore, encourage project proponents to use those. As long as they meet the certifier framework that we operate as a department, that again could speed up approvals.

The other aspect is our compliance framework. Again, that will build on the regulatory strategy that we already have underway. It is about capturing data about environmental problems and environmental risk. It will help us to identify areas facing the greatest environmental problems or risks and, therefore, help target our compliance resources. That will help Dean and his team and Tamara and her team around wildlife, as well, do their compliance and enforcement activities. We have really been looking far and wide for the best of the best when it comes to implementing this. We sought the support of world opinion leader Professor Malcolm Sparrow of Harvard University, because we are keen to get this right. We want to ensure that we are providing excellent customer service, but we want to ensure that we are also protecting the environment. Those three key projects are part of the compliance renewal plan and will go a long, long way. The director-general heads up a whole-of-government group that is exploring new technologies in terms of our compliance framework using satellite imagery and drones and so on to improve the way we monitor and enforce our activities as well. That is an exciting space to be in.

Mr COX: Thank you.

CHAIR: Desley?

Mrs SCOTT: Minister, with respect to the World Heritage committee's decision on the Great Barrier Reef, particularly point 7 which requests the state party to ensure that the option selected does not impact the outstanding universal values and is the least damaging option available—

CHAIR: I am not quite sure how that relates to the bill before the House. It is a report. This is about the budget papers; this is not about what a third party says.

Mrs SCOTT: You do not wish to make any comment?

CHAIR: I will rule it out of order.

Mrs SCOTT: All right. Minister, are you aware of any modelling or studies that examine the environmental impact of the disposal of dredge soil within the marine park compared to the use of dredge soil to reclaim land outside the marine park?

Mr POWELL: Yes, I am. A lot of them were done by the previous state Labor government and also by the federal Labor government and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.

Mrs SCOTT: Has your department conducted any modelling on the issue?

Mr POWELL: Again, I draw your attention to the work done by the previous state and federal governments in granting many of the approvals for what was going to be a 38 million cubic metre project at Abbot Point, which I am assuming you are referring to. That is why we have addressed it and made it three million. That is why the federal government has put the conditions on it. It is why the Great Barrier Reef has asked the proponent to explore a range of different sites and why the proponent is currently doing that.

CHAIR: Michael?

Mr TROUT: Minister, would you please explain the new environmental offsets framework and how that will deliver a better outcome for Queensland's environment?

Mr POWELL: I certainly can. I thank the member for the question. The short of it is that we used to have five offset policies across a range of departments in this state and we now have one and it is legislated. It has legislative backing. It has its own act. It sets out when an offset is required and what activities are required. I stress that it is after the proponent has demonstrated that they have been unable to avoid or mitigate any impact on the environment and it is only if the project is subsequently approved. What we have done is brought five into one. We have reduced the duplication. We have reduced the complexity. We have really made it a win for the proponents but also, as we mentioned earlier, strategically for the environment. A couple of things that we have allowed under it are investment in strategic corridors such as Flinders Karawatha, in your part of the world, Chair, and like some of the Wet Tropics area that you have up in your part of the world, member for Barron River. It allows us to also have direct benefit management plans. The best solution for something may not actually be buying a block of land; it may actually be investing in a research program to try to ensure that a species can continue to survive. It does still allow for a proponent to purchase land. It has a web based calculator that allows a proponent to determine what their potential offset is. Again, it is a great win for the businesses and also for the environment, because it will ultimately deliver far more strategic outcomes for the environment rather than the hotchpotch quilt-like effort that we used to have where you picked up a little property and protected it over here, only to find out that it was going to be mined two years later anyway and then you had to go and find another one and another one and another one. We can actually work with landholders and councils and find the right areas to invest in and make sure that we are getting the best benefit for the environment and for the species that are impacted by those projects.

CHAIR: This will be the last question as our time has just about expired. Can the minister outline how the changes to the protected plant legislation in Queensland have benefitted industry and improved business?

Mr POWELL: I certainly can. With your approval, I might keep my remarks fairly brief because I want to wrap up and give my thanks to a few people, Mr Chair. In short, the new framework is forecast to save business and government around \$50.5 million per annum. The savings to business are just over \$50 million and the savings to government are a bit over \$320,000. That is by not having to undertake flora survey requirements and no longer requiring a clearing permit for least concern plants. What we have done is focused on known areas where protected plants do exist and require proponents or landholders to undertake surveys in those instances. Where we know that there are no protected plants, we no longer require the flora survey. That is a huge saving in that regard.

It is also worth noting that we have made significant changes to the harvesting, growing and trade of protected plants. We have streamlined the number of permits required and have worked with industry around achieving benefits for those who do grow or harvest or trade protected plants as well. It has been a win all round in that regard. I am sure it will also produce—I know it will produce—wins for the protected plants themselves. If I may make a few concluding remarks, Mr Chair?

CHAIR: Certainly.

Mr POWELL: Again, I want to start by thanking the committee for the questions. It is always enjoyable to come and appear before an estimates hearing. I particularly acknowledge Desley, the member for Woodridge, and thank her for her questions today. Mr Chair, due to the delayed release of the transcript this year, which I understand for us is on the 22 July, first of all can I confirm that I had no questions on notice that are outstanding? I think I have addressed all of them in session. So I do not need to provide any further questions on notice, but I just wanted to check that up.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr POWELL: I would like to acknowledge the fantastic team I have in EHP. We are really well led by the director-general, John Black. How long have you been on board now, Director-General?

Mr Black: Since last September.

Mr POWELL: He hit the ground running and has continued the work that the former director-general, Andrew Chesterman, started, but taking it to another level. He has led our team extraordinarily well. I commend him for everything he has done and thank him for the work that he has done in preparing for today as well. Again I acknowledge the deputy directors-general in the room: Tony, behind us Tamara, Dean and Peter. I have a fantastic estimates team of David, Arnae and Ken. Our corporate services staff of Brad, Lindy, Kerry and Mark do fantastic work around

finance, communications and HR. The staff present today: Geoff, Elisa, Lisa and my cabinet team of Don and Elise. I have plenty of staff back in the office also to whom I would like to extend a special thanks, particularly the authors of the many briefing notes I have and to the managers who had to review those briefing notes. I thank, in particular, all of the staff within EHP. I know many of them are listening now. All of you will attest that your interactions with my officers, particularly in the regional areas, have significantly lifted and improved. We have a very customer focused team now working in EHP, dedicated to protecting the environment but also dedicated to working with all of the stakeholders and businesses around Queensland to ensure we get the balance right when it comes to growing our economy and protecting our precious environment. Again, Mr Chair, thank you very much for your stewardship of today's proceedings, and I thank your committee staff and Hansard. It was a very enjoyable session.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. That brings to a close the time for questions. Thank you, Minister and advisers. We will now take a short break and resume at 1.30 with the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines.

Proceedings suspended from 12.32 pm to 1.29 pm

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

In Attendance

Hon. AP Cripps, Minister for Natural Resources and Mines

Ms S McDonald, Chief of Staff

Department of Natural Resources and Mines

Dr B Heyward, Director-General

Ms S Ryan, Deputy Director-General, Policy and Program Support


Ms R Cronin, Deputy Director-General, Service Delivery

Mr P Harrison, Deputy Director-General, Mine Safety and Health

Ms B Parker, Deputy Director-General, Business and Corporate Partnerships

Ms K Platt, Chief Financial Officer

Ms B Ditchfield, Executive Director for Land and Mines Policy

 **CHAIR:** I declare this meeting of the Agriculture, Resources and Environment Committee open. I am Ian Rickuss, the chair of the committee. Joining me on the committee today are: Desley Scott, the member for Woodridge; Sam Cox, the member for Thuringowa; Jason Costigan, the member for Whitsunday; 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 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 this morning.

The committee has authorised the release of answers from ministers to the pre-hearing questions. These will be available shortly on our website. 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 guidelines at schedule 8 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 their mobile phones off or to silent?

This afternoon, we will commence our examination of the estimates for the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines beginning with estimates for the service areas of water services until 2.30 pm, followed by mine safety and health services and mining and petroleum services from 3.00 pm until 5.00 pm. Welcome minister and advisors.

For the benefit of Hansard, I ask advisors, if you are called to give an answer, to please state your name before speaking. Minister, the committee has granted leave to the Leader of the Opposition, the Hon. Anastacia Palaszczuk MP, to participate in 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 an opening statement?

Mr CRIPPS: Thank you, Mr Chairman, and good afternoon to you and members of committee. The Newman government has a clear focus on growing agriculture across Queensland as one the

state's four economic pillars and is committed to identifying new opportunities to help our government's goal of doubling agricultural production by 2040.

My Department of Natural Resources and Mines is focused on providing economic development opportunities for rural and regional Queensland. We are committed to ensuring the state's water resources are used in a responsible and productive way for the development and expansion of the agriculture sector and for the benefit of all Queenslanders.

It is our intention by the end of this parliamentary term to deliver wide-ranging reforms to Queensland's Water Act. This act developed under the previous government is now 14 years old. It is a complicated act—one that the previous government made unnecessarily so and seemed intent on increasing regulation and making it harder for businesses to operate in Queensland.

The Newman government wants to see it simplified while ensuring we maintain security, certainty and flexibility through better balancing the economic, social and environmental outcomes for water users. I want to provide more certainty for businesses to encourage and facilitate greater private sector involvement in major water infrastructure developments.

The review will build on other work we have undertaken over the last two years to provide additional and secure access to water users after years of frustration and bureaucracy. We have developed a draft strategy for water resource management on Cape York to support regional planning outcomes and the aspirations of industry and the local community. Last month I announced the removal of the wild rivers related water moratorium over parts of Cape York Peninsula—the first step in creating new opportunities for economic development in a region that the government realises has major potential for growth and prosperity.

In the Gulf of Carpentaria I responded quickly to the findings of the CSIRO's Flinders and Gilbert River agricultural resource assessment released on 6 February this year under the North Queensland Irrigated Agriculture Strategy. A week later I announced that I had brought forward the review of the gulf water resource plan in response to the CSIRO's report.

This review is focused on identifying new, unallocated water volumes in the Flinders and Gilbert River catchments to support cultural development. The review builds on the success of the release of almost 95,000 megalitres of unallocated water in the Flinders and Gilbert River catchments in May last year and demonstrates our commitment to providing new agricultural development opportunities in regional and rural Queensland.

We are addressing a number of longstanding issues previously ignored by the former government by undergoing a review of the Barron water resource plan and Barron resource operations plan. This review will ensure a stronger, more efficient and productive water management framework is in place to support industries and communities across the region.

Water users in the Wet Tropics region of Far North Queensland have been delivered greater certainty through the finalisation of the Wet Tropics water resource plan. The new plan gives entitlement holders a clear framework for the productive and responsible use of water for commercial, residential and future development while protecting the environment.

The previous government did not complete this process to put a sustainable water management plan in place for the Wet Tropics, but this task has now been completed. The plan is a common-sense approach to management, providing transparency for water users in the way that they manage their water and associated business operations. It will provide for continued use of existing amounts of water, provide a framework for dealing with seasonal adjustments in stream flow and a process for releasing unallocated water. This plan was developed in full consultation with rural and industry groups who share the government's vision to strengthen the agriculture pillar of the Queensland economy.

We have also commenced a state-wide rollout of the self-reading of water meters following a highly successful pilot program in the Bowen groundwater management area, where irrigators in the region have saved more than \$20,000 since April this year. The previous government relied for many years on SunWater to read water meters, at a cost of \$60 per meter, which was passed directly onto irrigators.

Self-reading of water meters is a common-sense approach that will save irrigators money and continue to provide the department with vital data to help ensure water security for all water users. It is part of our plan for the agriculture sector and we are supporting irrigators by enabling them to improve the productivity of their irrigation enterprise and use water more efficiently.

We have committed \$8 million over four years to the rural water use efficiency program to assist irrigators improve their efficiency, competitiveness and productivity. These projects will develop best management practices for on-farm sediment control to help irrigators identify opportunities to improve water efficiency, nutrient management and water quality, develop standards and codes of practice to improve irrigation design and installation for rural irrigation systems and develop and promote new technologies to assist irrigators with scheduling and water management.

Our \$31 million commitment over three years to Queensland's Regional Natural Resource Management Investment Program demonstrates the government is dedicated to projects that will improve water quality flowing to the reef lagoon. We understand how precious the Great Barrier Reef is to all Queenslanders and we will protect it now and into the future. We have done this in just over two years to protect the reef and we are looking forward to ensuring that the Great Barrier Reef remains one of the world's best managed World Heritage areas. The department will continuously strive for excellence in water management and planning. Mr Chairman, thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you for that brief statement, Minister Cripps. I will ask the first question. I refer to the Service Delivery Statement at page 11. In June this year the ABC reported that the Queensland government introduced amendments to the Water Act specifically to allow Karreman Quarries to avoid prosecution for illegal quarrying near Harlin. Can you comment on these allegations and whether or not all the relevant facts were aired in these reports?

Mr CRIPPS: Thank you for the question, Mr Chairman; it is an important one. There are a number of important historical facts relating to Karreman Quarries' Harlin operations that unfortunately were not explained in the ABC report that you refer to. When these facts are understood, the allegations aired in the ABC report can be seen for what they are—a one-sided account of what is a far more complex situation.

The reality is that this government has addressed what was a longstanding problem created by the former government as part of its 2010 amendments of the definition of a watercourse under the Water Act. For the committee's benefit, and as a matter of public record, the facts are as follows. In 2005 Karreman Quarries was granted a quarry material allocation notice under the Water Act 2000—these are commonly referred to as a QMAN allocation—which authorised the extraction of sand and gravel from the Brisbane River adjacent to lot 2 on RP 806767.

The QMAN was subsequently renewed in November 2006 with an expiry date of January 2010. In June 2007 Karreman Quarries appealed to the Planning and Environment Court against the department's decision to impose a condition limiting the extraction date under the development approval associated with the sand and gravel extraction. The appeal was in part about the department's interpretation of the definition of lateral extent of a watercourse under the Water Act.

Karreman Quarries contended that the quarry material, the subject of the development approval, was outside the defined bed and banks of the watercourse and argued that the department had no jurisdiction to require a development approval for the removal of quarry material from the land. The court agreed and determined that the quarrying on the land was outside the bed and banks and therefore not within the jurisdiction of the department.

The authorisations issued under the Water Act in 2005 and renewed in 2006 were null and void. In 2010 the then government introduced the Natural Resources and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, including amendments pertaining to ambulatory boundaries and the definition of watercourse. Those changes resulted, in some cases, in an extension of the state's jurisdiction over a watercourse onto land that was not previously under the state's jurisdiction under the Water Act. Because of a change to the definition of the outer banks of a watercourse, Karreman Quarries' activities were identified as being in a watercourse and without the appropriate approvals were deemed unlawful.

The bill included transitional provisions for pre-existing operations but these were inadequate because some businesses which had no authorities under the Water Act did have other authorities in place, such as a development approval over land adjoining the watercourse. The transitional provisions only applied if the entity already held a licence or permit under the Water Act.

Karreman Quarries, at the time of the commencement of the new provisions, did not hold a permit or licence under the Water Act. Indeed, they did not as the Planning and Environment Court ruling had made that abundantly clear. Karreman Quarries did, however, have an approved development approval issued by the then Esk shire council for the quarrying operation and so were entirely within the law at the time that the 2010 bill was introduced and passed.

