

FRIDAY, 12 OCTOBER 2012

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

Estimates Committee Members

Mr IP Rickuss (Chair)
Ms J Trad (Deputy Chair)
Mr JN Costigan
Mr SV Cox
Mr DF Gibson
Mr S Knuth
Mr JM Krause
Mrs MA Maddern

In Attendance

Hon. AP Cripps, Minister for Natural Resources and Mines
Ms LN France, Assistant Minister for Natural Resources and Mines
Ms S McDonald, Chief of Staff

Department of Natural Resources and Mines

Mr D Hunt, Director-General (Acting)
Mr J Skinner, Deputy Director-General, Policy and Program Support
Ms S Ryan, Deputy Director-General, Service Delivery
Mr S Bell, Deputy Director-General, Safety and Health; Commissioner for Mine Safety and Health; Pike River Royal Commissioner
Ms K Platt, Chief Financial Officer (Acting)
Ms B Parker, Executive Director, Human Resources and Strategy

Committee met at 8.57 am



CHAIR: Good morning. It being the 10th anniversary of the sad occasion of the Bali bombings, I ask everyone present to stand for a minute's silence out of respect for those who lost their lives in the Bali bombings.

Whereupon honourable members and officers stood in silence.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. I declare this meeting of the Agriculture, Resources and Environment Committee open and I first acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which this hearing is taking place. I am Ian Rickuss, the member for Lockyer and chair of the committee. Joining me today are Jackie Trad, the member for South Brisbane; Sam Cox, the member for Thuringowa; Jason Costigan, the member for Whitsunday; David Gibson, the member for Gympie; Shane Knuth, the member for Dalrymple; Jon Krause, the member for Beaudesert; and Anne Maddern, the member for Maryborough. We are here today to examine the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2012 of the portfolios of the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines, the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection. We are examining the estimates in that order.

The proceedings today are lawful proceedings subject to the standing rules and orders of parliament. As such, I am reminded that any visitors admitted to this hearing may be excluded in accordance with standing order 208. In relation to media coverage of today's hearing, we have adopted the guidelines prepared by the Committee of the Legislative Assembly for committee hearings. These guidelines have been distributed to the parliamentary press gallery and copies are also available this morning. The hearing will be broadcast live via the Parliamentary Service website. We extend a warm welcome to everyone who is picking up this broadcast. The estimates process is an important part of the parliamentary scrutiny of the budget and the work of departments. As laid out in schedule 8 at the back of the standing orders, we expect all departmental officers appearing today to provide full and honest answers to our questions. Anyone who is unable or unwilling to provide an answer should be prepared to state their reasons. I also remind those present that departmental officers are not here today to give expert opinions on the merits or otherwise of policy of the government. That is the role of the minister.

Finally, before we begin, I ask everyone to switch off their mobile phones or switch them to silent please. The first item for consideration is the estimates of the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines. Welcome, Minister Cripps, Assistant Minister France and advisers. We will examine the estimates for your portfolio until 1 pm. We will begin by examining the estimates for the areas of land services and water services until 11 am. Minister, the committee has granted leave for the Leader of the Opposition to appear, the member for Toowoomba North to appear and the member for Bundamba to appear to participate in today's hearings. I now declare the proposed expenditure of the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines relating to land services and water services 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: Thank you, Mr Chairman; I would and say good morning to the members of the committee. I am delighted to have the opportunity to outline the Department of Natural Resources and Mines budget and expenditure and to discuss briefly some of the programs that we are committed to in the current financial year. As I have already mentioned in the House when the bill was introduced, the budget that the Newman LNP government delivered in early September is the most important budget in a generation. Importantly, it is a budget that is aimed at commencing the huge task of addressing the shocking financial mismanagement that occurred in this state during the reckless tenure of the former Labor government. My department will be instrumental in achieving this outcome, as the resources sector has been identified as one of the key pillars of our state economy. That is why our investment decisions in this budget are so important.

