

## THURSDAY, 17 JULY 2014

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

#### Estimates Committee Members

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

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#### 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

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#### Committee met at 8.57 am

 **CHAIR:** I declare this meeting of the Agriculture, Resources and Environment Committee open. I am Ian Rickuss, the member for Lockyer. Joining me today are the deputy chair, the member for South Brisbane, Jackie Trad; Sam Cox, the member for Thuringowa; Jason Costigan, the member for Whitsunday; Shane Knuth, the member for Dalrymple; Anne Maddern, the member for Maryborough; and Michael Trout, the member for Barron River. The proceedings today are lawful proceedings subject to the standing rules and orders of parliament. As such, I remind all visitors that any person admitted to the hearing may be excluded in accordance with standing order 208.

In relation to 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 Service's website. We extend a warm welcome to everyone who is picking up this broadcast. The committee has authorised the release of answers from the minister in the prehearing questions. These will be available on our website. As laid out in the guidelines in schedule 8 at the back of the standing orders, we expect all department officers appearing here 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 opinion on the merits or otherwise of policies of the government. That is a role for the minister.

Finally before we begin, I ask everyone to switch their mobile phones off or to silent. For the next two hours we will examine the estimates of the land services area within the portfolio of the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines. Welcome back, Minister and advisers. For the benefit of Hansard, I ask advisers if you are called to give an answer to please state your name before speaking. Minister, the committee has granted leave to the Leader of the Opposition, the Hon. Anastacia Palaszczuk, to participate in these hearings. I now declare the proposed expenditure open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

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

**Mr CRIPPS:** Thanks, Mr Chairman, and good morning again to members of the committee. The government has a strong plan to deliver a brighter future for generations of Queenslanders to come. In particular, my Department of Natural Resources and Mines is pursuing significant changes in an effort to deliver new economic opportunities for Queensland, especially in regional and rural areas. We are seeking to overcome an unfortunate chapter in public policy where industry was tied up in a lot of red tape, hindering economic growth and new job creation opportunities. Over the past two years I have worked closely with my department to help support this government's commitment to power up the Queensland economy and create jobs.

Since 2012 the department has reoriented its focus and purpose towards becoming an economic development agency that enables the responsible and productive use of our natural resources to generate wealth and prosperity for current and for future generations of Queenslanders. The Newman government has delivered landmark reforms to support growth in Queensland's four pillars—resources, agriculture, construction and tourism. The Newman government has listened to community concerns and acted on transforming and modernising the management and use of state land in Queensland in particular. In May this year we delivered game-changing reforms to the management of rural and island tourism leasehold land, providing greater security of tenure, reducing the burden of land rental costs, and providing more attractive and affordable pathways to freehold title. These reforms have been hailed as a turning point for island tourism and agribusiness in Queensland. What this means is farmers and graziers and offshore tourism operators in Queensland can now confidently invest in their properties and businesses knowing that their leases are secure, that the burden of spiralling land rents will be moderated, and that there will now be a more affordable and realistic opportunity for rural landholders to freehold their properties. These common-sense reforms promote business certainty for industries sensitive to extreme weather, rising operating costs and volatile markets.

To grow Queensland, we must also continue to build agriculture as a key pillar of our economy. Last year I delivered landmark reforms to restore balance to the state's vegetation management framework in recognition of the major development potential in Queensland and to work towards our government's goal of doubling agricultural production by 2040. The reforms are consistent with our core election commitment to reduce red tape and provide a pathway for new, sustainable, high-value agriculture development opportunities. These reforms are already delivering benefits to the agriculture sector through savings in time and money, as well as helping farmers increase the productivity and sustainability of their business. In the past landholders would have had to wait for months for a development approval before they could carry out routine land management activities on their properties. Under our new self-assessable codes, landholders have collectively saved more than 100 years in time and opportunity costs that would have been lost under the unnecessarily restrictive framework developed under the previous government. Landholders now have more control over their land, allowing them to sustainably grow their farm businesses, driving agricultural production and delivering jobs in regional communities.

The Newman government recognises that Indigenous Queenslanders want to own their own homes in freehold in their local communities so that they can participate in the broader economy as well as having assets to pass on to future generations. Despite 20 years in office, the former government did not progress this issue in a meaningful way for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, denying them the opportunity enjoyed by their fellow Queenslanders. We have brought them closer to achieving homeownership by fixing problems that had previously prevented Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from obtaining perpetual leases in Indigenous communities across Queensland. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Land Holding Bill passed through the parliament last year, replacing the redundant and inflexible Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (Land Holding) Act 1985 with a more effective homeownership scheme for Indigenous communities. It addresses problems that had impeded the delivery of important social housing and the transfer of

land and homeownership in Indigenous communities. The new legislation established a process and framework to grant more than 200 perpetual leases in 15 communities and, where appropriate, for lessees to be confirmed as a homeowner. The amendments also provided clearer guidelines for pastoralists who enter into Indigenous access and use agreements or Indigenous land use agreements by completing native title processes. That was another step towards delivering on our election commitment to unlock potential social, cultural and economic benefits for Indigenous communities across the state.

The Newman government does have a strong plan and we are in the process of implementing it. Unlike the previous government, we are taking action; we are not just talking about it. Our landmark reforms and initiatives prove that we are committed to providing Queenslanders with the opportunities needed to ensure a prosperous future for their state for generations to come. Thanks, Mr Chairman.

**CHAIR:** Minister, referring to the SDS at page 11, you recently stated that self-assessment vegetation management codes have been developed by your department as the centrepiece of Queensland's new common-sense laws. Can you elaborate on this comment and whether or not the introduction has been successful?

**Mr CRIPPS:** The self-assessable vegetation management codes were introduced as part of the reforms to the Vegetation Management Act 1999 that passed through the parliament last year and, following extensive stakeholder consultation, the codes were finalised and commenced operation on 2 December last year. Self-assessable codes allow landholders to independently comply with particular vegetation management requirements without requiring departmental involvement and assessment. Landholders need to notify the state of their proposed vegetation management activities to ensure their activities meet the requirements of the code. No less than 24 field based workshops were conducted by the Department of Natural Resources and Mines with the involvement of industry groups such as AgForce and the Queensland Farmers Federation and Canegrowers, as well as 11 natural resource management or landcare groups. Landholders throughout Queensland were also consulted during field based workshops, with feedback being largely positive and supportive of the codes. The ongoing consultation has resulted in improved relationships with our clients and has empowered landholders to self-manage their properties.

As of 30 May this year, 350 landholders have notified for a total of 607 activities involving the management of vegetation for the following purposes: 94 for fodder; 19 for encroachment; 209 for native forest practice; seven for managing category R vegetation; 54 for improving operational efficiency; 81 for weeds; 24 for thinning in mulga country; 41 for managing category C on leasehold land; and 78 for property infrastructure. The government is committed to supporting agricultural development and since the introduction of the codes this has facilitated a total of 4,402 hectares becoming available for new agricultural production. Additional areas of land have also become available through development applications under the Sustainable Planning Act. As of 30 May this year, the self-assessable codes have facilitated 857 hectares of vegetation management activities to improve agricultural efficiency on existing horticultural areas and 3,545 hectares of regrowth clearing for agricultural purposes.

During the period from March to June this year, an assessment of landholder compliance with the self-assessable codes occurred on 24 properties. Of the 24 properties audited, 20 were compliant, two properties had not completed the clearing operations when the audit was undertaken, and on the remaining two properties the clearing activities were exempt. On 30 June this year six further self-assessable codes were made for necessary environmental works, managing clearing for an extractive industry and four thinning codes for the remaining bioregions of the state. These additional codes are expected to come into effect in August of this year. Self-assessable codes have significantly improved the way that landholders conduct their business and manage their land. Notable improvements include the reduction of course in the regulatory burden, streamlining of administrative processes, significant time and cost savings, and the ability to commence work immediately.

**CHAIR:** Following the previous question, recently the Wilderness Society alleged that satellite imaging proved illegal land clearing had taken place at Strathmore Station in the north of the state. Can you provide the committee with an update into investigations into these allegations?

**Mr CRIPPS:** It is correct to say that on 26 May this year the Department of Natural Resources and Mines received questions from a reporter from the media who claimed to be in possession of satellite imagery alleging illegal clearing on Strathmore Station in the southern Cape York Peninsula. A letter from the Wilderness Society also received by the department shortly after asked the

department what it proposed to do about the alleged clearing which had occurred on the property. Strathmore Station does hold a development permit issued by the Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning which allowed the clearing of native vegetation to commence from 6 January this year for the purposes of developing approved high-value agriculture. The Wilderness Society had used freely available satellite imagery and examined various images spanning several months prior to 6 January this year. The Wilderness Society considered that vegetation changes from one image to another amounted to unlawful vegetation clearing. They then alleged that, as the activities had commenced prior to the permit date, it was therefore illegal.

On 5 June this year department officers attended Strathmore Station for the purpose of viewing the locations depicted in the satellite imagery provided by the Wilderness Society and to validate or ground truth the veracity of the imagery. In the company of Strathmore Station's manager, department officers drove to various locations on the property using real-time satellite telemetry to view their exact position relative to the areas of concern identified by the Wilderness Society and discuss any clearing. It was explained to officers by the station manager that a large program of weed eradication, fence maintenance and fire control had been undertaken in the lead-up to 6 January this year when vegetation clearing had commenced under the development approval. Ground observations were consistent with this explanation.

Departmental officers had previously attended the property in 2012 on other business when it was noted that the property was subject to considerable infestation by woody pest weeds, particularly chinese apple, rubber vine and parkinsonia. The overall audit of the development permit area of the station indicated that woody weed removal and fire scarring had significantly contributed to satellite imagery changes identified by the Wilderness Society. Strathmore Station contained areas of long dead trees which were supporting heavy weed overgrowth, particularly chinese apple and rubber vine, which had grown up the remains of the streets and created dense canopies of weed. The dense canopy signature created by the weeds would, as a consequence of their removal, provide a distinct change in satellite imagery resembling the clearing of vegetation. In reality, nothing more than weeds and the dead trees that remained had been removed. Officers additionally reported that Strathmore Station has a ground cover dominated by native and non-native vegetation that will hay off or green up dramatically in response to rainfall or lack thereof. Likewise, fire activity will have a dramatic effect on ground cover signals. This means the topological view that satellites provide can be interpreted incorrectly, especially when rapid fresh growth flashes quickly change vegetation signals. Only an on-ground inspection can verify the cause of satellite detected vegetation coverage changes described on a property.

Recent changes to the Vegetation Management Act ensure that the department must prove beyond reasonable doubt that a person has committed an offence against the act. The department officers were not able to locate any credible evidence to confirm that the clearing of regulated vegetation had occurred prior to the commencement of development under the development permit. Strathmore Station is undertaking significant and permitted development to sustain the production of high-value agriculture and the department will continue to conduct regular audits and inspection of work through the development period.

**CHAIR:** So you are more than happy with the way that Strathmore is working with the department on these issues, Minister?

**Mr CRIPPS:** The manager of Strathmore Station and the owner of Strathmore Station have been very cooperative with the inspections that the departmental officers conducted following the receipt of the complaint from the Wilderness Society. They were allowed free access to the property, conducted their investigation and these were the findings that came back from those departmental officers.

**Mrs MADDERN:** Minister, I refer to page 11 of the SDS. How much vegetation was cleared outside the scope of the legislation last financial year? What actions have been taken against the operators?

**Mr CRIPPS:** I thank the member for Maryborough for the question. The Department of Natural Resources and Mines has officers authorised to undertake activity aimed at achieving outcomes consistent with the department's compliance policies and regulatory framework. Three matters were referred for prosecution by the department last financial year: under the Vegetation Management Act, one offender with multiple offences; under the Forestry Act, which involved investigating Vegetation Management Act offences, one offender with multiple offences; and under the Water Act, one offender with a single offence. The department also finalised one matter in that reporting period which

consisted of the following: one offender convicted on two charges, who was fined \$30,000 and ordered to pay \$10,000 in investigation costs and \$3,770 in legal costs. In total, 736 hectares of remnant vegetation were determined to have been cleared outside of the legislative scope. Through compliance negotiations, a total of 1,310 hectares will be restored. This includes 439 hectares voluntarily relinquished by landholders to be mapped for future remnant vegetation growth.

**Mr COX:** Minister, the government is committed to reducing red tape. I refer to page 11 of the SDS and some of the work that you have done in quite a proactive way. Can you give any examples of results achieved by your aggressive approach to red tape reduction?

**Mr CRIPPS:** I thank the member for Thuringowa for the question. The operational policy renewal and alignment project within my Department of Natural Resources and Mines has been, in my opinion, a great success. The positive outcomes and benefits realised by this project were only possible through the active and upfront engagement of regional officers from the very beginning. There are three executive directors of the regions represented in the departmental officers behind me—one from the north, south and central regions—and it is their officers who have been fully engaged in this program, something that I am very pleased about. A team of experienced officers reviewed all of the operational policies and procedures used by the department in making decisions under legislation across the department, but particularly in the area of land services. The review addressed valid complaints made on the restrictive nature of some of the operational policies and also identified business improvement opportunities, for example, in streamlining some departmental forms.

The project has resulted in a 90 per cent reduction in operational policies and a 96 per cent reduction in operational policy page numbers. These reductions were achieved through the removal of redundant and repetitive information and by identifying that much of the material should be developed as reference and training material to support good decision-making processes by departmental officers.

The project provided an opportunity to review and develop documents that were consistent, streamlined and contemporary. The project also identified that many operational policies were developed as a result of a lack of a learning and development program within the department. Some of the customer benefits that have resulted from this project include a reduction in administrative red tape, freeing departmental officers to think more broadly and to provide greater flexibility in decision making while working towards customer focused solutions and outcomes.

The member for Thuringowa asked about specific results from this particular project. The department has reduced the number of pages in our operational policies by approximately 13½ thousand pages. If you laid these superfluous pages head to head, it would stretch the length of 39 football fields. That is over 67 kilograms of redundant pages that have been removed through one of our red tape reduction activities.

**Mr COSTIGAN:** Minister, could you please detail how the land tenure reform initiatives in the Land and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2014—or LOLA—as outlined on page 5 of the SDS have improved security and certainty of land tenure for both rural and island tourism leaseholders, please?

**Mr CRIPPS:** I thank the member for Whitsunday for his question and realise that a number of these reforms are very relevant to his electorate of Whitsunday. On 1 July this year, significant reforms to the Land Act and Land Regulation commenced. These changes were made through the Land and Other Legislation Amendment bill and the Land and Other Legislation Regulation. These reforms focused on delivering tenure security and business certainty for leases used for grazing, agriculture and pastoral purposes and for tourism leases on declared islands.

Highlights of the significant land tenure reforms included the introduction of rolling term lease extensions for grazing, agriculture and pastoral purpose leases and tourism leases on declared islands; allowing direct conversion from term lease to freehold title; a new process to reserve the state's interest in timber on leases converting to freehold; removing anticompetitive ownership restrictions on certain rural leases; reducing red tape business hindrances associated with amalgamating and subdividing leases; changes to how rural rents are calculated; changes to hardship rental provisions; and changes to how the purchase price is calculated when converting a rural lease to a freehold title. The benefits of the reforms included removing or streamlining onerous tenure administration processes and procedures under the Land Act, resulting in reduced costs for leaseholders and government and better customer service through faster and easier processes; improving business investment and economic development opportunities for the rural and tourism sectors through improved tenure security, which is critical to long-term planning and business growth;

and reducing the financial burden from land rents for primary production leases, licences and permits to occupy as our rural leaseholders are vulnerable to natural disasters such as droughts, floods and cyclones and variability in commodity prices and rising operating costs. The act removed unnecessary hindrances to assist and stimulate business investment and growth especially in rural industry and, in particular, I think contribute to our goal of doubling agricultural production by 2040 under the Queensland agriculture strategy.

A key benefit of those reforms is the improvement of tenure security for rural and tourism island leases. Tenure security is fundamental to a landholder's ability to plan and invest in the long term and underpins the continued investment and growth of Queensland's economy. The improvement to tenure security was delivered through the introduction of rolling term leases and they are used for agricultural, grazing and pastoral purposes and for tourism purposes on those declared offshore islands. Leaseholders are now able to apply for an extension in the last 20 years of their lease and, if approved, the leaseholder will have tenure security for the remainder of their term plus an additional term equivalent to the original term of the lease. Leases that become rolling term leases now enjoy a quicker and easier process where the original term of the lease is renewed on a rolling basis, which cuts out unnecessary paperwork and expenses, such as land management agreements or an assessment of highest and best use.

Since the beginning of this month, the rents for primary production leases, licences and permits to occupy were changed in order to reduce the financial burden on the agricultural sector. These changes include the halving of rural rent rates for term leases, licences and permits to occupy from 1.5 per cent to 0.75 per cent; using current unimproved value for rural leases, licences and permits to occupy rather than a five-year averaged valuation, which kept rents higher in a falling market; halving the annual cap on rent increases from 20 per cent to 10 per cent for all primary production tenures; allowing for areas or a class of tenure, such as primary production tenures that have been severely impacted by hardship to be proclaimed for automatic deferrals of rent; and any rents referred due to hardship after 1 July this year no longer incurring two per cent annual interest.

**Ms TRAD:** Good morning, Minister.

**Mr CRIPPS:** Good morning.

**Ms TRAD:** And good morning to all your staff. Minister, in relation to page 11 of the SDS and the reforms under the Vegetation Management Act, can you please advise the committee what is the definition of high-value agriculture?

**Mr CRIPPS:** The definition of high-value agriculture, as per the changes to the Vegetation Management Act, which passed through the parliament last year, specifically relate to cropping activities under the act. Cropping activities are usually annual or perennial crops that are grown throughout the state, but specifically exclude things such as commercial forestry and also the improvement of pastures for grazing activities. So the clearing of vegetation for high-value agriculture would not be permitted if a property owner simply wished to clear that vegetation to improve pastures for their grazing operation. That is the definition that the government chose to pursue so that high-value agriculture really relates to those types of crops which traditionally in Queensland would be broadacre cropping—in wheat, or cotton, or sugar, for example, or horticulture with established tree crops—but would not include commercial forestry for timber or, as I mentioned before, the improvement of pastures for grazing.

**Ms TRAD:** So in terms of crops that are not particularly successful at returning a high yield—and I am talking about growing sorghum here—that would fall under the definition of high-value agriculture even though it is widely accepted that it only returns on its investment three out of every 10 years?

**CHAIR:** How does that relate to the SDS?

**Ms TRAD:** I am asking about high-value agriculture, which was the centrepiece of the vegetation management amendment bill or one of the reasons for the changes and whether or not the value of the crop in terms of the rate of return is part of the consideration in terms of the high-value definition.

**Mr COX:** Mr Chairman, the member's question as to whether sorghum is a high-value crop or not is irrelevant for the fact that it varies from country to country to parts of the state to parts of Australia.

**Ms TRAD:** Mr Chair, I am not sure why the opposition's question time is being allocated to debate. If the member for Thuringowa would like an adjournment to have a discussion—

**Mr COX:** I am just questioning your question.

**Ms TRAD:** Rather than take up the opposition's questioning time, then that is a matter for you to decide, but I am not having a debate with the member for Thuringowa, thank you.

**CHAIR:** Look—

**Ms TRAD:** I think the minister is happy to answer.

**CHAIR:** This is probably outside the scope of the requirements, Minister, but if you wish to answer the question.

**Mr CRIPPS:** I am happy to answer the question in this regard. Can I say to the member for South Brisbane that, in terms of the applications that are made through the Sustainable Planning Act for an exemption from the restrictions on clearing of remnant vegetation for high-value agriculture, there is a number of criteria that are applied to that application before it is actually approved. It makes no judgement in the application process about the type of crop that will be pursued by the landholder. That is a choice for farmers to make about the most appropriate use of that land, if they are successful in securing the exemption. What we do is ask the property owner to make application under a number of tests and those tests are, in terms of cropping on that land, whether or not there is suitable land available for that cropping and we ask them to demonstrate in their business case that they submit to the department for assessment whether or not that land is suitable for cropping.

We also ask for a demonstration, if that application is for high-value irrigated agriculture as opposed to high-value agriculture, whether or not there is available water for high-value irrigated agriculture to be undertaken. We also ask for a demonstration from the property owner of a business case for the expansion of their cropping operation in the case of high-value agriculture exemptions and we ask for suitably qualified people to lend their views about the viability of the expansion of the cropping operation on that property, from a financial institution, in particular, whether or not they are willing to lend capital to the property owner for the expansion of that farm business.

Whilst the Queensland government does not ask for the landowner to nominate which crop they are going to use their land for, because I do not think the Queensland government should be involved in passing judgement about whether or not that land should be used for that purpose for another purpose in terms of the crop that is actually grown, we do ask them to meet the tests of having suitable land available; we do ask them to pass the test of having a suitably qualified person, such as a financial institution, indicate that they believe it is a viable expansion of that farm business; and we also, in the case of them submitting an application for high-value irrigated agriculture, ask them to demonstrate that there is suitable or sufficient water available for that irrigation to be undertaken.

**CHAIR:** As a supplementary to that, of course, the sorghum has been at record prices, recently. The member mentioned sorghum. Do you have another question?

**Ms TRAD:** Yes, I have another question. Taking on board your response to that, Minister, and thank you, can I ask you to table for the benefit of this committee and these proceedings the actual definition of high-value agriculture as used by your department and other departments in assessing applications?

**Mr CRIPPS:** Sure, we can provide the committee with a definition of high-value agriculture.

**Ms TRAD:** The one that is currently used, thank you, Minister. Minister, I will now turn your attention to Strathmore Station, which the chair of the committee raised earlier in terms of government questioning. Your response to the question I just asked was that proponents or farmers really do need to demonstrate that there is suitable land available and, in terms of high-value irrigated agriculture, that there is suitable water available; is that right?

**Mr CRIPPS:** Yes, sufficient water available to undertake the extent of the irrigated agriculture that they are proposing in their application.

**Ms TRAD:** Thank you, Minister. In relation to Strathmore Station, I understand that mapping produced by your own department shows that these areas are not suitable for cropping; is that the case?

**Mr CRIPPS:** Are you able to provide the mapping?

**Ms TRAD:** No, I am not able to—

**Mr CRIPPS:** Or refer to it?

**Ms TRAD:** I am not providing the mapping.

**Mr CRIPPS:** You are not?

**Ms TRAD:** No. I am asking you about work conducted by your department in terms of mapping this area and whether or not it is suitable for the crops that are being developed in the area.

**Mr CRIPPS:** What maps are you referring to?

**Ms TRAD:** I am talking about soil class maps that your department has.

**Mr CRIPPS:** What maps?

**Ms TRAD:** Your maps, your department's maps.

**Mr CRIPPS:** Which ones are they? My department is involved in the development of a lot of maps, Mr Chairman, for a whole range of purposes. The member has started to narrow down which maps she is referring to by discussing the soil type maps. What maps are you specifically referring to?

**Ms TRAD:** I would like you to produce maps in relation to the quality of the soil in this area—

**Mr CRIPPS:** Soil quality maps?

**Ms TRAD:** Yes.

**Mr CRIPPS:** Mr Chairman, I did not come to estimates armed with all the soil quality mapping for the state of Queensland.

**Ms TRAD:** I am happy to take it on notice.

**Mr CRIPPS:** Thank you, kindly.

**Ms TRAD:** Thank you. I would appreciate it if you could take it on notice.

**Mr COX:** We do not dictate to farmers what they grow.

**Mr CRIPPS:** No, that is not the question, I do not think, member for Thuringowa.

**Ms TRAD:** That is right.

**Mr CRIPPS:** I think what the member for South Brisbane is asking for is the map, because the question was specifically about Strathmore Station?

**Ms TRAD:** It is specifically about Strathmore Station.

**Mr CRIPPS:** I think specifically what the member for South Brisbane is asking for is soil quality mapping covering Strathmore Station?

**Ms TRAD:** That is right, Minister.

**Mr CRIPPS:** Okay. I will endeavour to provide that to the committee, but I did not come to estimates armed with soil quality maps for the whole state.

**Ms TRAD:** Thank you. In relation to sufficient water being available for Strathmore Station, my understanding is that the CSIRO has reported that there is not sufficient water available for the irrigated agriculture that is proposed for Strathmore Station.

**Mr TROUT:** There are two river systems there.

**CHAIR:** Order, please. Is this referred to in the SDS?

**Ms TRAD:** It is referred to in the minister's answer where he talked about high-value agriculture and he talked about sufficient availability in terms of a high-value irrigated crop. I am asking the minister: my understanding is the CSIRO has a very different position on whether or not there is sufficient water that will allow for the irrigated crop to proceed.

**Mr CRIPPS:** I make two points in response to the member for South Brisbane's question, Mr Chairman. The first one would be members on this committee other than the member for South Brisbane would have heard me speak during the proceedings of this estimates committee on Tuesday afternoon, during the consideration of water services, that we did receive earlier this year the report from the CSIRO on the availability of water resources and soil suitability in the Flinders and Gilbert river catchments and that that report indicated that there are significant opportunities for the expansion of agriculture, including irrigated agriculture, in the Flinders and Gilbert river catchments. It does say that there is further work required. I spoke about some of the work that will be required to demonstrate that and that I had commenced a review of the Gulf water resource plan and the Gulf Resource Operations Plan, consistent with the recommendations of the CSIRO's report to make sure that we, I suppose, build on its work to properly inform the work of that review of that plan.



The second thing that I would say in response to the member for South Brisbane's question is that under the release of unallocated water from the Gulf water resource plan and Gulf Resource Operations Plan that was undertaken last year, I am aware that Strathmore Station secured 6,000 megalitres of water in the Gilbert River catchment, which I can only assume was secured with a view to having water resources available to pursue their planned agricultural activities in the future on that property. I am not quite sure whether or not the CSIRO's report specifically says that there are not water resources available for Strathmore Station or whether the CSIRO report says that there are no water resources available in the Gilbert catchment in that reach, but my understanding is that the report does say that there is water resources and soil suitability in that area of Queensland that would facilitate expansion of agricultural activities in the area.

**CHAIR:** Shane, do you have a question?

**Mr KNUTH:** My question to the minister is this: on SDS page 10 regarding land service, has the minister's department communicated with landowners on Keelbottom Creek and the Burdekin River their concerns of loss of property value as a result of Queensland now having a framework in place for uranium mining development?

**Mr CRIPPS:** Mr Chairman, I am not aware of any specific communications between the Department of Natural Resources and Mines and landowners in that area of Queensland about any impacts on land valuations. I am happy to report back to the committee if I can find any communications in that regard. I am also not aware of any communications that we have received from landowners specifically about impact on land valuations in those areas for whatever reason.

**Mr KNUTH:** Obviously, Minister, we have had a number of public meetings at which people have expressed that great concern. If there is an approval to uranium mining, obviously it would not increase the land valuation; it would decrease it. At the present moment, for those landowners wanting to sell that property it is not stimulating for a new buyer to come along and, all of a sudden, there is the possible potential development of an uranium mine at their doorstep.

**CHAIR:** Do you have a question there, Shane?

**Mr KNUTH:** Yes, I am bringing that to the minister's attention.

**CHAIR:** What is the question?

**Mr KNUTH:** I am bringing that to the attention of the minister because he asked me and I am putting it back to him, on what he has asked.

**CHAIR:** Do you have another question?

**Mr KNUTH:** Minister, in regards to page 3 and strategic water reform, can you explain why you will not allow the irrigators on Oakey Creek near Toowoomba to take more than their allocation when the creek is flooding?