During the debate on the 2010 bill the Deputy Premier, who was at the time the relevant shadow minister, highlighted his concerns about key aspects of the legislative amendments associated with the definition of the lateral extent of a watercourse. Notably, there was no compensation payable due to this change to Karreman Quarries nor was there any right of review or appeal offered.

At meeting held in August 2013 Karreman Quarries was advised by the department that it required a QMAN issued under the Water Act to allow its operation to continue. The issuing of the compliance notice in February 2014, in accordance with the legislation as it stood at the time, only drew our attention to the need for an appropriate transitional arrangement. It confirmed that the Deputy Premier's concerns about the transitional arrangements in the 2010 bill were justified and that urgent redress was required.

CHAIR: Further to the last question, can you please explain to the committee why the amendments were in fact drafted and what the outcome was designed to achieve?

Mr CRIPPS: Thanks for the question. The 2010 Natural Resources and Other Legislation Amendment Bill introduced by the previous government amended the Water Act 2000, the Land Act 1994 and the Surveying and Mapping Infrastructure Act 2003 to introduce a feature based methodology to clarify the lateral extent of the state's management powers in non-title watercourses and to resolve uncertainty over the location of ambulatory boundaries adjoining non-title watercourses.

One of the consequences of these amendments was to extend the lateral extent of the jurisdiction under the Water Act in relation to watercourses. This meant that a person who was lawfully undertaking an activity, such as a quarrying, sand and gravel operation, at a site adjoining a watercourse under the provisions of the Water Act watercourse definition could be subject to the new requirement to hold an authority for that activity under the Water Act. Transitional provisions included in the Water Act at the time of 2010 bill allowed for a temporary period, the continuation of activities already authorised by the Water Act licences and permits on land that became land under the jurisdiction of the Water Act as a consequence of those amendments.

However, the transitional provisions did not include lawful operations that were authorised under non-Water Act approvals, for example, some businesses that had other valid authorities, such as a development permit under the Sustainable Planning Act 2009, and Karreman Quarries' Harlin operations are an example of this. The fact that the 2010 transitional arrangements did not apply to operations approved under other acts, therefore, made what were legal operations illegal unless the operator applied for and obtained a quarry material allocation notice—or a QMAN—under the Water Act. The process by which operators could seek a QMAN did not distinguish between new and previously approved operations. That is why this government introduced an amendment to the Water Act earlier this year as part of the Land and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. These amendments re-establish the status quo that existed prior to the 2010 amendments and righted a wrong imposed by the previous government that made existing lawful operations unlawful.

The new transitional provisions confirm the validity of pre-existing approvals and provides certainty to businesses by providing for ongoing extraction of materials at existing operations for a period of five years. The 2014 amendments provide that ongoing extraction activities undertaken in a watercourse and on land adjoining the watercourse are lawful and continue to be lawful without the need for further authorisation for a period of five years.

CHAIR: Minister, the ABC report also contains some details about erosion. What are you doing already to combat the erosion in the Brisbane River?

Mr CRIPPS: Thank you for that question, Mr Chairman. It is also a good question. I would like, for the information of the committee, to advise that, in total, the Queensland government is spending some \$4.3 million in the Brisbane River and other catchments that flow into the Brisbane River to combat the effects of erosion. These include allocations under the Queensland natural resource management program. For example, we have riparian restoration projects in South-East Queensland in the Brisbane River worth \$750,000 and comprising of four projects undertaken by SEQ Catchments to improve riparian condition and water quality in the Neurum Creek area, in the Brisbane River at Fig Tree Pocket, Myrtle town and Enoggera Creek areas in order to address urban degradation and flooding impacts.

Closer to your area of the world, Mr Chairman, under the flood recovery program that is being administered by my department, in the Lockyer and Warrill creeks in the upper Brisbane River we are restoring eight at-risk reaches to greatly increase their resistance to future flood damage. The project

addresses eight major reaches of riparian failure that have significantly impacted both farmer and regional agricultural and horticultural production, aggravated the degradation of major watercourses and adversely impacted on the quality of Brisbane's bulk water supply. Our targeted recovery and resilience projects in these areas have assisted landholders in priority areas to return production and improve natural resilience of the waterway.

For three separate targeted recovery project programs in the Lockyer, Fassifern and upper Brisbane areas, a total of \$187,833 has been budgeted for these programs. In the Lockyer and Bremer areas of the Brisbane River catchment under, once again, the Queensland natural resource management program, we have riparian restoration projects worth \$300,000 comprising of two projects undertaken by SEQ Catchments to improve riparian conditions and water quality in the Kedron Brook, in the Schulz Canal area and adjacent to the Brookside Shopping Centre to address urban degradation and flood impacts.

We are also improving resilience through strategic cat's claw creeper control and sustainable agricultural initiatives in riparian management areas worth \$850,000 combining weed control, property management planning and riparian and landscape management to improve water quality and sustainable agricultural outcomes in the Lockyer catchment. It involves weed and pest initiatives aimed at reducing the impact of cat's claw, as I mentioned, but also parthenium weed. There are over 180 hectares in that catchment. Again, under our flood recovery program, \$2.2 million has been allocated to the Mulgowie-Laidley on-farm recovery project in the Lockyer and Warrill creeks in the upper Brisbane River, restoring eight at-risk reaches to greatly assist their resistance to future flood damage. I think that that demonstrates the government's interest and commitment to dealing with water quality programs and issues in the Brisbane River catchment.

CHAIR: It is important, Minister, simply for the fact that Brisbane was very close to running out of water prior to the 2013 flood and some of that was from that Mulgowie area and I know that you have been up there. I refer to page 5 of the SDS, which mentions water resource plans. Can you please provide an update on what is currently happening with the various water resource plans around the state?

Mr CRIPPS: Certainly, Mr Chairman. All catchment areas of Queensland, except for the cape, have a water resource plan in place. On 2 June 2014 I released a statement of proposals for consultation outlining the scope and aims of proposed amendments to the Barron River water resource plan and resource operations plans through a review of those plans. The review will focus on the allocation and management of groundwater and connected surface water in the upper Barron catchment.

Appeals relating to decisions for groundwater licences in the Atherton subartesian issued between 2002 and 2006 have been heard by the Land Court in Queensland and in some cases resulted in an increase in the volume specified on the entitlement. The court also flagged its concern about procedural fairness and the application of statutory requirements in issuing water licences in subartesian management area B between 2002 and 2006. The Queensland Ombudsman investigated the Land Court members' concerns into licensing decisions and practices in this area and a report outlining these concerns was tabled in parliament on 7 May this year. This review of the Barron River plans will address the findings of the court and the Ombudsman and will also be an opportunity to consider more flexible water-trading arrangements to ensure that the upper Barron community is gaining maximum benefit from its water resources while ensuring that environmental values are supported. Submissions on the statement of proposals, which closed on 16 July this year, and ongoing consultation with the Barron Water Consultation Group will also inform the development of the draft plan amendments.

I am also proposing to extend the Barron water resource plan beyond its scheduled expiry in August of this year to 2022, which will ensure that there is minimal disruption to water management arrangements while the targeted review is underway, thereby ensuring ongoing certainty and security for industries that rely on this important resource. This targeted review of water allocation and management arrangements in the area is an important step to restoring community confidence in local water management arrangements that will support the expansion of local industries across the region.

In relation to the Burnett Basin water resource plan, a review of the water resource plan for that area is currently being undertaken to replace the existing plan, which is due to expire in September this year. On 4 November last year, a new draft water resource plan was released for public review and submissions. The draft plan includes new water-sharing rules for the Barker, Barambah, upper

Burnett and Bundaberg water supply schemes. The new draft plan also proposes managed overland flow water and groundwater in particular parts of the Burnett Basin to protect existing access to water. A community reference panel and the water user groups were consulted during the development of the new draft plan. Information sessions about the new draft plan and consultation with key stakeholders were held throughout November last year and groundwater users in particular raised issues relating to the need for licensing and metering in particular groundwater areas. Further consultation has occurred with groundwater users in these areas and issues raised at these forums and through submissions is being considered in the finalisation of that plan. I can assure the committee that recommendations from the Ombudsman's report as they relate to the Burnett Basin will also be addressed appropriately before the finalisation of this plan.

In the gulf, the Queensland government is committed to supporting agricultural development in northern Australia, including in the Flinders and Gilbert River catchments consistent with our government's policy of promoting a four-pillar economy. As I mentioned earlier, on 6 February this year, the CSIRO released its findings of the Flinders and Gilbert Agricultural Resource Assessment under the North Queensland Irrigated Agriculture Strategy and on 13 this year, only a week later, I announced that I would bring forward the review of the gulf water resource plan in response to the report's findings.

On 13 March this year I formalised this commitment by releasing a statement of proposals outlining my intention to review the plan to identify new unallocated water volumes in the Flinders and Gilbert River catchments. Submissions on the statement of proposals closed on 2 May this year and we received 12 submissions. The feedback provided in these submissions in addition to the targeted stakeholder consultation will inform the development of a draft water resource plan amendment.

The CSIRO's findings highlighted the need to undertake further technical assessments to identify the implications of development for fisheries productivity as well as waterhole and flood plain ecology. I have since commissioned the CSIRO and the department of science to undertake additional technical studies to address these matters. These studies will help ensure that any allocation of additional volumes of water does not compromise the rights of existing water users or the water needs of commercial and recreational fisheries and the environment. I am planning to see that the amendment to the gulf water resource plan is finalised by the end of this year. This time frame will provide for the release of any new unallocated water reserves by early next year.

The Department of Natural Resources and Mines finalised an amendment to the gulf resource operations plan on 11 July this year. The amendment specifically provides for seasonal and permanent transfer of water licences in the Flinders and Gilbert River catchments, which will further facilitate agricultural development in these catchments. This planning initiative builds on the success of the release of almost 95,000 megalitres of unallocated water into these catchments in May last year. Once again, this demonstrates our ongoing commitment to providing for new agricultural development opportunities in Queensland.

CHAIR: Thank you very much.

Mr COX: Minister, water is obviously very important to North Queensland—being born and raised in the Burdekin, the land of liquid gold. I refer to page 10 of the SDS, which refers to water resources. Could you outline how the department has responded to the recent Ombudsman's report on water licensing?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for Thuringowa for his question. He is right: water is an extremely upon input, particularly into our agricultural industries and irrigated agriculture in particular. I referred earlier to a decision of the Land Court in 2012, which found that the department had failed to consider the efficient use of water when granting water licences in part of the Atherton subartesian area between 2002 and 2006. The Land Court also noted that it was unclear if this failing extended to other areas of the state.

Following this ruling, the then director-general referred the matter to the Crime and Misconduct Commission as possible official misconduct by departmental officers. The commission subsequently advised that the matter would be more appropriately dealt with by the Queensland Ombudsman. As a result, the director-general initiated discussions with the Queensland Ombudsman who, in February last year, commenced an investigation into the integrity of water resource planning provisions.

The Ombudsman's final report from that investigation was tabled in the parliament on 2 May this year. The report highlights various administrative deficiencies in historical water licence decision-making processes. For example, the Water Act 2000 currently prescribes numerous criteria

that must be considered in making a decision about a water licence. These criteria apply to decisions, for example, about granting, renewing and amending and reinstating water licences.

The investigation found that if any one of those criteria was not considered as part of the decision-making process there is doubt about the validity of the water licence resulting from the decision. The report is critical of administrative decisions suggesting some decisions were contrary to the Water Act. However, there is no suggestion that staff intentionally operated contrary to the law. Nor were there any findings in the report of corrupt or criminal activity. These failings happened under the previous government and, since coming into government, I have worked hard to restore certainty and confidence for water users throughout Queensland.

Furthermore, the Ombudsman's opinions and recommendations are based on pre-existing legislation. The government has initiated a number of significant reforms to address deficiencies in the historical approaches to allocating and managing water. Some of the key actions taken to date include: a review of operational policies; the revised policies are focused towards empowering regional officers to make decisions that are customer focused instead of trying to adhere to a one-size-fits-all approach; also, outdated references in departmental policies that could fetter the chief executive's decision-making power have been removed.

The department is providing training and support for good administrative decision-making processes under the act. As part of a broader review of the act, the department is undertaking a review of the water licensing framework. The focus of this part of the review is to ensure that the framework has a clear and easy to understand decision-making process for water licensing. Legislative amendments included in the Land and Other Legislation Amendment Bill this year to validate particular water licence decisions provide certainty for existing entitlement holders. A targeted review of the Barron water resource plan, which I mentioned earlier, and the resource operations plan also have been initiated to address issues of fairness. This will include a review of licence volumes issued between 2002 and 2006.

The department is significantly transforming its water business and this transformation covers all aspects of the water business including a comprehensive review of the act and of the department's business processes and information systems.

Mr TROUT: I refer to page 5 of the Service Delivery Statement. Can you provide an update on the progress of the draft strategy for delivering water resource management on Cape York, including what the lifting of the moratorium means to local and potential new users?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for Barron River for the question. I know, given he is a neighbour to the member for Cook, he will be interested in this particular issue. The Department of Natural Resources and Mines has released a final strategy for delivering water resource management on Cape York Peninsula. This follows a public submission period from late November last year to late March this year alongside the draft Cape York Regional Plan. The department has considered submissions received during that period in finalising this strategy. The strategy provides a framework to promote responsible and productive management allocation and use of the cape's water resources in both the short and long term.

The final strategy was released after a public submission period and identifies the following actions: revokes the current Cape York Peninsula amendment moratorium notice; deals favourably with water licence applications where the impacts of the proposed development are minimal or have been demonstrated to have manageable impacts on the environment and existing water users; implements a water resource planning process in Cape York to support responsible and productive use of the water resources in the region; and aligns water rights in special agreement acts with the Water Act framework to bring water resource management under a single legislative framework.

The department has already delivered the first of these actions by revoking the Cape York water moratorium on 28 May this year. This action was also consistent with the commitment that our government gave under its January to June six-month action plan for that period. The department has also commenced the preplanning assessment of the water resource planning process which in the longer term will enable water resource management to be consistent with a regional plan once it is finalised. The government is committed to enabling economic development opportunities on Cape York supported by the responsible and productive management of the region's water resources.

Mr TROUT: Minister, I refer to page 6 of the Service Delivery Statement. How many megalitres will be made available for irrigators in the Gilbert and Flinders River catchment area?

Mr CRIPPS: The member for Barron River's question follows on from some remarks I made earlier about water resource planning processes that are currently underway. As I have mentioned before, our government is committed to supporting agricultural development in northern Australia including in the Flinders and Gilbert River catchments consistent with our government's four-pillar economic strategy. As I mentioned earlier also, on 6 February this year the CSIRO released its findings of its resource assessment for those catchments under the North Queensland Irrigated Agriculture Strategy.

On 13 February, only one week later, I announced that I had brought forward the review of the gulf water resource plan in response to the report's findings. A month later I formalised that commitment by releasing the statement of proposals which outlined my intention to review the plan to identify new unallocated water volumes in the Flinders and Gilbert River catchments. Submissions on the statement of proposals closed on 2 May, and 12 submissions were received. The feedback provided in these submissions will inform the targeted stakeholder consultation process.