The Department of Natural Resources and Mines is committed to ensuring Queenslanders benefit from the productive and sustainable allocation and use of the state's natural resources and we have honoured that commitment in the allocation of funding for various projects this financial year. I am pleased that in the first six months of the Newman government we have encouraged a far greater recognition of the good stewardship of rural landholders across Queensland. These landowners are some of the state's best land and natural resource managers. It is far better to recognise and support their efforts than burden them with overregulation, as the former government did.

My department has moved from a punitive policy position to an environment that supports innovation and sustainable land and resource management. For example, we have significantly invested in water and catchment management programs as part of this budget. The government's \$11 million commitment in this area will significantly bolster resource management throughout the state, especially in Great Barrier Reef catchments. As part of the Newman government's commitment to the environment, 14 regional NRM groups will receive funding to allow them to continue their valuable work in pest and weed control, improving water quality and encouraging primary producers to adopt more sustainable agricultural practices—all areas the LNP has identified as a priority. We have also allocated \$1 million to five of those regional NRM groups operating in Barrier Reef catchment areas under the Paddock to Reef Program. My department's budget also protected mine safety standards and paved the way for more responsive and practical approaches to land and water management in Queensland.

A thorough review of spending by the department has identified cost savings that will make an important contribution to the significant fiscal repair process being undertaken across all government departments. It has been a tough process, but the Newman government must make the difficult decisions now to ensure we can meet the needs of Queenslanders, both now and in the future. Reducing government expenditure means this government has not had to consider increasing taxes and charges on Queensland families. I am satisfied that, in conjunction with the senior officers of my department, our savings program will protect the front-line services that this department offers to clients and stakeholders and will uphold Queensland's impressive mine safety standards and that we have minimised job losses in regional and rural Queensland.

We have identified savings in areas of the department that under Labor had become unfortunately fixated on overregulating clients and stakeholders in the agriculture, resources and property industries, with red tape tying them up in complex processes rather than supporting them to

achieve sustainable economic growth. We have also prioritised funding for abandoned mine rehabilitation programs, management of vegetation and water management issues across Queensland, tenure management and mines approvals processes. Many of these achievements are being progressed through the dismantling of unnecessary red and green tape imposed by our predecessors.

Briefly, I want to take this opportunity to thank the staff in the Department of Natural Resources and Mines. I want to acknowledge the difficult process that this budget has been to go through and thank them for their continued commitment to professionalism and the people of Queensland. They have been very hard working and their commitment has to be commended. I certainly have valued their contribution to the process of developing the budget for my department. Thank you, Mr Chairman.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Minister. The first question is from the member for Maryborough.

Mrs MADDERN: Minister, I refer to page 4 of the Department of Natural Resources and Mines Service Delivery Statements which outlines the department's plan to repeal the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (Land Holding) Act 1985. Could the minister please outline why he is pursuing the repealing of this act and what benefit the new legislation will have to Queenslanders of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage?

Mr CRIPPS: As you are aware, member for Maryborough, I introduced a bill into the parliament, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Land Holding Bill. It will make significant amendments to that act. It is not my intention to discuss the mechanics of the bill today given that it is before the House, but I think it is appropriate to talk briefly about the rationale behind the legislation. The reason we are pursuing not the repeal but the replacement of that legislation is that the land-holding act when it was originally introduced in the 1980s was for a particular purpose. Unfortunately in pursuing that particular purpose, the implementation of the legislation has not been particularly successful.

We have had some significant issues in relation to the surveying of the area and the issuing of the perpetual leases in those Indigenous communities. That has resulted in a number of complications for the people living in those communities when they have gone to confirm things such as their title and for other people seeking perpetual leases in the area to come to the realisation that there is actually a house built on the perpetual lease where they have been granted title. These complications have resulted in a situation where we have title that is messy and all over the place. We have got encroachments and we have got complications where councils with significant infrastructure have been very cautious and may have complicated issues in terms of where they may find themselves in terms of tenure in the future.