**Mr CRIPPS:** Mr Chairman, the issue of the amendment to the water resource plan that covers the Oakey/Gowrie creek system has been one that has been talked about, debated and commented on publicly in recent times. What the member for Dalrymple is referring to is a dispute between a number of landowners who take water from that system, and have been doing so for a long time, over and above the water that is allocated to them under their entitlement. The reason that they have been able to do so in the past is that there are periodically discharges from Toowoomba Regional Council's water treatment plant into that system. That has created an artificial increase in the flows in that system, which the landowners have been able to take advantage of for irrigated agriculture in the area. That has been a very longstanding practice for the landholders in that area. In the development of the water resource plan for that particular catchment area, what has been identified is that they do not actually hold any entitlement for the extraction of that water. However, the Toowoomba Regional Council has, in recent times, entered into commercial arrangements for the taking of that additional discharge from that water treatment plant with third parties on a commercial basis. They have every right to do so.

**CHAIR:** Let me get this clear: that is supplemented water, virtually; is that right?

**Mr CRIPPS:** It is supplemented water; that is right. In the transition of this catchment into the water resource plan for the Condamine/Balonne, they do not actually hold entitlement for these additional volumes of water they have been taking associated with the discharges from the water treatment plant. Because I am sympathetic to the landholders, I have made sure, in the amendment of the water resource plan, if there is an arrangement entered into between the Toowoomba Regional Council and the landholders in the future for the discharge of that water from the treatment plant into

that system, they will be able to take water from that system in accordance with that commercial arrangement with the council. However, the artificial flows created from that discharge are not something that I have control over as minister responsible for water planning. But I am happy to facilitate, through the plan, opportunities for those landholders to take that water in the future if they reach an arrangement with the council. Mr Chairman, it is within my power and responsibilities as the minister to make sure that there is an opportunity for them to do so in the future. At this point in time, to answer the member for Dalrymple's question, I cannot artificially create flows in that system which I do not have control over.

**Mr KNUTH:** If there is no arrangement or agreement between irrigators, landowners and the council, does the minister have any intention of compensating those landowners as a result of loss of water allocation?

**Mr CRIPPS:** It did not have that water as an entitlement in the first instance. That is the reason why we have not provided them with additional entitlement in the transition of that catchment into the Condamine-Balonne water resource plan. As I have just explained to the committee, there was opportunistic drawing of that water from the Oakey-Gowrie Creek system by these landowners because there were periodic discharges of water into the system from the Toowoomba Regional Council's water treatment plant. If you did not have an entitlement that has not been taken away from you, you are not entitled to compensation for that. What I can say is that, in terms of the Toowoomba Regional Council's activities, they are maximising a return to the ratepayers of the Toowoomba Regional Council area for the utilisation of that resource that is discharged from the water treatment plant. They would be derelict in their duties if they did not pursue opportunities to maximise a return to the ratepayer of the Toowoomba region.

**Mr TROUT:** Minister, how will the use of the new GIS technology for an online stock route management system, as outlined on page 5 of the SDS, better help local governments manage the network, especially during drought conditions?

**Mr CRIPPS:** I thank the member for Barron River for his question. Queensland stock routes are a 72,000 kilometre state-wide network for the movement of livestock on foot and short-term emergency pasture for grazing, especially during drought conditions. The government has responded to ongoing drought conditions in Queensland by providing a new online stock route management system to help local councils better manage the network. Local councils are the day-to-day managers of the network. The Department of Natural Resources and Mines has developed and released the stock route management system to assist them to efficiently carry out this management role.

The new system will deliver more timely and more transparent management of Queensland's 2.6 million hectare stock route network. Queensland's stock route network is vital to the cattle industry as it provides important travelling routes and reserves for travelling stock. We need to ensure information is readily and easily accessible to local councils who keep the routes maintained for graziers and drovers. The Newman government has significantly reduced red tape and provided this new system to local councils at no cost.

In the past councils had to rely on what is known as the bush telegraph to find out if routes were opened or closed, in good condition or poor, or if watering stations along those routes were operating. Councils will now be able to better manage the network in their area, ensure that more heavily used routes are prioritised for maintenance and highlight which sections of the network can be made available for grazing when there is little demand for use by travelling stock.

The web based system will clearly identify all travelling stock traffic plus identify routes that have been closed due to a lack of pasture or water. Councils will also be able to issue travel permits, agistment permits and water agreements online. This system will help strengthen the agriculture pillar of the Queensland economy and delivers on our election commitment to support that sector. The system is a web based computer system that automates the issuing of travel and grazing agistment permits to drovers and landholders, captures stock route usage data to support management planning and decision making by local councils and the department, provides public access to certain details about the status of the network, maintains a register of stock route assets and supports the stock route capital works program.

The Department of Natural Resources and Mines partnered with the mapping company Esri Australia to develop this first-of-its-kind tool which draws on geographic information system technology to visually represent stock route data via an interactive smart map. The state-of-the-art program is based on geographic information system technology and has been selected in fact to receive a special achievement award at this year's international user conference established by Esri

Australia, which is going to be held in the United States of America. The initial release of the system to relevant local councils commenced late last year, and future releases of the system including asset management modules, and a mobile field computer capability for pasture assessment and stocktake is expected in late 2014.

**CHAIR:** Has it been positively received by the councils, Minister?

**Mr CRIPPS:** It has been positively received by the councils because, as I explained, it gives them better information quicker about the status of the stock route network particularly during drought times, which was the point of the member for Barron River's question. It is essential that they are able to gain real-time information about the availability of pasture and whether or not there is water available at watering points on the stock route network. That can be of great benefit to making better decisions about when to issue or when not to issue a permit for travelling stock on the network.

**Mr TROUT:** Minister, I refer to applications for the use of state owned land, as outlined on page 5 of the SDS, and ask how the accomplishment of dedicated teams within your department will facilitate these.

**Mr CRIPPS:** I thank the member for Barron River for the question. The Newman government in its reform process over the last couple of years has been very consumer and customer focused, and the cutting of red tape has been a focus for our department. We have established dedicated teams to deliver faster and more transparent assessment of all new applications for state owned land in Queensland. The Department of Natural Resources and Mines has established a state-wide central point of lodgement for all new land tenure applications under the Land Act. We are delivering a more streamlined process for all applications to change tenure or to use state land administered under the act. All applications are now forwarded to the central point of lodgement team, which is based in Townsville as part of our commitment to the regions. This team will reduce by up to 60 per cent the time taken to process an application before allocating it to an officer to start the assessment process.

This central point of lodgement initiative is part of a broad reform program for the management of state land. State land management will be overhauled to deliver more streamlined processes so customers experience an efficient, timely and effective process for applications. The new streamlined approach and central point of lodgement will make the process smoother for all applicants. The team in Townsville are taking a hands-on approach to ensure that all applications are properly made and registered in the electronic land and vegetation administration system. They will also be able to take more effective action on any applications which are not properly made to secure additional information from the applicants and minimise any delays.

The Townsville based team is supported by a group of experienced officers in six hubs across the state who oversee decisions on the allocation, assignment and management of cases. These applications are made to the department and they can be for a variety of purposes including of course pastoral leases and grazing leases, commercial or industrial purposes, large tourism complexes, residential developments and leases, or reserves for community purposes.

**Mrs MADDERN:** Minister, I refer to page 11 of the SDS. Have the reform vegetation management codes contributed to the economic development of Queensland?

**Mr CRIPPS:** I thank the member for Maryborough for the question. Another aspect of our vegetation management reforms that were undertaken last year was the introduction of a range of self-assessable vegetation management codes. They became available for use on 2 December last year. These codes were introduced as part of the Queensland government's reforms to reduce red tape and streamline the vegetation management framework. These codes address vegetation management activities associated with fodder harvesting, weeds, encroachment, thinning, necessary infrastructure, agricultural operational efficiency, native forest practice and, as we discussed before, high-value regrowth and regrowth along watercourses in particular reef catchments.

Landholders no longer have to apply to the government for development approvals for these routine land management activities, all of which in the past could have taken up to two months for a development application to be processed. Self-assessable codes allow landholders to independently comply with particular vegetation management requirements without requiring departmental assessment. Landholders do need, however, to notify the department of their proposed vegetation management activities and ensure that these activities meet the requirements of the code which then allows them to get on with the job.

As of 30 June this year, as I mentioned earlier, 408 landholders had notified for 718 vegetation management activities such as fodder harvesting, weeds and property infrastructure. Through the

notification system, the self-assessable codes have saved landholders approximately 1,436 calendar months of waiting, or 119 years of time in opportunity costs—time which landholders have obviously been able to put back into their properties and making their businesses more successful.

In addition, landholders undertaking routine land management consistent with these self-assessment codes no longer have their authorities limited to five years. This requirement has been replaced with the new self-assessable code notifications lasting as long as the landowner owns that particular property. This delivers a cost saving of \$650 per landholder for each five-year period—a total saving so far since the commencement of the codes of about \$466,700 as of the end of June this year. Further, the self-assessment codes have supported landholders across the state wishing to improve the agricultural efficiency of their property or expand agricultural areas in areas of high-growth vegetation on leasehold land.

**CHAIR:** Minister, I refer to page 11 of the SDS. Can you explain how the strategic cropping land trigger map will be used in the new Regional Planning Interests Act? This is very important.

**Mr CRIPPS:** Yes. Thank you, Mr Chairman, for the question. There was a review of the Strategic Cropping Land Act which commenced in the middle of 2013. Twelve recommendations were made following that review including that a single integrated framework be developed to address strategic cropping land and statutory regional plan implementation while maintaining the current level of CSL protection across Queensland. The recommendations received approval in principle from the cabinet in October last year, and in March this year the Legislative Assembly passed the Regional Planning Interests Act 2014. That act and the Regional Planning Interests Regulation 2014 commenced on 13 June this year, giving effect to the majority of the recommendations including retention of the CSL protection policy.

The Strategic Cropping Land Act was repealed on the commencement of the RPI Act, with SCL protection policies migrating into the new legislation through the declaration of an area of regional interest for a strategic cropping land area. The strategic cropping land area is defined as SCL shown on the SCL trigger map. The RPI Act and the RPI Regulation will also give effect to the majority of the other recommendations including the retention of the SCL zone criteria and removal of the cropping history test, greater flexibility in the definition of permanent impact with a focus on rehabilitation standards rather than time frames, and streamlining of the development assessment process through the creation of a new category of low-impact development that is exempt from SCL assessment. Other review recommendations to be implemented by the government include a more accurate SCL trigger map and a streamlined and clear process for the validation of SCL by landholders and by other users.

Further consideration has been given to the most appropriate basis for refining the SCL map which aims to identify land that is most likely to be highly suitable for cropping. In May this year the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry released the Queensland Agricultural Land Audit, the objective of which was to broadly identify land important to current and potential future agricultural production across Queensland. The current SCL trigger map is only a subset of the audit mapping due to the different purposes of the maps. The Department of Natural Resources and Mines has an ongoing role in the assessment of impacts of resource activities on strategic cropping areas through regional planning interest development approvals and retains the ownership of the SCL trigger map.

**Mr COSTIGAN:** Minister, I refer to page 10 of the SDS. I would like you to outline what your department has done to support a resolution of long-running issues on a magical part of my electorate and that is, of course, Keswick Island?

**Mr CRIPPS:** I thank the member for Whitsunday for the question. Keswick Developments Pty Ltd has been the lessee of two leases over state land on Keswick Island near Mackay since 2008. These leases currently provide for multiple uses being tourism, residential, commercial and the staged development of a deep water jetty and marina. Unfortunately, a series of disputes have arisen between the lessee and some sublessees that inhibited the development or the progress of that particular development on the island.

The Department of Natural Resources and Mines has, until recently, been facilitating meetings between the lessee and the sublessees in an attempt to resolve the outstanding issues and break the stalemate. However, these meetings have been unable to facilitate an amicable solution. But, thankfully, the lessee and the sublessees have recently been able to resolve a long-running court dispute and have publicly committed to working together to create a path forward for Keswick's development. With the court action resolved, it is entirely appropriate that the lessee and the

sublessee be given an opportunity to engage directly with each other to resolve the issues that are inhibiting the viability of this commercial development.

Moving forward, the department will, of course, continue to contribute to the discussions between the lessee and sublessee group if they are requested to do so by the respective parties. The department conveyed its willingness to be part of this approach to the sublessees at a meeting on 23 June this year.

**Mrs MADDERN:** This is an area that I have a particular interest in in view of my past career. Can you explain to us how many mortgage documents have been registered online in the last 12 months using the e-conveyancing system?

**Mr CRIPPS:** It is a very interesting question. I thank the member for Maryborough for raising it. It is one of the lower profile initiatives that have been undertaken by the government, but an important one. Phase 1 of this particular initiative was released in Queensland in December 2013 and allows for digital preparation and lodgement of mortgages. E-conveyancing is an alternative to the existing paper based process. It offers efficiencies for customers, particularly for those people representing customers who work in the finance and legal sectors. The rollout of phase 2 is planned for 2015. This particular phase of the program will allow for transfers.

E-conveyancing will fill the gap between processes at the beginning of a property transaction and registration on title. It allows online preparation and settlement of transactions and digital lodgements of title dealings. Parties will not need to be physically located with one another for the purpose of settlements. They will not need to exchange documents and cheques. The banking sector and the Queensland Law Society support this initiative and were consulted by the Registrar of Titles and the national e-conveyancing development company Property Exchange Australia.

E-conveyancing will give stakeholders great certainty that settlements will occur as scheduled and will remove impediments that cause settlements to fail. This will reduce associated costs for affected parties. As the member for Maryborough is aware, settlements can fail due to very minor issues such as the misspelling of a name or a minor discrepancy on a bank cheque.

Pertinent information is prepopulated in an online work space and validated electronically at any stage up until settlement. There will not be any substantive changes to the land laws of the state of Queensland. Queensland's titles registry will continue to be maintained under our current legislation. This initiative offers property market participants significant processing efficiencies. I am looking forward to phase 2 of the program being rolled out.

**CHAIR:** I call the member for South Brisbane.

**Ms TRAD:** Minister, in relation to the new mapping system that has replaced the old mapping system for vegetation management across the state, has your department kept any records of the total land area that can be cleared under all of these reforms—not the land that has already been cleared but could potentially be cleared?

**Mr CRIPPS:** I am not sure that we do have a new mapping system for Queensland's vegetation. I believe we have maintained the existing system of mapping for vegetation across the state.

**Ms TRAD:** The mapping system was replaced by a single regulated vegetation management map. That replaced the previous system.

**Mr CRIPPS:** We may produce different maps but I think the mapping system is the same.

**Ms TRAD:** So the system is the same. In terms of the actual map, is that available online?

**Mr CRIPPS:** Could you repeat the second half of your question, please?

**Ms TRAD:** Firstly, is the single regulated vegetation management map available online? Secondly, under that map has any modelling been done in relation to the total amount of land that can be cleared under the amendments passed last year?

**Mr CRIPPS:** I might get one of my deputy directors-general to indicate to the committee whether or not the single regulated vegetation map is available on the website. I am advised that it is available online. That answers the first part of the question, I suppose.

**Ms TRAD:** In terms of the second part of the question—

**Mr CRIPPS:** Whether or not a calculation has been made for land that is available—

**Ms TRAD:** Land that can be cleared?

**Mr CRIPPS:** Land that can be cleared. The situation in terms of what land is available for vegetation management activities, I think we dealt with during the proceedings of last year's estimates when, I think it may have been, the member for South Brisbane asked that question. I think I have already answered that question during the proceedings of last year's estimates.

**Ms TRAD:** So the answer is no. In relation to additional vegetation that has been cleared, under your reforms to the Vegetation Management Act has there been any calculation done in relation to carbon emissions associated with that additional vegetation clearing?

**Mr CRIPPS:** I am not aware of any calculations that the Department of Natural Resources and Mines has undertaken. I would also point out that I do not think it is responsibility of the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines to do any such calculations.

**CHAIR:** I am struggling to see the relevance to the SDS, member for South Brisbane.

**Mr CRIPPS:** I also object to the statement made by the member for South Brisbane who tried to provide an answer for me when she said that I had answered no when in fact I had not answered no. The point I would like to make in relation to land or vegetation that is available for clearing is that all of that is a hypothetical question because the opportunities for vegetation management activities to take place in Queensland is an application based process. In fact, the amendments made to the Vegetation Management Act last year simply increased the number of available exemptions for the management of native vegetation under the act.

There were a number of opportunities to clear or manage vegetation under the Vegetation Management Act before we made those amendments. We did not remove protections for native vegetation in Queensland as part of our amendments last year. We increased the number of exemptions that could be applied for to clear or to manage that vegetation. The same protections for remnant vegetation that were in place prior to last year's amendments to the legislation remain in place now. There are simply a wider range of exemptions that can be applied for for each clearing or management.

I do not agree with the assessment that the member for South Brisbane made that the answer to her previous question was no. It certainly was not no. It was simply that I think I had a similar question asked last year and I gave her an answer in the estimates proceedings last year in that regard. I would point out that because it is an application based process neither I nor any of the officers in my department can forecast what vegetation will be managed or cleared in any given period.

**CHAIR:** I call on the member for South Brisbane to stay out of the realms of hypotheticals.

**Ms TRAD:** You did refer to your answer last year. I will for the public record remind you that last year you did inform the AREC estimates hearing that no your department had not taken on that modelling project before the amendments.

**Mr CRIPPS:** And probably for the reasons that I just given again. The system is an application based one and from period to period neither I nor the departmental officers are going to be able to forecast, in a crystal ball-gazing fashion, what applications are going to come forward for the management of native vegetation in Queensland.

**CHAIR:** You are wasting your question time with hypotheticals, member for South Brisbane.

**Ms TRAD:** Thank you, Chair, if I would like your guidance I will actually ask for it.

**CHAIR:** I will give it when I feel it is relevant.

**Ms TRAD:** In relation to the land reform agenda undertaken by your department, has your department done any modelling or any assessments around the number of leasehold land tenures that may in fact transfer to freehold through the reform process?

**Mr CRIPPS:** If I could just clarify the nature of the question. Are you asking for numbers of leases that are eligible to go through the new process?

**Ms TRAD:** Yes, from leasehold to freehold.

**Mr CRIPPS:** I am sure we can actually secure those raw numbers of leasehold properties that are eligible to go through the freeholding process. I will ask my department to see if they can put their hands on those exact numbers while I am speaking. Once again, I would point out to the committee that I cannot forecast which individual lessees will actually make an application to go through that process.

**Ms TRAD:** I understand that, Minister. It is actually about modelling which I understand most departments do.

**Mr CRIPPS:** Yes. I do not think we can really model which leasehold landholders will sit down and work out for themselves whether or not it is an attractive proposition for them—

**Ms TRAD:** That is not the question, Minister.

**Mr CRIPPS:** It is actually because you cannot model what is going on in people's heads about whether or not they will sit down and make an application to freehold their lease.

**Ms TRAD:** It was actually about what leaseholds would be eligible.

**Mr CRIPPS:** We know that that is just raw numbers. You do not need to model that.

**Ms TRAD:** That is what I am asking for, Minister?

**Mr CRIPPS:** You do not need to model that.

**Ms TRAD:** That is all I am asking for; not what is going on in people's heads.

**Mr CRIPPS:** You were asking for modelling.

**CHAIR:** Member for South Brisbane, let the minister answer the question without—

**Ms TRAD:** He is not answering. He is actually verballing me.

**Mr CRIPPS:** No. There is no modelling involved in identifying the raw numbers of leases that are actually eligible to go through the process to apply for freeholding. I would say, while the department is locating those raw numbers of leases eligible to go through the process, that, for the information of committee members, there will be a difference I think in the way that term leaseholders and perpetual leaseholders consider whether or not it is an attractive or affordable proposition to go through the freeholding process.

The single most significant additional barrier for term leaseholders to freehold their property will, of course, be resolving any native title issues associated with the change of title. If you hold a term lease in Queensland, you need to deal with native title under the Commonwealth Native Title Act to be able to go from a term lease to a freehold property. That is not the case for perpetual leases. Perpetual leases do not have to deal with native title before going to freehold. So I think they will have fewer hurdles involved. Under the amendments, for term leases and perpetual leases there are 5,736 term and perpetual leases on rural leasehold land that will be eligible to go through that freeholding process.

**Ms TRAD:** Do you have those figures as a subset of each?

**Mr CRIPPS:** Yes. I will just take that on notice and I will provide the raw numbers to the committee of perpetual and term leases who will be eligible to go through that freeholding process, if that is acceptable to the member for South Brisbane.

**Ms TRAD:** It is acceptable. Thank you very much.

**Mr KNUTH:** Minister, how many coal seam gas wells are now in the Condamine Alluvium?

**Mr CRIPPS:** Mr Chairman, I will give my department an opportunity to see if they can locate the raw numbers of coal seam gas wells that are currently in the Condamine Alluvium. I will give them an opportunity to do so by prefacing the answer with some observations about some of the work that the department is doing in the CSG industry. Members of the committee who were here on Tuesday afternoon during the proceedings of the committee would have heard me speak about the work of the Coal Seam Gas Compliance Unit and I gave a number of figures about their activities in terms of responding to inquiries from the community about concerns about the potential impacts of the CSG industry on agriculture and also on local communities and also the Coal Seam Gas Compliance Unit's activities associated with infrastructure that supports the development of the CSG industry in Queensland.

One of the things that has been welcomed by the community was the release in 2012 of baseline information about the impacts of the CSG industry on groundwater in the Surat Basin by the release of the first Surat Basin groundwater report. We now have reliable information about the baseline levels of groundwater in the Surat Basin against which we can assess any further impacts of activities of the CSG industry on groundwater resources. So I think that has given some confidence to landholders in the area about any potential impacts of the CSG industry.

One of the things that I would also like to draw to the attention of the committee is that we have released a CSG Globe as part of the Queensland Globe initiative. This put online information about

individual wells right across this area so that we can have real-time information coming to the CSG Globe data layer about the impact or potential impact of use of that water for agricultural purposes or any potential CSG impacts. That has been also warmly welcomed by the local community.

If it is acceptable to the member for Dalrymple, I will take the raw numbers of CSG wells in the Condamine Alluvium on notice and attempt to provide him with an answer later in proceedings, or on notice.

**Mr KNUTH:** Thanks, Minister.

**CHAIR:** There was quite a detailed examination of that in one of the reports that the Agriculture, Resources and Environment Committee had done earlier in the year, too.

**Mr KNUTH:** Has the minister met with Arrow Energy and spoken about their tenure on prime agricultural land near Cecil Plains? What was the result of that meeting?

**Mr CRIPPS:** Mr Chairman, I have spoken to Arrow Energy. They are a company involved in the CSG industry in Queensland. I am not quite sure what their mining tenure, or petroleum and gas tenure has to do with this land services part of the estimates committee hearings for this portfolio. I would have thought that, on Tuesday afternoon, if the member for Dalrymple, who was present, wanted to ask that question, he had every opportunity to do so.

**Mr KNUTH:** Is the minister aware of any donations from Arrow Energy to the LNP?

**CHAIR:** That has nothing to do with the SDS. That is out of order. Ask that one in the House. Another question?

**Ms TRAD:** Minister, has your department provided advice to government generally in relation to the IFED project?

**CHAIR:** To the what project?

**Ms TRAD:** IFED.

**CHAIR:** What does IFED stand for?

**Ms TRAD:** IFED is a project that has Coordinator-General status currently, but it is a multiresource agricultural project.

**CHAIR:** Would that be in the SDS?

**Ms TRAD:** It relates to land services, yes. Minister?

**Mr CRIPPS:** Mr Chairman, I can make some general remarks about it. As the member for South Brisbane mentioned, the IFED project is a coordinated project through the Office of the Coordinator-General. I can make some general remarks, I suppose.

**CHAIR:** That is Minister Seeney's—

**Mr CRIPPS:** But generally speaking, I suppose it would. I think it is fair enough to say that there are several aspects of the project. Because it is an agricultural project, there are land and water resource issues associated with it.

**Ms TRAD:** That is right.

**Mr CRIPPS:** So I can make some general remarks about it. The Queensland government certainly does support private investment in irrigated agricultural developments consistent with our government's commitment to growing the agriculture sector of the economy. Certainly, privately funded projects such as the IFED project are compatible with this agenda.

The member for South Brisbane referred to the IFED project. It is located near Georgetown and includes a proposal to irrigate 65,000 hectares of crops, such as sugar cane and guar bean as well as 241,000 hectares of grazing land.

**CHAIR:** Is that the De Lacy—

**Mr CRIPPS:** The proponent is Integrated Food and Energy Developments. IFED is the acronym associated with that. Its proposal at this point is to divert 555,000 megalitres per annum on average from the Einasleigh and Etheridge rivers of the Gilbert River catchment in the Gulf of Carpentaria. It is a very significant project, which is probably why the Coordinator-General has taken it on as a coordinated project.

The Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning has determined that project to be coordinated and it is subject presently to an environmental impact assessment process. The understanding of the water related impacts on and implications for existing water rights,



environmental values, aspirations of other developments in the area and, of course, issues I spoke about on Tuesday afternoon, such as the impact on commercial and recreational fisheries, is something that will be considered under that EIS process. It is also something in terms of the review of the gulf water resource operations plan that I am considering through that amendment review.

The Office of the Coordinator-General is liaising with the Department of Natural Resources and Mines to ensure that the significant water requirements for the project and their impacts are appropriately considered during the environmental impact assessment process. I think that goes to the member for South Brisbane's question. In the process of the EIS being proceeded with, as far as the IFED project is concerned, my department is providing advice to the Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning in that regard.

**Ms TRAD:** Minister, has departmental officers from your department advised the government that the requested allocation of water is unsustainable for this project?

**Mr CRIPPS:** Mr Chairman, I am not aware of any advice from my Department of Natural Resources and Mines to any other agency of the Queensland government that says that the volume of water that is currently proposed to be used on average by the IFED project is unobtainable, or unsustainable. I think that it is a very large volume of water. It is a very significant proposed irrigated agriculture project. Obviously, the implications for the use of water resources in the area would need to be considered carefully. I think that is the reason there is an environmental impact statement process associated with considering the project and I sure that those issues will be borne out through the EIS process.

**Mr COX:** Minister, I refer to page 11 in the SDS, which I believe is world-class research and world's best practice. Why is there a delay between your data on vegetation management activities and the release of the annual SLATS report, which stands for Statewide Landcover and Trees Study?

**Mr CRIPPS:** The Statewide Land Cover and Trees study is a major vegetation monitoring initiative to monitor the overall cover of woody vegetation in Queensland. The Department of Natural Resources and Mines funds approximately \$1.2 million annually to monitor vegetation cover across the state. The production and analysis of SLATS in the form of a report is conducted yearly by geographic information system experts within the Department of Science, Information Technology, Innovation and the Arts. The size of the information analysed leads to a general delay period between the satellite scan and the SLATS report. SLATS data is used by the department when dealing with changes in vegetation cover. It forms a useful tool in assessing potential incidents of unlawful vegetation clearing by detecting the historical change in coverage over specific periods. However, SLATS cannot be specifically responsible for identifying vegetation species or accurate canopy heights. For that reason it may be used to monitor areas of concern or areas where a court has ordered the restoration of vegetation and it also assists to identify where vegetation may be thickening or causing potential problems for farmers or lowering productivity through pasture degradation. But the department can only form an opinion about the nature of changes in vegetation cover after a conclusive on-ground analysis of the resource.