As I mentioned earlier, the requirement in the CSIRO's report for further technical assessments to identify the implications of development for fisheries productivity as well as the important waterholes and flood plains in the gulf country has been forwarded to the CSIRO and the department of science to undertake. It is these studies that will ensure that any allocation of additional volumes of water do not compromise the rights of existing water users or the water needs of existing commercial fisheries, the needs of recreational fishers and the environment in that gulf catchment, and I stressed the importance of these issues before in my previous answer.

Once again can I say to the member for Barron River that the volumes of unallocated water that become available as a result of this review will very much depend on the needs of those existing users and the environment and the fact that we will take into consideration the scientific findings of the CSIRO report and the work that they are subsequently doing, as well as the work of the department of science. I am planning to have this process completed by the end of the year. That will mean that any additional unallocated volumes of water will be available to be released by early next year. I know that there are a number of stakeholders and property owners in gulf catchments on the Flinders and Gilbert that are anxiously looking forward to the opportunity to secure more water under that water resource plan and resource operations plan.

We already released last year 95,000 megalitres of water to kick-start the opportunities for growth in irrigated agriculture in the Flinders and Gilbert River catchments. I hope that new volumes of water that we can make available will assist with the growth and expansion of irrigated agriculture, giving new opportunities for the expansion of agriculture in North Queensland.

CHAIR: I call the member for Woodridge.

Mrs SCOTT: Minister, thank you for your explanation on the Karreman Quarries issue. I have a number of additional questions for you just by way of clarification. If the matter relating to Karreman Quarries was associated with the government's Water Act review, why were amendments moved during consideration in detail on the Land and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2014 to make Karreman's Harlin operation retrospectively legal prior to the consultation on the Water Act review closing on 29 July? If the matters are not related, why did you describe at the meeting on 8 April this year in your diary as being about the Water Act review when the Deputy Premier was rightly describing it as cross-portfolio matters?

CHAIR: You are starting to stray a fair bit from the SDS. Minister?

Mr CRIPPS: The matters that pertain to the Karreman Quarries situation do not relate to the government's review of the Water Act. They relate to the Water Act because it was amendments to the Water Act by the previous government in 2010 which triggered the expansion of the jurisdiction of the Water Act and infringed upon the authority held by Karreman Quarries to operate on land adjacent to the watercourse. The issues that pertain to my portfolio pertain to the Water Act. The Deputy Premier's diary entry which describes cross-portfolio issues is correctly identified in his diary because his interest as the minister responsible for planning relates to the existence of a legitimate development application or planning instrument under the Sustainable Planning Act. So the Deputy Premier's responsibilities or interest in the matter as far as that is concerned relates to the fact that it was a DA that was impinged upon by the amendments by the previous government in 2010. My diary entry is correct because my portfolio interests relate to the Water Act.

Mrs SCOTT: Fine. Minister, on the day after your meeting with the Deputy Premier on the Water Act review you met with departmental and ministerial staff with the same topic detailed—a

Water Act review. Did you instruct the department to draft amendments to be moved during consideration in detail on the Land and Other Legislation Amendment Bill—

CHAIR: This again is starting to stray a long way away from—

Mr TROUT: No relevance.

Mrs SCOTT: The minister has given a whole explanation of it and this is just clarifying a number of issues relating to that.

CHAIR: No. It is clarifying his diary issues that do not relate to it at all.

Mrs SCOTT: Minister, when did you first become aware that your department was taking compliance action against Karreman Quarries?

CHAIR: Again, I think it is straying away from the SDS. It is not mentioned in the Appropriation Bill. I think it is more a question for the House or somewhere else. It is definitely not a question for here.

Mrs SCOTT: Can I ask another question then? Let me see if it is likely to get through. Minister, in the explanatory notes accompanying the Land and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, it is implied that the amendments to the Water Act are merely about fixing an inadequate transitional provision—

CHAIR: Again, it is not related to the SDS. I cannot see how that has anything to do with the Appropriation Bill.

Mrs SCOTT: Was the minister's explanation?

CHAIR: If you look at page 10, if I remember off the top of my head, it was about the reform of the Water Act and that sort of thing. That is what his explanation was about.

Mrs SCOTT: I would have thought this was simply clarifying some of that.

Mr CRIPPS: I am happy to answer those questions, Mr Chairman.

CHAIR: You can answer the last question then, Minister.

Mr CRIPPS: If it assists the committee, I am happy to answer the question of the member.

CHAIR: Do you want to repeat that last question?

Mrs SCOTT: Minister, in the explanatory notes accompanying the Land and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, it is implied that the amendments to the Water Act are merely about fixing an inadequate transitional provision in the Natural Resources and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, and no explicit mention is made of the pending legal action by your department. The legislative changes in those amendments go far beyond just the transitional provisions of the Natural Resources and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. Why did you fail to properly inform the parliament of both the intent and the government's reasoning for these amendments which were moved at the last minute during consideration in detail? Do you want to answer that?

CHAIR: It is up to you, Minister.

Mr CRIPPS: The amendments that I moved during consideration in detail of the Land and Other Legislation Amendment Bill earlier this year do not go beyond rectifying the inadequate transitional arrangements that were put in place by the previous government from the 2010 legislation. I reject the premise of the member's question in that regard. The effect of the amendments was clearly outlined in the explanatory notes accompanying the bill.

CHAIR: So you were just correcting an error by the previous Labor government.

Mr CRIPPS: That is the opinion of the government and was explained in the explanatory notes.

Mrs MADDERN: Minister, water issues are very front of mind in our area, particularly given the drought that we are going through at the moment. I note that the government made a commitment at the election to review the Water Act. Can you please outline how Queenslanders are expected to benefit from this review?

Mr CRIPPS: It is correct that the member for Maryborough has outlined that last year I gave some instruction to the Department of Natural Resources and Mines to commence a review of the current regulatory arrangements associated with the Water Act and consider proposals for reform. The key aim is to reform the act to keep pace with advances in water resource management, government service delivery and technology in order to deliver improved customer services and benefits. As a result, the department is preparing changes to the act to deliver security, certainty and flexibility to water users through a framework that balances economic, social and environmental

outcomes. Water markets across Queensland would be expanded by converting a further 9,500 water licences to secure tradeable water allocations. This will ensure water is available to support economic development opportunities for our customers.

A water development option will be developed to provide proponents of major water projects certainty of access to water resources early in their development project. This would enable them to further invest and progress their development with confidence about access to water resources. Processes would be simplified and made more flexible to provide faster access to the almost two million megalitres in water catchments across the state which are currently unallocated for water users and to cut costs to government. Water rights for bore owners would be protected by requiring mining companies to make good where there are impacts on water supply boards. Legislative provisions would be streamlined to deliver water plans faster through more efficient processes to establish or review plans and transactions such as water licence amendments, amalgamations and subdivisions would be simplified to allow water licence holders to do business more efficiently. I look forward to progressing these proposals to reduce the red tape and regulation for customers and stakeholders as well as for the officers in my department so we can have more productive and responsible use of water resources in Queensland.

Mr KNUTH: Minister, I want to say thank you very much for bringing attention to the hearing here today with regard to the Ombudsman's finding on 7 May with regard to the application for allocation based on area B, I believe, the Upper Barron water resource plan relating to underground water. As you are aware, there have been a number of landholders who were severely disadvantaged and have lost significantly financially as a result of this deficiency in that the Ombudsman indicated there was a deficiency. Has there been any indication as a result of this budget or the department in terms of compensation to these landowners?

Mr CRIPPS: In response to the member for Dalrymple's question, what I can say is that, subsequent to the decision of the Land Court in March 2012, I took action to make sure that the Department of Natural Resources and Mines was accountable and responsive to the decision of the Land Court, and the Land Court's decision related to the circumstances of two landowners who progressed their argument or disagreement with decisions that had been made by the department under the previous government in relation to their application for water entitlement. The action of the court determined an adjustment in the water entitlement that ought to be made available to those two landholders and, in the opinion of the court, that was the restitution that ought to be made to those landholders. But subsequent to that I took the comments of the Land Court in its judgement very seriously. Hence, as I explained earlier, I asked my director-general at that time to refer the matter to the Crime and Misconduct Commission which subsequently said that the matter would be more appropriately dealt with by the Ombudsman. To my knowledge the Ombudsman's report does not recommend any compensation to either the landholders in the Barron water resource plan area, particularly in area B, but it does draw the government's attention to what in the opinion of the Ombudsman was a deficiency in decision-making processes by officers of the department under the Water Act for water entitlements issued during that period.

The issue subsequently is: how can we ensure in the future that decisions about water entitlements for people who make application to the department for additional entitlement is done appropriately and fairly and efficiently under the act? That is the reason why I have directed that there be not only a review of the Barron water resource plan and resource operations plan, which includes the Barron water consultation group of local stakeholders who can provide input into that review, but also asked my department to commence a review of the Water Act. I am determined to improve the efficiency and the robustness of the water resource planning process through the review of the Water Act and, as a result, provide not only more certainty but more flexibility and more opportunities for more water to be secured by water users across the state of Queensland in all catchments so that we can have more productive and responsible use of our water resources but for the benefit of the state.

Mr KNUTH: In reference to page 3 of the SDS, there are a lot of motherhood statements about strategic water reform, but what is the minister doing within this budget to deliver sustainable water supply in terms of the cost to farmers and to communities, because, as there is a drought and as we have seen within the Burdekin, there has been more than a 200 per cent increase in the last three years with regard to water charges?

Mr CRIPPS: In respect of the last part of the member for Dalrymple's question, I think it may fall outside of my portfolio responsibilities.

CHAIR: I am pretty sure it does fall outside, Minister.

Mr CRIPPS: The commercial water charges in that particular catchment in the Burdekin irrigation scheme are delivered through SunWater and those commercial operations fall within the responsibilities of the Minister for Energy and Water Supply. If it pleases the committee and pleases you in particular, Mr Chairman, the first part of the member for Dalrymple's question related to strategic water reform in relation to efficiency and I can offer the committee an answer in that regard if you would like me to do so.

CHAIR: Yes, that would be great; thank you.

Mr CRIPPS: Mr Chairman, in the first instance I think I would direct the member for Dalrymple to my previous answer which was fairly comprehensive in relation to the strategic reform of the Water Act that I am planning to undertake as a result of a number of issues that have arisen since I became the Minister for Natural Resources with responsibilities under the Water Act. But I would like to also point out a couple of other initiatives that I feel very strongly about which are specifically designed to improve the efficiency of water use in Queensland, and the rural water use efficiency program is one program that I would like to highlight which I think demonstrates how important rural water use efficiency is to particularly the agricultural sector across the state. We have delivered an \$8 million funding program for a renewed version of the rural water use efficiency program for the next four years and six rural industry groups and two support organisations will be funded under that iteration of the program to provide services to irrigators. The main thrust of this program is to assist irrigators to increase productivity while improving water and energy efficiency. Although the member for Dalrymple referred to irrigation charges in the Burdekin, I can inform him that under the RWUE program Canegrowers are assisting irrigators in the Burdekin, particularly in relation to the groundwater management area, to manage high water tables through financial incentives, modifying irrigation practices and installing dewatering bores. Irrigation scheduling information systems are being developed in other cane-growing regions.

Queensland Dairyfarmers Organisation will be helping dairy and fodder growers with financial incentives and irrigation system evaluations and its main focus will be in the Callide Valley area but also in the Atherton Tablelands, which is represented by the member for Dalrymple, to help irrigators with reduced water availability. Growcom will be helping fruit and vegetable growers with on-farm technical advice, particularly in the Lakeland area, which again is on the Atherton Tablelands in the member for Dalrymple's electorate, in the Callide Valley in the Central Highlands area and in the Burnett and the Lockyer areas in your electorate, Mr Chairman.

CHAIR: Yes, you were up there visiting one of the Qualies, weren't you?

Mr CRIPPS: Indeed I was. It is an excellent program. The nursery and the garden industry will also assist irrigators to develop whole-of-farm management plans focusing on increased productivity and sustainability. We will also be supporting Turf Queensland and also the Flower Association of Queensland to work with irrigators in South-East Queensland to demonstrate water and energy efficiency through implementation of efficient hardware and management practices. The National Centre for Engineering in Agriculture and Irrigation Australia will work with and support the industry bodies in priority areas and will facilitate technology adoption with irrigators. Additional funds carried forward from the last program phase will also be used to support industry programs through improving decision support tools, facilitating a dairy demonstration farm in the Callide Valley area, developing sediment control practices in horticulture, supporting service sector certification, and scoping alternative energy options for irrigation systems.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. It is amazing how big that lifestyle horticulture is as far as turf is concerned.

Mr COSTIGAN: Minister, I want to commend you on what you said earlier in relation to your contribution in growing the four-pillar economy and supporting agriculture productivity and growth, particularly in Northern Australia, which I know is very important to a number of members on the committee from the government point of view. Minister, in reference to page 5 of the SDS and the \$80 million that has been put there to support responsible management and productive use of our state's natural resources, could you outline the positive benefits of this funding for Queenslanders in general?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for Whitsunday for his question and I note each year at these estimates committee proceedings he takes a keen interest in the Queensland natural resource management program. The Queensland government's election commitment to provide continued funding to Queensland's 14 regional natural resource management bodies to support the productive and sustainable use of Queensland's natural resources took the form of the \$80 million Queensland

NRM investment program. A total of \$55 million will be provided to regional NRM bodies to support regionally based on-ground projects targeted to the government's natural resource management priorities, which are controlling pests, weeds and feral animals; improving water quality, particularly in Great Barrier Reef catchments; and sustainable agriculture projects.

In 2013-14 \$12.9 million was provided to fund these bodies in the first year of three-year contracts. That is an important innovation for these regional NRM bodies. Regional NRM bodies are expected to work through partnerships with landholders, community and Indigenous groups, rural industries and all levels of government—local, state and federal. I expect at least 20 per cent of this funding to be implemented on projects in collaboration with volunteer landcare groups and coastcare groups but otherwise similar local grassroots volunteer organisations. In addition, \$18 million will be provided under the broader regional NRM program for state strategic NRM projects. This includes \$6 million per annum—\$30 million in total over the funding period—to protect the Great Barrier Reef. Three projects currently being supported include investing in monitoring, wetlands management and on-ground best practice natural resource management.

CHAIR: Minister, that just about brings our time to an end. Have you got anything you would like to sum up in the Water portfolio area or are you quite happy with your responses?

Mr CRIPPS: As far as my contribution is concerned, Mr Chairman, I just reiterate that we are moving to modernise the framework within which we manage Queensland's water resources. We are looking to provide new opportunities to support the Queensland government's goal of growing a four-pillar economy, and within that area water input into the construction, tourism, agriculture and resources sectors is a very important input. In particular, I think it is fair to say that water for the agriculture sector is vital and my department is spending a lot of its time trying to provide additional opportunities for the responsible and productive use of water resources in Queensland to support the growth in the agriculture pillar of our economy. The reason why that is important is because agriculture underpins the economy, particularly in regional and rural areas, of the state and its strengths and its growth will provide new opportunities for jobs in those communities, and that is very important to me personally as a regional MP from North Queensland but also important to the government, which has a clear economic strategy but is also looking to create jobs for this and future generations of Queenslanders.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister, and thank you to all of your advisers. They probably enjoyed listening to you today, so thank you very much. We will take a short break now and resume at 3 o'clock to consider mining safety and health services.

Proceedings suspended from 2.30 pm to 3.05 pm



CHAIR: Welcome back, Minister. We will now examine the estimates for the Mine Safety and Health Services and Mining and Petroleum Services. Minister, would you like to make an opening statement in relation to mining?