So the rationale behind repealing that act in the first instance and replacing it with a modernised, more efficient act is so that we will have the opportunity to provide certainty and opportunities in the future for Indigenous communities to grow with security. I think that is a very important step forward. It is one of the reasons why it was one of the first pieces of legislation I brought before the House for its consideration in terms of Indigenous communities across the state, particularly in North Queensland, and the government is very serious about providing opportunities for economic growth in that area. We firstly need to provide security for them, and security primarily comes with security of tenure. So it is a clean-up operation that the government is pursuing in that area that we think is very important for the future of those communities.

Mr KRAUSE: Good morning, Minister. The Premier has made requests that state information be made more accessible to the public and business through open data. How will DNRM make changes to allow the large amounts of information held by the department to be more accessible?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for Beaudesert for his question. The department researches, collects and manages a large database of information, including geospatial information, water information for flow and monitoring of surface and groundwater systems, geological data, spatial information including property boundaries, and even place name information, which has been topical this morning. The department is examining ways for this information to be more accessible to the public on a 24/7 basis and provide value added services to businesses, industry and the general public.

Improved access to information, as the Premier has pointed out, is a priority for the government and at the moment is being provided via the Queensland Government Information Service which forms part of the information Queensland initiative. This initiative aims to improve access to government held spatial information to the community, industry and all levels of government while reducing duplication and supporting infrastructure and services initiatives. The Queensland Government Information Service allows customers to discover and download digital spatial information resources and it is part of the department's commitment to shared online service delivery. The information resources are typically used by individuals and organisations in geographic information systems for a range of planning and management purposes.

As of 30 June this year, 691 spatial data sets were available for download by customers of the department. During the previous financial year, 41,000 data sets were downloaded by customers, representing an 87 per cent increase over the 2010-11 financial year. The most popular data sets, for your information, member for Beaudesert, were property cadastre and 10-metre contours, each

available by local government area. These accounted for 29 per cent of total downloads, and you would appreciate the importance of that information coming from a regional and rural electorate. Other departments and organisations used the service to make their data available. The Queensland Government Information Service allows new information resources to be published quickly. Sometimes we can get it within two days of a request, supporting customers with access to information they need to respond to government proposals.

The department is continuing to review licensing conditions associated with information resources available through the Queensland Government Information Service. We want to support the initiative that the Premier has outlined. The availability of information resources with the least restrictive form of licensing allows customers to combine the information resources with other information that they can access. This meets customer needs and provides value added information to others, thereby increasing the usefulness of information. We will continue, where possible, to add new information resources as they become available and encourage customers to access information through the Queensland Government Information Service.

Mr COX: Morning, Minister. Minister, I refer to page 4 of the Department of Natural Resource and Mines Service Delivery Statements which outlines the department's plan to initiate and processes for the release of unallocated water in the gulf. Could the minister please outline what benefit this will have on the state financially and if landholders in the area have been sufficiently consulted and supported?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for Thuringowa for the question. One of the initiatives that we have pursued in recent months has been the release of water in the Flinders and Gilbert River catchments in north-west Queensland. I announced during an address to the Northern Outback Irrigators Forum in Hughenden in late July the commencement of a tender process to release unallocated water from the Flinders and Gilbert River catchments. The previous government had been urged by the people of north-west Queensland to open up this area for irrigation for many years, but that had fallen on deaf ears until relatively recently in the previous term. It finally lent some modicum of support to that initiative.

There has been a lot of testing, a lot of reports, studies and years of inaction by the previous government. But within a matter of months of the Newman government and myself as the Minister for Natural Resources we did announce the release of water, and these landholders have been requesting that for some time. The announcement is part of the government's contribution to growing the agricultural sector in Queensland. This could bring significant financial investment opportunities to the north-west, which their economy needs. This release process does strike a balance between economic development and the responsible management of water resources. Prior to my announcement, I met with landholders and community leaders to hear their aspirations about the future of an irrigated agriculture industry in north-west Queensland.