A detected change in vegetation cover is not a trigger for the department to automatically commence a compliance audit. Any allegations of unlawful vegetation management activities are investigated in alignment with the department's compliance framework. The department undertakes an extensive audit and assessment of the land adjoining property vegetation, historical clearing records, expert on-ground botanical and geological analysis and observes natural justice principles before reaching an opinion regarding the legality of any vegetation management activity.

Reports are loaded into the compliance incident reporting and management system for SLATS. The 2010-11 notifications were recently received from the Department of Science, Information Technology, Information and the Arts and they have been loaded into our system.

**CHAIR:** And the report is available?

**Mr CRIPPS:** That is correct.

**CHAIR:** It might be advantageous for the member for South Brisbane to get hold of that report.

**Ms TRAD:** I have a point of order, Mr Chair. I really object to that comment and I ask for you to withdraw it. I know the SLATS report came out last month, and I would like you to withdraw your partisan comment.

**CHAIR:** I call the member for Barron River.

**Mr TROUT:** Minister, I refer to page 5 of the SDS. As a part of the department's natural resource management funding, how have grassroot volunteer groups such as Landcare been supported?

**Mr CRIPPS:** I thank the member for Barron River for the question. In 2014—which is incidentally, and as a matter of interest to the committee, the 25th anniversary of the Landcare movement in Queensland—the Queensland government has been proud to continue its commitment to support natural resource management volunteers working in Landcare groups and similar organisations. The Queensland Regional NRM Investment Program 2013 to 2018 focuses on controlling pest weeds, improving water quality and promoting sustainable agricultural. With the \$55 million funding component of this program that is allocated to Queensland's 14 regional NRM bodies, I have set an ambitious target to support organisations such as Landcare by asking that at least 20 per cent of the activities of these bodies be delivered to grassroots voluntary groups, such as Landcare and Coastcare, and subcatchment groups that are voluntary in nature, including Indigenous groups across the state. The departmental analysis suggested that the 2012-13 program yielded about 28 per cent of the funding of overall NRM projects delivered through volunteer groups. It is expected that these great results will continue in the future.

The government has also provided support for Queensland Water and Land Carers as a peak body for natural resource management volunteers in Queensland. This peak body provides services such as registration, networking, representation, promotion and insurance protection for registered volunteer NRM groups and Landcare organisations. The department is continuing to support Queensland Water and Land Carers, allocating annual funding of \$350,000 per year over the next three years to June 2017. This funding will ensure continued representation and delivery of services to around 300 NRM volunteer groups representing roughly about 29,000 people across the state.

**CHAIR:** I call the member for Whitsunday.

**Mr COSTIGAN:** Minister, this question no doubt goes to the heart of many electorates up and down the coast, including yours and mine. I want to go back to page 5 of the SDS also. Could you outline how tenure security has improved for island tourism leaseholders, particularly in this new era of modernisation of land tenure administration?

**Mr CRIPPS:** It probably has not been highlighted enough that the reforms that we delivered this year to the Land Act not only helped rural landholders but also offshore tourism island leaseholders. In August the Queensland government announced its reforms to state land lease arrangements for island resorts to optimise security of tenure and promote investment certainty as a pillar of the Queensland economy—that is, the tourism sector. These reforms include: the establishment of rolling leases as the base level of investment certainty for the sector; providing leases who are proposing significant capital investment with a 50-year term lease upfront and an option of a further 49-year lease once the development is completed; enabling amalgamation of existing leases to reduce red tape; and supporting the conversion of existing term leases to perpetual leases where the site is substantially developed.

As part of this plan to implement the above reforms, the Department of Natural Resources and Mines has proactively undertaken a review of all of the offshore island tourism related tenures in consultation with lessees. The amendments commenced on 1 July this year, after we announced our initiative in August last year, enabling a dedicated departmental team which is based in Mackay to commence delivery of site specific solutions with each of our 77 island tourism leases. The priority actions the department will deliver include streamlining of conditioning for 13 existing perpetual leases to more appropriately reflect business requirements and risks in the modern era and proactively offering rolling leases to five lessees. There is the potential conversion of four term lessees to perpetual leases where significant development has already been completed. These measures will assist Queensland's offshore island tourism operators to make vital investment decisions in their businesses in the full knowledge that these business commitments are backed by high levels of tenure security.

**CHAIR:** I call the member for Maryborough.

**Mrs MADDERN:** Minister, I refer to page 5 of the SDS, which again is an area I have a great interest in. Could you update the committee on the 2014 annual land valuations and the progress of the online process for managing objections to those land valuations?

**Mr CRIPPS:** I thank the member for Maryborough for the question. Under the Land Valuation Act 2010, the Valuer-General is responsible for undertaking annual statutory land valuations. Statutory land valuations are used by local governments to calculate rates, by the Office of State

Revenue for state land tax purposes and by the Department of Natural Resources and Mines for state land rental determinations. The act provides for statutory land valuations to be undertaken annually in all rateable local governments in Queensland. Valuations must be issued prior to 31 March unless the Valuer-General considers that it is not possible to do so because of unusual circumstances or after consideration of market survey reports for all local councils.

After consulting local governments and industry groups and the consideration of market survey reports for each local government area, the Valuer-General determined that 41 out of the 62 rateable local councils would be valued in 2014. On 12 March this year, the Valuer-General issued approximately one million valuations across 41 local government areas in Queensland. The release of the annual valuation was supported by extensive communication material, including the Valuer-General's market movement report, information brochures, a toll free number to a call centre, state-wide and rural media releases, tailored media releases for each of the 41 councils that were valued, market sales information for residential areas, the Land Valuations Globe which is another Globe in the Queensland Globe initiative, and online valuation listings as well as hard copy displays and rural maps in selected offices.

Landowners who believe that their valuations are incorrect and have information to support their claim had until 12 May this year to lodge an objection with the Valuer-General. Landowners are able to lodge their objections online. The online lodgement system was successfully implemented last year providing many benefits including the availability to upload relevant information, save a draft, receive instant confirmation when an objection was lodged as well as the ability to track an objection online. This system is available year round and will continue to be enhanced to improve functionality. A total of 1,687 objections were received against the 2014 annual valuation, which continues a downward trend in the number of objections received against annual valuations. The number of objections received this year represents just 0.17 per cent of the total of one million valuation notices that are issued to landowners.

**Mrs MADDERN:** Minister, there is still the capacity for those who do not have internet access to lodge a paper objection.

**Mr CRIPPS:** Absolutely.

**Mrs MADDERN:** Because I have a lot of people in my electorate who simply do not have internet access because they do not have any coverage.

**Mr CRIPPS:** Absolutely, Mr Chairman, to the member for Maryborough, there is still the facility for people to make paper based objections to their annual valuations. I am very pleased with the outcomes that continue to show a decline in the number of objections that are issued. The Deputy Valuer-General is here today—I do not know where the Valuer-General is; he is probably busy—and I would like to thank them for the work they do. They put a huge effort into trying to provide as much information to the public as possible about what has gone into the valuation process. They underpin our valuations. The State Valuation Service across the state does an excellent job.

**CHAIR:** I call the member for Thuringowa.

**Mr COX:** Minister, I know this government's direction towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and their land is different from the previous government. I refer to the bottom of page 2 of the SDS and I ask: how have you continued to achieve the accelerated resolution of native title claims?

**Mr CRIPPS:** I thank the member for Thuringowa for the question. Landowners and proponents of projects have stated that obtaining native title consent for undertaking land dealings can be very resource intensive and time consuming for all the parties—for example, in negotiating agreement through an Indigenous Land Use Agreement. It can also be very time consuming and resource intensive for the native title party involved. To assist, the Department of Natural Resources and Mines has produced two detailed template agreements—that is, the guide to negotiating an ILUA which includes a template ILUA, and the pastoral ILUA template and guide. They are available on the department's website. The pastoral agreement template was developed in collaboration with AgForce Queensland, Queensland Native Title Services and the North Queensland Land Council. It provides a simpler and less costly process for negotiating agreements. There is also a supporting guide that contains more detailed information on the benefits for all parties in using the template.

The template can be used to negotiate multiple agreements over a single area so that negotiations involving different pastoralists can occur at the same time. This means that some negotiations may take considerably less time. Actions of this type help to deliver enduring native title

agreements that are well structured, are functional and contain benefits for all the parties involved. Over the next 12 months, the department will be working with key stakeholders to develop new templates to facilitate streamlined agreement making and will work with all interested parties to consider an improved approach to native title negotiations, including examining incentives to enhance how consents are obtained.

**CHAIR:** Shane, do you have a question?

**Mr KNUTH:** Minister, I am aware that there are development opportunities in regard to irrigation on the Gilbert and the Flinders. Can the department give an indication of how other landowners can go into the opportunity to irrigate and expand their opportunity to irrigate when it is tied up right at this present moment with only a select few?

**Mr CRIPPS:** Mr Chairman, I can answer the member's question, but if he had that question ought not he have asked me that question on Tuesday afternoon when we were dealing with water services?

**Mr KNUTH:** It relates to land as well. They both coexist, Minister.

**Mr CRIPPS:** It does relate to land as well. It is a good opportunity for me to talk about how proactive the government has been in this regard so I am happy to take the question. I will also point out that I think I have answered this question on two prior occasions during the course of estimates, but nevertheless the member for Dalrymple seems intent on prosecuting whatever point of view he has about this process and I am happy to oblige him.

**CHAIR:** It is called rote learning.

**Mr CRIPPS:** It could be but he might be—

**Mr KNUTH:** I have a point of order, Mr Chair. I ask that—

**CHAIR:** I withdraw.

**Mr KNUTH:** Thank you.

**Mr CRIPPS:** He might just be very interested.

**Mr KNUTH:** I am absolutely interested.

**Ms TRAD:** It is the same way you gave two answers to the code assessable question. It was the same answer to the code assessable question from Dorothy Dixers.

**Mr KNUTH:** As you are aware, Minister, this is my former electorate so I do have an interest.

**Mr CRIPPS:** Indeed. To answer the member for Dalrymple's question, how can other people participate—

**Mr KNUTH:** Which I did lay the foundations to get things moving.

**Mr CRIPPS:** Whereabouts?

**Mr KNUTH:** In regards to the Flinders and the Gilbert.

**CHAIR:** That is not really in the SDS, Shane. Just let the minister answer.

**Mr KNUTH:** Well we are getting sarcasm from one side. Surely you can get it back from the other.

**Mr CRIPPS:** I do not know about the member for Dalrymple's assertion that he laid the foundations.

**Mr TROUT:** Tracks. Railway tracks.

**Mr CRIPPS:** Whatever reality exists for the member for Dalrymple—

**Mr KNUTH:** I have a point of order, Mr Chair. I ask the member for Barron River to withdraw that. Likewise, I was in the process of a number of those meetings and discussions right from the beginning way back since 2004, so if you want to look into it you may see my name there.

**CHAIR:** Let us focus on the minister's answer.

**Mr CRIPPS:** I do not think I need to look into it, because what I can say to the member for Dalrymple is that when I became the Minister for Natural Resources I immediately moved to release the unallocated water in the Gulf water resource plan that was available at that time. I released all of it in the general reserve. We went through the normal process for that water to be released, and it was secured by people who made application for it, as the member for Dalrymple well knows. Everyone had an opportunity to make application for that water that was released at that time, and I answered

repeatedly questions from the public, particularly from the community in that area, who had opinions that there should be more water made available. I told them very clearly about what process I would go through.

When we received the CSIRO's report into new opportunities for irrigated agriculture on the Flinders and Gilbert in the Gulf catchment, when I had an opportunity for my department and I to make informed decisions about what additional volumes of water could be made available for agriculture in that catchment, I would bring forward the scheduled review of the Gulf ROP from 2017 to this year, which I have done. We have commenced the review of the Gulf ROP. We can do that, being fully informed by the information provided for in the CSIRO report, that report being funded by both the Queensland and Commonwealth governments through the North Queensland Irrigated Agriculture Strategy.

As I mentioned on Tuesday afternoon when I was talking about this issue, we have also commissioned the CSIRO and the Department of Science, Information Technology, Innovation and the Arts to do additional work to inform our review of the resource operations plan. That review, because we have the benefit of the CSIRO report, will be able to be completed by the end of this year. I am happy to advise the member for Dalrymple, as I said to the committee on Tuesday afternoon, that will mean any additional unallocated volumes of water available in those catchments can be made available from the beginning of next year. That is really the answer to his question. More people will have the opportunity to make application for that water when we have a release of any additional water that is made available through the review process early next year. Given the enthusiasm that was expressed by the public and the community in that area at that time, I am sure it will be replicated when we have another release early next year.

**Mr KNUTH:** Thank you very much, Minister.

**Ms TRAD:** Minister, my next question is to your director-general, Dr Brett Heyward. Dr Heyward, has your department ever prepared advice and furnished that advice to government that the allocation of water being sought by the IfED proponents was unsustainable?

**Dr Heyward:** I thank the member for the question. I will have to defer to departmental officers involved in that process. To handle the question in a general sense, I am not aware of any departmental information that has been provided to the minister in that regard, but I defer to my deputy director-general for policy. She has a much more intimate knowledge of the proposal than I do. I will ask Sue Ryan to comment on that specific matter.

**Ms Ryan:** As has been alluded to by the minister, the department was waiting on the CSIRO report so that we can make an informed decision as well as waiting for the science for the water resource plan that the minister has just alluded to.

**Ms TRAD:** So the answer is no?

**Ms Ryan:** As far as I am aware, no, that is basically what we were waiting on.

**Mr CRIPPS:** Before moving to the member's next question, I can provide the definition of high value agriculture to the committee and also the guidelines for determining high value and irrigated high value agriculture which are available on the department's website in response to an earlier question from the member for South Brisbane.

**CHAIR:** Do we agree to have that tabled?

**Mrs MADDERN:** Yes.

**Ms TRAD:** Dr Heyward, do you play any role in facilitating the information provided by your department to the Deputy Premier's department in relation to the IfED coordinated project?

**Dr Heyward:** My department does. Again, I will need to defer to my deputy director-general of policy. We are a technical advice agency to the Coordinator-General. To outline that process I will again ask my deputy director-general, Sue Ryan, to comment.

**Ms Ryan:** Basically the director-general has declared his conflict of interest with respect to this particular project. I have all his delegations and any information that we provide to anywhere in government comes through me. It does not go through the director-general.

**Ms TRAD:** Thank you, Ms Ryan. Minister, moving on, page 11 of the SDS lists an achievement of 2013-14 as having allowed water users to self-manage property risks by removing the need for them to develop a land and water management plan in order to use their water entitlement. In their submission to the Land and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2014, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority raised the concern that 'land management plans are an important best practice tool for

understanding, monitoring and managing catchment conditions' and that 'the bill and explanatory notes are not clear on how the Queensland government will monitor and manage catchment conditions for the long-term health of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage area without dedicated leasehold land management tools in place'.

**Ms TRAD:** Minister, what is the department doing to address these concerns from the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority?

**Mr CRIPPS:** Mr Chairman, I believe that the achievement nominated on page 11 of the SDS removing the need to develop a land and water management plan in order to use their water entitlement is a totally different statutory instrument from the land management agreements referred to by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority in its submission to the Land and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2014.

**CHAIR:** There is no requirement for people not to do land plans and that sort of thing now, is there?

**Mr CRIPPS:** No, they are different statutory instruments, and for that reason I do not understand the reference by the member for South Brisbane to the SDS and then her subsequent question. Land and water management plans, I believe, are different statutory instruments from land management agreements referred to in the submission by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority to the bill that the member for South Brisbane referenced.

**Ms TRAD:** All right, Minister. Let us refer to page 2 of your SDS in relation to the allocation of available funding under the \$80 million five-year Queensland regional NRM investment program, which includes initiatives to protect the Great Barrier Reef. Can you please provide the committee with an itemised list of what that funding is being spent on, where it is going and what it is achieving?

**Mr CRIPPS:** Yes, I am sure we certainly can. We are accountable for the distribution of that money through the Queensland natural resource management program. Unless my department has the full itemised list of the 14 NRM groups and other organisations that receive funding—

**Mr COX:** Wasn't that a prehearing question?

**CHAIR:** Question No. 10?

**Mr COX:** Question No. 10, the prehearing question referencing page 2 of the SDS, asks—

... can the Minister provide further details of the initiatives to be delivered from the allocation of \$80 million over five years ...

It is quite detailed. It goes for about four pages.

**Mr CRIPPS:** It does appear that there is a fairly extensive answer in terms of the distribution of \$80 million through the Queensland Regional Natural Resource Management Investment Program in the answer to question on notice No. 10 from the government.

**Mr COX:** Why don't you read the prehearing questions?

**Mr COSTIGAN:** It takes us through the on-ground projects. It is very detailed indeed.

**Mr CRIPPS:** It actually provides information by catchment as well. In that respect, I could, if the member for South Brisbane would like me to continue, go through the regional NRM groups and their respective funding. For the Burnett-Mary regional group, the total funding for 2013-16 was \$2,060,000 specifically for managing invasive species, conserving soils and improving water quality. The Burdekin regional NRM group—

**Ms TRAD:** Thank you, Minister, I can see it. Can I ask you about the unallocated regional funds? Can you explain what the \$22 million out of the \$80 million allocation is earmarked for?

**Mr CRIPPS:** The unallocated SSP and unallocated regional funds which amount to \$26.9 million will be allocated to projects that will target the government's natural resource management priorities including controlling pests and weeds, improving water quality, particularly in Great Barrier Reef catchments, and sustainable agriculture projects.

**Ms TRAD:** But not exclusively?

**Mr CRIPPS:** Those are the areas which have been stated for some time since I became the minister are the national resource management priorities of the government—controlling pest weeds and feral animals, improving water quality and sustainable agriculture projects.

**CHAIR:** That would be from Brisbane's water quality too, Minister?

**Ms TRAD:** This is GBR money.

**Mr CRIPPS:** No, there is some specific information about what funding is used in Great Barrier Reef protection programs through this particular program provided for in question on notice No. 3, which came from non-government members, and it provides an extensive list of the breakdown of the funding that comes to Great Barrier Reef catchments in that regard. I would point out that the Great Barrier Reef will benefit from both sides of the Queensland regional NRM program, because if you are in those Great Barrier Reef catchments and there is water quality projects being undertaken but they are not being funded under the reef side of the program they are still contributing to improvements in reef quality in those reef catchments. I would like to think—I have always held this view—that work in relation to pest weeds and particularly feral animals such as feral pigs in those reef catchments has a positive influence on improving water quality flowing into the Great Barrier Reef lagoon, which I suppose in addition to sustainable agriculture projects is the reason why we have looked very closely at prioritising these types of NRM outcomes through this Queensland Regional Natural Resource Management Investment Program.

**CHAIR:** Minister, we are almost out of time. This one is rather important. On page 10 it refers to the planned and managed allocation and use of state land resources. What is being done to manage fire risks on state land? As the El Nino kicks in, it could be quite important.

**Mr CRIPPS:** Thanks for the question, Mr Chairman. The 2014-15 program for the management of fire and pests on unallocated land has an estimated base budget of \$3½ million to be used to fund bushfire and land management activities on unallocated state land, freehold land owned by the Department of Natural Resources and Mines, and reserves that do not have any trustees. We have responsibility for over 20,800 land parcels covering approximately a million hectares across the state. The department maintains an ongoing risk assessment of land parcels to assign a level of risk based on factors such as proximity to houses, proximity to critical assets such as substations or community infrastructure like hospitals and schools, and vegetation type and the history of fires in those areas.

In managing fire on its estate, the department places the highest priority on protecting human life followed by protection of private and public infrastructure followed by environmental values. Approximately 4,500 parcels have been assessed as high risk. Almost all high-risk parcels are within the urban interface where any bushfire could have a direct impact on communities. Planned burns and other fire risk assessment activities on the department's land focus primarily on these high-risk areas. We focus of course on protecting human life, public and private property and the protection of infrastructure for the community.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister, and your advisers. That brings the examination of the natural resources and mines portfolio to a close. I remind you of the time frames set for questions on notice to be taken. They have to be in by 10 am on Tuesday the 22nd. Would you like to make a quick summation?

**Mr CRIPPS:** Only to thank you, Mr Chairman, for your stewardship of the estimates committee proceedings today and Tuesday afternoon. I would like to thank my departmental officers who obviously put in a significant effort to help me prepare for the estimates process. I would like to thank my ministerial staff for their assistance and support to prepare for this process and thank the parliamentary staff who support you and your committee in undertaking the estimates.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. This committee will resume at 11.30 for the agricultural, forestry and fisheries portfolio.

**Proceedings suspended from 11.01 am to 11.29 am**

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

### **In Attendance**

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

Mr B Mills, Chief of Staff

#### **Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

Mr J Noye, Director-General

Dr B Woods, Deputy Director-General, Agriculture

Mr S Spencer, Deputy Director-General, Fisheries and Forestry

Mr M Letts, Executive Director, Regions and Industry Development

Ms L Brown, Finance and Asset Management

Ms M Hoffman, Deputy Director-General, Corporate Services

#### **Agri-Science Queensland**

Mr J Chapman, Managing Director

#### **Biosecurity Queensland**

Dr J Thompson

#### **Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges**

Mr B Kinnane, Executive Director

#### **QRAA**

Mr C Holden, Chief Executive Officer

#### **Safe Food Production Queensland**

Ms B Wilson, Chief Executive Officer



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

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

The committee has authorised the release of answers from ministers to the prehearing questions. These will be available shortly on our website. As laid out in schedule 8 at the back of the standing orders, we expect all departmental officers appearing today to provide full and honest answers to our questions. Anyone who is unable or unwilling to provide an answer should be prepared to state the reason. I would also remind members that departmental officers are not here today to give expert opinion on the merits or otherwise of the policies of the government; that is the role of the ministers.

Finally, before we begin can everyone please switch off their mobiles phones or switch them to 'silent'. For the rest of the day we will be examining estimates of the portfolio of the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. We will examine the estimates of the agricultural service area until three o'clock. We will have a break for lunch from 12.30 until 1.30, followed by biosecurity, fisheries and forestry until 5.



Welcome, Minister and advisors. For the benefit of Hansard I ask the advisors that if you are called to give an answer, please state your name before speaking. Minister, the committee has granted leave to the Leader of the Opposition, the Hon. Anastacia Palaszczuk, to participate in today's hearing. We have also granted leave for the member for Redcliffe to appear at these hearings as well.

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 like to give a brief opening statement.

**Dr McVEIGH:** I thank the Deputy Chair and all members of the committee for this opportunity here this morning and into this afternoon. I would like to make an opening statement and provide an overview of the highlights of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry's budget and the key issues across the department.

This year the budget for the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry is some \$409 million, down from the \$427 million actual expenditure last year, but up from the \$396 million adjusted budget in 2013-14. The budget is about providing the front-line services that agriculture, fisheries and forestry need in the most efficient and industry-responsive manner possible. This budget continues with the LNP government's focus of cutting red tape and directing money to where it is needed: in our case, growing an efficient, innovative, resilient and profitable agriculture, fisheries and forestry sector. The budget contributes to the objective of growing a four-pillar economy by strengthening the economic growth of those areas of industry activity right across Queensland, particularly in regional Queensland.

My objectives as minister are to build agriculture, improve industry performance, manage biosecurity risks, support the sustainable use of fisheries, maximise the financial return from state owned forests, and of course modernise services while strengthening the department's capability. In continuing to focus on all of those issues, as I said, we are very much focused on better front-line services because the industries we serve are principally regional communities.

Can I just touch on the key business areas, Mr Chairman. Agriculture has an objective of lifting productivity and profitability on farms with the aim of doubling agricultural production by 2040. It is about working with industries to develop industry plans and address barriers to industry growth. It is about undertaking research, development and extension activities to improve productivity and to reduce costs. Of course it is about supporting producers facing the challenges of drought and natural disasters. The agriculture strategy developed and being implemented with industry—and a key focus of our inaugural Queensland Agriculture Conference here in Brisbane just a few short weeks ago—drives that approach.

In relation to fisheries and forestry industries, the objective of this service area is to support sustainable long-term management of fisheries and forestry industries. By that I mean obviously fisheries, fish habitats, forest products and quarry materials. The environmentally responsible, sustainable and profitable use of all of those natural resources is a key focus and responsibility of my department. In this regard I would like to briefly mention the wide-ranging review of fisheries management that was announced on 6 March this year—a review that will recommend principles for a new modernised and simplified system of fisheries management. I also mention the Queensland Timber Industry Plan again developed and being implemented with industry.

Biosecurity Queensland has the objective of reducing the risks and impacts of animal and plant diseases and weeds to prevent, respond and recover from biosecurity threats. It also maintains market and consumer confidence by ensuring the welfare of animals and reducing the risk of agricultural chemical contamination. Importantly, we passed the new Biosecurity Act 2014 on 6 March, demonstrating the government's commitment to cutting red tape by achieving a reduction of about 150 pages in legislation. The act replaces six current acts and parts of several others. Previously it could not be delivered; but we have, and we have done that whilst ensuring residual industry concerns have been considered. I will just touch very quickly on the structure, staff and locations of my department.

The department employed 1,099.1 full-time equivalent staff as at 30 June, including corporate staff that provides services to other departments as part of the business and corporate partnership. Our staff are employed in 76 locations across Queensland working in research and extension biosecurity, fisheries and forestry management, industry development and, as I said, corporate support positions. Including corporate staff who provide services to other departments, 70 per cent of the department's full-time equivalent staff work outside the Brisbane CBD. For 2013-14,

Queensland's primary industry commodities combined gross value of production in first round processes is forecast at \$14.7 billion, which is three per cent higher than the average for the past five years. Dry seasonal conditions, though, have reduced the forecast by an estimated \$190 million in the last six months. In summary, Queensland produces: 50 per cent of Australia's total gross value of production of beef, worth some \$3.259 billion; 90 per cent of Australia's bananas; most of the vegetables in the country; 94 per cent of Australia's sugar cane; 50 per cent of Australia's prawns, crabs and scallops; 10 per cent of Australia's forestry production; and is the second highest producer of fruit for the country

Certainly I believe very strongly that the LNP government has a good story to tell with agriculture. We do have a strong plan for a bright future, but we are not without significant challenges. 75 per cent of the state remains gripped by drought and the current forecast for this dry to continue is sobering news indeed. The government and my department have been working hard, therefore, to support our farmers in drought. Last year we spent a record \$31 million on drought assistance. As the Premier has repeatedly said, we stand by our farmers at this difficult time and of course if we need to do more, we will.

Dealing with the high volume of applications for drought support for what has been an unprecedented impact on our state has at times—and particularly during last January—led to longer than benchmark times that we set ourselves in the interests of transparency in processing applications. As minister I acknowledge these delays, but I can assure the committee that we have resolved those shortcomings. You yourself, Mr Chairman, are aware that fire ants continue to be a major focus of our biosecurity efforts. Effectiveness and efficiency improvements continue to be implemented in the management of the South-East Queensland eradication program, as indicated in the independent scientific review and financial audit last year, and we are dealing very comprehensively and efficiently with a new outbreak or incursion in Central Queensland at the same time. Whilst we continue to face significant funding challenges there under national cost sharing arrangements, we will certainly maintain our conversations with the Commonwealth and other state colleagues in that regard. Red witchweed, or *Striga asiatica*, was also identified on a small number of sugar properties in the Mackay region during the year, and our timely and responsive approach was necessary given the threat that it poses certainly to the sugar industry, but most particularly to cereal crops right throughout the nation. Again our efforts to secure an appropriate national cost sharing agreement are proceeding in that area.