Mr CRIPPS: Thank you, Mr Chairman, and members of the committee. Before I commence my opening statement I would like to express my sincere condolences to the family and the friends and colleagues of Mr Brett Michael Kelly, a resources sector worker who recently lost his life in Mount Isa. These are the first proceedings of the parliament since that incident. As such, it is the first opportunity I have had to put my condolences on the record.

This tragic news highlights the very real hazards faced in the workplace by the tens of thousands of employees in the resources sector. I can assure all Queenslanders that this government and I, as the responsible minister, are committed to ensuring the state's mines meet the highest safety standards. Although this situation is a sad reminder of the need for continual improvement, the reality is that Queensland can be proud of the fact that it has one of the best mine safety records in the world. Queensland's Mine Safety Framework continues to uphold world's best practice and is internationally recognised.

The Newman government is committed to ensuring resources sector employees leave for work knowing that they will return home safely to their families. We are currently undertaking a major review of Queensland's mine safety legislation to further enhance the state's world-class mining safety and health standards. We realise the importance of the resources sector's zero-harm goal, so we are working with the industry and undertaking a comprehensive consultation process to ensure Queensland is the safest mining jurisdiction in Australia.

The Newman government has a strong plan for the resources sector. We realise the important role the sector plays in driving economic growth and creating jobs. We realise the contribution it

makes to our state through royalties to help build Queensland's schools, its hospitals and its roads. We are turning the table on the actions—or should I say the non-action—of the former government, which took the resources sector for granted and hindered economic development with unnecessary red tape and regulation. We are making it easier for the resources sector to do business in Queensland so we can get more projects invested in and deliver more jobs for Queensland.

The Newman government is committed to supporting a strong resources sector by reducing red tape and costs through streamlining regulatory processes. My department and I are currently delivering the first stage of the Newman government's initiative towards the phased development of a single common resources act for the mining, petroleum and gas, greenhouse gas and geothermal energy sectors. We want to make it easier, not harder, for the resources sector to do business in Queensland. We are committed to ensuring that we get the balance between the resources sector development, landholder rights and environmental protection correct. We also want to ensure landholders can rest assured knowing that their rights are protected and that they are getting the best deal when it comes to dealing with resource companies.

We are committed through our ResourcesQ partnership with industry to develop a 30-year vision and action plan to grow a robust resources sector that will continue to deliver significant economic benefits for Queensland communities. It is a partnership between the government and the resources sector to develop a shared vision for Queensland's resources sector and ultimately an action plan to achieve this vision. The ResourcesQ initiative will be the driving force in the continued growth of the resources sector and the economic benefits that it delivers to Queensland. As the mines minister, I want Queensland to have a competitive and diversified resources sector that truly reflects the state's resource base and realises the full potential of emerging resource industries. I have recently released for public consultation a draft 30-year vision distilled from the ResourcesQ consultation process, and I encourage the community to have its say on this vision for the future of the sector.

We are considering the 18 recommendations of the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Exploration, which I established in October last year to provide me with direct feedback on how we can position Queensland as the best performing exploration state in Australia. It builds on the work this government is already doing to make Queensland more attractive for exploration investment. We want to see projects get on the ground faster so we see the benefits of the resources sector delivered back to our communities through jobs and to the whole of Queensland through royalties. We have introduced a streamlined, 90-day approval process for exploration work programs, which is now in place, and regional hubs in Townsville, Rockhampton and Brisbane to quickly assess and approve exploration permit applications.

In October last year we cleared a backlog of more than 1,400 applications. Under the previous government it took an average of 22 months to process applications, but today the new streamlined process enables applications to be resolved in around three to six months, depending on Commonwealth native title conditions. Online lodgement of tenure applications through MyMinesOnline means the Department of Natural Resources and Mines can now process applications quicker and companies can track their progress online. The Newman government is serious about growing the resources sector, not stifling it. The proof is in the results that we are delivering in terms of application assessment times.

We have lifted the ideological and backward-looking ban on uranium mining in Queensland, and from later this month a comprehensive and modern framework will allow applications for new projects to come forward. For more than 30 years Queensland has missed out on economic development opportunities and potential further discoveries through our policy banning uranium mining. We have also delivered a framework for the development of a commercial oil shale industry in Queensland. Queensland has large volumes of both uranium and oil shale resources, and our proactive work on contemporary regulatory systems will allow us to take advantage of any commercial opportunities that present themselves. We have a plan to unlock these resources that would provide royalties and other economic benefits for our regional communities and the broader economy.

We will continue to grow the resources sector because it is these projects that will help ensure Queenslanders are provided with the vital infrastructure and services their communities need—again, the schools, the hospitals, the roads and the other services which are provided by the Queensland government. Our government has a strong plan for the resources sector which will ensure a brighter future for generations of Queenslanders.

CHAIR: Minister, can you please expand on the department's role as an economic development agency, as mentioned under Strategic direction on page 2 of the SDS?

Mr CRIPPS: Thank you, Mr Chairman, for the question. As part of the department's blueprint we are setting a very clear path to provide a customer focused and modernised government agency that will support and encourage regional Queensland and grow the state's economy. Unlike the previous government, we have a plan for the responsible and productive use of Queensland's mineral and energy resources for the benefit of all Queenslanders. This vision creates the foundation for how we will generate economic opportunities for current and future generations of Queenslanders.

Our blueprint has three strategic priorities which identify the ways in which we will focus our energy and effort over the next three to five years. We will be powering up regional Queensland and the state's economy, ensure a customer focused delivery of services and will be the best natural resources management agency in Australia. This combination of a clear role as an economic development agency and its realisation with a focus on regional Queensland, customers and excellence in resource management makes the Department of Natural Resources and Mines an engine room for economic development in this state.

The Newman government has made it clear that Queensland is open for business, and my department has made practical changes to encourage and support industry to grow. As steward of the resources sector, the department's performance is integral to the development of the resources sector as a pillar of the Queensland economy. Wide-ranging tenure reform will eliminate outdated and prescriptive regulation and deliver a more flexible and responsive framework. We are facilitating the further diversification of our resource industry into the oil shale and uranium sectors. Faster processing of applications through MyMinesOnline will allow projects to commence sooner. We are now paving the way for Queensland's resources sector to grow with the ResourcesQ initiative, which will be overseen by the ResourcesQ Partnership Group to develop a 30-year vision for the sector which will help modernise the regulatory framework for our resources sector.

The future of Queensland's resources sector will be supported by a strong and responsive department with a solid plan. We are committed to delivering better services for Queensland in the resources sector and we have the plan and the tools to allow us to do so.

Mr TROUT: Minister, will you detail just how the Queensland resource sector and our explorers in particular will benefit from recommendations contained in the recent MACE report, mentioned on page 4 of the SDS?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for Barron River for the question. I mentioned the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Exploration in my introductory remarks. That committee was formed in October last year to provide direct feedback from industry on Queensland's exploration performance and direction on how to position Queensland as the best performing exploration jurisdiction in Australia. As well as advising on the current status of the exploration sector, this committee was tasked with identifying practical measures for improvements within the Natural Resources and Mines portfolio.

On 30 May this year I was provided with the committee's final report that included a number of recommendations under the following six priorities: make land available for exploration with a clear strategy for land release and a mix of cash and non-cash tender opportunities; build in flexibility with a regulatory framework that reflects the method of exploration needed and the prospectivity of the area explored; cut exploration costs by streamlining exploration permit regulations and examining further opportunities to minimise costs; take the lead as a one-stop-shop resources sector lead agency; improve customer service with a case management model of streamlined service delivery focusing on outcomes and using best-practice technology; and promote Queensland as an exploration destination with a campaign focused on both geological potential and ease of doing business in Queensland.

In response to the decisions occurring through the committee's process, the Department of Natural Resources and Mines has initiated the following projects: procurement of a suitable company to develop a communication strategy and implementation plan to enhance the government's communication with the resources sector and the community and a marketing strategy and implementation plan to promote Queensland as a resources investment destination; revitalisation of the current tenure framework to promote exploration, development and economic growth, covering all facets of resources projects from exploration, retention and production; more effective communication of the department's land release framework; and enhancing the delivery of exploration and investment data and information through online platforms. Implementation of the committee's recommendations will be through the extensive reform agenda undertaken by the department,

including ResourcesQ, the Tenure Reform Taskforce and the Modernising Queensland's Resources Acts program.

Mr TROUT: I refer to page 10 of the SDS. How much land has been released for exploration in Queensland over the past 12 months?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for Barron River for the question. I note that land release for exploration is a cornerstone of the development of new projects for the resources sector. In relation to land release programs, a tender process has been in place since 2004 for the granting of exploration rights for petroleum and gas, including coal seam gas. The process has been extended to coal exploration and, where appropriate, can be applied to mineral exploration. Since the commencement of the revised competitive tendering framework, the predominant focus continues to be on work program based tenders without a cash bid component. Accordingly, 12 areas that total approximately 8,000 subblocks have been released for non-cash coal and petroleum and gas tenders. In comparison, only 122 distinct subblocks in seven locations have been released for petroleum and gas exploration under competitive cash tendering. It is important to note that the inclusion of a cash component only relates to potentially highly prospective areas, which has been demonstrated through the significantly smaller releases that this has applied to.

The tender releases by year are: in the 2012-13 financial year one cash tender release of two areas; in the 2013-14 financial year, which was originally released in June last year and closes in that financial year, one cash tender release of six areas; in the 2013-14 financial year, released in May last financial year and closing in that financial year, one non-cash petroleum and gas tender release of six areas and one non-cash coal tender release of seven areas; and in the 2013-14 financial year and closing in this financial year, one non-cash petroleum and gas tender release of six areas.

These releases show that the Queensland government is committed to developing the junior exploration sector. By evaluating tenders for these areas based on the proposed work program and the technical and financial capability of a tenderer, the explorer with the most suitable approach is granted the right to explore.

The processes have been undertaken in a clear and transparent manner, and I am sure the committee would like to be assured that an independent probity adviser has been engaged throughout the tender processes to facilitate an unbiased process. The probity adviser has found that the processes undertaken by the Department of Natural Resources and Mines were compliant with probity standards.

In October last year the department called for tenders to explore for coal in the resource-rich Bowen Basin in Central Queensland. The seven areas of land being made available for coal exploration by the department collectively covered more than 1,292 square kilometres in the northern Bowen Basin. In April this year the department released land in six areas for petroleum and gas exploration totalling more than 16,400 square kilometres of land in the state's north-west and south-west.

Mr COX: Minister, in light of the department's strategic direction under the best natural resource agency in Australia, can you update the committee today on the ResourcesQ initiative and the progress being made to craft a 30-year vision for the sector, especially considering the nature of the industry—up and down?

Mr CRIPPS: I would like to thank the member for Thuringowa for the question. The ResourcesQ initiative is a Queensland government and industry partnership that will deliver a 30-year vision and action plan for the Queensland resources sector. ResourcesQ is the vehicle through which the Queensland government is engaging with the resources sector to develop a long-term vision for the industry. A 30-year vision and accompanying action plan will recognise the challenges and opportunities facing Queensland's dynamic resources sector and will ensure all Queenslanders prosper from resources now and in the future.

ResourcesQ has informed our foresight study that identifies the key opportunities and challenges facing the Queensland resources sector over the next 30 years. To underpin the industry engagement process, our department commissioned a foresight study that examined the key trends guiding the resources sector over the next 30 years. The foresight study was completed by the CSIRO and the University of Queensland Sustainable Minerals Institute and the findings were used to drive discussion at seven industry workshops held around Queensland in April, May and June that year. Stakeholder engagement has been via industry leaders and supply chain leader workshops, which were attended by the Premier, senior ministers and over 100 resource company and supply chain leaders. Combined, these events have attracted the attendance of almost 400 industry leaders

from various companies, local government authorities and government agencies associated with the resources sector. The feedback received from those involved in these workshops has been overwhelmingly positive. The workshops provided the ResourcesQ initiative with a vast amount of information and feedback to support development of the vision and action plan. These forums have been complemented by a series of regional workshops in key resource regions including in Mount Isa, Cairns, Gladstone, Roma and Emerald. These have all been attended by local stakeholder representatives from the resources sector.

The ResourcesQ partnership agreement has also been delivered, which is a landmark agreement that affirms government and industry's commitment to the process and outlines an immediate action agenda to address the priority issues. In parallel, the Queensland government has signed a partnership agreement with peak industry bodies and has appointed a partnership group to support the policy development process. The landmark agreement affirms the commitment of the government and industry to work together in developing and delivering the 30-year vision. The agreement includes a range of immediate actions that industry considers priorities for government attention.

The ResourcesQ Partnership Group has been formed and consists of six experienced and respected industry leaders who provide practical advice on the vision and action plan. The partnership group is a panel of industry experts who bring with them grounding in the commercial realities of the industry and a wealth of experience. The group has been providing valuable strategic input to the drafting of the vision and action plan, and its input will continue through until September. The draft ResourcesQ vision and themes, based on the feedback from the workshops, the foresight study and the partnership group, were released for public comment on 7 July. Public comment is being sought until 4 August. This process will culminate in a ResourcesQ launch at a major event in September this year.

Mr COSTIGAN: Minister, I would like to ask you a question in relation to page 27 of the SDS. I make the point that obviously mining is very important to our part of the world. As you would appreciate, it is the biggest regional economy of the north. Even with its ups and downs, it is still the biggest regional economy of the north and it is largely thanks to mining. I commend your work, particularly in relation to the ResourcesQ initiative. I refer to page 27 of the SDS and I would like you to provide some details on how the \$30 million allocated to the Future Resources Program will actually be spent?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for Whitsunday for his question, once again, on the issue of how we can support exploration in Queensland, which does provide a grounding for future resource projects in the state and, therefore, future jobs. Delivering on our election commitments with respect to the critical resources pillar of the state economy, last year's state budget allocated \$30 million over three years to the Geological Survey of Queensland to support key projects to further encourage exploration and attract investment into Queensland's mining and petroleum sectors. This funding boost was made possible by the success of our competitive cash bidding initiative for exploration tenure. It recognises the contribution the resources sector makes to the Queensland economy and to the vital role that GSQ plays in attracting and supporting this investment. Initiatives being funded under the Future Resources Program include geophysical surveys in North-West Queensland; a minerals resource assessment of Cape York; extraction of geochemical data from GSQ's company report archive into a publicly accessible, easily searchable database; scanning of the archive of hard copy format company seismic sections; and continuation of the collaborative drilling initiative.

Planning is underway for the construction in 2015 of expanded departmental core storage capacity at Zillmere to preserve economically and scientifically valuable core samples acquired from company and government drilling. An allocation of \$2.5 million per year will fund geoscientific programs identified by industry as being a priority. In round 1 of this industry priority's initiative, 24 proposals were submitted through the Queensland Exploration Council, the Association of Mining and Exploration Companies and the Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association. After a rigorous process, four proposals were selected for funding. In round 2, which has just been completed, five proposals were selected from 17 submitted. I must say that the Future Resources Program has been very warmly welcomed by industry.

Mr COSTIGAN: Minister, I was going to ask a supplementary, but you have detailed a few outcomes there. The supplementary was going to be exactly that, some of the outcomes so far of the Future Resources Program industry priorities initiative. Obviously you are heading in the right direction from what we have just heard.