Other challenges, Mr Chairman, before I wrap up, certainly involve our ongoing response to bovine Johne's disease in the state. We continue to work side by side with affected producers and the industry in a quest to maintain the Queensland protected zone status, which is so important for our key export markets and, just as importantly, is in line with industry requirements. Those challenges continue at a time when opportunities here and abroad for our agricultural, fisheries and forest industries continue to abound. Mr Chairman, I do look forward to the opportunity of exploring these details further during the session here this morning and this afternoon, and I would be very pleased to take questions from your committee.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Minister. I will start off with agriculture and drought. You did touch on drought policies and programs, I refer to pages 3 and 5 of your SDS, including the federal government's funding for drought assistance. Can the minister detail what funding this government has provided to farmers who are in drought?

**Dr McVEIGH:** Thank you, Mr Chairman. Much of Queensland, as I have said, is currently experiencing very dry conditions, with 75 per cent still officially drought declared. In response to those conditions the Queensland government allocated that \$31 million in drought assistance last financial year that I referred to. There was an initial allocation of \$11.2 million and then an additional allocation of \$20 million announced by the Premier and myself in Longreach on 21 January this year as we found conditions deteriorating. The drought assistance package has received additional funding for 2014-15 of \$25 million. Of course there is other funding for other areas across government as well.

In response to your question, since it was introduced the package has included: land rent relief and water licence fee relief; agistment on a selected number of national parks and reserves (that ceased on 31 December 2013); transport concessions for shifting droughted livestock; mental health workshops across the state; community support assistance with organising community events, training and resources for community leaders—which has been well taken up by various local government organisations; and other elements of the Drought Relief Assistance Scheme. The Drought Relief Assistance Scheme itself is certainly administered by my department and the rebate

on emergency water infrastructure for producers across some of those drought declared areas has been well taken up.

Actual expenditure in 2013-14 was \$23.859 and as DRAS, the scheme itself, is demand driven, any eligible claims will be met under the scheme this financial year. It is available to primary producers in drought declared areas. Of course it is available to primary producers who secure an individual droughted property declaration in some of those local government areas that may not be drought declared based on the advice of local drought advisory committees. Those committees, so you understand the transparency of the whole process—particularly that declaration process—are made up of local producer and departmental representatives. I share as a matter of interest with the committee that on numerous occasions I have had people in drought affected areas make contact with my office wanting to know who members of that committee are in their local area, and of course that is confidential information for obvious reasons and certainly respected by our government and by previous governments.

The drought committees consider a range of issues in providing advice to me on potential drought declarations: issues such as the condition of pasture, the availability of water and most particularly, of course, the condition of stock. So whilst we saw some parts of Queensland receive reasonable rainfall during autumn, that rainfall generally was not considered to be drought breaking, although some declarations were revoked right up in the far north of the state or in the northern gulf country. So the challenges remain, and of course the Drought Relief Assistance Scheme that has received further support through this recent budget will be very important to support those producers going forward right across the state.

I could also note if you wished—but I will just touch on it in very brief detail—the collaboration with the federal government through their various drought relief assistance programs, particularly the drought concessional loans announced by the federal government earlier this year and which are now flowing out to producers who are eligible.

**CHAIR:** As the climate is always very variable and unfortunately cost pressures are great on farmers, can you explain what the government is doing to improve the preparedness and resilience of primary producers to climate risks such as drought?

**Dr McVEIGH:** That is a very important question and I guess the subject of discussions right across the country in fact in relation to proposed national drought policy reform. As a matter of personal interest, the committee and others would be aware that the *Australian* newspaper is celebrating its 50th birthday. I am told that online there is a promotional tool or a little gimmick perhaps where you can log on and find the front page of the *Australian* newspaper on the day that you were born. It only works for those under 50 obviously. My wife tells me that the front page on the day she was born—and I am sorry I cannot reveal her age; I best not—

**Ms TRAD:** We will be able to tell from the front page that you refer to, Minister.

**Dr McVEIGH:** If the deputy chair wants to research that, go right ahead, but please be conscious of my welfare. That front page had as a headline regional representatives from right across Australia talking about the need for national drought reform, so this is an ongoing issue for us. In Queensland, as I am sure other state authorities do, we are very keen to, as your question posed, Mr Chairman, improve the preparedness and resilience of primary producers to climate risks such as drought. As I mentioned in response to my previous question, prediction of a higher chance of El Nino conditions by the Bureau of Meteorology are sobering news indeed and I have just this recent weekend caught up with Roger Stone from the University of Southern Queensland who is well known in terms of his climate predictions and variabilities, so the challenges are certainly there. What was underway in terms of a national discussion when our government was elected and I was appointed minister just over two years ago under the leadership of the then federal minister for agriculture, Joe Ludwig, was exactly this—national drought policy reform. The concept was that the federal government would look at providing assistance to farm households in times of drought and that state governments would focus on education and ensuring farmers, producers and graziers were well and truly prepared for drought risk.

The reality is that that discussion about national drought policy reform, commencing as it did off the back of a review about previous approaches to drought management, including interest rate subsidies, for example, under what were called exceptional circumstances, has been a discussion that has not proceeded as quickly as any state authority or the federal authorities would have envisaged just over two years ago. Why? Because drought has certainly gripped Queensland and certainly gripped a significant part of New South Wales as well and, in simple terms, it is very difficult

to finalise and discuss and explore national drought policy reform when you have, in our case here in Queensland, 75 per cent of your state back in the grips of drought; so hence the rollout of the state government's Drought Relief Assistance Scheme that I have explained and hence the state government through me under what was known as SCoPI, the standing committee on primary industries under the former COAG arrangements and now through what is referred to as AGMIN meetings of agricultural ministers around the country and with New Zealand, have explained very clearly that the Queensland state government remains committed to those concepts under national drought reform in ensuring preparedness of our producers but our ability to embrace that discussion has been significantly slowed given the need to respond to the current drought. The concept though is that the federal government will remain responsible for what we might call big-ticket items under drought support programs, particularly the farm household allowance that I referred to, and the state will be responsible for all of that support that I have just mentioned.

I have no problems sharing with the committee and anyone interested that as the first state to advise that we needed to provide continuing drought relief assistance initially announced in May of last year there was some puzzlement, if I can put it that way, from the other states that were of the belief that we are all committed and rolling fairly fast into the new national drought policy reform agenda. Questions were asked and on behalf of the Queensland state government, the LNP government, I explained very quickly we need to support our producers, particularly graziers initially in the north-west and more recently right across the state and even here into South-East Queensland as you know and other members of the committee know. That is exactly what we will continue to do whilst continuing discussions on that national drought policy reform agenda.

**CHAIR:** It was actually quite surprising after the 2011 and 2013 floods how quickly some of the areas turned, wasn't it?

**Dr McVEIGH:** It certainly was, Mr Chairman. I guess that is the challenge for Queensland in general and, given the importance of agriculture to our broader economy, certainly for farmers and graziers and certainly for organisations such as my department and staff and management within my department whose role it is to serve these industries—to move from the stage of responding through national disaster recovery arrangements with other state agencies in the likes of Bundaberg and the North Burnett and in your part of the world into the Scenic Rim and Darling Downs and those parts of the southern half of the state in flood early last year. Some of those very same local government areas, including your own, were drought declared earlier this year, so to see that cycle within a 12-month period is unprecedented.

**Mrs MADDERN:** Minister, we have obviously dealt quite extensively with drought. I turn now to red-tape reduction and your references in the SDS documents. Can you outline for us what the government is doing to reduce red tape for the farming community?

**Dr McVEIGH:** As was a commitment at the last election, the LNP government was certainly very focused on reducing red-tape burdens across industry in general but no more so than in Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. As a result, my department has made progress on a range of initiatives on reducing that regulatory burden. These initiatives include the Biosecurity Act 2014. As I mentioned very quickly earlier, that replaces six acts and parts of several other acts and reduces the number of pages of primary legislation by some 20 per cent. The idea of this act is that it focuses on simplifying and consolidating permits issued, amongst other things, under biosecurity legislation. It increases the permit duration to three years and rationalises the number of biosecurity fees by over 50 per cent. In 2014-15 a regulatory impact statement will be released and new regulations will be developed to support that new act, and it is envisaged that that will be commencing in late 2015. We are seeing at the same time other biosecurity legislation being consolidated, streamlined and modernised, and I can give one quick example of a RIS in relation to exhibited animals legislation released in November 2013. The Veterinary Surgeons Act 1936 is one that is certainly in need of review and reform, and hence the steering committee that I appointed to oversee the review has submitted its first report identifying where legislation regulation can be improved and at the same time red tape reduced. It has examined the current system of registration and oversight of veterinarians, for example, against other professional registration legislation. Again, I will be proposing a new legislative framework based on that and other information for veterinary professionals in 2014-15.

In March of this year I announced on behalf of the government a very wide-ranging review of fisheries management arrangements in the state of Queensland, and that was based on the government's conclusion that fisheries management in general in this state has become cumbersome and involves over-regulation and very confusing conditions for commercial fishers, for recreational fishers, certainly for Indigenous fishers, particularly in the north of the state, and those who are quite

rightly interested in environmental credentials right throughout the state, both at sea and inland fisheries as well. So we have appointed a ministerial advisory committee taking input from commercial, recreational, Indigenous and conservation sectors to provide me with support and advice. We have appointed consultants—international consultants in fact who are leading the charge in a lot of that consultation at the same time—and the development of that policy and overall framework for fisheries management going forward is something that I look forward to completing with their support by the end of this calendar year or early next year such that Queenslanders will know what our overall framework will be going forward.

Whilst I am on fisheries in answer to the member's question, I did want to touch on the Queensland Competition Authority's review of aquaculture at the same time. It is a separate but related exercise and I am very keen to look at the final report due in September of this year which, again, we will build into our own fisheries management review given that there are some similar issues, at least from a market perspective. I just want to mention as well a key industry for us—the beef industry. It is very important for Queensland and our biggest agricultural industry. We are looking at a national project to review regulation. We are having the encouragement and the participation of other jurisdictions in that. The work will review and identify best practice regulatory outcomes which are being achieved for the beef industry and where regulatory reform as we can see elsewhere is reducing compliance costs at the same time. Again, we are looking for a resilient and profitable sector, so that is particularly important and part of our Queensland Beef Industry Action Plan that I have underway.

Finally, members may recall the repeal of the Chicken Meat Industry Committee Act 1976 earlier this year—an important deregulation supported by industry. Again, that was a piece of work that was underway, along with the Biosecurity Act development, certainly before I became minister but work that we needed to draw to a close sooner rather than later, and we have just done that. Industry is now leading the charge there in terms of regulating its own environment rather than continuing with an outdated act. So there is a cross-section of the sorts of activities we are pursuing from a red-tape reduction perspective.

**CHAIR:** And quite a lot to crow about, Minister.

**Mr COX:** Minister, in referring to the SDS, can you please tell the committee how the LNP government is working in partnership with our leading universities to deliver better R&D outcomes for farmers and obviously to boost production, which is a primary aim of the government?

**Dr McVEIGH:** Whether it is James Cook University in Townsville which is—I do not think it is in the member's seat, but next door perhaps—

**Mr COX:** Just outside, Minister.

**Dr McVEIGH:**—in the same community or whether it is the University of Southern Queensland in my own home town of Toowoomba, these university partnerships are, I think, vital and I have been very excited to lead development of them with my department. They are vital because they are all about ensuring that we have alliances in place to provide research and development to leverage the shared resources we have between various agencies. Of course, all of our universities in the state and, in some cases, elsewhere in Australia have their special areas of expertise. So by pursuing these alliances, which I will explain in brief detail in just a few moments, it is all about harnessing first-class science capacity and in other areas management and economic research capacity, for example, to boost outcomes for agriculture, fisheries and forestry. The university sector in Queensland is well regarded in the agricultural space and as my Deputy Director-General, Dr Beth Woods, can attest and expand on if the committee wanted, the University of Queensland itself is regarded as amongst the leading—on some scales the leading—agricultural research university, as I understand it, in the world. So we indeed should be very proud of that.

We have established partnerships with the University of Queensland, as I have just said, particularly through the Queensland Alliance for Agriculture and Food Innovation, and with the University of Technology, just next door. That is robotics in agriculture, for example. As one example, a lot of work is happening in pulses given the market potential for Queensland mung beans in the likes of India et cetera. There is a lot of work to be done there throughout the supply chain. The University of Southern Queensland, as I mentioned, has commenced a new round of research looking at supply chain innovation, particularly given some of the infrastructure that is now coming to the fore in the Darling Downs and Southern Queensland in terms of road, air transport and linkages to international markets. There is some enthusiasm about potential rail improvements in the future as well. There is also a partnership with James Cook University, as I mentioned before. There is a

specialisation there, quite obviously, in tropical agriculture. There is a partnership with the Central Queensland University. As the member for Whitsunday would appreciate, there are discussions about how they conduct their own activities from a teaching and research perspective in Central Queensland centres such as Emerald where, of course, we have a Queensland agricultural college. There is also the University of the Sunshine Coast. Again, there is a significant impact on a range of industries.

Very quickly I want to emphasise the point about the importance of these partnerships. There is \$6.98 million with the University of Queensland, \$1.4 million with Queensland University of Technology for what I referred to before as the tropical pulses research, \$1.3 million with QUT for that robotics work in agriculture that I referred to and for USQ there is \$1 million over and above what I mentioned before in relation to supply chain work. This is relevant to broadacre agriculture that predominates on the Darling Downs, in the South Burnett and in Central Queensland. I refer there, for example, to winter and summer crop pathology, winter crop nematology, agricultural engineering and agricultural systems modelling.

The JCU relationship that the member for Thuringowa and others throughout the state would be very focused on—whether it is the Townsville campus or, as the member for Barron River is aware, the Cairns campus—is focused on tropical research. It is about integrating, strengthening and adding flexibility to the delivery of our science, particularly in the north. There are broader exciting potential developments with research in the north from an agricultural perspective, given the continuing pursuit of a northern agriculture CRC proposal, which does have significant promise and potentially significant funding support as that proposal is being drawn together.

**Mr KNUTH:** The member for Maryborough covered a fair bit with regards to the drought assistance package funding for 2014-15 and, likewise, 2013-14. Where are we up to? Obviously, there is a lot of trial and error as well and there is that collaborative support with the federal government with regard to loans. However, there are a number of factors relating to the red tape such as the time it will take to get reimbursement or subsidies and, likewise, the criteria in terms of property owners who are seeking the loan but whose application does not meet the criteria. Where are you at with this? Are you working with the federal government? How are some of those trial and error processes going?

**Dr McVEIGH:** I thank the member for Dalrymple for his question. It is a question about which I know he is quite passionate in terms of his own electorate, as am I as Minister for Agriculture. The quick history in terms of federal government collaboration and support programs delivered largely through the QRAA would reflect on, first of all, the loans that were provided under the former federal government under a program developed by the then Treasurer and, as I understand, your federal leader, Mr Bob Katter, from a concessional loans perspective. So it is looking at debt problems within the state. That was reviewed by the present minister, Barnaby Joyce, last calendar year and the new drought concessional loans—so debt last year and specifically drought concessional loans this year—that were proposed by the Prime Minister and the federal agricultural minister earlier this year started flowing last month through QRAA.

Your question touched on the red tape, the paperwork, and that is an important point. It has been an ongoing focus of mine, of my department and, of course, of QRAA itself to get the balance right. When we have a federal government, for example, allocating through the drought concessional loans some \$100 million to Queensland over two years, that is a lot of taxpayer dollars. As the federal minister himself has said, that just cannot be handed out willy-nilly. So we have to get this balance right in terms of being accountable for taxpayers' dollars—in this case federal taxpayers' dollars—that are administered through QRAA under a specific agreement between QRAA and the federal authorities and the immediate, day-to-day needs of farm households, of producers, who are interested in their stock and, ultimately, in keeping their businesses going and, therefore, their keeping their families in the manner to which they have become accustomed.

The agreement for QRAA—and I guess this is a question that could be touched on again later in the session as I understand there is a specific session for QRAA and other authorities of the department—does stipulate how QRAA must manage the process on behalf of the state government. One could say that QRAA's hands are tied to a certain extent. More particularly, QRAA has to live up to the agreement it has with the federal government. Yes, we have reviewed that from time to time. We have streamlined the process and we have recognised very strongly that for producers, particularly graziers, who have been struggling with stock all day in very hot and dry conditions to have to come back to the house or the homestead at night and sit down at the desk and start to go through paperwork does provide some concerns for them. For many of them that is a lot of stress,

hence the department is available to continue to provide advice, as I note are other agencies in various communities who have also stepped up to provide assistance where they can, be it NRM groups and, in some cases, other community groups as well. That is an ongoing challenge, but it is a balance between distributing taxpayers' dollars in an accountable way, in this case, under an agreement with the federal government—in other words, we have to distribute it the way they dictate—but in such a way that it is as responsive as possible for people who are, in some cases, eligible for up to \$1 million in funds if they have successfully applied for that amount.

**Mr KNUTH:** We are all praying for rain and for this drought to break. I can remember that when Senator Barnaby Joyce and the Prime Minister visited Queensland, their attention was directed to the fact that small business is also suffering. They are all doing it tough. Have there been any discussions between the state and the federal governments about what we can do to assist, because they are laying off jobs left, right and centre in rural and regional Queensland? Have there been any discussions with the feds with regard to supporting small business?

**Dr McVEIGH:** In answer to the specific question, I have certainly raised those sorts of points in discussions with my federal colleagues. In fact, equally, my state colleagues are looking at drought problems in their states, most particularly New South Wales. The important point to realise is that in regional communities when we are talking about supporting agriculture it does include those small businesses that exist because of the local economy, and in so many areas that is predominantly agriculture. I know exactly the issue that the member raises. In fact, my wife's family were small business operators in your home town of Charters Towers. So over the years my late father-in-law could certainly tell the stories of when times were good, they were good and when they were tough, they were tough. That was driven largely by climatic events, drought in particular.

The concept of the original exceptional circumstances program through what were interest rate subsidies—a concept that I know remains quite popular in the bush but is not being considered by either this federal government at this stage or the former federal government at all—was all about making sure that there were more dollars in local communities to circulate so producers had the ability to pay their local bills. Obviously, that had a strong psychological impact on them as well. At least they had the dignity of being able to pay their local bills, whether it was the local agricultural equipment supplier, produce supplier or other household needs. Similar to that concept is one promoted by successive federal governments in terms of drought concessional loans, in terms of the debt restructuring loans that I referred to earlier, getting dollars circulating back into the community. Out of the economy that supports those local businesses, be they retail or whatever in our towns, is the concept that our federal colleagues continue to pursue because you get the dollar circulating through a number of entities in the community, not just to one entity. If it is to the wealth generator in a local community—as I said, the agricultural industry in most cases, as most people from regional communities would be familiar because that is how it operates—they then circulate those dollars through the local community.

I should mention that the federal government's focus in the national drought policy reform discussions in recent years in terms of providing advice direct into farm households, which I referred to earlier, and which is now being pursued by the current federal government through that farm household allowance, is again focused on this concept of getting some dollars back into the farm household so that they can circulate. That is certainly the approach that this federal government has taken through that particular allowance as proposed originally.

**Mr KNUTH:** With regard to feral pigs, which are probably the biggest environmental vandal we have in this country, there is estimated to be six million pigs in North Queensland. What funding was provided in the 2013-14 and 2014-15 budgets for the eradication of feral pigs?

**Dr McVEIGH:** Again, I thank the member for the question. It is a wide-ranging question from a government perspective, and I will explain why in just a moment. That certainly is reflected in our biosecurity activities from a pest animal perspective. As you would be aware, it is not just pigs that are of concern.

The reason that I have suggested it is a wide-ranging question is that other areas of government, particularly the Department of National Parks under Minister Steve Dickson is conducting, in collaboration with federal authorities and federal funding programs, their own eradication activities in those park areas. I can provide some information for you in that regard. In terms of a specific dollar figure, I can provide a response on notice as a whole-of-government response should you wish. The issue is that we maintain a long-term focus on feral pig research just as we do with wild dogs and other threats.

It was fascinating to be in the Gulf Country many months ago. During the three-quarters of an hour or so that I was flying back into Karumba with local producers on a light aircraft, looking at a range of issues including drought, BJD, I saw the feral pigs in the area and it was mind blowing—a sea of feral pigs in that part of the world. That impact, particularly in North Queensland and into the far north, is quite serious. The research continues with not only eradication in dealing with the pest—in terms of eradication, extermination or whatever one might have called it—but even exclusion, fencing and other initiatives that can come together as a coordinated approach to the problem.

**Mr KNUTH:** We have been discussing how rural and regional Queensland is struggling. At the same time, there are a number of initiatives in place. I mention feral pigs. I was at the Peeramoon pig hunt, and I know that a lot of people go out there in their own time and at their own expense. They spend a lot of money on camping equipment, four-wheel drives—you name it. They are creating an economy in itself. They are shooting pigs from helicopters. There is funding to trap pigs in national parks, but we need to look at some way of providing incentives to recreational hunters to hunt the feral pig but provide income back to rural Queensland.

**Dr McVEIGH:** Again, the member raises an interesting question. I guess I could find a link to the SDS in relation to the question, so I am certainly happy to take it on board. I have certainly been aware of approaches to government from those involved in recreational hunting and wanting incentives, as you have termed it in your question. I have been aware of such approaches in other states, particularly New South Wales. I am not cognisant of all of the detail in New South Wales, I must admit, so I will make only brief comment, but I know that those sorts of conversations and people involved in them, as I understand it from media reports, have not gone well. If there is further information the member wanted in relation to that, I am happy for my office to find that information for him.

When a recreational hunter has approached me as Minister for Agriculture and said, 'Please provide me with an incentive because I have expensive firearms, an expensive four-wheel drive, camping equipment and so forth,' personally, quite honestly, I have not seen the link. Any incentive or support or investment or research or initiative that we can develop is, as far as I am concerned, best designed for the landholders themselves.

I will make the point, though, that we as a state government do not regulate hunting on private land. Other states in some cases do. So recreational hunters, or whatever they term themselves as, can certainly engage with local landholders if they wish—I think most of us would be aware that that happens quite regularly—to help reduce pig populations, dog populations in more southerly or eastern parts of the state and even feral deer populations for example, and that is certainly something that happens.

**Ms TRAD:** Good afternoon, Minister. Minister, thank you for your opening remarks in relation to the drought relief assistance package. I did want to go through those figures again, because, as you may be aware, there are different figures from the Budget Measures statement to the SDS and also regarding question on notice No. 479 of just last month. You are confirming now that the 2013-14 expenditure was \$31 million or the allocation was \$31 million?

**Dr McVEIGH:** I am confirming that the allocation was \$31 million, including that within my own department and other departments such as the Department of Natural Resources and Mines, Health, the small business component of Minister Stuckey's department et cetera.

**Ms TRAD:** So was the \$11.2 million that was allocated against your department in last year's budget for some of that in-kind assistance—grazing in national parks, the mental health programs et cetera—the total figure for all of that direct assistance plus in-kind assistance?

**Dr McVEIGH:** That was the first tranche. As you would recall me mentioning before, the follow-up was \$20 million announced to bring up the \$31 million for the year—that \$20 million announced in January this year and the just over \$11 million that you referred to announced in May of last year.

The \$11.2 million includes some elements that I would imagine you are referring to as in-kind, so I will just run through that for you. As I said, they cut across various departments. First of all is the Drought Relief Assistance Scheme. These are cash outlays, if I can put it that way, including fodder freight subsidies, water cartage subsidies administered by my department and the emergency water infrastructure rebate in particular, which has probably been the most popular component of the whole scheme. The total amount there is \$7 million out of the \$11.2 million.



The mental health and psychological health first-aid efforts of Queensland Health involve an outlay of \$165,000. Transport concessions from the Department of Transport and Main Roads—these were along the lines of providing some exemptions, if I can put it that way, for large livestock vehicles to get closer to sale centres such as Roma and other centres throughout the state, particularly Gracemere—in some cases involved simply exemptions and in other cases provided the department paying for escort services, for example, for some of those large vehicles—very large configurations—that under normal conditions are not allowed to get that close. That totals some \$100,000. The leasehold rent rebate from the Department of Natural Resources and Mines—so forgone revenue by not collecting that revenue—was an amount of \$1.2 million. Grazing in national parks and reserves—that was for up to 25,000 head—out of the department of national parks involved in the order of \$2.2 million in free agistment. So that is an in-kind amount that you may refer to, I would imagine. There was also a cash injection in the order of \$500,000 into infrastructure in those areas where fencing was required, for example, in particularly sensitive areas or in some cases revamping watering points in areas that were previously grazing properties so all of the infrastructure was there.

**Ms TRAD:** Thank you for that. Minister, I refer to page 11 of the SDS. You referred to this in your opening remarks and I think the member for Dalrymple also referred to it. It relates to the performance measure 'percentage of applications for business assistance as a result of natural disaster or drought processed within 21 days of lodgement'. The footnote in relation to the processing of these applications states that part of the problem was the allocation of staff in order to process the applications. Can you advise how many staff were reallocated to that area to assist in the assessment of these applications?

**Dr McVEIGH:** I thank the deputy chair for the question. I am happy to address that question. The actual number of staff and the specific allocation, if I can put it that way, involves, quite obviously, staff within QRAA, which is a separate authority outside of my department. I understand that there is a suggestion that QRAA questions could be put later in the session. I am more than happy to take that on notice on the basis that we can get back to you with any updates from the CEO of QRAA, Colin Holden, who is here. I should make the point, though, in exploration of that particular challenge, that that standard was introduced by us to provide some transparency, if you like—to provide some information.

**Ms TRAD:** Sorry, Minister. I am just confirming that 90 per cent target. Is that what you are referring to?

**Dr McVEIGH:** Yes. That 21-day turnaround target that we introduced for processing of applications—again, this applies generally speaking; we can explore it later in the session—goes across both my department and QRAA. A target was established so that we had, for obvious reasons, a target for staff in the organisation to pursue.

I am on record as minister as acknowledging that during the months of the financial year, particularly early this calendar year, we were well below that target. There is no doubt about it whatsoever. That simply was not good enough. I guess the context was unprecedented drought conditions, a new state scheme and latterly a new federal scheme, and applications within some of those months increasing tenfold. Also with some schemes generally speaking there is often—I guess I can understand it given producers who are normally very busy on their properties—a circumstance, I guess, where some will leave it to the last moment.

Again, with various assistance programs that we roll out over the year I have been in the media encouraging people a few months out and certainly a few weeks out from those deadlines. On some occasions—on at least one occasion that I can recall off the top of my head—I have extended the deadline, keeping in mind that people have left it to the last minute. But it is an ongoing challenge, and I am sure it was an ongoing challenge for the former minister and former state governments here in Queensland who would have had responsibility for this as well. So you encourage people to be timely to prevent that balloon right at the end, but when the balloon happens you have no choice but to deal with it.

**CHAIR:** Minister, if you do not mind me interrupting, I think a little bit of that might have been simply the fact that there was virtually no wet season. I think a lot of people were waiting for that process to see whether they could get through it.

**Dr McVEIGH:** Chair, thank you for raising that, because that is a significant part of the challenge from a budget allocation perspective and keeping in mind what we have seen in terms of unprecedented climatic conditions in the last 12 months. When you are moving through the year and you have an assistance program in place for one event and you are recognising there is a potential

for a similar event or opposite event in the coming months, you really do need to ensure that these applications are being made on time, not dragging on, because you are into a totally different space.

To come back to my main point, though, those performance targets were set in place deliberately for management reasons. I have been on record as saying that we did not meet them in some of those months. More recently we have, so that has been very pleasing to see. I am confident that we are on top of the problem.

I share with the committee, for the committee's interest, the target used by the former government, which simply had a target number of claims to be processed but made no reference at all to the timeliness of turnaround. But even with that target, I have been advised that for no financial year of the previous drought was the target for the number of claims ever met under the former government. It is a challenging area, but I am a strong believer that we do need to put in place targets that mean something to producers—in this case timeliness of turnaround—and strive to meet them. We were not at one stage. We have in recent months achieved a 100 per cent strike rate, so we are over our 90 per cent.

**Ms TRAD:** Minister, just to confirm, I am not condemning it; I am just seeking to understand what the factors were.

**Dr McVEIGH:** Yes, and I am happy to provide that background.

**CHAIR:** Thanks for that, Minister. We will now break for lunch.

**Proceedings suspended from 12.30 pm to 1.29 pm**



**CHAIR:** I call the member for Whitsunday.

**Mr COSTIGAN:** Firstly, Minister, on behalf of my colleagues can I commend you on your work in the portfolio, particularly during these heartbreaking times for many of our graziers in the west, as you have alluded to in many of your answers here today. Minister, could you outline how the LNP government and your department is investing in critical research for the sugar industry? Obviously it is very important not only to my region economically and otherwise but also to many regions right up and down the Queensland coast.

**Dr McVEIGH:** Mr Chairman, I seek leave to follow up on a question asked of me in the previous session before I address the member for Whitsunday's question.

**CHAIR:** Certainly.

**Dr McVEIGH:** I mentioned to the deputy chair in the previous session that I would be happy to follow up with some information in terms of processing staff numbers in relation to drought support activities, and that was obviously in response to a specific question. I took that question on notice and I can provide that update now. In doing so, I just wanted to again reiterate the comments made about our performance standards that the deputy chair was asking about and the associated question about the numbers of staff involved in processing.

You may recall, Mr Chair, that I gave a fairly broad answer in the sense that I wanted to provide the background in terms of the unprecedented drought circumstance and therefore the unprecedented demands on staff involved in processing applications—a tenfold increase—very quickly and, of course, with the balloon at the end of such open periods where people leave the application to the last minute. My comments were in relation to departmental staff handling the Drought Relief Assistance Scheme. I made a reference as well to QRAA. It has its own performance standards, but the issue that I am addressing, and was attempting to address then, relates specifically to departmental staff.

I can advise that, in terms of those processing staff numbers, to answer the question, in July 2013 there were fewer than 0.5 full-time equivalents involved in that process. In June 2014 there were 13 full-time equivalents involved in that processing process. So I just wanted to clarify that for the reference of the committee.

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

**Dr McVEIGH:** I come back to the member for Whitsunday's question in relation to critical research for the sugar industry—something that I know the member for Whitsunday is passionate about, as are his neighbouring members representing sugar seats, virtually all up and down the coast. In reference to the industry, obviously the government recognises the importance of the Queensland sugarcane industry as one of our most important agricultural industries supporting, as we know, regional communities, affecting most of the coastline. I was going to say from the member for Maryborough's electorate north, but in fact it is from the Beenleigh district and other districts to the

south all the way through to the north. So we recognise that very much. The gross value of production of this industry is some \$1.14 billion. Therefore, the importance of science and technology and other research directed towards increasing the productivity and the profitability of the sector, keeping in mind all of those regional communities, is absolutely critical.

In 2012 the LNP government made a commitment, or started to implement a commitment, that we had to increase funding for sugarcane research, development and extension to the level of \$16 million over four years. I can break that down. It includes a contribution or an investment of some \$3.95 million in 2013-14 to Sugar Research Australia, the new overarching research body that the industry itself has established in recent years as the principal provider of research development to the industry, keeping in mind that when we talk about the Australian sugar industry it is largely a Queensland industry, with activities on the far north coast of New South Wales as well.

In 2014-15 the funding will continue, with \$4.05 million being invested to fund those RD&E projects with Sugar Research Australia. That 2014-15 funding complements the industry's own \$21 million annual investment and certainly provides certainty, as I said, as the industry continues to implement this new Sugar Research Australia structure. It provides certainty to research infrastructure, institutions and programs, amongst other things. So that is critical. We will assist the sugar industry through this research—that is the objective—through all research we are involved in, to halt in some cases a slight decline in productivity with a view to increasing production to 36 million tonnes per annum.

To break down some of that research allocation for the benefit of the member for Whitsunday and other members of the committee, we are very much focused on developing better parental selection systems to improve sugarcane variety selection and development. I was pleased to see that in my first year as minister, only a few months into the job in 2012, being displayed at the BSES establishment just west of Mackay at the sugar research field day there, or the BSES field day, I should say. It was great to join with the member for Whitsunday in Mackay just in the last few months for the sugar industry field day in Mackay itself, led by Canegrowers Mackay. That sort of varietal development, whether I have seen it there or at meetings that I have attended at Ingham, for example, is absolutely critical to the industry. So my department understands and supports that.

Developing nutrient disease and weed management technologies is another critical component of sugarcane management, and integrating all of those new technologies as they develop within the industry itself and of course integrating what is learnt from other industries, such as broadacre cropping from an agronomy perspective, into the farming system is again all about improving productivity year in year out. That is the reason my department is so focused on those sorts of activities and, as I said, in relation to our Agriculture Strategy, improving that productivity—that being one of the four pathways, as outlined in our Agriculture Strategy, towards doubling agricultural production by 2040.

Of significant concern to the industry just in recent years is this new phenomenon of the Yellow Canopy Syndrome being felt right throughout the industry—it is not just in the Herbert and it is not just in the Burdekin, but it is as far south as some of the southern sugar growing areas of the member's own seat of Whitsunday and further south—that has been identified this year, a syndrome which certainly does impact on the loss of productivity and, of course, profitability in sugarcane. It remains still somewhat of a mystery for the industry, for Sugar Research Australia, for my department. We are putting significant dollars into that specific program along with SRA, Sugar Research Australia. We have been looking at international advice over the last couple of years, but it has been pleasing to be able to secure a continuing commitment to that Yellow Canopy Syndrome research program. When we sit down and look at the infield losses, potential systems from a farming systems perspective—that is why I talked about our agronomy work earlier—that might be able to aid in finding some of the answers to this problem, nutrient issues and anything else we can think of are certainly being pursued as we try to get on top of Yellow Canopy Syndrome in the sugar industry.

Mr Chairman, that is a quick overview of where our dollars are being directed, how they are being directed, particularly with Sugar Research Australia, and the sorts of standard agronomy, continued varietal selection, improvement activities and even dealing with the more contemporary issues of Yellow Canopy Syndrome.

**CHAIR:** I call the member for Maryborough.

**Mrs MADDERN:** Minister, following on from that, could you please outline what the Queensland government is investing in dairy research, development and extension to boost profitability and productivity? I declare an interest here because my sister is a dairy farmer.

**Dr McVEIGH:** I thank the member for Maryborough for her question and I am happy to address that. From my perspective as minister, it is pleasing to see that we have regional members who are either involved in agriculture or very closely associated with agriculture. We all recognise the importance to our economy.

Our dairy program conducts research, development and extension again with a focus on productivity and ultimately profitability. As my federal colleague the federal minister, Barnaby Joyce, so rightly says, and has said in the period that he has been appointed minister, at the end of the day if we are going to be achieving our objectives for agriculture in Australia we have to be ensuring that our ultimate objective is to get profitability back inside the farm gate—in this case, dairy. Improving the sustainability of the industry, again, from a productivity and therefore profitability perspective, is what our efforts are all about in supporting this \$230 million industry.

To again break down some of our dairy research investment, in 2013-14 the government invested almost \$1.37 million, for example, in research to help sustain the industry through the current seasonal challenges. So it is not just about long-term improvements but responding to current seasonal challenges at the same time. The quality and quantity of fresh milk that is required to meet at least 85 per cent of Queensland's market needs is what this RD&E program is designed to target.

Dairy Australia, I am pleased to say, a national body, are key collaborative funders with the Queensland government and with the likes of the University of Queensland at Gatton in our partnership towards this research. With those partnerships in mind, the Queensland government has invested an additional \$476,000 in 2013-14 over and above what we were doing with these partnerships previously.

Queensland dairy is not a Victorian situation. It is not a southern New South Wales situation. It has to be specific to Queensland in terms of our research. So the tropical feed base and the feed conversion therefore in terms of productivity of our dairy cattle and their production is very much the focus of our dairy systems up here. I mentioned a moment ago Dairy Australia and its partnership with us in so many of these issues from a northern dairy industry perspective—by 'northern' I mean northern New South Wales and Queensland. I think it is particularly important for us to stop and recognise that Dairy Research Australia—again, an organisation that supports activities right around the country, particularly in Victoria—recognises that our dairy research centre at the University of Queensland at Gatton is a leading research facility, if not the leading research dairy facility in the country. I know you, Mr Chairman, as the member for Lockyer, are very proud of that facility.

I can only compliment very positively and congratulate the academics at the University of Queensland at Gatton, students and researchers—those who are funded by Dairy Australia and others outside of both the university's own budget and my department's budget—on the collaborative activities that are conducted there at the university in a farming situation. Its research, its education and, of course, its extension provides that support for industry extension at the same time. That is a model that is something I am very keen to replicate with in fact all of our research facilities as we plan new facilities in the years to come across all industries. That is I think something that is going to mean a lot for industry as we continue to evolve our resources.

Additional ongoing funding from Dairy Australia—keeping in mind the support they have expressed for us—is not just about science, animal science, nutrition and agronomy from a feed perspective. It is also about business management. It is pleasing to see that Dairy Australia has, with us, focused on enhancing the business management initiatives that support the Queensland Dairy Accounting Scheme. This is a scheme that is very highly valued by the industry, an industry that I think most of us would know full well is under significant stress, not just because of climatic conditions affecting all agricultural industries but because of the market pressures of the supermarket chains here being a dominant market supply mechanism domestically. But at the same time we look forward to the opportunities particularly expressed from the likes of China for both fresh milk and infant powder formula supplies out of Australia going forward as well. So that Dairy Accounting Scheme is important for both purposes—on-farm and modelling your businesses going forward.

More broadly, just to finalise the overview of research in the dairy industry, there is engagement of my department in those co-funded initiatives that straddle various industries. So I talk, for example, about the water use efficiency program that means as much to dairy as it does to horticulture, as it does to sugar, as it does to irrigated agricultural across the state.

The reduction in electricity costs and looking at how we can be most efficient in relation to managing what have been increasing electricity costs for a number of years, despite the initiatives of

our government which will take hold under Minister McArdle's efforts in the coming years, will be important. We do need to assist farmers in dealing with what they are dealing with now.

In that regard, it would be remiss of me not to mention that the repeal legislation, as I am sure many in this room would be already aware, for the carbon tax has passed the upper house in Canberra. If anything is going to have an impact on reducing those electricity prices, in this case for rural producers, it is going to be that repeal. It is good to see common sense finally prevail.

The collaborative efforts, as I have just said, whether it is water use efficiency, whether it is productivity in general, with so many agricultural industries right across-the-board, mean as much to dairy, as a member of the Queensland Farmers Federation, as they do to horticulture, grain, cotton, sugar—you name it. Those broader market and production research activities on behalf of our government apply equally to the dairy industry as well.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. I think it highlights that one of our great strengths is the diversity of the state and the difficulty you have servicing that diversity. I call the member for Barron River.

**Mr TROUT:** What important research is being undertaken by your department to improve pest and disease management in our livestock industry?

**Dr McVEIGH:** I thank the member for his question. Pest and disease management in our livestock industries is something I know the member holds near and dear given his own background in agriculture, as do so many member in Queensland who recognise the importance of our livestock industries.

Our research through the department continues. As I outlined in the previous session, much of that is done in collaboration with not only industry bodies but with our universities in Queensland. I spent some time in the previous session talking about our research partnerships with the University of Queensland, for example, in the south to James Cook University in the north. The research that we participate in, we invest in, we support is very much tied up with many of those universities.

What we are looking at there of course is livestock pests and diseases. Again, we are looking at increasing production. In terms of our livestock industries, it is as much about market access, in many cases, as it is about productivity. Of course, we are talking as well about food safety. All of this is quite important given that our livestock industry represents \$4.8 billion per annum to our economy.

Let me touch on some of those partnerships, please, Mr Chairman. With the University of Queensland, as I outlined earlier, through the Queensland Alliance for Agriculture and Food Innovation, QAAFI, we focus on cattle ticks. Cattle ticks are estimated to cost \$175 million each year to our industry. Currently there is no vaccine for cattle tick control itself and tick resistance to various pesticides is increasing. So there is a significant need for ongoing research in that particular area.

Projects coordinated by the beef cooperative research centre saw \$3.29 million invested into the development of a new vaccine for cattle tick control. Following the closure of the beef CRC in July 2012—it came to the end of its national agreement—a number of potential vaccines required further testing or deserved further testing. That is exactly why my department continues to support those activities.

A new project led by QAAFI at the University of Queensland, with our collaboration and co-funded by Meat and Livestock Australia, is being undertaken to evaluate the efficacy of vaccine candidates for subsequent commercialisation. The first of five cattle trials is currently underway at the Queensland animal science precinct in Gatton.

This research focus to the extent of ensuring commercialisation or ensuring we are looking towards commercialisation is an objective that the department is very focused on. It is one that I have been personally focused on for my entire professional career prior to politics. I refer to the commercialisation of research ensuring there is an uptake, in this case, in the beef industry.

Just to touch on another example for the member's benefit in response to his question, buffalo fly is a pest, as he would be aware, of the northern cattle industry. It has been estimated to cost some \$78 million per year. Again, my department and QAAFI have collaborated to develop new, improved laboratory methods for rearing buffalo flies without the use of live cattle. That will fast-track cost-effective research into new control methods. Having inspected a lot of that work myself—rearing buffalo flies—I have increased admiration for researchers involved in such work. Their dedication is just amazing.

I would also like to refer to bovine respiratory disease in beef cattle feedlots. It is an important issue throughout the state, particularly in my part of the world—the Darling Downs. It is estimated to

cost some \$40 million per year. The feedlot sector contributes \$2.7 billion to our national economy annually and half of that sector is located in Queensland. So, again, it is worthy of significant research.

The collaboration between my department and QAAFI, with the support of Meat and Livestock Australia, has a focus in this regard on a \$3.5 million national bovine respiratory disease study to enable feedlot operators to better manage the problem or related losses using vaccines and diagnostic tools developed by my department's scientists. A second area is to provide commercialisation data for a DAFF developed vaccine against the two major pathogens involved in bovine respiratory disease.

I should mention that the Queensland government is investing in a \$1 million project containing two QAAFI led vaccine development research partnerships to develop applications of platform technologies in polymer adjuvant technologies. One is between my department and Zoetis. That is to develop platform applications of nanotechnologies. The second is between my department, Virbac and the polymer cooperative research centre. It is very complicated work, particularly when we start talking about the application of nanotechnologies. But that is exactly what we want to invest in in terms of pursuing these significant challenges for the industry.

The importance of that particular research I wanted to touch on. I have mentioned a fair bit about vaccines that have been developed, are being used or are in the process of development. This project I have just referred to aims specifically at vaccine efficacy—the duration of the protection, the shelf life and the potential to overcome the need for even cold storage for vaccines. Preliminary application of these technologies I have referred to have been underway. They, all going well, will mean something for cattle tick, bovine viral diarrhoea virus, bovine ephemeral fever and other areas that we are attempting to combat.

I could go on. I will touch very quickly on screw fly worm, if I can. It is one of the main exotic pest threats to the livestock industry. Direct producer losses in that case are in the order of \$400 million per year. Again, that is a significant impact on our economy. Again we have the DAFF-QAAFI collaboration involved in looking at optimal chemical treatment strategies for the potential containment and eradication of screw worm should an incursion of that pest occur.

Respiratory diseases in pigs are equally of concern, as I have mentioned in the bovine situation. I am pleased to see the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research is collaborating again with my department, with the University of Queensland and the Philippine council for agriculture, forestry and natural resources. Again, it is evidence of a collaborative approach not only within Queensland and within Australia but, where appropriate, internationally to, in this case, expand research into respiratory diseases and in some cases the non-respiratory diseases of pigs. In answer to the question, livestock pests and diseases are an absolute priority in terms of research and development in my department.

**Mrs MADDERN:** Following on from that research and development theme that we have been going through, Minister, could you outline the investment that DAFF will make in research and development in 2014-15 for aquaculture and cover some of the work being undertaken at the Bribie Island research centre?

**Dr McVEIGH:** I thank the member for her question. I think I touched briefly in my opening comments on certainly what we are doing in reviewing fisheries management in the state. I made reference to the Queensland Competition Authority review of regulation and red tape in terms of aquaculture. I stated that as minister I am looking forward to the outcome of that review and the Queensland Competition Authority's report in September of this year. I think that will certainly look at the aquaculture regulation from an industry perspective. I will be very keen to look at any implications from a product, a farming system or a market development perspective in relation to some of our research and development. That is very important. We are fortunate to have the Bribie Island research centre.

In 2014-15 we will be investing \$2.57 million in aquaculture research and development. Without going into the detail of our aquaculture strategy nor the fisheries management review we have underway at present, I just wanted to explain that that is consistent with our objectives of doubling production.

It is important that the committee and the rest of us understand that the aquaculture sector is a unique sector. It is not agriculture and it is not traditional agricultural production, although it uses many similar inputs, similar methodologies and similar management systems—and, of course, it is not wild caught fisheries. We do in this case learn a fair bit from my department. We apply a fair bit of

knowledge and technology from both perspectives, whether it is from the fisheries area or from the agricultural research area.

I would imagine that the committee would either know or easily understand or appreciate that the aquaculture sector is growing faster on a global scale than just about any other agricultural sector. I share with the committee that for the first time, in 2013, global aquaculture production exceeded that of global beef production. Hence the significance of aquacultural development globally and I would suggest the significance for Queensland going forward.

Aquaculture in our state has traditionally been based on barramundi and prawns, but economic opportunities for other species—and again I talked about the breadth of our research and development, not only production but even some market related—both in Australia and overseas leading to further significant diversification in the industry. Our scientists in our department are certainly part of that charge and in many cases are leading the charge, I am pleased to say.

Aquaculture, of course, in Queensland, has a low environmental footprint, but the industry is nonetheless subjected to a stringent zero net discharge requirement for new farms. I might share with the committee, as a matter of interest, that that is a hurdle that is not applied to any other primary industry or coastal development, such is the stringent requirements under which aquaculture operates and operates successfully. To come back to Bribie Island and our centre there, world-leading innovative research at the centre, conducted in partnership with the Australian government under the national Landcare program interestingly enough, is using sand worms and sand filter beds to filter and clean the water used in prawn aquaculture ponds. That stringent environmental requirement means that we are putting significant research into that particular area, because, if nothing else, that would be a significant impediment to further expansion.

Interestingly enough, when harvested the sand worms also provide a high-value feed for prawn hatcheries, as feed for their brood stock. In the season just past, fine tuning research has demonstrated the excellent quality and growth rate of prawns grown in association with this particular filter system. Again, in agriculture right across the board we are looking at integrated solutions like this and this is a classic example. One of the next season's objective is to work with the prawn industry to accelerate the adoption and the uptake of this particular technology for the benefits of all. Again, I reiterate my comments about the department and myself personally being focused on the commercialisation of our research. If we are going to be researching something and if they are going to be investing taxpayers' dollars, we always have to look at the outcome that is planned from day 1.

Major advances have also been made in finfish aquaculture. In collaboration with an industry partner, a project to bring the farming of cobia or black kingfish to Queensland is nearing the end of its first phase. This is a real local success story. Growth and survival of cobia in farm ponds has been very good and the market response in restaurants and fish markets to this fish has been very positive. Again, there is a commercial focus to the research and a commercial test for the research that we are undertaking. We will continue with this focus on the transition from a research-for-development project to a profitable commercial enterprise. As I can discuss at another time if the committee is interested, that is exactly the approach that we have applied to aquaculture research and aquaculture industry development right throughout the state, not just at the Bribie Island centre. Bribie Island continues to be an important facility for us. That is where we are conducting our leading aquaculture research and it is a centre that enjoys the collaboration of industry on a very regular basis.

**Ms D'ATH:** Minister, I wish to follow on from the questions from the deputy chair prior to the break, in relation to the Drought Relief Assistance Scheme. You have provided the committee with the numbers of staff that were transferred over to deal with the processing of the applications. If I understood your answer correctly, those are staff that were moved from within the department; is that correct? You talked about 13 full-time equivalents as of June 2014. Were they from elsewhere within the department?

**Dr McVEIGH:** They were agency staff, so they have come from other activities.

**Ms D'ATH:** Can you identify where they have been transferred from?

**Dr McVEIGH:** We are talking about 13 individual people. I can certainly take that question on notice and get their histories for you, if that is what you are looking for.

**Ms D'ATH:** Minister, you said there was about 0.4—

**Dr McVEIGH:** Sorry, Mr Chair, can I just clarify: did you want me to take that question on notice and provide that information?

**Ms D'ATH:** Yes, please.

**Dr McVEIGH:** I shall do.

**Ms D'ATH:** In taking that question on notice, you stated that 0.4, I think, was the figure of full-time equivalents in July 2013.

**Dr McVEIGH:** That is correct.

**Ms D'ATH:** So what were the numbers for each month over that period? You talk about starting with a 0.5 and ending with 13. What was that progression?

**Dr McVEIGH:** Should the member want that information, we can certainly take that on notice and give you that information.

**Ms D'ATH:** Thank you, Minister.

**Dr McVEIGH:** All going well, later in this session.

**CHAIR:** If not, you have until Tuesday.

**Dr McVEIGH:** Certainly, but I am just saying that we will probably get back to you with that today.

**Ms D'ATH:** Thank you, Minister. I know in your answer to a question on notice, you provided an analysis of the number of claims received and processed and those that were processed within 21 and 30 days. However, as you state in your own materials, there was a large percentage not processed within those time frames. Are you able to provide the average length of time taken to assess an application broken down by month?

**Dr McVEIGH:** I am sure we can. Again, we can take that on notice. As you may be aware, in response to the original question on notice we provided a breakdown per month against the various criteria for the entire period, right through to the latest month. What would have been provided there was, I think, to almost June

**Ms D'ATH:** June 10.

**Dr McVEIGH:** So it is just into June.

**CHAIR:** Member for Redcliffe, is that the information you are actually after?

**Ms D'ATH:** Chair, that talks about how many were processed within 21 or 30 days. The question to the minister is: what was the average time frame per month to process applications.

**Dr McVEIGH:** I am happy to take that on notice.

**Ms D'ATH:** Thank you, Minister. Minister, I note you state how many claims were received each month. Can you advise how many applications were rejected over the 2013-14 period?

**Dr McVEIGH:** Again, I can take all of that on notice, no problems at all.

**Ms D'ATH:** You do not have any of those figures on hand, as far as how many were rejected?

**Dr McVEIGH:** Mr Chair, the member is quite rightly taking the opportunity to ask a range of questions, but is digging down into detail that has been either partly addressed in previous answers to questions on notice or is certainly available if you wish me to chew up the committee's time in rifling around and getting information now. I can do that or, as I have suggested, I can take the question on notice and provide a fulsome response.

**CHAIR:** It can be very complex.

**Dr McVEIGH:** That is fine, but I am happy to take them on notice.

**CHAIR:** I think we are happy to have them on notice.

**Ms D'ATH:** We are more interested in thorough answers so, Minister, I would rather give you the time and take it as a question on notice, thank you.

**Dr McVEIGH:** Not a problem.

**Ms D'ATH:** Minister, regarding the funding allocation for the drought assistance package in 2014-15, if I can take you to the SDS at page 2, it states that there is \$18.7 million in 2014-15 for the Drought Relief Assistance Scheme. In the Budget Measures statement, page 15, it says \$15.75 million. Can you please identify which is the correct figure and why there is a difference between the two budget papers?

**Dr McVEIGH:** Again, I am happy to take that question on notice because there is a complex range of drought relief assistance provided over the period of this drought: the initial allocation of just over \$11 million in May of last year; the second allocation in January of this year of some \$20 million.



What does concern me more generally is that people, without stepping through all of the detail, can get confused between our Drought Relief Assistance Scheme and what is provided more broadly by both the former federal government through Minister Joe Ludwig and Minister Joel Fitzgibbon and the current federal government through Minister Barnaby Joyce. I can take all of that on notice. Therefore, can I just clarify the last part of the question, because it is important to get the detail of a question on notice quite right. You are talking about the comparison of figures and you referred to 18—

**Ms D'ATH:** I will take you through them again, Minister, to assist.

**Dr McVEIGH:** Just those points so that we can take the proper question on notice.

**Ms D'ATH:** Page 2 of the SDS states that DAFF allocated \$20 million in 2013-14 and \$18.7 million in 2014-15 for the Drought Relief Assistance Scheme. The other document I referred to is the Budget Measures 2014-15, at page 15, under Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, where it refers to \$15.75 million in 2014-15 for the drought assistance package.

**Dr McVEIGH:** Thank you.

**Mr COX:** Mr Chairman, can I just check that that is not government question No. 3, which we asked previously? I could be wrong.

**Dr McVEIGH:** It could well be, but we will compare those queries and make sure that the member is getting the detail she needs.

**Ms D'ATH:** Thank you, Minister. In reference to your media statement of 6 July, which urged farmers to prepare for another delayed wet season, is the government anticipating that the current allocation for drought relief in 2014-15 may be exceeded?

**Dr McVEIGH:** I thank the member for the question. In the previous session in some overview comments in relation to drought asked by the member for Dalrymple—and, of course, I acknowledge the member for Redcliffe's colleague was in that session, not herself—I talked about the \$31 million allocation for drought relief assistance from the government in general, not just the Drought Relief Assistance Scheme itself but other supplementary support provided by other departments, being a record spend. The Queensland government has not provided that level of funding for drought relief previously. The member may be aware that the Treasurer, in his budget announcement this year, again advised that the government would be allocating in the order of a very similar amount of money, \$31 million for this year. Of course, like producers themselves, we are budgeting for situations that we cannot quite predict at present, in terms of how they will evolve.

The best information that I have, keeping in mind the nature of the failed wet season last year in terms of what areas were declared and what areas were not, and keeping in mind of course the areas that had their drought declarations revoked more recently and there are only a couple of shires right up in the north of the Gulf Country, a few have come off the list. The eastern side of the Charters Towers local government region has come onto the list. At this stage, based on all of that advice and based on what the Bureau of Meteorology is providing in relation to predictions of a higher chance of El Nino conditions as we progress through this year and my discussions, as I said in an earlier session, with the likes of Roger Stone from the University of Southern Queensland just this past weekend, I am confident at this stage that what we have in place is a fair allocation. When I compare our last event and expectations at this stage of what the wet season or failed wet season might be like at the end of this year, I am confident that we have taken a proper approach to that from a budgetary perspective. I will always reapproach cabinet should a different approach be required as the season evolves. Again I reiterate to the committee that on numerous occasions the Premier himself has supported me in that regard, including in Longreach in January of this year when we announced the second tranche of our existing scheme, the \$20 million, when he said if further assistance is required the government will certainly look at that very strongly from a cabinet and Treasury perspective.