CHAIR: How did the new tender system transpire? Did it work as well as it was hoped it would work?

Mr CRIPPS: Mr Chairman, in relation to your supplementary firstly, the competitive cash tendering process has been working well. We have long-term targets over the forward estimates in terms of revenues that are able to be realised from those competitive cash tendering processes. To this point in time, we have had success in that regard and will continue with that process. One of the important things that we have prioritised in undertaking that process is, of course, making sure that probity around that process in a competitive cash bidding process is foremost in our mind. That is the reason why we have had very strong oversight by probity advisers in undertaking those competitive cash bidding processes. The success of those programs is what I referred to just a moment ago. It has allowed us to invest in the Future Resources Program, which we believe will provide better information and better data to our exploration companies across the state, which increases opportunities and the potential for investment in new projects in Queensland. That is the type of process that we are trying to encourage through the investment in that Future Resources Program.

I am grateful for having the opportunity, through the question from the member for Mount Isa, to talk about the details of some of the projects that were successful in getting up through round 1 of the Future Resources Program. As I mentioned before, it is a \$2.5 million per year investment in that program, which is prioritised in consultation with industry groups and bodies to make sure that the investment of that Future Resources Program funding is orientated towards what industry sees as the priority, which will help them the most in securing that important data to determine where they will invest their capital for potential new projects in the future.

I will go through a few details about some of those projects that were successful in round 1. One of them was the North Queensland intrusion related gold and base metals systems. This will be of interest to the member for Dalrymple. The evaluation of the prospectivity of the widespread intrusion related hydrothermal gold and base metal systems of North Queensland is part of this project. The project aims to shed light on where major new deposits, similar to the recently opened Mount Carlton mine, are likely to be found. The projects aim to assess older systems such as those responsible for the historically very rich Charters Towers gold deposits; draw together years of fragmented research and major current advancements in the understanding of North Queensland's mineral systems to form a landmark foundation for significant new exploration success in the region; produce a comprehensive analysis of mineralisation timing, distribution and discovery potential; and dramatically improve exploration rates in the North Queensland region.

There was also a project in the southern Mount Isa area. The southern Mount Isa survey will shift attention back to the greenfield possibilities where previous geophysical survey suggested that base metal-rich, black shale basins and other conductive ore bodies may lie concealed beneath thin layers of cover south of Dajarra. These rocks will be explored using a process that measures the electrical conductivity of the earth. This exploration technique is an extremely cost-effective way of viewing large areas of the subsurface to reveal geologically favourable sites for mineral explorers as well as revealing the thickness of the cover sequences overlying mineralised basement in the region. This survey is planned for implementation under a technical collaboration agreement with Geoscience Australia.

This will interest members of the committee as well. A new innovative way of determining whether or not there is potential for new resource projects is the spinifex biogeochemical survey. The spinifex biogeochemical survey uses a promising new exploration method based on chemical analysis of the spiny leaves of the spinifex plant, which are widespread across many areas of north-west Queensland. The project focuses initially on the soil covered plains of the Boulia-Birdsville region, where traces of mineralisation from the Berry Creek, Tennant Creek and Mount Isa style basement rock are potentially brought to the surface by the deep plant root systems penetrating to depths of 25 meters. The survey will initially be focused on an area with known soil geochemistry to enable reliability calibration before being expanded elsewhere.

We have also had a successful assessment of petroleum generation in the Maryborough and the lower Galilee basins as a project. The assessment of petroleum generation in the Maryborough and lower Galilee basins aims to provide a better understanding of the origin and timing of generation of the hydrocarbons found in the Lake Galilee sandstone and in the Galilee Basin and the Gregory sandstone in the Maryborough Basin. The project involves chemical analysis and other scientific studies of drill core from the lower most strata of the Galilee and Maryborough basins. The results will enable a better understanding of which hydrocarbons were potentially produced and when in relation

to the burial history in relation to the rocks. This information will provide a better understanding of the petroleum systems present in these basins and enable better targeting of future exploration.

Mrs MADDERN: Minister, would you care to explain the significance of the wide-ranging resource tenure reform being undertaken by the department, please?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for Maryborough for her question. She has picked up on the tenure reform processes which I mentioned in my introductory statement. The existing resources tenure framework has evolved over time and is now unresponsive to the needs of the modern resources sector. In response, the Queensland government has committed to an urgent and comprehensive review of all elements of the current resources tenure management framework in Queensland.

I have established a tenure reform task force within the Department of Natural Resources and Mines to undertake the review. This groundbreaking reform will replace the existing framework with one that is timely, transparent, predictable, flexible, efficient and objective. The reform brings forward the major work of the Modernising Queensland Resource Acts Program for earlier completion than originally intended. The program will move all five principal resource acts under one common statutory instrument.

The reform will take a whole-of-life-cycle approach to address all components of resource discovery and production from the release of land for exploration through to the range of approvals required to establish, operate and decommission a resource project. The reform will be delivered in two phases. Phase 1 has already seen changes delivered to petroleum and gas legislation. These changes were instigated via the Land and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2014 earlier this year and provided companies with six years instead of four years to complete their current exploration work programs.

The Department of Natural Resources and Mines also introduced more flexible work programming relinquishment arrangements by providing special amendments that will enable companies to optimise their activities and expenditure across a number of petroleum and gas exploration tenures. There has also been a reduction in the requirements for applying for a petroleum lease to expedite the application process. This reform has also been carried out in conjunction with the business processes and systems reform, and as of 30 June this year the department has progressed all pending petroleum tenure applications and renewals to the extent that all work remaining to complete those approvals is now the responsibility of the relevant companies. The department will continue to track company progress and provide assistance along with other customer service delivery improvements.

Phase 2 will see a comprehensive whole-of-life-cycle tenure framework for the resources sector including petroleum and gas, coal and minerals. This will be introduced next year and will be informed by outcomes from industry consultation through initiatives including the ResourcesQ program and the Ministerial Advisory Council on Exploration. The department is working closely with all key resource sector stakeholders to develop this new framework.

Mr KNUTH: Minister, you have mentioned a few times the approval of mining exploration and mining development approvals. The Ben Lomond mine has already been declared unsafe and a risk to the public by a previous state owned mining Warden's Court. Coupled with this is the fact that the Charters Towers region in the last five years received a near 1946 record flood, a small earthquake, a category 2 cyclone, and it has already been affected by a spill back in 1980. Contamination spilt into the Keelbottom Creek, which runs into the Charters Towers water supply. Will the minister take into consideration all of this before the reopening of Ben Lomond mine 50 kilometres west of Charters Towers and I would say 50 kilometres west of Townsville?

CHAIR: I do not know whether that is part of the documents that we are examining today, Shane. There is no application to open a mine. It was previously said in previous hearings they have exploration permits at the moment. There is no application to open a mine there.

Mr KNUTH: No, not at all but—

CHAIR: It is a hypothetical, Shane. Have you got another question?

Mr KNUTH: It is up to the minister whether he would like to reply to that.

Mr COX: No, it is up to the chair.

CHAIR: No, I have ruled it out of order.

Mr KNUTH: Okay. Minister, what provisions are there in this budget for the compensation of the resumption of land due to mines and the rail corridor for Galilee Basin?

Mr CRIPPS: Mr Chairman, if I understand correctly, the question being asked by the member for Dalrymple relates to the acquisition of rail corridors through the state development area for the Galilee Basin; is that correct?

Mr KNUTH: It is a combination of both in regard to land owned and affected by mines and also the rail corridor. If you want to take a question on notice in combination with State Development—

CHAIR: The rail corridor is definitely out of order. Has the department done anything about the mine land? Is that part of your department or not?

Mr CRIPPS: Mr Chairman, I thank you for what I believe is correctly ruling out of order the part of the member for Dalrymple's question relating to the acquisition of the rail corridor, because at this point in time my understanding of the situation is that process is an action being undertaken by the Coordinator-General which comes under the responsibility of the Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development, Infrastructure and Planning. The Coordinator-General's process at this point in time I believe is identifying that particular corridor and specifying it for the purposes of the development of a railway line. Perhaps the member for Dalrymple would be well advised to direct that question to the Deputy Premier, who I think is the responsible minister in that regard.

In relation to the first part of his question regarding the acquisition of land for mines, I am going to have to ask the member for Dalrymple to give me some more information about which mines he is referring to and under what process the land would be acquired for a mine.

Mr KNUTH: I am happy to accept the fact that the minister has directed it to the Deputy Premier.

Mr CRIPPS: No, I have not directed—

Mr KNUTH: No, I am happy to accept that. I am happy to provide further information to the minister when I source that further information.

Mr CRIPPS: In relation to?

Mr KNUTH: In relation to the properties that have been affected by the Galilee Basin.

Mr CRIPPS: And the acquisition—

Mr KNUTH: The acquisition of land in the Galilee Basin, yes.

CHAIR: Does that give the minister any more clarity?

Mr CRIPPS: It does not give me any clarity whatsoever.

CHAIR: I think you will need some mining lease data.

Mr KNUTH: I am happy to provide the minister with further information.

CHAIR: Could you do that by five o'clock today?

Mr KNUTH: I will do my best.

Mr CRIPPS: The resource projects usually involve the application to the Department of Natural Resources and Mines for a mining lease, but it is not the acquisition of land process that is involved in establishing a resource project or a mining lease. A mining lease applies over land which has title, and we do not actually have processes whereby land is acquired through an acquisition process for land unless there is a separate commercial transaction which occurs between the mining company and the original landholder. The Department of Natural Resources and Mines has no role to play in a separate private commercial transaction between a resource company and a private landowner if they wish to sell the land for a resource project.

CHAIR: Does that make it clearer?

Mr KNUTH: That is clearer, thank you.

Mrs SCOTT: Page 2 of the SDS talks about responsible access to natural resources. Minister, during the Premier's overseas trade mission to Houston he announced that he would like to see a shale gas export industry in Queensland similar to that in the United States. I note that in January last year you had a meeting about shale gas and tight gas activities underway in Queensland. What plans does the government have for a shale gas export industry? Will you convene an implementation committee as you did for uranium mining?

Mr CRIPPS: Mr Chairman, as the committee is aware, over the last decade or so there has been a significant expansion of the coal seam gas industry in Queensland. At this point in time the establishment of three LNG trains at Curtis Island near Gladstone is the focal point for the commencement of a major export industry of LNG for Queensland which will yield very significant revenues to the state of Queensland. What I think the member for Woodridge is referring to is the potential for a second generation of gas projects in Queensland in relation to what is known as shale gas by some people and what potential there is to continue to develop those resources for what is at the moment a very strong demand for LNG resources internationally.

What I would like to indicate to the committee is that the Queensland government does wish to encourage a responsible petroleum and gas industry in Queensland. In particular, what the member for Woodridge refers to as shale gas is also known as deep gas by other people because of its different geological context from existing gas extraction operations in coal seams in places like the Surat Basin in Central Queensland. Deep gas in petroleum refers to resources such as shale gas and oil and tight gas and basin centred gas. I think all of these different names reflect the fact that in different jurisdictions in Australia and around the world these types of resources are often given different names. The framework for what we like to refer to as the next generation of onshore oil and natural gas projects in Queensland does identify where the government can help grow the deep gas and oil industry and ensure it is responsibly regulated in the future.

The Department of Natural Resources and Mines has undertaken targeted consultation on the framework with other departments, local industry and representative bodies of those industries as well as the Local Government Association of Queensland, AgForce and the Queensland Farmers Federation. Importantly, broader public consultation will certainly form part of some specific recommendations that we develop in terms of a framework for the development of these deep gas resources. For example, consultation could take place on options for changes to the underground water management regime for companies involved in exploration or production of deep gas resources. But certainly the public will also have the opportunity to provide input into any site specific applications for environmental authorities including through the environmental impact statement process if they are applicable to the development of those deep gas resources.

CHAIR: So, Minister, we would make sure there were safeguards there for any of the water resources?

Mr CRIPPS: Of course. In response to the member for Woodridge's question, the development of a framework for the realisation of the value of any of these deep gas resources not only involves the investigation of the type of tenure required in my portfolio responsibilities—that is, the authorities to prospect involved in exploration and the petroleum leases involved in the production of deep oil and gas resources—but as the member may know and the committee may also know no commercial production of activities or exploration can take place without an environmental authority which goes with that particular exploration or production tenure in Queensland. It is through those environmental authorities that appropriate protections are put in place to ensure that they are minimising any adverse impacts on the environment as a result of that activity.

Mrs SCOTT: I have one more question. Will there be any cost-benefit analysis undertaken by the government including any potential impacts on other industries such as agriculture prior to proceeding with the shale gas export industry?

CHAIR: That would start to strain at the hypothetical.

Mrs SCOTT: Is it?

CHAIR: Yes, I think so.

Mrs SCOTT: I think it is just to do with safeguarding against.

CHAIR: The minister has just highlighted the fact that there are all those environmental safeguards. Do you have another question you would like to ask?

Mrs SCOTT: I have a sequence on uranium mining.

CHAIR: All right. You can start on those.

Mrs SCOTT: This is with reference also to page 2 of the SDS. Minister, on 1 July your government commenced the process of inviting applications for uranium mining in Queensland. How many applications have been received to date? If any applications have been received, where are the proposed mines to be located and who are the proponents?

Mr CRIPPS: We have not received any applications for uranium mining in Queensland since the commencement of the framework in Queensland.

Mrs MADDERN: Minister, could you give us some examples of the results achieved by your aggressive red tape reduction mentioned on page 11 of the SDS?

Mr CRIPPS: Mr Chairman, I would like to thank the member for Maryborough for her question. It is a hallmark of the Newman government that we have, with a great deal of fervour, pursued the reduction of unnecessary red tape associated with our portfolios since we came to government. Regulatory reforms have resulted in a 5.7 per cent decrease in regulatory requirements from March 2012 to December 2013. In my portfolio, the Department of Natural Resources and Mines is tracking to meet its 23 per cent reduction target by 2018. This reduction trend will continue, with significant reforms across the department where progress will be tracked in the department's Regulatory Reform Action Plan which is updated on a quarterly basis.

In 2013-14 significant red tape reforms were undertaken relating to the resources sector such as proposing a new framework for the management of overlapping coal and coal seam gas tenures, facilitating greater cooperation between the coal and coal seam gas industries and allowing for petroleum wells to be converted to water supply bores, giving landholders ready access to water without having to pay to drill a bore. Recent reforms include repealing the Strategic Cropping Land Act due to its inclusion in the regional planning framework. Following regulatory best practice, three regulatory impact statements were released in 2013-14 for community feedback. We are also moving towards a standardised consent framework for restricted land in Queensland. We have also undertaken transformations of the department's business and this will continue in the current financial year, particularly through progression of key reforms to our water business as it relates to the resources sector and modernising Queensland's Resources Acts Program. The department's reforms enable greater opportunities for business and the community through greater security of tenure, certainty of ownership, responsible access to natural resources and timely delivery of services.

I want to also draw the committee's attention to the exploration tenures improvements in terms of progressing assessments by the department. The department has significantly reduced the processing time frames for coal and mineral exploration permits. Since the release of electronic lodgement for exploration permits on 28 October 2012, there have been 587 applications lodged. Of those, 346, or 82 per cent, have been decided on average within the published service standard of 12 months; 216, or 36 per cent, remain under assessment and within the client service standard; and 30, or five per cent, are undecided, falling outside the published service standard as they are either ranked applications or are undergoing a native title process.

In October last year there was a backlog of over 1,400 exploration permits awaiting consideration. These have now been cleared. Of these exploration permits, 1,095 have been decided. The remaining 305 are with the proponent for action. The backlog was further reduced by streamlining the native title notification and advertising processes and committing to a 90-day work program decision service delivery target. As part of this government's commitment to regional jobs, the management of exploration permits for coal and minerals have transitioned to the coal hub in Rockhampton and the mineral hub in Townsville. Establishment of the coal and mineral hubs will ensure the department's permit administration business is in sync with the needs of industry. Collectively, Mr Chairman, I hope that these measures that we have taken will ensure that exploration permit backlogs do not occur again.

Mr COSTIGAN: Minister, congratulations with what you are doing in relation to this expedited process. I just want to come back to these mineral assessment hubs. How have they affected those assessment time frames, in particular EPMS that are covered by native title?

Mr CRIPPS: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I am grateful to the member for Whitsunday for the question, because it is an important one. The Department of Natural Resources and Mines has established four regional assessment hubs to facilitate faster permit processing times: a mineral assessment hub in Townsville; a coal assessment hub in Rockhampton; a small scale mining hub in Emerald responsible for mining leases under the small scale mining code and mining claims; and a petroleum and gas assessment hub in Brisbane. Since the Townsville hub was established in November last year there has been an average of 31 applications each month compared with the previous average of 26. The implementation of this new model was established through the interim establishment of virtual teams within regional hubs in order to meet processing requirements while transitioning to the new model. The hubs will progressively be resourced through staff attrition within the current Exploration Management Unit. As staff who are located in Brisbane leave or are relocated

within the department, their position will be transferred to one of the hubs. The distinct advantage of this new model is that the regional field officers will be able to focus exclusively on land access related matters and field compliance. The transition to these hubs supports the government's commitment to decentralisation of the public sector to regional Queensland. The transition is expected to be largely complete by the end of the 2013-14 financial year, with remaining Brisbane based staff within the Exploration Management Unit working within virtual teams and reporting to the new assessment hubs. This is a good initiative to support the resources sector, and I might point out to the committee that it is also a good initiative supporting the Queensland Plan's goal of regionalising Queensland's population.

Mr Chairman, with your permission can I just briefly clarify an answer to a question that I gave earlier to the member for Woodridge in relation to the receipt of applications for uranium? I need to correct the record in terms of a specific question that the member for Woodridge asked. This is the earliest opportunity I have had to do so. In relation to the member for Woodridge's question, it is accurate and correct that I said that we have not received any applications in Queensland for mining leases associated with uranium. We have received exploration permit applications in Queensland which nominate uranium as one of the minerals that they will explore for during their exploration activities. They are called EPMs. We have received applications since the commencement of our framework for EPMs that cover uranium.

Interestingly, and before that is misinterpreted, one of the nuances of the previous government's policy ban on uranium mining in Queensland was that it did not exclude any companies making application to explore for uranium in Queensland; it just prevented any companies from making an application to commercially mine uranium in Queensland. It is an interesting observation that even under the previous government in Queensland, and since the government of Queensland imposed the ban on uranium mining in Queensland over 20 years ago, there has continued to be investment in exploration for uranium in Queensland during that time. These EPMs for uranium exploration in Queensland could have actually been applied for prior to the commencement of the Queensland government's new framework for uranium mining, but for the sake of completeness I thought I ought to make it clear to the member for Woodridge that we have received EPMs since the commencement of the new framework but no applications for a mining lease. Certainly EPMs for uranium would have been eligible to come forward prior to the commencement of our new framework. I hope that is clear.

Mrs SCOTT: Minister, then I had a couple of follow-up questions.

Mr CRIPPS: I was just clarifying an earlier answer. It is up to the chairman how he handles it from here.

CHAIR: Minister, just on your assessment hubs, you mentioned about the gas hub. This question is out of left field for you. Is there any thought about a gas hub in Toowoomba? I know you have the gas hub in Brisbane at the moment, but Toowoomba is a lot closer to the gasfields. Is there any thought of a gas hub as part of the regionalisation of the Toowoomba—

Mr CRIPPS: Mr Chairman, it is a good question. I can say two things about that: we have strategically selected the locations where we have established these regional hubs to accord and align with the existing expertise in those Department of Natural Resources and Mines offices. So whilst it is not exclusively the case, generally speaking most of the mineral resource activity in Queensland is in the central and northern regions of Queensland, and that is why we put the mineral hub in Townsville. We chose Rockhampton as the assessment hub for coal because, although it is not exclusively the case, most of the coalmining activity in Queensland is located in Central Queensland with a small amount in the north and a small amount in southern Queensland. We chose Brisbane as the hub for the petroleum and gas assessment teams because there was a concentration of expertise in that office in southern Queensland.

I might say that we have based the CSG Compliance Unit which, as you are aware, is a multidisciplinary unit, in Toowoomba. It services the Surat Basin, which is the heart of Queensland's growing CSG industry in this state. So we do actually have a significant number of officers who are based in Toowoomba as part of the CSG Compliance Unit supporting the development of the CSG industry, but also continuing to monitor its compliance with the regulatory framework that is in place and also responding to inquiries that come from the community and from other industries which coexist with the CSG industry in the Surat Basin.

Mr TROUT: Minister, I refer to page 3 of the SDS. You have previously voiced your support for the rail load-out facility at Cloncurry. Why has this development stalled?

Mr CRIPPS: Mr Chairman, I want to thank the member for Barron River for the question. It is an issue that has been in the media release recently. I have seen some articles in the media over the past week where CuDECO has stated that the Queensland government—and indeed me personally—were not supporting mining developments, including their own, near Cloncurry.

I can only say, Mr Chairman, that these statements made by CuDECO are not reflective of the reality of this government's support for the mining and exploration industry, which, as we all know, is one of the key pillars of the economy in Queensland. We promote economic development in the region. In early 2012 the department became aware that three separate mining companies, the Mineral and Metals Group Australia (MMG), CuDECO and Xstrata, which is now Glencore, were proposing rail load-out facilities to support their operations near Cloncurry. They were planning to use the facility to load a number of different high-value mineral concentrates for predominantly export through the port of Townsville. In recognition of these benefits, I announced in July 2012 that we certainly supported a new rail load-out facility in Cloncurry which would be funded by the proponents, but the government would work with them to deliver the regional facility.

Late last year two of these three companies, Glencore and MMG, made decisions based on commercial realities that changed their immediate need for a rail load-out facility at Cloncurry and they both withdrew completely with the lease transferred to CuDECO in January of this year to progress the application as the sole proponent. There are a number of regulatory requirements that are based on commercial decisions or negotiations that rest with the proponent to finalise. The requirements for the mining lease to be progressed to grant continue to be solely reliant on CuDECO gaining consent from the underlying exploration permit holders through a commercial negotiation process. It has to be very clearly said that the government is not party to these commercial negotiations and departmental officers are not in a position to be involved in or to influence outcomes or make any recommendations on the way in which these commercial negotiations occur.

CuDECO can progress its mining lease application by completing the statutory requirements that are the same for all companies to undertake to have a mining lease considered for grant. Either CuDECO or the Cloncurry Shire Council can progress the facility under a development application and this arrangement would allow a commercial multi-user rail facility to be developed for the benefit of the region without the need for CuDECO to gain consent from the exploration permit for mineral holders subject to normal regulatory approvals being met. If either CuDECO or the shire council wishes to progress down the development application path, the department would, of course, support this process in relation to tenure, but the development application process would, of course, be through the Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning.

Mrs SCOTT: Minister, further to the document released by your government entitled 'An action plan to recommence uranium mining in Queensland', what processes have been established within the department to assess the Australian government's leading practice guidelines and Australia's in situ recovery uranium mining best practice guide during the assessment phase for uranium mines?

Mr CRIPPS: Mr Chairman, before I hand over to one of my officers to speak in more detail about some of the technical issues and aspects of the member for Woodridge's question, can I say from the outset that this government has been through a very rigorous process to develop a modern framework for the recommencement of uranium mining in Queensland. One of the things that I was determined to do as minister when we announced that we would lift the policy ban on uranium mining in Queensland is that it would recommence under the guidance of a modern regulatory framework. We spent some time, through the establishment of an implementation committee which was led by Councillor Paul Bell, looking at the regulatory frameworks that were in place in other jurisdictions around Australia because it is the case that we do have uranium mining that is occurring in South Australia, in the Northern Territory and in Western Australia. We wanted to make sure that the framework that we had in place for the recommencement of uranium mining was modern and was best practice. I might say in relation to that framework that all of the applications that come forward, when they do come forward for the commercial production of uranium in Queensland, will go through a full Coordinator-General process and an environmental impact statement process and, of course, we have negotiated with the Commonwealth government in terms of our assessment and approvals processes to take into consideration the framework that the Commonwealth has in place for these types of environmental assessment processes. We have been very mindful of the need to make sure that our framework is modern and is comprehensive in terms of health and safety for the employees in the sector, but also for local communities and the environment.

I am confident that the effort that we have put in over the last 18 months leading up to the commencement of our new framework has been worthwhile and puts Queensland on a sound footing

to rigorously assess applications that come forward for the recommencement of uranium mining. If I can hand over now to one of my officers to give some further detail about the technical aspects of the member for Woodridge's question, I would be very grateful to the committee.

CHAIR: By all means.

Ms Ditchfield: Chair, my name is Bernadette Ditchfield. I am the Executive Director for Land and Mines Policy with the Department of Natural Resources and Mines. As part of my role, I am the chair of the Uranium Mining Oversight Committee which is looking into the implementation of the Uranium Mining Implementation Committee's report. I can assure the committee that we are working with Commonwealth agencies in implementing and aligning our framework with all Commonwealth guidelines.

Mrs SCOTT: I refer to page 9 of the SDS which details that staffing for Mine Safety and Health Services will be 306 in 2014-15 which is the same staffing level as in 2012-13. Has the workload of this service area remained unchanged since 2012-13?

Mr CRIPPS: Mr Chairman, in relation to the staffing for Mine Safety and Health Services, or the full-time equivalent matters, I am going to ask the Deputy Director-General for Mine Safety and Health to answer that question if that is okay. The Deputy Director-General is more familiar with the full-time equivalent staffing levels in that particular area of the department.

Mrs SCOTT: Thank you, Minister.

Mr Harrison: Thank you, Minister. I would say that the workload has been consistent for the last couple of years. I wouldn't say that there has been an increase or a decrease. I couldn't.

Mrs SCOTT: So have we had an increase in mining activity or that has remained steady as well?

Mr COX: Mine activity has steadied off. There has been an increase in activity in the gas sector, but there has been an increase in the number of gas inspectors in the gas sector. I think we have increased the number of gas inspectors by two.

Mrs SCOTT: Good. That is fine.

Mr CRIPPS: Obviously at the same time there has been a contraction in the activity particularly in the coal sector. So I think there are swings and roundabouts involved in the allocation of full-time equivalent resources within the department. But whilst there has been, as the Deputy Director-General pointed out, increased activity in the petroleum and gas sector, we should be mindful of the contraction of activity in other sectors of the resources industry.

Mrs SCOTT: Fine. Minister, I refer to page 13 of the SDS and page 11 of the 2013-14 SDS. Why has the budget for the mining and petroleum service area fallen from \$89.92 million in 2013-14 to \$61 million in 2014-15? I note that other revenue of \$23.8 million for this service area in 2013-14 has not been included in the 2014-15 year.

Mr CRIPPS: Mr Chairman, could I ask the member for Woodridge to repeat those figures? You are referring to page 13?

Mrs SCOTT: Are they a little different to yours? Yes, page 13 of the SDS.

Mr CRIPPS: Mine safety and health?

Mrs SCOTT: And page 11 of the 2013-14 SDS. Yes, that is what I have. Why has the budget for the mining and petroleum service area fallen from \$89.92 million in 2013-14 to \$61 million in 2014-15? I note that other revenue of \$23.8 million for this service area in 2013-14 has not been included in the 2014-15.

Mr COX: Mr Chairman, can I just ask for clarification? I cannot see that on my page of the Service Delivery Statement.

CHAIR: Have you found that, Minister? I am struggling to find it.

Mr CRIPPS: I think we can provide an answer to the member for Woodridge. I think the member for Woodridge might be comparing and contrasting two different SDS documents, one from this year and one from last year, is that right?

Mrs SCOTT: Yes.

Mr CRIPPS: My chief financial officer will be able to give the member for Woodridge an answer in respect of the inconsistency between the two documents, if that is okay? Mr Chairman, I would like to ask my chief financial officer to give an explanation about the two figures.

Ms Platt: The difference in the movements is mostly to do with the changing funding arrangements for the geostorage initiative that was originally going to be managed through the department. That is the majority of it. The rest of it is about timing of the multiyear programs like Greenfields and our Future Resources program. It is just about timing of payments.

CHAIR: Would you like a more detailed answer to that on notice?

Mrs SCOTT: If there is more detail you can supply it on notice.

Ms Platt: I can give you numbers.

CHAIR: You can give numbers on notice.

Mr CRIPPS: We have them here now.

Ms Platt: The Carbon Geostorage change is around \$23.3 million, the Future program's deferral was \$3.3 million and the Greenfields was \$3.5 million.

Mrs SCOTT: I refer to page 15 of the SDS. Why is the department targeting 90 per cent in 2014-15 for the percentage of mining exploration applications granted in accordance with time lines set out in published performance standards when 95 per cent was achieved for this service standard in 2013-14?

Mr CRIPPS: You are on page 15, member for Woodridge?

Mrs SCOTT: I am. And, minister, I might just add by way of explanation that we were not aware that we were swapping the land services to today so we have put together some questions very, very hurriedly.

Mr CRIPPS: I am sorry if the member was inconvenienced. It facilitated some obligations and commitments that officers from the department had and I am grateful to the committee for allowing that to occur.

Mrs SCOTT: That is fine.

CHAIR: Unfortunately it got lost in translation. It was not the department's fault.

Mr CRIPPS: It certainly is not intentional.

Mrs SCOTT: Just so you understand where we are coming from.

Mr CRIPPS: That is perfectly okay. My interpretation, member for Woodridge, if I can ask for a clarification, is that the target that was established for that service standard in relation to mining exploration applications granted was 90 per cent and we exceeded that target. The estimated actual is 95 per cent in that same financial year so we exceeded our target in that regard. We are maintaining the service standard that we had in the coming financial year. We have not reduced the service standard that we have nominated from the last financial year, but last financial year we exceeded that performance target. If there are any other details about that service delivery target, my Deputy Director-General for service delivery is happy to provide you with any additional material, if that is okay with Mr Chairman?

CHAIR: Yes, certainly. You have done good, Minister, really, getting 95 per cent.

Mr CRIPPS: We did. We exceeded our targets and we are not dropping our targets. We certainly want to continue to improve our performance. I have spent a considerable amount of time in my earlier contributions in response to answers talking about the types of regulatory reform that the department is pursuing to try to minimise the time taken to assess and approve applications that come before the department. I might say that we are doing that at the same time very mindful of the need to maintain the rigour of those assessments. We believe that the utilisation of new technology and also the review of our systems of assessment is what is delivering those improved time frames. I might say, for the benefit of the committee but particularly in relation to the question just asked by the member for Woodridge, that in terms of the improvements in our time frames we are mindful to maintain the rigour of those assessment processes. That has been made very clear to our departmental officers.