**Ms D'ATH:** Thank you. Minister, do you believe that the significant TAFE cuts that are occurring in the education minister's portfolio are having any effect or are likely to have any effect on the administration of the Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges?

**CHAIR:** That would be fairly hypothetical, I imagine, that question.

**Ms D'ATH:** They are real cuts that apply from 1 July 2014. Will any of those cuts—

**CHAIR:** Are they cuts or modifications of the project?

**Ms D'ATH:** They are removal of subsidies and a reduction in subsidies, leading to very significant increases in fees, to be precise.

**Dr McVEIGH:** Mr Chair, you and the member for Redcliffe appear to be debating something here, so I will await your guidance.

**CHAIR:** It is actually very hypothetical and it is about another minister's portfolio that we are starting to get into the realms of. Minister, I will give you the option. If you wish to answer it, you can.

**Dr McVEIGH:** Thank you, Mr Chair. In relation to the member's question, for which I thank her, I trust the committee would appreciate, understand and in fact support my advice that I am not in a position to answer questions in relation to another portfolio, in this case the education minister's portfolio, but I can certainly talk as long as the committee wishes about the agricultural colleges. The Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges, which is a corporation established following our legislative review last year, has been in operation since 1 July—so this month—and it takes over from what was known in recent years as the Australian Agricultural College Corporation, the AACC, which was established by the former Labor government.

When I was appointed minister just over two years ago, we obviously came into the position at the end of June 2012 where we started to receive the financials on various organisations, and in my case that included the old AACC. The financials were in a severe state of disrepair for the Australian Agricultural College Corporation, including the Longreach Pastoral College, the Emerald Agricultural College and other agricultural training facilities and activities right around the state—from Mareeba in the north through to Ayr, Mackay, Bundaberg, Gatton and elsewhere. We found ourselves in the position of dealing with a recorded financial loss at the Australian Agricultural College Corporation in 2011-12 of some \$7.17 million—a loss that was quite severe and of significant concern to the government. I discussed that with government colleagues and we agreed fairly quickly as a cabinet that we needed to find out what was happening with the old AACC. For that reason, we appointed Ernst and Young to come in and review the corporation to see what was going on.

To cut a long story short, there were significant financial performance shortcomings and significant financial recordkeeping shortcomings, there were workplace health and safety concerns in terms of student welfare in some cases and there were environmental concerns in relation to waste management, particularly as I recall at the Emerald Agricultural College. I make the observation that in the corporate world under Corporations Law, if a company director is found negligent in terms of financial performance and management, workplace health and safety or environmental management, they can be very severe offences. So when I saw that report from Ernst and Young in relation to the 2011-12 results that we inherited from the former government, I was understandably aghast. As a result of that, we have had Ernst and Young and other advisors move in and address the immediate problems.

In the case of the Longreach Pastoral College and the Emerald Agricultural College, we have returned to local college boards. The Emerald board is chaired by Mike McCosker and the Longreach Pastoral College board is chaired by Donald Brown. They are local pastoralists and farmers and they have the input of local community and business leaders who understand agriculture, who understand the demand for agricultural education and who understand what farmers, graziers and agricultural businesses want in terms of graduates in the future. They also understand how to run farms, and Emerald and Longreach were not even productive from a financial perspective. I do not understand why you would want to educate young people on farms that were not even working let alone use education programs that were not related to industry requirements. So we revamped that very significantly with those local college boards in place.

We have put in place measures that will mean that the Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges, which is a corporation, will perform far more productively in terms of relating to industry needs. While those industry training activities in other parts of the state away from the residential establishments of Emerald and Longreach continue to perform quite well and to industry expectations, we want to return those two residential colleges to their former glory.

Mr Chair, you would recall the old Queensland Agricultural College, which is the foundation of the University of Queensland Gatton campus as we know it nowadays. You and other members would know the sad litany under the former government of the closure of the Dalby Agricultural College, the Burdekin Agricultural College and similarly the one at Mareeba. We are doing what we can with those two colleges representing both irrigated agriculture and dry land agriculture from an Emerald perspective, right through to extensive pastoral operations at Longreach.

I would like to take the opportunity, if I may, Mr Chair, to announce that, in line with our legislation that we took through parliament just recently about revamping and establishing Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges as a corporation, we have now put in place a governing board that will sit across the whole organisation, given that it is a single registered training organisation. I have mentioned the residential college boards at Emerald and Longreach, and I am very pleased to share with the committee today—and for the first time publicly in fact—the members of the Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges governing board. That governing board includes representatives of Emerald and Longreach—Donald Brown, Mike McCosker, Richard Pietsch and Christine Rolfe. It includes a government representative, Elton Miller, from my department. I am particularly pleased to announce that it is being chaired by Hugh Rose, a former headmaster of Toowoomba Grammar School and a former rugby international for Australia, someone who has worked extensively in regional education and continues to do so as required in his post-schooling retirement. I am also pleased to announce the deputy chair is Mr Mike Stalley, a graduate of Longreach Pastoral College himself. He is from a well-known Western Queensland family and is someone who has spent most of his professional career in finance. He is at present the chief finance officer of the Toowoomba Regional Council. So those are two gentlemen who both happen to reside in Toowoomba and who have significant experience right across Queensland agriculture from an education perspective and from a finance perspective. That focus in our overarching board in our colleges to get back to what industry requires is something that I am happy to discuss at great length.

In terms of the VET training references that the member was perhaps hinting at in terms of Minister Langbroek's department, we are certainly aware that everything is being done in a manner that will be consistent with education right across the board—whether that is in relation to VET training support activities—and at the same time it will be something that has transferability, if you like, into universities and out of high schools. By that I mean that we have seen over time that students at the colleges at Emerald and Longreach—previously at Dalby, Mareeba and Burdekin—in some cases simply wanted to gain their experience and their educational qualifications and immediately apply that in a hands-on agricultural role. Others wished to step on to other levels of education. That has certainly been the case for some in recent years and we will maintain that transferability, that relationship with other levels and sectors of education which I think is appropriate within my responsibilities overseeing the agricultural training colleges.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. I call the member for Dalrymple.

**Mr KNUTH:** Minister, the Brigalow Research Station was sold off but rented back. Can the minister advise the cost of the rent and the rationale behind selling it?

**Dr McVEIGH:** Certainly. The member has asked me a specific question about the cost of the rent and I will find that for him. The research station and the leasing back that he referred to is simply a continuation of the rationalisation of research facilities across the state being conducted by my department, and in some cases it commenced under the former government. I am particularly proud, for example, of the dairy research facility that I referred to earlier at the University of Queensland at Gatton—just to use one example. That research facility, as some in this hearing may recall, took over, if you like, the role of dairy research that was previously conducted at a specific departmental owned research property at Mutdapilly, which is in the chairman's own electorate as well. The former government had made a decision to look at the continued evolution of research facilities and in that case co-locate it at the University of Queensland Gatton. And, Mr Chairman, guess what. I agree with that. That was the right move towards rationalisation under the former government. In answer to a previous question, I can see now that that is being endorsed very strongly by the likes of Dairy Australia, which sees that as a pre-eminent research facility. It not only does on-farm research but education activities and extension activities at the same time. So that is quite important.

Equally, I refer to Spyglass research station, which I believe is in your own electorate. The budget papers show that we are continuing to invest significant funds into that research station in terms of capital development because that has been identified as a research property from a beef perspective. That is typical of extensive northern grazing properties, as you would be aware. I note it is a property that was again acquired by the former government, and at one time in recent decades it was operated by the late Peter McKechnie—a former member of this House and minister—and his late wife Jeanette, both of whom have passed in recent years. We are continuing those sorts of activities in terms of rationalising the research facilities right across the state.

You asked me a specific question about rent of the Brigalow block. I am afraid I am going to have to take that on notice. My recollection is that we are not renting it, but I will stand corrected on

that once I receive some more information and I am happy to come back to the member in reference to that particular question that he asked.

**Mr KNUTH:** Minister, my question is in response to the question on notice about the problematic lantana. I was very encouraged in regard to weed research and that there are forms of possible rusts that could be available to help eliminate lantana. I want to have that assurance in regard to the Charters Towers weed research station. What is its future? Are those scientists who are researching this information coming from Charters Towers?

**Dr McVEIGH:** Again, though you, Mr Chair, I thank the member for his question and recognise and endorse any commentary about the importance of research being conducted in Charters Towers—or anywhere else in the state—in relation to weed threats throughout the state. I of course endorse any comment about the importance of the office of my department which is located in Charters Towers—and I have been fortunate enough to be able to visit that on regular occasions—because it is a very important centre. I think there was a fair bit of detail provided in response to the question on notice in relation to lantana. Lantana is a scourge in many locations right across the state, including the block that I live on, and regular attempts are made to clean it up. It is a long-term problem.

I refer as well to our scientists who provide assistance, leadership and answers over time in this regard. They are not just in Charters Towers—as important as that is, and they are—but they are here in the Ecosciences Precinct in Brisbane, for example. They deal with weeds, woody weeds, prickly acacia in the north-west and into the central west of the state. There is a significant amount of work happening. I just wanted to take the opportunity to refer to what we refer to as our war on western weeds project as a way of emphasising to the member that this whole space is very important to us and we are deliberately putting in resources and a fair bit of effort.

In saying that, I can assure you there is no plan to scale back activities in this regard at Charters Towers or elsewhere. Let me underpin that by talking about the war on western weeds approach. A particular focus here, as I mentioned a minute ago, is prickly acacia, Bellyache bush and similar scourges in the west. This particular project is a five-year \$1.88 million initiative. It is a more vigorous biocontrol research program which looks at potential new agents to complement traditional control technologies and new herbicide control technologies. The member may be aware of previous approaches and support that was provided in terms of diesel costs with certain herbicides right through to research that is in the very early stages of development in terms of aerial surveillance and drones—very early stages of development and everything in between including biocontrol initiatives that, as I mentioned before, are being conducted here at the Ecosciences Precinct at Boggo Road in Brisbane.

One thing that local government in particular tells me—and it is an interesting theme, whether we are talking about weed threats or from a biosecurity perspective animal pests as well as weed pests—is the need for collaboration and coordination at a local level, at a landholder level. Whether it is wild dogs in Longreach, for argument's sake, whether it is rabbits which the member for Southern Downs and health minister deals with in terms of the rabbit fence and control technologies or the West Moreton-Darling Downs rabbit fence, or whether it is prickly acacia in the north-west, unless we have landholders who are of a similar mind, supported in many cases by local NRM bodies, you are not getting a comprehensive approach to the problem.

It is easy for us as politicians to make that quite right observation, whether we are local government, state government or even federal government. When you are under economic pressure, drought pressure and other pressures on the land, it is just another battle that in some cases people from time to time cannot handle. This war on western weeds project is very much looking to bring together that sort of collaboration, coordination and communication between landholders, local government and NRM bodies. The member may recall a prickly acacia workshop that we held in the north-west. Through you, Mr Chair, I think the member may have been there on that day?

**Mr KNUTH:** I am not sure.

**Dr McVEIGH:** Some of your colleagues were, so you were well represented. Coming out of that workshop at Richmond, again, prickly acacia has been a focus of our research. The short-term solutions—the herbicide type control solutions—we can pursue. Medium term biocontrol work is being done looking at agents that we might be able to bring in from elsewhere to help combat the problem and there are the longer term solutions that I mentioned earlier. We have been focusing on making sure all of that has been pulled together in a sensible plan.

I was therefore pleased earlier this year to appoint a War on Western Weeds Project Advisory Group and to have the likes of Ninian Stewart-Moore as a grazier and deputy mayor representing the Flinders Shire Council, Scott Harrington representing AgForce, a grazier as well; Jenni Gray representing the Remote Area Planning and Development Board and the Deputy Mayor of the Barcardine Regional Council; John Bellingham representing the southern Gulf catchments; and Peter Spence, who is a field supervisor representing Desert Channels Queensland—in other words a mix of grazing areas, a mix of local government interests, a mix of NRM bodies. That group I think will continue to guide our activities very well. We are coordinated. We are fair dinkum. Charters Towers and work conducted there by staff based at Charters Towers will remain very important, whether they are in Charters Towers or Toowoomba or anywhere else that conducts weed research throughout the state. It remains an absolute priority.

**Mr KNUTH:** Minister, earlier you spoke about the wide-ranging review in regard to fisheries, and you are quite excited about this as it is going to be for the better. As you are aware, there has been a lot of passion from businesses—

**CHAIR:** Shane, we are dealing with fisheries this afternoon.

**Mr KNUTH:** We are doing fisheries this afternoon?

**CHAIR:** Yes.

**Dr McVEIGH:** I am happy to address it.

**Mr KNUTH:** You want to address this now or will I bring it up in the fisheries?

**Dr McVEIGH:** I am in the chair's hands.

**CHAIR:** We will wait for fisheries.

**Dr McVEIGH:** Mr Chair, while there is a short break in questions, I have an update regarding the suggestion that we were leasing back the Brigalow property. I have had confirmation from my director of research and infrastructure that we are not, but if there is a query or any misunderstanding or misinformation that the member has got they are only too happy to explore that during this hearing, during the next session or at any time to answer any queries he may have in that regard.

**Ms D'ATH:** Minister, in your answer to question on notice 9 you detailed the sale of approximately \$37.2 million in agriscience facilities and state that the proceeds from those sales will be reinvested. However, you also list just \$12.5 million in upgrades to the remaining facilities. Can you explain what has happened to the remaining \$25 million?

**Dr McVEIGH:** Thank you for the question. I am certainly happy to provide that detail, but I make the observation that there are ongoing discussions about research facilities required for various industry sectors going forward. In other words, potential new research facilities as well as the upgrades that you have referred to in some of the figures there. I am not at liberty to speak about all of the detail of those potential new research facilities. I am certainly in quite detailed discussions with at least one external research and development corporation about a potential location and property, but in short I can confirm that funds yielded from the sale—it goes back to my response to an earlier question about ongoing rationalisation of our research facilities—of any facilities are held in account for investment in new research facilities. They are sitting there ready to go. The committee will be the first to know through you, Mr Chair, if you like about contracts on new research facilities that we are looking at right throughout the state.

**Ms D'ATH:** Minister, are you able to clarify the \$25 million is the full amount budgeted for those new facilities?

**Dr McVEIGH:** It is for investment back into research facilities so for new and required upgrades in existing.

**Ms D'ATH:** I understand \$12.5 million is for the upgrades of existing facilities. So is the \$25 million in addition to the \$12½ million—

**Dr McVEIGH:** Oh I see. So in terms of over and above the allocation?

**Ms D'ATH:** Yes. Is \$25 million allocated solely for new research facilities?

**Dr McVEIGH:** I will take that on notice, Mr Chair. I know the total funds are allocated for investment back in research facilities. I will get you the specific split between reinvestment in existing and investment in new research facilities.

**Ms D'ATH:** Thank you.

**Mr COX:** Minister, I applaud your passion and your knowledge of the portfolio. You are the man for the job. Could I change the subject and focus on my background, which is the beef industry? Could you please outline what planning measures the government has to support the beef industry in Queensland other than what you have already highlighted?

**Dr McVEIGH:** I thank the member for the question. There is a significant range of initiatives related to our efforts to support the beef industry in Queensland going forward. We are committed to supporting the industry because, as I said earlier, it is the largest agricultural industry in the state of Queensland and we are the largest beef state in Australia so the priority is absolute. As I said earlier, it is about productivity and profitability on farm, but it is about developing and expanding the market opportunities for Queensland beef both domestically and internationally.

Members would be generally aware that global demand for beef is forecast to grow strongly over the coming decade. Anyone needs only to pick up a paper or look at media to understand that. The growing demand, particularly in middle-class Asia, is most significant. In specific reference to the member's question, I recently released the draft beef industry action plan. That sets the ambitious target of producing two million tonnes of beef by 2040, supporting the overall strategy of doubling the production of agriculture in general by the year 2040.

The Beef Industry Action Plan had its genesis with my industry beef round table. When I became minister it became very apparent to me very quickly that government under my department needed to ensure we were engaging with industry properly right across-the-board. I was disappointed to see that in my view that was not the case over recent decades. So we established a beef industry round table. It has significant beef producers on that round table. It has processors on that round table. Shock, horror thinking a minister wanted to bring producers and processors together, but that is exactly what we have done because we are focused on the entire supply chain.

I take the moment in referring to that beef industry round table to acknowledge the efforts of two important people in the beef industry who assisted me greatly as I became minister, and I refer to the late Zander McDonald and the late Graham Acton, whom the beef industry in Queensland and Queensland at large sadly misses. Those gentlemen and other leaders have sat with me around the Queensland beef industry round table. That is where the beef industry action plan had its genesis. That plan aims to continue investment in research to increase that farm profitability that I keep talking about in the beef sector. That means improving nutrition, of course. It means ensuring better animal genetics, and that is underpinned by promoting best practice management in pasture management, in stock management and, as the committee or committee members may be aware, in environmental management.

The plan also aims to support and attract new investment opportunities and promote better market access. The Queensland government's agricultural investment forum, held here in Brisbane quite some months ago, attracted very significant interest from overseas in terms of those who wanted to either source our products—and I refer specifically here to beef—or who wanted to adopt our technology, or source our technology and, in some cases, those who wanted to invest to improve our supply chains for burgeoning demand overseas. The better market access extends from the beef industry perspective right across-the-board from certainly chilled beef into China, for example, where we have dealt with AQSIQ—a Chinese authority that a layman might equate generally speaking to AQIS here in Australia—explaining to them issues or perceptions around blue tongue coming in relation to beef out of northern Australia and how that perception can be managed, if you like, right through to the live cattle trade that has, thankfully, got itself re-established in Queensland, the Northern Territory and WA, much to the delight of particularly northern beef producers as we have seen the debacles in recent years for beef producers right throughout the country, in fact, given the influx of cattle that were destined for live export markets on to the export market and crashing prices throughout Queensland and into the south. So that investment and promoting better market access and opportunities is what I am referring to there.

A third key area of the beef plan is creating a business and regulatory environment that reduces costs—again, cuts red tape and encourages a more resilient industry that can bounce back, that can withstand difficult conditions longer than might otherwise be the case if they are burdened with bureaucracy. That area of the beef plan not only applies to efforts within my own department, quite obviously, but also touches on significant collaboration across departments in support of Queensland's Agriculture Strategy in general, in this case, in relation to the beef industry.

Mr Chairman, I could speak in great detail, if the committee wished, in relation to collaborative activities with Minister Scott Emerson, the Minister for Transport. I refer there to the Agricultural

Transport Blueprint. I will refer to the parliamentary inquiry led by Howard Hobbs' committee in terms of getting agricultural freight back on rail. I could refer to some of the activities that Minister Emerson and I have already been able to pursue in terms of Aurizon contracts savings there that mean something for not only the beef industry but also grain and cotton transport, for example, in the south—getting it on rail rather than on road. That collaboration is significant from a beef perspective. So is, as I touched on before, trade promotion and investment attraction with the Treasurer and Minister for Trade. And so is, of course, the case most predominantly for beef producers in relation to vegetation management and land tenure reform. I continue to praise the efforts of Minister Andrew Cripps, the Minister for Natural Resources, and of course, the Deputy Premier, with his planning portfolio in that regard.

At the same time as having that beef plan in place, as I said, with its genesis in the Beef Industry Roundtable, we continue to deal with a grazing sector that is severely impacted by drought. I touched on drought issues significantly in answer to other questions across-the-board. I might be accused of going on and on too much if I try to do that again, so I will not touch on drought. Certainly, the committee would be aware of our efforts that mean something to grazing and other agricultural industries, particularly the beef industry from a grazing perspective.

The beef processing sector, given the conditions that we have seen in recent years—and again I stress that at my Beef Industry Roundtable I have producers and processors there working together in terms of overall industry solutions. Do they have their differences from time to time? Of course they do. That is the basis of commercial negotiations within the industry. But we have seen the beef processing sector reach record highs for throughput in recent times and, of course, the export of meat has reached peak levels as well. So that has been an outcome for that sector from drought, the live cattle export ban and the influx of extra cattle on to domestic markets.

Can I share with the committee that from 2011-12 to 2012-13 China significantly increased imports of Queensland beef—from \$37 million to \$257 million. That unbelievable expansion for our traditional large beef export markets has provided, obviously, some competition and significant opportunities for our producers going forward. Again, I am talking here about boxed beef. We know that live cattle export opportunities continue to increase as well. The United States has increased some 7.1 per cent to \$554 million during that period. South Korea increased 11 per cent to \$452 million. So China is a very promising market—a market that has grown almost exponentially just in recent years—but we retain very important markets in the United States, South Korea et cetera.

As I have said, part of our effort with the beef industry in response to the member's question is focused on best management practice and programs. I refer in particular to the grazing BMP. The new research station at Spyglass north of Charters Towers that I referred to in response to an earlier question enables us to continue our own on-property research as well as supporting that of producers. Of course, we are always looking at those export market opportunities that we have touched on.

I guess that is an appropriate way to answer the question that has been put to me. It is research, it is the beef plan, but it is not only nutrition and pasture research and grazing best management practice for particularly environmental but as well economic reasons; it is right through to market development and investment attraction that is the focus of our ongoing support for the beef industry. We will continue that. It is a very important industry to the state.

**CHAIR:** It is amazing, considering the drought, how the numbers have stayed up in the meatworks and the export numbers. Some of that is feedlot processing and all of that sort of thing. The beef industry has moved to a new dimension, really.

**Ms TRAD:** Hello again, Minister. Just in relation to pages 3 and 11 of the SDS—and I am particularly looking at dot point 3 down the page on page 3—it talks about the \$15 million over five years investment in improving practices or the delivery of best management practice programs and extension and technical services to improve uptake of management practices by producers. Is this exclusively for reef catchment areas?

**Dr McVEIGH:** It is at present very much focused on reef catchment areas from both a cane best management practice program—sorry, our current efforts are very much focused on cane best management practice and the grazing best management practice programs. Are they reef catchment areas? Yes, of course they are.

**Ms TRAD:** Yes.

**Dr McVEIGH:** But it continues efforts in grain best management practice, which has, obviously, a focus on the Murray-Darling Basin system and similarly, in that case, continues efforts that we finetune in cotton BMP programs. So whether it is the Murray-Darling Basin, whether it is reef catchments, BMP across agriculture in general continues to roll out under my department.

**Ms TRAD:** Terrific, but my question is: is this money—the \$15 million—being spent specifically on activities within the reef catchment area?

**Dr McVEIGH:** Given current budgets and current focuses, it probably is. I will get a specific answer to your question. There is an element within that breakdown that would continue our support for grain, cotton BMP and other activities. Predominantly, I would suggest that, yes, that is in those two programs—cane and grazing—which are reef catchment related programs, yes.

**Ms TRAD:** If you are doing it, get back to me to confirm. I would really appreciate that, Minister.

**Dr McVEIGH:** But I would suggest to you that that is most likely.

**Ms TRAD:** That is the main focus.

**Dr McVEIGH:** Yes.

**Ms TRAD:** Minister, then going to page 11 of the SDS and the first service standard, which is about the percentage of graziers and cane growers who have increased knowledge and skills through participation in best management practice programs, is that looking at a 20 per cent increase or is that the percentage state-wide who have an increased—

**Dr McVEIGH:** We will check the definition for you, but it obviously refers to graziers and cane growers. We are talking about grazing and cane BMPs. So we will check that definition for you.

**Ms TRAD:** I just wanted to know if the 20 per cent is about an improvement, an increase in the number, or is it about the total number of graziers and—

**Dr McVEIGH:** Uptake, yes.

**Ms TRAD:** Terrific. My follow-on question to that is, what does that 20 per cent represent, depending on what? If it is 20 per cent of all—

**Dr McVEIGH:** I am more than happy to come back to that question once we make sure that we have the definition of what you are looking for.

**Ms TRAD:** The actual definition correct. Minister, if there is a funding increase for the extension program of \$5 million within DAFF and a further \$10 million in the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection, why is the 2014-15 target exactly the same as 2013-14? I am just trying to pinpoint where that additional money that the government announced in the budget is.

**Dr McVEIGH:** The targets relate to, as you would see there, over a period of time—over a number of years. If I look at the cane BMP program launched with cooperation of the cane industry, both Canegrowers and ACFA—the Australian Cane Farmers Association—I believe that was in early December last year that we had the formal launch of the program at—

**Mr COSTIGAN:** At Farleigh.

**Dr McVEIGH:** At the Farleigh property just north of Mackay. The member for Whitsunday was there.

**Mr COSTIGAN:** At Farleigh in the shadows of the mill, Minister.

**Dr McVEIGH:** Michael Deguara's property. The member for Whitsunday was there and the Deputy Opposition Leader was there on that day. Others were present. We were in that case talking about a program that was formally launched and attended on that day by the minister, Andrew Powell, the Minister for the Environment and me jointly as the Minister for Agriculture. So I am looking at the rollout. We have to keep our time lines in mind. A percentage increase applying to a number of years at the same rate is simply a planned rollout of the scheme looking for an uptake over that period. The funding applies to what is happening in those specific years. In the last year, quite obviously, given what I have just said, roughly six months worth of the year going forward would be a full financial year.

**Ms TRAD:** So there could be a better indication in the next financial year? Is that what you are saying?

**Dr McVEIGH:** No, I am saying that there is an allocation of funds over the years.

**Ms TRAD:** Yes, across the forward estimates.



**Dr McVEIGH:** There is an expectation of uptake over the years. The allocation of funds relate to activity within the year. Last year, as I have just said, was six months of a financial year. Obviously, this year will be a full financial year. So six months versus 12 months. That is the sort of flexibility in terms of allocation. It has obviously been built in.

**Ms TRAD:** So do you have any idea of the uptake at this stage?

**Dr McVEIGH:** I can confirm some figures. Yes, we do have some figures and I will get those for you again. I will take that question on notice. Michael Deguara was the first to be fully accredited under the scheme. That came through just a few months ago. So the sort of information that I can respond to the deputy chair with will relate to all sorts of things—for example, the numbers involved in workshops at present, the numbers that have followed Michael in terms of his full accreditation, their progress, how we expect them to fall through in terms of their accreditation but, more particularly, the expected incoming uptake of the scheme, those who are continuing join.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. That brings this session to a close. We will have you all back at 3.30 pm. Thank you very much.

#### **Proceedings suspended from 3.00 pm to 3.28 pm**



**CHAIR:** Welcome back, Minister. Would you like to make a brief statement about Biosecurity Queensland and Fisheries and Forestry?

**Dr McVEIGH:** I certainly can, Mr Chair, thank you. With your indulgence, are you happy for me to just follow up on a couple of the questions I took on notice during the last session?

**CHAIR:** If you wish.

**Dr McVEIGH:** I had some questions in the previous session—four that I recall—requiring reference to specific figures for a fulsome answer. These are in no set order.

There was a question from the deputy chair in relation to best-practice management programs in those reef areas. The query was about the 20 per cent figure. I can confirm that that in essence refers to both content and number. Let me explain. It is a percentage of the total number of participating graziers who have measured an increase in knowledge and skill. So that is them providing the advice through processes contained within the program itself. In relation to why the percentage number therefore remains the same, it is a required improvement in those that are reporting an improvement in their own knowledge and skill. So, for argument's sake, if there were 100 graziers in the first year we are looking for 20. If there are 200 in the second year we are looking for 40 in terms of numbers. That is how the percentage is applied across the time frames and that is why it is the same. I am just conscious that the deputy chair may have some other questions that stem from that. Do you want to address that now?

**Ms TRAD:** I will seek guidance from the chair on that. We are in a different section.

**CHAIR:** It is up to you. Do you have the answers there?

**Dr McVEIGH:** I have answered that specific question, but—

**Ms TRAD:** Minister, thank you for that. I am happy with that answer.

**Dr McVEIGH:** I will move on to the next question I have on my list. The member for Redcliffe asked a question about the research property investment. Members of the committee may recall that she was asking questions about funds that have been allocated for research property improvements and funds presumably made available for new research properties, which I confirmed is the case. I will just provide a quick overview of that in response to the question asked by the member for Redcliffe.

I will not go back through all of the detail, but I explained that there is the ongoing renewal of research facilities, whether it is continuing to invest in existing ones—I used a couple of examples—or disposing of old properties and replacing them with new, more industry relevant properties. Most of the disposals in 2013-14 were to offset new facilities established, interestingly enough, in previous years. I will give some examples.

I referred to the Mutdapilly dairy research centre in your electorate, Mr Chair. Revenue from the sale there will support the new dairy research facilities at the University of Queensland Gatton. Not only did all of these funds stay within our research facilities, which was fundamentally the question of the member for Redcliffe; in that case they stayed in the same electorate.

Toorak, Brigalow and Swans Lagoon revenue will support the purchase of and ongoing development of Spyglass north of Charters Towers. I talked about that in response to other questions

as well. Revenue from Southedge is being reinvested in further development at the Walkamin research station for tropical horticulture tree crops, which the member for Dalrymple may be aware of. I am not sure whether that is in his electorate or in the electorate of Cook.

Here in Brisbane, the Sherwood facilities were replaced at the Ecosciences Precinct at Boggo Road, and the Eagle Farm facilities sale reimbursed the cost of the Health and Food Sciences Precinct at Coopers Plains. So in some cases you are securing new properties before the old ones have been disposed of in order to maintain the research activities.

Funds from Emerald and Biloela are retained for future investment in grains research infrastructure. I am quite focused on that area but am not in a position to make any further announcements at this stage. And Rosebank in the Longreach area has been made available to the Queensland Agricultural Training Colleges corporation in exchange for a QATC property, Manningham, which will be sold to streamline their operations and meet a shortfall described earlier in their budget, as is reflected in the papers.

The upshot of the response to the question is: yes, all funds being generated through the sale of research properties are directed to reinvestment—either continued development of existing properties or purchase of new ones.

The third question was also from the member for Redcliffe and made specific reference to drought budget activities. The member referred to page 2 of the SDS and an amount of \$18.7 million. She contrasted that with the \$15.75 million and asked about the difference between the two. Quite simply, the \$15.75 million is a new Treasury allocation for DRAS grants from within our existing departmental budget and savings found. In an ongoing program, the \$3 million is yielded as well to make up that \$18.7 million.

I think there was one further question, from the member for Dalrymple in relation to pig research. He asked for some specific figures and activities—an interest he quite rightly has in Charters Towers related activities. I can advise the committee that in 2013-14 the department invested in excess of \$3.5 million in management of a variety of pest animals. That certainly includes pigs, dogs, wild deer and rabbits. In 2014-15 we will continue that level of support. We are focusing our activities in relation to feral pigs through the provision of 1080, training of authorised officers, technical management advice, which is important when you are sharing responsibility with industry, and some research. A lot of research has come to the end of its phase and we move into this implementation phase, but we continue some research particularly in terms of modelling feral pig populations—so not just the individual pig but their populations—and how to monitor them and best determine control methods going forward. We continue a lot of work in that regard with AgForce—I touched on this previously, I am sorry—local governments, regional groups and their individual NRM bodies.

I should just mention that from the drought funding we are expecting over \$400,000. The drought funding I am referring to there is the recent tranche of pest animal drought funding that Minister Barnaby Joyce announced—\$10 million for the country, with \$5.6 million over two years allocated to Queensland. My chief biosecurity officer, Dr Jim Thompson, who is sitting behind me, has led a process with other departmental officers of determining the priorities with local government and with NRM bodies. I myself chaired a meeting in Longreach just a few weeks ago on exactly that. So there is \$400,000 out of that specifically for feral pigs.

When I answered the question previously I stressed that it was a broad question and my answer must make reference, therefore, to activities elsewhere across government. I talked about what is happening in national parks. There is \$7 million for combating feral pigs there, and that is specifically to protect turtle rookeries, as you may recall, announced by Minister Dickson. There is \$8 million from the Department of Natural Resources and Mines for regionally agreed pest and weed management plans. That includes in many cases feral pigs. I am not in a position to break that one down for you, sorry. I would have to get that one from Minister Cripps if that was of interest to the member for Dalrymple. Similarly, Minister Andrew Powell, through his Department of Environment and Heritage Protection has in the order of \$750,000 allocated through the Everyone's Environment program for about 17 projects, some of which include feral pig work. Again, I am not in a position to break that down for you, but we or he could certainly provide that information should you require.

**CHAIR:** Supplementary to that, is the \$400,000 the feds are applying to save some of the waterholes and that sort of thing? You might want to defer to your biosecurity officer. So because it is drought, are they making some of the waterholes toxic or something—or do they disturb the waterholes?

**Dr McVEIGH:** I will ask Dr Jim Thompson to answer that question for you, Mr Chair. It is a pest animal program. As you would appreciate, our workshops and our collaboration with local government, NRM bodies and individual producers have involved everything from exclusion fencing at one end of the spectrum through to baiting, shooting and trapping at the other end of the spectrum.

**Dr Thompson:** Drought provides a tremendous opportunity to target pest animals when they are at their lowest numbers or going down—particularly pigs, which congregate around waterholes at that point. So the focus of this work was really not to hand out money to individuals but to hand out money to collectives of groups of people who are working on feral pigs to augment their current projects. A lot of the money is going towards wild dogs because, again, it provides a great opportunity on that. But certainly for pigs, which do need to be near water, it provides a great opportunity for aerial shooting programs or targeted baiting programs. That is where that money will go.

**CHAIR:** Minister, have you finished providing answers now?

**Dr McVEIGH:** Unless there were any other queries from any of those comments.

**CHAIR:** Would you like to make your statement now?

**Dr McVEIGH:** Yes. Again, I thank the committee as we move into examination of biosecurity, fisheries and forestry issues. I will just touch on a few key points as highlights here from a biosecurity perspective. As I have mentioned previously, there has been significant effort to reduce regulatory impacts on business whilst maintaining the protection that our industries need.

For us, that has meant very much a focus on regional biosecurity positions right across the state. As I stated earlier, the parliament has now passed the new Biosecurity Act, achieving a reduction in legislation of about 150 pages but most particularly focussing on what is termed a shared responsibility model. It is not just my biosecurity officers acting as policemen and industry doing what they are told if and when those policemen turn up; it is a shared responsibility, and industry has really stepped up as this legislation has been developed. Through the process we have seen six acts and parts of several others being replaced with the new legislation. As a result of that, whilst the regulation is being developed the department is certainly in the process of aligning our business models, our staff training, our procedures, our systems et cetera to be ready before the act commences, as I said earlier, all going well in later 2015.

From a biosecurity perspective, a significant number of challenges have been put to Queensland agricultural industries during the last 12 months and certainly Biosecurity Queensland, led by Dr Jim Thompson, has stepped up to the mark.

From a bovine Johne's disease perspective, our state is continuing to play a leading role in implementing new lab testing technologies based on collaboration with interstate laboratory partners and has been able to influence national protocols to assist properties out of quarantine as soon as possible. Again, an extensive beef property in central or particularly northern Queensland is a different proposition altogether to an intensive dairy property in the south-west of Victoria, for example. So bovine Johne's disease, from a Queensland perspective, has meant that we have had to focus on those protocols and influence those national protocols.

At present we have 23 properties subject to movement restrictions by way of a quarantine notice. That is down from the 171 trace-forward properties at the start of the most significant outbreak of bovine Johne's disease in Australia's history here in Central Queensland in 2012. So we continue to work with industry, side by side, to apply that national protocol in order to maintain what is called Queensland's protected zone status. That is particularly tough for those who remain under quarantine, but it is very important for your key export markets and, most importantly, it is in line with industry requirements, be that the Cattle Council of Australia, AgForce, members of the Queensland Farmers Federation such as the Queensland Dairy Organisation and others.

We have made significant improvements, or continue to make improvements certainly, to the South-East Queensland Fire Ant Eradication Program. I am very pleased, following independent scientific review and a financial audit last year overseen by our interstate colleagues, that I am in a position to advise that the program is certainly showing success. We have been, on the basis of the accumulated knowledge, able to respond very quickly and very efficiently to a brand new incursion in Central Queensland thought to come from a ship coming from South America in recent times. We are on top of that and it is very good to be able to share that progress with the local member, in this case Liz Cunningham, and, of course, the federal minister, Barnaby Joyce, who has been on site as well.

Nevertheless, and this is a theme across biosecurity across the country, we continue to face significant planning challenges within the national cost-sharing agreement arrangement. That means

where states agree to share costs in a national response, whether it is fire ants, more recently in Queensland red witchweed, for example, or *Striga asiatica*, a parasitic plant identified in the Mackay region that we talked about earlier. It is important that we keep those interstate colleagues and our Commonwealth partners committed to the agreements that they have signed up to. I, alongside my federal colleague Barnaby Joyce, continue to focus on that at the moment.

Can I just touch on fisheries very quickly. We have mentioned our review, the Fisheries Management Review, that I announced on 6 March. That continues for the rest of this calendar year. In the meantime, as I explained at the time, Mr Chair, we will continue to implement government commitments, the net fisheries buyback, for example, certain initiatives in recreational fishing, and we will continue to reserve the right to manage issues in the fisheries that we are responsible for as they arise. It would seem that Queensland's responsibility under the joint zone management arrangements in the Torres Strait had sadly been neglected by the former state government so it has been right and proper that we have engaged with that area again, together with local and Commonwealth authorities in that part of the world. Obviously I am referring to local government, I am referring to the federal government, my federal colleague, Senator Colbeck, and Papua New Guinea representatives given that it is a joint management zone. The Fisheries Management Review will recommend principles for new modernised simplified systems of fisheries management and that will inform, I can assure the committee, a major revamp of outdated and cumbersome fisheries legislation and a management regime that has evolved in Queensland in recent decades.

Finally, from a forestry perspective, the implementation of the Queensland Forest and Timber Industry Plan was something that we achieved in our first year in office—that first calendar year: to have that plan developed and presented then by industry before the end of 2012 with the government response that followed it. It is very much about delivering a series of practical actions to address key industry growth challenges, research priorities and, of course, a focus on environmental stewardship throughout the state as well. Thank you, Mr Chair. I would love to explore those issues in more detail.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. Further to safe food production in Queensland, can the minister outline how the LNP government is minimising costs for intensive livestock industries while ensuring the safety of our food?

**Dr McVEIGH:** Thank you, Mr Chairman, an important question, and I welcome my Safe Food Queensland colleagues who, again without looking around, I assume are sitting behind me. The Safe Food Queensland organisation plays a critical role in ensuring, as the name suggests, food safety in various industries across food industries across Queensland. We have spent a lot of time in consultation with industry over the last couple of years to ensure that Safe Food Queensland has a culture of engagement and support for our industries.

We recently reviewed compliance with meat safety standards under the meat scheme, for example, using alternative methods to just auditing. Those alternative methods focused on key food safety indicators such as skills and knowledge of operators and product integrity. We are seeing very positive results across the board in that particular example. The application of alternative compliance arrangements and harmonising where possible, Mr Chairman—and this is a very important point—harmonising where possible our requirements through Safe Food Queensland with requirements through bodies such as federal authorities in terms of market access ensures significant benefits for small business. If you have got a state authority in a plant looking at an issue, you have also got a federal authority looking at an issue in a particular food plant, I just thought it was clever that they should talk to each other and whether or not they could share resources and share some of the data required to meet their specific objectives. That makes it easier for small business, in particular. That is why Safe Food has implemented, at the request of industry and my request, an approach with a particular business whereby audit methodology has been tailored now to suit their commercial market access requirements. They can present an independent assessment of their systems to a number of commercial customers. We believe that that approach is likely to be adopted more widely over the next 12 months in industry.

Replacing monthly audits, as I put it, with a single systems based audit that satisfies both regulators and customers who are focused, as we all are, on food safety greatly assists the process of meeting those standard requirements but also reducing the impact on small business. Excessive prescriptive regulation has created costs that have, in some cases, as members of this committee would be aware, for small food industry businesses, been either insurmountable or led to the end of their business activities. Involving all businesses in the supply chain, all interested parties in the supply chain, in this case Safe Food Queensland and indirectly through the standards and

requirements that they express even consumers, means that we are looking at the whole system and making sure that the whole system works.

Most activities in the poultry meat industry have already been incorporated within the Meat Food Safety Scheme with the exception of some on-farm activities. We are working through that so that those sorts of operations can be accredited and monitored under agreement as well. The submission of electronic data by poultry processors again will reflect performance at key steps in the processing chain which can be measured against the requirements for customers—consumers eventually—in a process that is far different to the time-consuming and often too specific auditing approach. Public health and safety remain Safe Food Queensland's primary responsibility and requiring that businesses display decent and appropriate compliance with food safety laws continues to be paramount.

We have recently commissioned an independent economic analysis of the implementation of the standard in Queensland for the poultry industry. The benefits over a 10-year period in terms of particular pathogens, for example, and the costs of monitoring that in one case present a present value benefit of \$70.7 million. For an industry like the poultry meat industry that is very significant. The net benefit of that through modelling to the community at large over the 10-year period is expected to be just over \$40 million. It is about food safety, it is about compliance and it is about minimising the regulatory impact on small business and producing the sorts of benefits that consumers and the economy at large deserve to see.

**Mr TROUT:** Can the minister please outline what major biosecurity responses the LNP government is currently dealing with?

**Dr McVEIGH:** Thank you, Mr Chairman, and I thank the member for Barron River through you. The responses are numerous and certainly have tested the resolve of Biosecurity Queensland. Can I say, Mr Chairman, that not because he is a friend and colleague but because he is a very professional operator, I have to acknowledge the efforts of Dr Jim Thompson and his team in Biosecurity Queensland who have stepped up, stepped up and continue to step up as these challenges befall us here in Queensland. We have, during 2013-14, demonstrated capacity through Biosecurity Queensland to meet all service requirements by effectively responding to three new significant animal incidents, 41 new significant plant biosecurity incidents and a number of invasive plant and animal responses, including: three confirmed hendra virus incidents in horses on the Gold Coast, Bundaberg and Beenleigh; detection, as I have said earlier, of red witchweed infestation on the five properties near Mackay; exotic fruit fly detections in the Torres Strait; a confirmed post quarantine detection of coffee borer at two commercial nurseries near Cairns; detection and destruction of Asian green muscles at Hay Point; the detection and destruction of three American corn snakes, one red-eared slider turtle and, in my own electorate of Toowoomba South, a Chinese stripe-necked turtle; and as I touched on earlier, a new incursion of red imported fire ants at Yarwun near Gladstone. Some of those events that I have referred to there the members of this committee would be very familiar with: hendra virus; I have talked previously at length about BJD; red witchweed; and fire ants. But some of these other incursions are equally of interest although far smaller and I just want to share with the committee that in responding to the identification, for example, of American corn snake, Chinese striped-necked turtle and some of those more exotic pests that I have referred to, we make the point publicly and I make the point on behalf of the government in person, that in many cases it is likely to be the illegal pet trade that has brought some of those species in. Together with the Attorney-General, as interesting as it might sound and even humorous for some when they hear a politician talking about American corn snakes, the red-eared slider turtle, et cetera, et cetera, we emphasise that there are severe penalties for participating in the illegal pet trade, in this case creating significant risks for our native species coming into Queensland and similarly for those taking some of our species out of Queensland. It is a high priority for us to drive those messages home. The highly invasive Mexican bean tree was also found in Wet Tropics rainforest areas using, interestingly enough, an unmanned aerial vehicle demonstrating that we are also employing the latest technology in terms of detection platforms to assist future surveillance operations.

The Biosecurity Queensland staff, as I have mentioned earlier, are certainly continuing the charge in relation to bovine Johne's disease; are involved in the National Four Tropical Weeds Eradication Program; and we are the lead agency in 44 class 1 weed eradication programs such as hudson pear, karoo thorn and various cacti in Queensland. The containment of alligator weed in South-East Queensland using biological control agents is an example of another significant activity for us. I have mentioned exotic fruit fly in the Far North—in fact, in the Torres Strait—and continuing

surveillance of many of those other incursions that I have talked about and are involved in either the activities related to eradication, depending on national partnership agreements, management of other pests or pest incursions that we have inherited from the past.

The total cost of responding to biosecurity incidents in 2013-14 was in excess of \$3.39 million, and that is in addition to what we call passive surveillance for pests and diseases such as Asian honey bee and myrtle rust, which have been referred to by others on this committee on previous occasions. We will require ongoing surveillance of these threats in 2015 and beyond and that is what we will continue to ensure. The capacity of our response mechanisms through Biosecurity Queensland as the government's leading agency is not only based on our resourcing—our fronts across the state, if you like, those regional officers that I have continued to put in place—but also a flexible method of ramping up to threats as they occur. Contract labour hire in particular regional locations has been used very successfully when we need to get significant forces on the ground for an emergency that we have had to handle.

The department and Biosecurity Queensland have obviously learned a lot over the years from other incursions: citrus canker, equine influenza and the analysis and reviews of those sorts of responses over the years. Even those that I have called upon in the two and a bit years that I have been minister continue to inform our approach going forward.

**Mr COX:** Thank very much, Minister. You have gone over a lot of the pests and diseases that the state deals with. I may have missed this, but can I get some comment from you on how the government is making sure we are better prepared for foot-and-mouth disease should it become a problem in the state?

**Dr McVEIGH:** Through you, Mr Chair, I thank the member for Thuringowa for the question because it is an important one about our preparedness, flexibility and capability as Biosecurity Queensland. No, I did not mention it before because it is not a threat that we are actively dealing with at the moment. Thankfully we do not have any foot-and-mouth disease incursion to deal with. We would obviously hope that we never will in Queensland or in fact in Australia.

Early in my tenure as minister for agriculture here in Queensland, as I mentioned earlier, I, along with other ministers, participated in national—and international, as far as New Zealand is concerned—discussions. I attended a Standing Council on Primary Industries meeting in Auckland with the then federal minister Joe Ludwig and all the other relevant agriculture ministers. Our colleagues in New Zealand explained to us very clearly an exercise that they had gone through in terms of how they might handle a foot-and-mouth incursion should it enter New Zealand in the future—a trial run, if you like. I was very impressed with what they explained they had done and the emergency procedures that they had put in place. From a New Zealand perspective, that involved a mock control room that went to the highest levels of their national government.

I returned from that trip and, in strategic planning with my departmental colleagues—Director-General, Deputy Director-General, chief biosecurity officer in particular—I set the objectives for the department that we needed in Queensland to be the most foot-and-mouth disease prepared state in Australia for a couple of reasons: it sets an objective that we must all strive towards if we continue to compare ourselves with our interstate and New Zealand colleagues; secondly, I believe here in Queensland we have that responsibility, given our exposure to the north and our coastline. Let's face it, if foot-and-mouth gets into Queensland through the north somehow, that will mean that the Northern Territory, New South Wales, Victoria, et cetera, et cetera, will have it. And, as is often said, it is not far across the ditch to New Zealand. So we have that significant responsibility. An outbreak of the disease would have catastrophic effects on our agricultural industry. Economic modelling has indicated that it could result in revenue losses of up to \$52 billion for a multi-state incident. Of course the social impacts, as those of us from regional communities are fully aware, would also be devastating given the impact on farming and grazing businesses, families, local business and communities. Many would be pushed to breaking point. In Australia we have been free of FMD since the 1800s and we need to keep it that way. An FMD incursion would be just another incursion to deal with like the American corn snake, for example. This would be the 'big daddy' of them all, if you like.

Last year as part of the agriculture strategy we put in place a commitment to lead the way in terms of FMD preparedness in Queensland from an Australian perspective; therefore, last year Biosecurity Queensland established a three-year program to deliver on that commitment—the Queensland Foot-and-Mouth Disease Preparedness Program—so significant progress has been made since it has been established. An independent report benchmarking our current capacity and

capability has been completed. Not surprisingly, that report has found that there are a range of areas where improvement is required. That is exactly why I put this program in place: training, industry engagement, whole-of-government approaches to preparedness, trade, community recovery even, are areas that we need to look at quite comprehensively as we ensure this preparedness that I have referred to. Biosecurity Queensland has also hosted five activities as part of Exercise Odysseus. Now we are playing a leading role here, but these are a series of national activities which also enhance the preparedness for any potential national livestock standstill. So obviously if there is an FMD incursion identified, that is what would happen: there would be a national livestock industry standstill. That exercise has been run, and the sixth and final exercise is being held in fact this week. We have full involvement of key industry groups in that process, as you would imagine. By mid-2016 the project will undertake significant work to ensure that preparedness, training and new surveillance strategy that I have referred to. Our laboratory capability for any potential outbreak is being reviewed and, if necessary, any requirements specifically from an FMD perspective would be addressed there. The efficient management of vaccines to be rolled out in any potential response management, and of course the establishment of local, state and national emergency control centres, are being planned so that we would be ready to roll in such an instance.

This sounds like a lot of work, and it is. It sounds like a hell of a commitment in terms of Biosecurity Queensland and our budget, and it is. I believe we should do that, and the beauty of this sort of preparation and stepping up and making sure that we have all known angles covered is that it continues to develop our general biosecurity capability and capacity in any case so it is of benefit to managing the incursion of any pest or weed threat, not just the most concerning one of all: FMD.

**Mr KNUTH:** Minister, you have previously mentioned the wide-ranging review and even revamp of fisheries. I have brought to your attention the issue of stocking red claw, which was previously available to Tablelanders but now has been withdrawn for five years, and the benefit that has to the community. 1,500 petitioners have signed the petition. Will the minister look into this as part of his revamp and review?

**Dr McVEIGH:** Through you, Mr Chair, I thank the member for the question and I note his passion in this regard, because it is a question that he has put to me on a few occasions. In fact, from memory I think we might have even touched on it in the estimates hearing last year. I could be corrected on that. But I certainly recognise the member's passion in this regard. I will respond firstly in relation to the Fisheries Management Review so that I get the background in context for the member and then talk specifically about red claw and the Tinaroo Dam that he referred to.

The Fisheries Management Review that I announced in recent months here in parliament is based on the state government's belief that fisheries management in general, legislation and regulation, not only through the Fisheries Act that I am responsible for, but through other pieces of legislation and regulation across government, is cumbersome. It has developed in recent decades along the lines of seeing a problem and, if you like, applying a bandaid, then applying a bandaid where there is another problem, and all of a sudden we have regulation and legislation that I believe—and certainly the government believes—is overbearing and in many cases irrelevant to fishing interests in the state. I touched on this earlier. Those fishing interests refer to commercial and recreational fishermen, and that in many ways would include those interested in red claw in Tinaroo Dam as you have referred to, member for Dalrymple. It refers to those quite rightly interested in the environmental aspects of fisheries, and of course our fisheries population throughout the state and those who are interested in Indigenous fisheries interests and rights. So the review involves the consideration of all of those issues.

As I mentioned, not only within my own fisheries legislation, the Fisheries Act, I believe there are in the order of 900 pages of legislation. We have in the order of only 1,500 commercial operators in the state who are doing it tough enough already and some of whom are participating in the LNP's commitment for a \$9 million east coast net fishery buyback program. That program is about halfway through its implementation, if you like. To put this into context, when I was appointed minister I was given the responsibility of implementing that particular policy and other associated fisheries management policies and commitments such as rec fishing surveys, et cetera, so that we could get a better understanding of what the recreational fishing take is in the state. Through logbooks and other mechanisms we have a good idea of what commercial fishers take. What do recreational fishers take? At the end of the day if you are interested in the sustainability of the stock of any species, it is important to know what that effort is. We had put in place initially the advisory committee to me on the east coast net fishery buyback program. That advisory committee—I think quite rightly—took the liberty of providing me with advice not only on the buyback, but other relevant issues right across

fisheries management in the state. For example, they said to me that the state government needed to deal with once and for all a crab fisheries review that had been left on the shelf or had not been progressed in the years previous. That was a review called on by crab fishers throughout the state who wanted to know: what their businesses were going to be going forward, their rights, their access and what their take was going to be. So we did just that, and unfortunately, that had been left in abeyance for far too many years. In looking at that review and considering any consultation that would be required going forward, including a regulatory impact statement as per standard processes, as you would appreciate, I took the issue to cabinet as I am required to do. After that it was made clear through announcements made in the parliament that the government supported a broader Fisheries Management Review; in other words, there was not much clarity in what industry had put forward in terms of a crab fishery review. There were all sorts of weird and wonderful ideas. There were some common themes, I guess, in relation to the suggestion of looking at regional management approaches—in other words, not one size fits all right across the state, but in regional parts of the state to look at specific management arrangements for specific stocks—and there was a common theme that there might be many people keen on a buyback. Other than that, there were not many common themes in the feedback on the crab review. With that in mind, the government decided that we needed to embrace an overall Fisheries Management Review.

I know that is a lot of detail, but it is important to understand that this is a catch-all. As I said in an earlier session in relation to a question about aquaculture research and the Queensland Competition Authority's review of aquaculture regulation, the final report of which I am expecting in September, it will take on board broader discussions that are raised from time to time by various sectors of the community, for example, fishing zones, green zones, marine parks and all those sorts of issues that people raise from time to time—and they have every right to raise them if they want to. It will take on board inland fisheries review activities that we have been involved in.

In the context of all of that, I want to emphasise for the member the overall theme of fisheries management in the state. Of course, we are looking at the framework through this review and we will present back to the people of Queensland late this calendar year or early next calendar year what that framework will be looking like with a view to it providing a basis for a rewrite of the Fisheries Act in the next term if I am successful in being able to pursue that. It will mean that people will know what the framework for that will be by at the end of this year or early next year. The overall principle that we operate on is a science based approach to fisheries management, whether it is stock assessment or the ability to see certain species in certain areas.

What we need to remember with all of that background is that, when we come back to red claw as a specific inland species favoured particularly from a recreational fishing perspective, in some Australian states and, in fact, in some overseas countries, red claw is recognised—and formally recognised—as a noxious species. We need to keep that in mind. In Queensland the natural distribution of red claw crayfish is largely restricted to rivers flowing into the Gulf of Carpentaria and some rivers draining into the northern Cape York Peninsula. The facts of that distribution are well and truly documented in records held by the Queensland Museum. There are peer reviewed scientific publications, published field guides et cetera.

**CHAIR:** So what you are saying is that it is not actually native to the Tinaroo catchment?

**Dr McVEIGH:** Precisely. It is in other parts of the state, in the north, but it is not native in Tinaroo. There is no doubt that it is a very important species for aquaculture potentially. It a popular target species for recreational anglers, as we all know. That popularity has, unfortunately, led to red claw naively being translocated out of its original natural range. In recent years we have seen red claw introduced in some rivers in the Lake Eyre Basin and reported to be in a dam in the Murray-Darling Basin. The unfortunate reality is that, outside of its natural range, it is widely regarded as a pest species. They are aggressive and they are successful at outcompeting other species for limited resources—even crayfish species—and causing significant environmental damage. As is the case when you translocate species out of their natural range, they are potential carriers of several pathogens including serious diseases such as the crayfish plague.