Mr COX: Minister, in light of the industry's booming and waning at times and the need to supercharge the economy, I refer to page 10 of the SDS. Your department slashed processing times for coal and mineral exploration permits from an average of 22 months to less than six months for those without native title. What are the benefits to the companies, to the industry as a whole and to the state from such processes being sped up?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for Thuringowa for his question. It is a timely question, given the previous inquiry from the member for Woodridge. The Queensland government is investing in streamlining approvals processes, and this is starting to pay dividends. There is no better evidence of this than the time taken to grant an exploration permit for minerals when using the new MyMinesOnline system. The average time to grant for an exploration permit for minerals for the period 2012-13, as reflected in the Queensland Resources Council Exploration Scorecard, was approximately 21 months. For applications made on MyMinesOnline in the financial year 2013-14 this has decreased to approximately 8.23 months. This is a concrete result of the efficiencies delivered by the streamlining processes and the MyMinesOnline system. These results have been achieved by examining every business process involved and setting performance standards for processing times. For example, applicants for exploration permits to minerals are now formally advised within 90 days of lodgement whether or not their work program is approved, which means applicants can start the required native title and land access processes earlier, reducing overall time to grant.

Further, impressive reductions have been made in reducing the time taken on high-volume transactions such as transfers and the registrations of mortgages, caveats and agreements. Under the old paper based system, these took a considerable time to process and tied up staff who could otherwise be used to undertake higher value assessment tasks. By automating many of the functions through MyMinesOnline, time frames have been significantly reduced. The time taken to process non-assessable transfers has fallen by 99 per cent, while the time taken to process assessable transfers has reduced by 85 per cent. The times taken to register a mortgage, caveat or agreement have all reduced by more than 96 per cent. This automation has a double benefit, as I mentioned, as it frees up staff time to focus on processing applications and renewals through the relevant regulatory processes.

Mrs MADDERN: Minister, could I ask you to expand on what your department is doing about the management and storage of historical and current mine plans and surveys?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for Maryborough for her question. The initiative we are undertaking is that the department will be requiring persons who are responsible for the temporary cessation of operations or the abandonment of a mine to submit accurate plans of the operation within a set period after the cessation or abandonment. If the mine is in receivership then the obligation will be placed on the receiver. This will be in addition to the current requirement for mines to submit mine plans to the chief inspector annually. However, it is proposed that submission of mine plans will be to the department and not specifically to the chief inspector, thus allowing the development of changed practices within government for the storage and retrieval of survey information.

Already, many historical maps dating back to the 1800s have been scanned and stored digitally. Professional surveyors, the Surveyors Board of Queensland and the Australian Institute of Mine Surveyors have commenced consultation with the department's Mines Inspectorate, Titles Registry and Cadastral and Geodetic Services to establish a comprehensive and reliable approach for the future capture and storage of all survey information, including survey information for resource activities. The intention is to work cohesively with a wider departmental initiative aimed at providing access to timely and accurate spatial data above and below ground, which is critical to planning for future developments and businesses.

CHAIR: Just a supplementary to that, Minister, I did have some mine surveyors come to me. It sounds like you have answered their questions adequately, simply for the fact that they were concerned there was not going to be a good system put in place to retain those old survey plans and so on. Of course, areas like Collingwood Park are very important when something else happens further down the track. Gympie would be another example, I would imagine.

Mr CRIPPS: They are very important, Mr Chairman, and you have exactly pointed out the reason. If we can hold that historical data and information about mine surveying plans we can accurately respond to any issues that come up in the future with the management of those sites. It particularly becomes important when we have a site that is put into care and maintenance or is abandoned by a company. In the event that there are any issues or incidents that occur on the site, we have accurate historical information about the type of work that has been carried out on those mine sites in the past and we are able to provide information to anyone doing any work on the site and make sure their risk is minimised and they are safe when carrying out activities.

Mr COSTIGAN: Minister, I refer to page 4 of the SDS. I would like you to update the committee this afternoon on what your department is doing for the safety of our mineworkers. You may wish to

go to Mr Harrison on this. I also make the point that this is a rather timely question in our part of the world given this October happens to be the 60th anniversary of the Collinsville mine disaster of 1954.

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for Whitsunday for his question. I do have information to hand about what we are up to to ensure the safety of employees on mine sites throughout Queensland. Certainly, ensuring Queensland mineworkers return home safely after each shift is of paramount importance to the government and particularly to my Department of Natural Resources and Mines and the mine safety inspectorate within it.

Queensland is recognised internationally, as I mentioned earlier, for its excellent mine safety record. Our preliminary numbers show that, as at the end of June, the lost-time injury frequency rate in mining was down from 3.5 injuries per million hours worked in the previous year. To the end of June this year it was at three. We have had a full half-a-percentage-point decrease in that amount of injuries per million hours worked. Information for June is still being received from the industry, but I do not expect it to make a material difference to the average. While this trend is heartening to see, in the 2013-14 financial year it must be pointed out that there was still one fatal incident in the underground coal sector and one in the metalliferous sector in Queensland.

In the 2013-14 year the Mines Inspectorate undertook 67 audits and 1,624 inspections which resulted in 1,450 compliance actions including 308 directives, 1,128 substandard condition or practice notices, and 14 level 3 or 4 compliance meetings with companies or individuals. Two thousand, one hundred and seventy high-potential incidents were reported to the inspectorate in 2013-14. This is up 297 from 2012-13, when 873 were reported. The inspectorate is analysing the reports and will plan future audits and inspections to target known trends across industry and at specific mine, where appropriate.

I might just pause at this point to draw the committee's attention to that particular statistic. It is not a bad thing that we had an increase in high-potential incidents that were reported to the inspectorate. It is an indication of a strong culture of reporting potential safety hazards in the industry. I encourage employees in the resources sector to report anything they see on a mine site that could potentially be a safety concern. We must always encourage that culture on our mine sites, because safety is everyone's responsibility on a mine site. Whilst we have had an increase of those reported potential incidents to the inspectorate, I am not concerned about that. I encourage that reporting and I am grateful that they have been reported to the inspectorate because we can consider and act on those reports and try to improve the standard of safety in the resources sector.

One hundred and twenty-one complaints were received regarding mine safety, and they have been investigated. All incidents resulting in serious injury or death are thoroughly investigated. If the investigation results in adverse findings against the parties involved, prosecution or other appropriate enforcement action is undertaken. Serious, high-level potential incidents are also investigated and mines inspectors ensure that mines have introduced the safety management measures identified to prevent a recurrence.

When the circumstances warrant it, prosecutions are also undertaken for high-potential incidents. In 2013-14 there were three completed prosecutions, with four defendants convicted. There are currently seven prosecutions underway, with 24 defendants charged. Eliminating fatalities and serious accidents is directly related to effectively managing risk and associated hazards in the mining industry. These incidents emphasise the need for a vigilant and active Mines Inspectorate which will continue to proactively undertake audits and inspections and direct its activities to areas where there are identified safety management concerns.

An adequately resourced, well-qualified and committed Mines Inspectorate will continue to be a government priority. I pointed out earlier that the deputy director-general for mine safety is here with me for this particular session, but I also have a group of distinguished men from my Mines Inspectorate who are the chief inspectors and the deputy chief inspector in relation to explosives. They take their responsibilities in the Mines Inspectorate very seriously.

I hope I have reassured the member for Whitsunday and all of the members of the committee that we take those responsibilities very seriously. I would like to reiterate that we have completed prosecutions and we have prosecutions on foot for breaches of our Mine Safety Framework in Queensland in the previous financial year. We are very serious about upholding our reputation as a first-class jurisdiction as far as mine safety is concerned. As the responsible minister it is important to me that we do have a good safety track record in the resources sector.

Mr COSTIGAN: Minister Cripps, I commend you on your work in this area but particularly Mr Harrison, the wise men who are here today and your team from the Mines Inspectorate. Minister,

further referring to page 4 of the SDS, could you update the committee on the process of consultation on any changes to mine safety legislation?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for Whitsunday for the question. We are always looking for ways to make Queensland's world-leading safety and health regime for mineworkers even more effective through continual improvements to the state's mine safety and health laws. Queensland is recognised internationally for its good mining safety and health record, but no system is perfect—and we cannot afford to become complacent, as the details of the figures that I just gave to the committee outline. Queensland's strong mining industry continues to grow, and our aim is to improve safety and health standards to meet these new challenges.

A 193-page consultation regulatory impact statement was released for public comment on 7 September last year by our department. Public submissions to the consultation RIS closed on 11 November last year. We received 246 public submissions in response to this RIS. Many of these submissions were very lengthy and detailed on what is a complicated and technical subject.

The department has worked closely with the Office of Best Practice Regulation to ensure that the regulatory impact analysis is accurate and comprehensive and provides an objective and transparent process for regulatory decision making. It has taken significant time and resources to give full consideration to the material in the public submissions and to undertake a thorough analysis necessary to meet the Office of Best Practice Regulation requirements. The resulting 84-page decision RIS was approved by the Office of Best Practice regulation on 24 June this year.

In relation to the consultation process to develop the RIS and our response to the RIS, the coalmining safety and health and the mining safety and health advisory committees have been involved and consulted on the legislative amendments proposed in the Queensland mine safety regulatory framework impact statement. A number of the advisory committee members were directly involved in the National Mine Safety Framework consultation and negotiation process, some from the outset of that consultation process. Committee members were regularly updated at committee meetings on the progression with the National Mine Safety Framework negotiations.

The Department of Natural Resources and Mines released the public consultation paper on 6 June 2012 seeking comment on its preferred options in relation to the National Mine Safety Framework consultation and negotiation process. The paper was provided to all committee members from the coalmining and safety and health and the mining safety and health advisory committees. There is users' material from the National Mine Safety Framework process as well as submissions previously made by the advisory committee members and their representative bodies. As I said earlier, while a total of 246 responses to the RIS were received, no submissions were received from either of those committees, but those advisory committees have met to discuss the content of the RIS in detail.

Mrs MADDERN: Minister, you have given an extensive explanation of mine safety compliance and prosecutions. Could you just clarify for me, does that cover the CSG sector or is the CSG sector treated separately from those figures?

Mr CRIPPS: I would like to thank the member for Maryborough for her question. In addition to the excellent work of the deputy director-general for mine safety and health and the chief inspectors and deputy chief inspectors for explosives who are behind me, we have an additional layer of compliance that we have for the CSG industry. The Coal Seam Gas Compliance Unit within the Department of Natural Resources and Mines coordinates a program of annual activities set out in the Coal Seam Gas Engagement and Compliance Plan 2013 to ensure that the operations and impacts of the coal seam gas industry are effectively managed. The executive director of the unit, Ian Heiner, is with me today for the benefit of the committee. The plan features a proactive approach to inspecting, checking and auditing Queensland's coal seam gas industry operations, building relationships between landholders and resource companies and keeping communities fully informed about CSG activities in their regions.

We have some key outcomes under the CSG Engagement and Compliance Plan, which I would like to draw to the attention of the committee. Three hundred and forty-six wells were inspected for leaks and safety compliance, which is 38 per cent more than the 250 which we targeted last year. Two hundred and nine drilling and workover rigs were inspected or audited for compliance, which is 44 per cent more than the target. Forty-one pipelines and 14 petroleum processing facilities were inspected. Three hundred and three water bores were monitored for water levels or pressure readings to assess potential groundwater impacts and water samples were taken from 76 bores. The department managed 466 inquiries and matters of concern about CSG operations during 2013. These

were predominantly from landholders. Departmental staff participated in 36 coal seam gas related forums and community events to improve understanding of industry regulation and issues. The department takes this proactive approach to compliance with Queensland's CSG industry by using promotion, education and advice as a preferred method to encourage compliance with the legislation.

The expansion of the industry into the liquefied natural gas export market is helping to drive economic growth, investment and jobs for Queenslanders, attracting \$60 billion of new investment, generating 30,000 jobs and \$100 million in community programs. But it is important to give communities confidence that the industry is being appropriately monitored and regulated. That is why we have our compliance plan and that is why we have our CSG compliance unit.

Mrs MADDERN: Just as a supplementary to that, have there been any court actions or penalties as a result of your compliance program for the CSG sector?

Mr CRIPPS: Mr Chairman, in relation to compliance actions that have come from compliance either through the gas inspectorate or the Coal Seam Gas Compliance Unit, in relation to the gas inspectorate, I will ask the deputy director-general to provide some information in that regard.

Mr Harrison: If we are talking just about prosecution—

Mrs MADDERN: Basically, yes. We have talked about the compliance process. I am just interested in knowing what any of the outcomes might have been. So over to you for whatever information.

Mr Harrison: We had five prosecutions with seven complaints and summons issued during 2013 for health and safety breaches. One is on foot and four of them are in the preproceedings stage.

Mrs MADDERN: Right. Okay.

Mr Harrison: We also had coming into the year three prosecutions on foot and two were completed during the year.

Mrs MADDERN: Which basically demonstrates that the process is working.

Mr Harrison: Yes.

CHAIR: Minister, I did happen to hear the Cameron Cole name mentioned. Cameron Cole was a young bloke from my area. I just notice that the Coroners Court is now looking into the Cameron Cole death, which was out at the gas field in November 2009, if I remember rightly. I think there was some conflict about whether the legislation covered that. Could you enlighten us on that?

Mr CRIPPS: Certainly, I can provide some background information about where that process is up to. I think it is important to make sure that we continue to keep the family, the friends and the colleagues of people who were involved in these types of incidents in the resources sector informed about the progress of investigations in relation to these incidents.

As the chairman mentioned, Cameron Cole was an employee of Lucas Mitchell Drilling, who was fatally injured on 14 August 2009 at the Santos Fairview gas field when he was struck by pipes which fell from the back of a truck while being unloaded. Prosecutions were commenced in August 2011 under the Petroleum and Gas (Production and Safety) Act 2004, but were struck out or discontinued due to judicial decisions about legal technicalities made in May 2012 and June 2013 respectively.

On 12 July 2012, the Commissioner for Mine Safety and Health wrote to the Coroner to advise him that the prosecutions would not proceed to trial. The commissioner explained the circumstances and requested that serious consideration be given to holding a public inquest in relation to the fatality. This would be to determine the nature and cause to be sure that sufficient measures have been implemented to prevent a recurrence of this incident.

On 26 July 2012, the Coroner advised the commissioner that he had formed the view that an inquest should be held. The first pre-inquest conference was held on 12 June this year and a further pre-inquest conference is scheduled for 28 July this year. A tentative inquest date was set down from 22 September this year in Roma. The length of the inquest will be clarified at the next pre-inquest conference, which I mentioned is due on 28 this month.

CHAIR: All right. Thank you for that. Minister, I refer to page 10. How many abandoned mines were remediated last year?

Mr CRIPPS: Mr Chairman, thank you for the question. The Queensland government has actually increased its efforts to increase public safety and decrease risks from abandoned mines in close proximity to communities. Achievements by the Abandoned Mine Lands Program in the

previous financial year include ground truthing of more than 170 sites across the state, with risk mitigation works carried out on more than 490 individual mine sites. It is unfortunate that the member for Dalrymple is not here, because in the northern region a lot of that work was undertaken in the Ravenswood, Herberton and Charters Towers areas.

In the central region, \$106,000 was spent in areas in the Isaac and Central Highlands, Rockhampton, Mackay, Whitsunday, Bundaberg, North Burnett, Banana and Gladstone regions. In the southern region we spent \$120,000 on work in the Passchendaele State Forest at Pratten, in the Conondale National Park and around Maryborough and Leyburn. We have ongoing shaft repair activities that occur in Gympie and Charters Towers. In Gympie, we had 29 shafts made safe with 22 minor works at a cost of \$312,000 and in Charters Towers we had 13 shafts made safe, with one minor works at a cost of \$159,000—once again, some work occurring in the electorate of the member for Dalrymple.

At Mount Morgan, which is our most significant and complex abandoned mine site in Queensland, we have the operations of the lime based water treatment plant's evaporators and seepage inception systems, the reduction of water levels in the Mount Morgan mine pit by more than 1½ metres, the operation of a water treatment plant capacity and reliability upgrade and engineering reviews of the stability of the Mundi Gully embankment at a total cost of \$3 million within that financial year. In places such as Horn Island, Croydon, Herberton, Mount Oxide, Irvinebank, Target Gully and at Mary Kathleen, our expenditure in the order of \$1.5 million has been involved in the maintenance and monitoring of site systems for the management of safety barriers and signage, groundwater and seepage, run-off and erosion, vegetation management and fire management and community and stakeholder interaction. We have also continued our work at Collingwood Park, with over half a million dollars involved in investigations, monitoring and maintenance to meet the commitments of the state's Collingwood Park guarantee. We have also completed repairs to St Luke's Anglican Church. The other work that we have done in the abandoned mines area has been the creation of a new abandoned mines database in Queensland and the government is also improving access to small historic mine stockpiles, seeking practical ways to manage mining heritage and seeking more flexible ways of remediating historic mining areas.

Mrs SCOTT: I refer to page 12 of the SDS and the minister's responsibility to manage mining leases and the expenditure of his agency towards this management role, as well as his answer to non-government question on notice No. 10 for this estimates hearing. In the answer to the question on notice it states that the budget for the department in 2014-15 is \$1.409 million to go towards implementing the Indigenous land use agreement with the Quandamooka people. Could the minister provide further advice on how this funding will be allocated? Is that a bit obscure?

Mr COX: Mr Chairman, is that relevant to what we are talking about now?

CHAIR: Yes, I do—

Mr CRIPPS: Yes. With regard to the SDS reference in relation to the management of mining leases, I did not quite see how that lined up with the question that the member for Woodridge asked. The management of mining leases and the management of an Indigenous land use agreement do not appear to me to correlate directly. If the member for Woodridge could clarify what she means—

CHAIR: Or ask the question again.

Mrs SCOTT: The Quandamooka people were very involved in the Sibelco mining plans and so on, were they not?

CHAIR: That is actually before the High Court at the moment. I do not know whether the minister would wish to answer that.

Mrs SCOTT: I was not aware of that, no.

CHAIR: It is actually before the High Court.

Mr CRIPPS: Yes, that is true, Mr Chairman. The Quandamooka people have lodged a case in the High Court questioning the validity of the legislation passed by the government last year in relation to Sibelco's sandmining operations on North Stradbroke Island. However, I am still confused about the SDS reference that the member for Woodridge made with respect to the management of mining leases and how that relates to the management of an Indigenous land use agreement and I am just seeking clarification from her about the link.

Mrs SCOTT: Minister, as I explained earlier, these have been put together very rapidly and I have not been involved in the formulation of this question. But I might just go to one very short

question at the end here. Did you or the LNP mention at any point before the election a commitment to extend sandmining on North Stradbroke Island to 2035? At the time of the 2012 state election Sibelco had agreed to exit sandmining in 2027.

CHAIR: That is not relevant to the appropriation bills.

Mr COSTIGAN: Minister, earlier you were talking about Mount Morgan, a place that I am very familiar with from my days in Rockhampton and Central Queensland. I want to go back to a story that appeared in the last few days in the Rockhampton based newspaper, the *Morning Bulletin*, about the WA based company Carbine Resources and Mount Morgan. I would like you to update the committee on this potential development. From my observations, it sounds pretty exciting for Mount Morgan and Central Queensland in general.

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for Whitsunday for the question. I can advise the committee that the department is working closely with Norton Gold Fields and Carbine Resources Ltd to explore the potential of new technology controlled by Carbine Resources which may be applicable to the treatment of various materials on the site, including the pit water. Carbine Resources publicly announced in the Rockhampton *Morning Bulletin* on 11 July this year, as the member mentioned, that it is completing a scoping study to confirm that the extraction of the remaining gold and copper at the mine site is technically and economically viable. The department met with both parties on 30 June this year where it was agreed to exchange information to enable further development of the proposal. The parties will reconvene later this month and the government is assisting Norton Gold Fields and Carbine Resources to prove up its proposal, which, if implemented, could substantially reduce environmental issues at the mine site and provide important jobs in the local community.

CHAIR: Minister, as you are well aware, I have some government magazines in my electorate of the Lockyer and I am quite interested in fireworks and cracker nights and that sort of thing. With Riverfire not far off, can you provide us with an update on firework safety?

Mr CRIPPS: Certainly. It is one of the more interesting and exciting responsibilities that I have as Minister for Mines. I am responsible for our explosive legislation in Queensland covering not only the run-of-the-mill explosives that are particularly used in the mining industry but also ammunition and fireworks, which is the nature of the chairman's question. Thankfully, there have been no reported serious injuries from outdoor fireworks displays in the past seven years in Queensland.

CHAIR: That is a good effort, isn't it?

Mr CRIPPS: There are approximately 1,500 notified fireworks displays in Queensland each year, and there have been some cracking fireworks displays at my local shows in the Hinchinbrook electorate over the last couple of weeks. The one that went off in Innisfail last week which coincided with the 100th Innisfail Show was particularly fantastic.

Mr COSTIGAN: Almost as good as Proserpine, hey?

CHAIR: Went off with a bang, did it?

Mr CRIPPS: It did go off with many, many bangs and the Governor of Queensland was at the Innisfail Show for the 100th Innisfail Show and she was delighted with the fireworks display on that occasion. Fireworks safety in Queensland has been significantly improved, particularly since the Bray Park incident in May 2000 and the subsequent Coroner's report and recommendations handed down in December 2001. A standing Fireworks Advisory Committee consisting of representatives of the fireworks industry associations, fireworks contractors and the Explosive Inspectorate chaired by the Chief Inspector of Explosives was established in November 2001 and continues to meet to pursue fireworks safety in Queensland. A total of 35 meetings have been held to date.

The results of the Bray Park fireworks accident investigation and the subsequent safety initiatives have been promoted both nationally and internationally to improve fireworks safety generally as recommended by the Coroner. All licensed fireworks contractors and operators are trained to the national competencies that were developed here in Queensland. This training program was developed and delivered by the Southern Queensland Institute of TAFE, which is based in Toowoomba. Fireworks safety in Queensland is now operating at a high level of safety. The popularity of Riverfire, Queensland's largest fireworks display, demonstrates the efforts of the fireworks industry and departmental officers who have established and continue to maintain very high safety standards. I pay tribute to the extraordinary level of coordination and monitoring that goes on from the Queensland Explosive Inspectorate in the lead-up to Riverfire every year—a massive fireworks display and a very technically complicated fireworks display—and I know that for months beforehand the Explosive Inspectorate works closely with the contractors and the organisers of Riverfire to try to

maintain a very high level of public safety indeed so that we can all enjoy Riverfire but that we can do so safely. They take their work, especially in relation to the management of our explosives reserves across Queensland, very seriously. We are mindful of the importance of those assets for the state of Queensland.

CHAIR: We even just had a good fire burn behind one of them so that there is no risk of fire this year up there, so that is good.

Mr COX: Minister, I have a quick question in reference to page 10 under 'Mining and Petroleum Services'. It states that outcomes include policy and legislative certainty. Minister, can you confirm that uranium will not be shipped from Townsville or any other Queensland port and why? This is relevant to my city.

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for Thuringowa for his question, and the question is timely and is relevant to the city that both he and I represent in the parliament. There have been a number of claims made about the Ben Lomond mining project which, as the member for Dalrymple mentioned earlier, is some 50 kilometres west of Townsville, but I must correct him in some of the statements that he made earlier that Ben Lomond has never been a producing uranium mine.

Mr KNUTH: That is misleading, Mr Chairman. I did not say that.

Mr CRIPPS: Okay then. If the member for Dalrymple did not say that earlier, then I withdraw and apologise to him. But the Commonwealth government's decision in 1984 to introduce the three mines policy was actually the policy which restricted uranium mining operations to three mines in Australia and effectively stopped the development of the Ben Lomond site at the time. Since that time Ben Lomond has been in care and maintenance and there have been no operational activities on site. I can say in response to the question that has been asked that the mining, transport and export of uranium from Queensland will be managed under tight environmental controls regulated by both the state and federal governments and will be subject to international treaties. For example, under the Commonwealth Nuclear Non-Proliferation (Safeguards) Act 1987, an operator must be licensed by the Australian Safeguards and Non-Proliferation Office to obtain, transport and export uranium from Australia.

In relation to the question asked by the member for Thuringowa, there are currently no ports in Queensland that are licensed to export uranium oxide. The only two licensed ports permitted to export uranium oxide in Australia are located in Adelaide in South Australia and in Darwin in the Northern Territory. The Queensland government's view and preference is that uranium be exported through existing licensed ports in Australia and the practical reality is that the volumes of produced uranium oxide for any uranium mining that does recommence in Queensland will not justify the licensing of a port in Queensland to export uranium oxide from this state. In contrast to other types of hard rock mining, uranium mining does not produce large volumes of material for export. It produces a very small amount or volume of material and the process of securing certification at a port to export this material is complicated and involves both state and federal legislation. I believe that the practical and commercial realities of the situation are that it will continue to be exported out of the existing licensed ports in Darwin or Adelaide when and if uranium mining recommences in Queensland.

Mr COX: Thank you, Minister.

CHAIR: Last question.

Mr COSTIGAN: Minister, I have one final question, and it is probably timely in that QME is going to be held in Mackay, my home town, next week and I am sure this issue will be talked about by many exhibitors and those coming through the gates—that is, the SIMTARS virtual reality training centre. Minister, could you explain the importance of this facility for Queensland's mining industry?

Mr CRIPPS: Certainly. I want to thank the member for Whitsunday and would point out that SIMTARS not only has facilities at Redbank in southern Queensland but we also have facilities in the city of Mackay, part of which is represented by the member for Whitsunday. SIMTARS has a long and proud history of innovation and working with industry and business partners to introduce new and cutting-edge technology to the Queensland mining industry. In November 2013 the SIMTARS virtual reality immersive mine safety training centre was officially opened. The new state-of-the-art facility is a first for mine safety training in Queensland, and I actually opened the facility and was very proud to do so. The immersive experience allows trainees to experience the sights and sounds of a lifelike mine environment as part of mine safety training. Scenarios have been developed which allow trainees to identify hazards, improve situational awareness, and respond to emergency situations in a safe and controlled environment.

The state-of-the-art virtual reality mine training facility will improve safety in the resources sector, which is one of the four pillars of the Queensland economy. The resources sector employs thousands of Queenslanders and we expect there to be many thousands more as projects such as those in the Galilee Basin get underway. In the past many trainees would begin employment without ever having experienced these conditions, but now they can do so in a safe and controlled environment. The immersive VR technology used in this centre will take miners into an underground mine environment, allowing them to experience simulated emergency situations and identify the most appropriate responses to keep themselves and their fellow workers safe. Training this way will help reduce the potential for critical mistakes to occur in the actual workplace and will protect the future of this industry that is vital to the Queensland economy.

A 3D replica of a working Queensland underground coalmine is created using this cutting-edge, real-time interactive graphics and immersive display technology, including above and underground equipment and mine infrastructure such as operating longwalls, continuous miners, loaders, shuttle cars, belt systems, support, ventilation devices and safety equipment. This level of detail allows trainees to safely experience and respond to situations from many perspectives including time and event pressure, which is not possible in real life. This new training facility is another first for SIMTARS, which is recognised around the world as a leader in innovative mine safety training, education and technology. Initially, immersive virtual reality training will focus on underground coalmine safety, but SIMTARS plans to expand future courses to cover workers involved in metalliferous and open-cut mining.

SIMTARS has designed a range of mine gas monitoring systems to prevent mine fires and explosions. These best-in-class systems are not only to be found in Queensland and Australia underground coalmines but have also been exported to China, India, New Zealand and the United States. SIMTARS was instrumental in introducing this GAG engine inertisation technology to Queensland after Moura No. 4 disaster. The GAG engine, located at the Queensland Mines Rescue Service in Dysart, has been deployed on five occasions to various coalmines in Queensland, New South Wales, the United States and New Zealand to quell underground mine fires. Later this year SIMTARS will be trialling a new smaller version of the GAG which should be easier to deploy and allow more targeted application of inert gas. The new technology may supplement the existing GAG engine or ultimately replace it.

In early 2014 the SIMTARS mobile gas laboratory underwent a significant electrical refurbishment which included installing a backup power generator to ensure power is maintained during critical mine gas testing and analysis. The mobile gas laboratory and an emergency response team is on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week to respond rapidly to a mine fire or explosion. SIMTARS has also recently identified new, innovative microseismic technology to research and trial in the Queensland mining industry. Microseismic sensing technology is used to monitor seismic events that forecast strata failure or ground movement in an underground or surface mine. The technology can even be used to identify the location of miners trapped underground. SIMTARS will be conducting mine safety trials later this year.

Finally in relation to the work of SIMTARS, they launched a new accredited stone dust sampling and underground coalmines course in January of this year. The course targets those persons working in underground coalmining who are responsible for collecting or supervising the collection of stone dust samples, in particular mine managers, under managers, deputies and technical service staff. A risk assessment and demonstration of new stone dusting technology as part of ACARP projects was hosted by SIMTARS in April of this year. The event was attended by representatives from the Queensland and New South Wales Mines Inspectorates as well as other industry representatives.

Currently, stone dust is applied dry to the roof, ribs and roadways in an underground coalmine to reduce the possibility of coal dust explosions. The new product uses a wet application technique to apply stone dust to the exposed surfaces of a coalmine. If trials are successful, this new technology will result in improvements in the application of stone dust which will further lower the risk of stone dust explosions. SIMTARS continues to conduct testing of stone dust explosion barrier bags using its explosion propagation tube as well as laboratory testing of mine roadway dust samples to ensure the application of stone dust in a mine is adequate. These are examples of the Queensland government's ongoing commitment to improve access to state-of-the-art technology in mine safety in Queensland.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Would you like to make a brief statement just summing-up for the day?

Mr CRIPPS: I would only say that I think from the range of questions asked today you can see that the Mines portfolio is very varied—right across from mine safety and health and through the regulation not only of explosives but also things like fireworks and ammunition to the issues associated with regulatory frameworks for tenure right across our different sectors in minerals, coal and petroleum and gas. The officers behind me take great pride in being the agency that supports the development of the resources sector in Queensland which of course historically always has been, is and will be into the future one of the key pillars of the Queensland economy.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. That brings our hearing today to a close. I thank the minister and his advisers for turning up today. We will finish examination of the Natural Resources and Mines portfolio on Thursday and then move into Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. I declare the hearing closed.

Committee adjourned at 5.06 pm