When the freshwater stocking program in Queensland commenced in the mid-1980s, unfortunately, little was known of these risks. A permit was granted at the time to stock red claw in Tinaroo Dam which, as we would all be aware, is located on the Barron River—certainly outside of the documented natural distribution area of the species. Tinaroo Dam remains the only location where a permit to stock red claw outside their natural range has ever been issued. At the time there were no regulations in place that recognised a lot of those risks that I have just mentioned. When the translocation policy was introduced in 1999, the stocking of red claw in Tinaroo was discontinued.



Subsequently, there have been a number of applications—and, of course, more recently the member for Dalrymple's interest has been focused on reinstating that program. To date they have been refused, in line with that current translocation policy. We have to ensure that the Tinaroo Dam is self-sustaining and that we are avoiding those risks.

Tinaroo is a highly successful stocked fishery with a reputation for its large barramundi. Crayfish including red claw are common prey for barramundi. I have been advised by scientists that, even if red claw stocking were to resume, predation by those stocked barramundi would most likely greatly reduce the success of such a restocking program anyway. From all angles, to get to that point I believe changes to the existing policy would perpetrate an ad hoc approach to fisheries management, in this case recreational fisheries management. That is what we have seen too often in the development of fisheries management, our regulation and legislation over the last 20 years. It has to be science based, and the science at the moment tells me from the perspective of all of that information I have referred to that restocking at this time in Tinaroo would be inconsistent with that science. It is certainly inconsistent with current fish stocking regulations. For that reason, the government does not have a mind to allow restocking, keeping in mind that that fisheries management review is underway. I fully imagine that people will take up their right to raise this issue with me again. That will be the nature of the conversation.

**Mr KNUTH:** Minister, would you agree that there is a lot of technicality in what you were talking about there? In the past Tinaroo Dam was stocked by the DPI. Those people who stocked it then are still there to this day and they have scientific proof of the benefits of red claw. I say to the minister—and I do know the area of the Mitchell that you were talking about—

**CHAIR:** You are nearly making a statement there.

**Mr KNUTH:** That area of the Mitchell and the Barron do intertwine during massive floods providing the opportunity for the red claw to move from one river system to another—from the Mitchell into the Barron and then Tinaroo. Would the minister be willing to come to the Tablelands and talk to the experts we have there and to hear the experience of those people over the years that red claw was stocked in the dam?

**CHAIR:** This is probably something you should discuss with the minister in a parliamentary sitting. It does not actually come under the estimates portfolios.

**Dr McVEIGH:** I might just mention very quickly that I have provided my answer to the member's question. His supplementary question was: would I be willing to visit the Tablelands? Of course, and I regularly do so, whether it is with regard to forestry, cane, avocado or mango and I will continue to do so. If the member wants to alert me to locals involved in agriculture, fisheries or forestry on the Tablelands in his electorate with whom he thinks I should meet, there are no problems at all—diary commitments pending.

**Mr KNUTH:** Thank you very much, Minister. Very quickly, SDS, page 3 talks about minimising production costs. For the benefit of the committee, I table a letter on behalf of the Queensland bird, softbill and finch associations. We are all fully supportive of biosecurity, but sometimes we can get it wrong when it becomes to a small element of bird, softbill and finch associations. They are more or less saying that they have been hit with a lot of red tape, severe penalties and registration documentation in the case of transfers. They have more or less been told that 10 pairs of finches equals 100 birds and, thus, they then have to go through all that rigmarole. I will table this letter.

**CHAIR:** We have all received that correspondence. We have already referred this letter to the minister. The minister can answer that. It really was to do with past legislation.

**Mr KNUTH:** The SDS talks about implementing initiatives in the department's regulatory reform plan including revised biosecurity regulations. This relates to what they are asking about.

**Dr McVEIGH:** I am happy to answer the member for Dalrymple's question. I have not seen the letter that you are referring to. I am not aware whether it is a letter that I have seen previously or it has not reached my desk yet.

**CHAIR:** We only referred it last week. It was sent to all of us.

**Dr McVEIGH:** It was sent to me last week? Okay.

**CHAIR:** Or Monday, was it?

**Dr McVEIGH:** Monday of this week. Okay. So being referred to my office three days ago, I am sorry, I have not seen it cross my desk as yet.

**CHAIR:** The main gist of it was that they felt they had missed out on some consultation in the process of the drafting of some of the biosecurity legislation.

**Dr McVEIGH:** I will consider the letter when I see it. Thank you for that. I am happy to provide a response. I am just reading the letter for the first time now. This is a letter that has been written to you, member for Dalrymple? Is that right?

**Mr KNUTH:** That is correct.

**Dr McVEIGH:** You then referred that on to me. I would automatically then respond to you if that is coming to me as a request—or through the committee chair. I will see how it has come to me once I get the correspondence on my desk. The fundamental point about red-tape reduction in terms of biosecurity legislation is very important. As I have explained and touched on a couple of times here today, the process has involved the passing of the new Biosecurity Bill 2014, as you would recall, recently in the House. As I have explained, in the normal course of legislation development completion we now move on to all of the regulations. There will be significant consultation within my department as well as between the department and all industry sectors as those regulations are finetuned. Of course, as I have explained earlier, I would expect the legislation itself in that regard would be completed towards the end of 2015. I take on board what you have supplied formally through the committee obviously in recent days and now supplied to me here informally during this hearing, and we will consider that throughout our process.

**Mr KNUTH:** I have one more question—and you have half covered this—with regard to foot and mouth disease. Now that the biosecurity lab in Townsville has closed, can you advise of the capacity of the southern biosecurity units that can handle all forms of biosecurity issues and incursions coming from the north?

**Dr McVEIGH:** I thank the member. You mentioned that I have half answered your question, so let me fully answer it. The veterinary laboratory logistics issue has been well documented in the two and a bit years that I have been minister. The focus is well and truly on the veterinary laboratory at our Health and Food Sciences Precinct at Coopers Plains. Your question regarding capacity is a bit broad. Let me just explore it from a number of angles.

The resources are in place: the lab space is in place and it is a start-of-the-art facility that is co-located with Queensland Health's own laboratories. If we look at some threats such as Hendra in particular, just to use one example, that co-location is, as you would imagine, most important. The capacity, therefore, from a lab space, resources and staffing capability is well and truly in place. During 2012 I had the opportunity to visit the Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute in New South Wales, their central biosecurity lab, on the western outskirts of Sydney. I have also visited and toured the national facility at Geelong, maintained by CSIRO.

I just want to explain those interstate resources, because this comes back to your capacity question. If I use the example of a number of threats that we have dealt with—hendra, BJD—often specific protocols might require that there are confirmatory tests, depending on the threat and depending on the issue, at other laboratories. Confirmatory tests are required under national protocols, so if you get a positive on a particular issue normal process can be, depending on that issue, that you then send that on to, for example, the Australian Animal Health Laboratory at Geelong which, as I have said, I have visited. From a capacity perspective, national protocols require, whether it is Queensland or whether it is New South Wales, South Australia et cetera, that confirmatory testing in some cases is conducted at Geelong. So I can confirm through that supply chain of laboratory services, if you like, that there is plenty of capacity at Geelong as well. In terms of capacity from a staffing perspective and capacity from particularly a technology perspective, I mentioned in a brief overview of bovine Johne's disease earlier there is a leadership role that my department has played in terms of the technology used in bovine Johne's disease testing. HTJPCR—high throughput Johne's polymerase chain reaction—testing is a new technology developed in recent years by, is it, the University of Western Sydney?

**Dr Thompson:** The University of Sydney.

**Dr McVEIGH:** The University of Sydney; my apologies. My department stepped up along with other interests around the state to bring that research through to commercial adoption, if you like, and our leadership role in that was most significant specifically because of bovine Johne's disease and the need to get quicker testing if at all possible rather than the traditional culture testing based on faecal cultures which took up to three months to get a response one way or the other. So when you talk about capacity in laboratories, sure, it is about the facilities—the square meterage, if you like—which we have absolutely no problems with at Coopers Plains; it is about the staff, and we have some

of the leading veterinary laboratory staff in the country who I know are well regarded from visits that I have had interstate where they are complimented by their colleagues interstate; the supply chain and use of other laboratories, particularly the Australian Animal Health Laboratory; and, interestingly enough, the cooperation, if you like, between the state laboratories where other states have recognised the need to work on a central centre of excellence, you might say, and they share resources for research purposes and for professional development purposes between those laboratories given they are so unique.

The other point I wanted to mention was the supply of samples that industry or community groups and individual producers might want to forward through to Coopers Plains for testing, whatever it might be. In many cases—hendra and BJD are classic examples—testing for some of these threats was only ever conducted at certain laboratories, so depending on the threat if you were in Mount Isa or in the Daintree, for argument's sake, or Longreach or Cunnamulla, they all went to the one laboratory historically anyway even if they were in North Queensland, where there was previously a run-down lab. Ultimately in terms of foot-and-mouth disease threats there would be all sorts of resources brought to bear quite obviously that we are developing in terms of a planning perspective at the moment, but in terms of routine stuff we have ensured that courier services and transport charges associated with that at the government rate have been made available to people, particularly regional veterinarians themselves, for the purpose.

I have worked just recently on some particular concerns from a veterinarian in North Queensland in relation to specific transport charges and challenges. We have specific arrangements in place and I can share that we have seen transport charges for shipment of a three kilogram package category B biological sample estimated for the following towns and local governments: from Cairns, \$29.95; Cassowary Coast, \$30.64; Burketown/Doomadgee, \$42.01; Tablelands, \$42.01; and Weipa, as an example, \$42.01. We maintain a sample collection facility in Townsville just at a central spot for transshipping on to Brisbane which, as I said earlier, for many of these threats was always the case. They were never tested in Townsville or in my case Toowoomba in my home town previously. So capacity in terms of our laboratory services could be considered from many facets, as I have just tried to outline. But to come back to your question, capacity in all of those ways that I have just mentioned I am quite satisfied with.

The last part I wanted to mention was the Coopers Plains development. Ensuring that that laboratory was in position to take on new technologies that we have identified in recent years—I take the example of BJD again out for the committee's interest—has involved the oversight of an industry committee that involves industry or veterinarian representation and talking about the vet labs, their capacity and issues such as the logistics I have just mentioned are issues that I have been very pleased to discuss openly at the Australian Veterinary Association Queensland branch annual conference on the Sunshine Coast just in recent months and last year it was held at Stanthorpe on a weekend, so I was happy to go and address them again on these sorts of issues. So a lot of work has been done and I am very satisfied with capacity and in fact in many cases our leading position as an Animal Health Laboratory from a biosecurity perspective in the country.

**CHAIR:** As a supplementary to that, I know that the Gatton campus has some pretty high-tech labs, but they are categorised if I am right, aren't they, into category 1, category 2 and category 3? I think Geelong is the highest category in Australia, isn't it?

**Dr McVEIGH:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** Do we have any of those category labs in Queensland?

**Dr McVEIGH:** That is a good question. I might ask Jim Thompson just to give you a quick overview of that categorisation right across the country so you understand where the facilities are. I am interested in the laboratory at the University of Queensland Gatton that you are referring to which is obviously largely for teaching purposes because at this stage I have a 16-year-old daughter who is expressing some interest in veterinary studies when she leaves school and it may well be at that university. I will get your advice as the local member.

**CHAIR:** About 70 per cent of the students are female doing veterinary science at the moment, Minister.

**Dr Thompson:** Certainly there are different categories that are needed to test for certain pests and diseases. The highest level is category 4, which is what Geelong is, the Australian Animal Health Laboratory. We have category 3, as Health does, at Coopers Plains with capacity for category 4 in effect at that site. FMD would be the absolute highest, and clearly there has been a lot of work done nationally to prepare all the labs around the country for that. I guess the consolidation of the labs in

Queensland has allowed us to have a much greater facility, particularly as the minister said, around technology at the one location. It also gives us a great redundancy in terms of staffing at that laboratory. Hendra is also one that needs a level 3 laboratory, which obviously is at Coopers Plains. It is very expensive to maintain those labs across the state, and that has been one of the difficulties. For Hendra we have always had those tests done at Coopers Plains. We have worked with the University of Queensland and will continue to work with them about the possibilities for diagnostic testing at the university, as we worked with JCU. We have set up some mutual facilities at Townsville with JCU to be able to look at sample preparation and necropsies of animals that might come in, and we will continue to work with the University of Queensland at Gatton around that. The systems that we have in place—the accreditation of our labs—is one that most universities do not have because they are focused on research rather than diagnostics. So that is something that we need to work with the University of Queensland on, but we will continue to do that in the future.

**Ms TRAD:** Going to an area that has not been touched yet, I refer you to page 15 of the SDS, Minister, in relation to forestry assets. You talk about the disposal of assets. It says that some were transferred back to government; I assume but am not sure—to property services within government? It continues—

The department has been developing and implementing a strategic asset disposal plan for the disposal of these assets.

Can you just detail that further? In relation to the next question, which is financial statements and variance explanations in relation to administered items that appear in the department's financial statements, is that in specific relation to the net assets/liabilities at page 23 where the asset revaluation surplus goes from \$226,000 down to \$29,000 in the last financial year and projected to be \$33,000 in this financial year?

**Dr McVEIGH:** There are a couple of points the member is referring to there. First of all, in terms of asset management, you have referred to the items touched on from a forestry perspective on page 15 of the SDS. With regard to the transfer process in relation to specific assets, I could ask Scott Spencer, my director in that relevant area, to step through some of that if you wish. I could talk about the disposal of certain assets, even through to not forestry assets themselves but forestry related assets—the forestry office, for example, in Yarraman. Just broadly speaking, you may recall in parliament quite some months ago I believe it was one of the members from the Sunshine Coast was asking about a forestry asset—a building—in a state forest and his desire for that to be transferred to a local Men's Shed group, a community group. If we talk about forestry assets in general, both forests themselves and assets owned by the department over the years, there is a fair bit going on in terms of transfer and consideration of surplus assets. I will ask Scott Spencer to refer to the specific issues you have raised in line items of the SDS. It may well be that he needs to take some of that on notice as well, but I will ask Scott to run through some of those examples for you.

**Mr Spencer:** The asset disposal program you are talking about relates to what we might call our orphan assets, so the minister has already talked about the Yarraman facility which we have disposed of. We have a number of old forestry barracks around the state—for instance, Mapleton—which we will need to look at disposing over time. Many of them became orphan, if you want to use that term, as a result of the sale of the plantations, so we will need to work through that over the process. There are a lot of demands from community to get access to those assets, so the government will have to make decisions about that and then we will just move forward progressively over time disposing of them as we get ready. Obviously a lot of them are very old and they are in very poor repair. There is asbestos, for instance, in some of them, so there is quite an effort in disposing of those assets.

**Dr McVEIGH:** I will just follow that up if the member wants some specific detail in relation to, I think it was, page 23 of the SDS as you referred to. The chief financial officer, Leith Brown, might be able to touch on some of that for you.

**Ms Brown:** Just to clarify, are you wanting to know about the movement in the values?

**Ms TRAD:** In the assets revaluations.

**Ms Brown:** Yes. That is the annual process that we go through to an indexation of all our assets, so that represents the movement in the value of the assets.

**Ms TRAD:** There is a significant decline.

**Ms Brown:** Yes. The asset themselves, as we said, are declining in value and we need to work our way through a disposal process with them, so we are not, I guess, maintaining them in a—

**Mrs MADDERN:** Could I just ask a supplementary question? Is your annual valuation of assets supported by a valuation from within the department or private valuers?

**Ms Brown:** We go to private valuers every five years, but this process at the moment has just been done through an indexation.

**Mrs MADDERN:** Through an indexation based on that original portfolio valuation.

**Ms Brown:** Yes, that is correct.

**Dr McVEIGH:** And, as is often the case, when we have an understandable expression of interest for an asset—I use the example of an old forestry hut full of asbestos—from a community group or even a local government organisation saying, ‘We believe we have a use for that. We are very interested in acquiring it,’ or, ‘Government, you gifting it to us,’ which is normally the starting point, issues such as asbestos provide an enormous challenge to the valuation but particularly to any potential disposal. Often you get to the stage where the department owns those significantly devalued assets given the nature of them and, despite their interest, other parties do not actually want to take them on.

**CHAIR:** They shy away.

**Dr McVEIGH:** They shy away. That is a common issue right across government. It is a common issue in local government itself in terms of assets like that.

**Ms TRAD:** Minister, can I ask a question in relation to the forestry industry, and I want to make reference to a question on notice at last year’s estimates but it does refer to allocations under the SDS currently or the financial year we are currently scrutinising. That question on notice at last year’s estimates was No. 9. My question is in relation to the state forests that were opened back up to the timber industry after the reforms or the changes pursued by your government. Minister, you provided a list of some 100 state forests which might be eligible for access by the timber industry. It was that they may be accessed. Can you provide details as to which ones were actually accessed in the last financial year?

**Dr McVEIGH:** I thank the member for her question. I ask for guidance. It is a question about last year or this year?

**Ms TRAD:** No. It is a question that was answered in last year’s estimates process, but it relates to the financial year that we are looking at.

**Dr McVEIGH:** The member is referring to a question on notice at last year’s estimates. I assume what you are saying is you want an updated answer to that question, in effect, in terms of those sites?

**Ms TRAD:** Yes. This was the potential list. What was the actual?

**Dr McVEIGH:** Mr Chairman, I am more than happy to take that question on notice and get that updated list to the committee.

**Ms TRAD:** Minister, in relation to bovine Johne’s disease, which you referred to at length previously, are there any properties which are currently under restricted movement and, if there are, can you detail how many are still?

**Dr McVEIGH:** I thank the member for her question. Yes, there are properties that are under movement restrictions, as the official term is. The movement restriction is delivered by way of a quarantine notice. Whilst it is formally a movement restriction, it is often referred to as a quarantine. In effect, the property, as you would appreciate, is shut down in terms of its ability to move cattle in most circumstances, unless of course those cattle are moving on to works, because bovine Johne’s disease presents no concern at all for human consumption. It is a bovine disease.

**CHAIR:** So healthy cattle can be moved off to a meatworks then. Is that what you are saying?

**Dr McVEIGH:** Yes. That is why it is referred to as a movement restriction. Jim Thompson, the head of Biosecurity, can go through the detail, should you wish, Mr Chairman. It is referred to as a movement restriction. We are restricting the movement of the cattle so that they are not going on to other properties or getting in contact with other cattle. They go straight through to the works. In some cases it is a movement restriction that allows placement in feedlots, but again there is a specific management regime within that feedlot to, in effect, isolate the cattle. So, yes, there are properties under restriction. You have asked about numbers which is fine. Obviously you would appreciate I cannot provide the detail of the locations—

**Ms TRAD:** I am not asking for identifying details.

**Dr McVEIGH:**—and I am know you are not asking for that, for privacy reasons. There are a number of outbreaks or incidents that we are dealing with. There is the late 2012 incident in Central

Queensland. I will make sure that you get the up-to-date figures by asking my Chief Biosecurity Officer to answer your question in just a moment. I believe the total trace forward properties from that incident—and the process is that, once bovine Johne's disease or the risk of it is identified on a property, we immediately look at where beasts from that property have gone to; in other words, trace forward properties. They are immediately investigated then as well. So from that original incident—and that is one incident—171 were identified. At this stage I believe that number is down to 23.

**Dr Thompson:** Correct.

**Dr McVEIGH:** You would appreciate that that changes regularly as properties come out of risk management. The number can actually drop, and depending on any risks that have been identified from time to time it can go back up again. So that is that outbreak. There has been a subsequent far smaller outbreak—

**Ms TRAD:** Sorry, Minister, can I just interrupt and seek clarification. What was the date of the 23 figure?

**Dr McVEIGH:** That is as at today?

**Dr Thompson:** That is current, yes.

**Dr McVEIGH:** As at today. There was an outbreak, which I will get Jim to detail for you in terms of current figures as at today, further north in Central Queensland last year, and there is at least one dairy incident that we are dealing with at the moment. So in terms of the figures on those two incidents I will hand over to Jim Thompson.

**Dr Thompson:** Just clarifying the numbers, there are currently 63 properties in Queensland that are under movement restrictions. They relate to the Queensland 2012 incident, and there are 32 properties under movement restrictions. The minister said 23. He was correct about 23 trace forward properties, and we have other feedlots and others that have accepted cattle and accepted movement restrictions. There are 18 properties from the Queensland 2013 incident that are still under movement restrictions, and we have 10 other incidents that we are working on now in Queensland—10 other cases where BJD suspect animals have come in—and they make up the balance to get 63 properties in total.

**Ms TRAD:** But there were just those two confirmed incidents?

**Dr Thompson:** We have had two major confirmed incidents—that is correct—of home bred animals in Queensland with BJD. The other cases are traces from interstate from suspect animals, so from cases interstate where they have sent animals into Queensland.

**CHAIR:** Jim, how long do you think before this will work its way out of the system?

**Dr Thompson:** There are only two ways out of quarantine. One is that the animals that are suspect are destroyed and then you test the herd to determine if BJD is in the herd. That still takes up to two years after the last contact with that suspect animal. If you keep that suspect animal on your property, you can never be sure. BJD is a very slow-moving disease, so you have to isolate that animal and keep it isolated. So unfortunately the best way out of it is to destroy that animal at some point. If you do keep it on a property, we can quarantine a small part of the property—and many of the properties at the moment only have a small part quarantined. So it is a very difficult and slow disease to deal with and it does take many years to get out of quarantine.

**CHAIR:** Minister, can I ask you a question about fire ants. We have had a minor incursion of fire ants in the Lockyer Valley. We are not talking about big volumes of ants, but they are annoying single nests and that sort of thing. I might also ask Jim to expand on the sniffer dogs and how that is working.

**Dr McVEIGH:** Thank you, Mr Chair. I appreciate that fire ants and the management of the eradication process is near and dear to you as the member for Lockyer, so I will provide an overview of the program at present. I know I have touched on it in relation to broader biosecurity comments earlier in the day. Yes, Jim Thompson can follow up on some of those questions you have just put to him through me as well.

So the fire ant program, just to put things into current context, is focused on a delimiting program, which in layman's speak—and Jim Thompson will clean up my layman's speak no doubt in a few moments—is trying to identify the limit. Originally the program started out quite some years ago here in South-East Queensland. There was eradication achieved at the Port of Brisbane and then we had the concern, as you are aware, in the western parts—the West Moreton region, if you like—of Brisbane and further to the south-west. Early in the program—I go back 10 years or more—one would

have to say it was about people wandering around and sticking sticks in holes to see if they could find any fire ants. The level of sophistication, if you like, was just about that. In more recent years we have employed aerial surveillance technology that Jim Thompson can outline for you. The beauty of this approach is that the aerial surveillance technology means that one helicopter in terms of surveillance can cover in the order of 750 hectares per day, whereas previously a team of five—

**Dr Thompson:** Five teams of two.

**Dr McVEIGH:**—five teams of two would cover in the order of 15 or 16 hectares per day. So new technology means we are able to cover a lot more territory and pursue this delimiting exercise in effect, in layman's speak, to work out where the boundary is and continue to contain activities within that boundary.

We remain focused on an eradication program at the moment under a national partnership agreement, under a national cost share agreement. As I have explained to this committee on previous occasions, maintaining that commitment is not without its challenges. My first SCOPI meeting—Standing Council on Primary Industries meeting—in Adelaide, which must have been in about May 2012 or thereabouts, not long after I was appointed as minister, had the then federal minister Joe Ludwig suggesting that we should give up. We were able to confirm with him, based on explaining this new technology, that we should maintain the fight. The majority of our interstate colleagues are equally focused, as confirmed at a recent AGMIN meeting with the current federal minister, Barnaby Joyce. In fact, the support from some states has verged on passionate, particularly South Australia, as a matter of interest.

I then just wanted to refer very quickly to the Yarwun outbreak at Gladstone. I touched on that previously. We have been able to respond very quickly, very comprehensively there. Whilst we have maintained eradication here, the Yarwun outbreak is a new incursion. It is not any old incursion revisiting us. It is a new incursion thought to be from South America. In terms of sniffer dogs and other specific questions you asked through me of Jim Thompson, I will hand over to Jim.

**Dr Thompson:** The use of dogs for a range of programs is something that has really come back into vogue in recent times, I guess. They are really sensitive and used for a range of different means in relation to eradication programs, not just fire ants. We use them for fire ants and electric ants. They are very well suited to that. We use them principally in areas where the highest risk is. We put them into those areas so they can run over those areas to see if they can find fire ants. They are far more sensitive than us walking through those areas. We also use them comprehensively to clear areas where we think we have actually removed fire ants. Bringing dogs into those areas is an area where we have used them quite regularly and we continue to use them. They remain a critical part of the program and will remain a critical part of both the fire ant and electric ant programs.

**CHAIR:** Minister, that brings our estimates hearing to a close. Would you like to make a brief closing statement?

**Dr McVEIGH:** I will. Thank you, Mr Chairman. Before doing so, I will just follow up on some detailed information requested earlier in the day by the deputy chair in relation to BMP programs. I think I addressed all of the questions bar this one at the beginning of this session. The deputy chair, as I recall, asked the question: what is the uptake so far of BMP programs in cane and grazing? The survey for last year for the cane industry is complete, keeping in mind it was the first year of operation. Forty per cent of all attendees have taken up the techniques in the workshop. We expect at this stage that the results for the past year for grazing BMP will be about the same, but we will not have the results of that survey until September at which time I am happy to provide that information.

**Ms TRAD:** In terms of the 40 per cent, Minister, what is that in actual numbers?

**Dr McVEIGH:** Forty per cent of total attendees—just bear with me while I find out if we have that detail of total attendees, given they are run by Canegrowers, officers from my department, officers from the department of environment. For cane alone, it was 500.

**Ms TRAD:** So the 40 per cent equals 500 participants. Is that right?

**Dr McVEIGH:** Forty per cent of the 500 participants.

**Ms TRAD:** Thank you.

**Dr McVEIGH:** Thank you, Mr Chairman. I do appreciate the time of the committee here this afternoon. I certainly thank you, the deputy chair and all members of this committee and others present here at this hearing for the opportunity to provide some detail in relation to my Department of

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and our budget. I also thank all of the staff of your committee for their ongoing efforts.

I wanted to particularly thank my senior officers: my Director-General, Jack Noye; my Deputy Director-General, Dr Beth Woods; Deputy Director-General, Corporate Services, Marcia Hoffmann; Chief Financial Officer, Leith Brown; other senior management team representatives that are present, some of whom you have heard from; and most importantly our dedicated staff right throughout this state. I also wanted to thank my own Chief of Staff, Bruce Mills, and all of my other ministerial staff, both present and back in the office, for their assistance in our estimates preparation and their continuing dedication to the industry sectors that we serve.

Mr Chairman, it is an absolute honour to be Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry in this government. I look forward to our continuing implementation of the Queensland Agriculture Strategy, the Queensland timber industry plan and, of course, our Queensland fisheries management review that is underway. As you heard here this afternoon and late this morning, challenges will no doubt continue to appear. My department will continue to respond to those challenges, but most particularly we will continue to work with industry to pursue the great opportunities for our state, because we have a strong plan for a bright future.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Minister. Thank you very much to your staff and officers, Minister, who have come and presented today. Thank you to Hansard and thank you to Rob and your team, and even the wayward Michael.

**Committee adjourned at 5.02 pm**