I am proud of the Queensland government's commitment to supporting the growth of the agricultural sector, proud to support my colleague Minister McVeigh in his portfolio. My department is working alongside his department to support the proponents in this tender process. In August, the department held information sessions in a number of communities across the Flinders and Gilbert river catchments to help proponents gain an understanding of the requirements to make a tender. I really want this process to be successful. I requested that the department extend the closing date for tenders from the 28th of last month to the 26th of this month to give irrigators more time to respond to the merits of their proposals.

The department and I have listened carefully to the community in providing this extension. To be successful, tenders will have to meet certain conditions and evaluation criteria, including meeting a reserve price. Eight thousand megalitres of unallocated water is available in the Flinders River catchment and a further 15,000 will be available in the Gilbert River catchment. Importantly, I must stress that these volumes meet the requirements of the gulf water resource plan and reflect potential demand for water in these catchments at this point in time.

The release complements the work being undertaken by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and the CSIRO under the North Queensland Irrigated Agriculture Strategy. I have indicated to the community, to landholders in that area, to civic leaders in that area, that I would consider bringing forward a review of the gulf water resource operations plan from 2018 if there is a strong uptake of this water and if the irrigated agriculture strategy research shows that more water can be substantially allocated in that catchment.

In the meantime, we will be preparing a draft amendment to the gulf resource operations plan 2010 to provide, where practical, for seasonal and permanent trading of water licences to support potential future development in the area. The water licences will be granted to the successful parties expeditiously after the close of submissions of those tenders to give them an opportunity to start the construction of infrastructure that will support any irrigated agricultural activity next year.

CHAIR: Thank you. I refer to page 5 of the Department of Natural Resources and Mines Service Delivery Statements which outlines the creation of an interim flood plain map for the Queensland Reconstruction Authority. Could the minister please outline what actions his department has taken in the creation of these maps and the department's response to the findings of the Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry?

Mr CRIPPS: Thank you, Mr Chairman. You are quite right, the Department of Natural Resources and Mines has responsibilities to pursue the development of a flood plain map as a result of recommendations that came from the Floods Commission of Inquiry. The department has created 8,854 interim flood plain maps for the Queensland Reconstruction Authority in the 2011-12 financial year. The mapping covered the state's 129 river sub-basins and it was the largest program of its kind in Australia. I have had the opportunity to visit the Landcentre and go around with the officers and see some of the maps that they have been developing to support the initiative, particularly the flood plain mapping for the Brisbane area.

This program will assist the government and the Reconstruction Authority in its preparation in response to flood events in regional and rural areas and in urban areas of the state. My department is leading the implementation of that recommendation from the Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry for the state and relevant local councils to complete a Brisbane flood study as soon as practical. A three-year study—and it is estimated to cost \$5 million—has commenced recently. Sixty per cent of the estimated study cost is being provided by the Queensland government. The remainder is being provided by local governments in the Brisbane River catchment, including the Brisbane City Council, the Ipswich City Council, and Somerset Regional Council. The Lockyer Valley Regional Council is also assisting with the study.

The floods study will provide an up-to-date, consistent and agreed set of hydraulic and hydrologic models based on comprehensive, scientific and technical investigations appropriate for flood plain management in the entire catchment of the Brisbane River. The flood models that emerge will be used by the Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning in developing a Brisbane River flood plain management study and plan. The models will underpin important flood plain risk management land use and disaster management planning and water supply system's operational activities by various state and local government entities. Project planning for the study is progressing under the guidance of a multiparty steering committee so that we have expertise from a number of departments having input there.

Some initial data collection and analysis has already commenced. Interlinkages between this and related studies about water supply security and dams operations are also being refined. There will be an independent expert panel established to advise on these relevant studies. Can I say that, having been born and raised in Tully in North Queensland, I understand the importance of having accurate and up-to-date flood information, which is used by local authorities, emergency services and indeed members of the public to inform themselves during flood events. So I can certainly understand why the commission of inquiry suggested that we upgrade the flood plain study for the Brisbane area.

CHAIR: As a supplementary question to that, is a lot of this stuff being done on computer modelling? Is there on-the-ground work that is going to verify the computer modelling?

Mr CRIPPS: Yes, both will have to be undertaken. Certainly, we will have a lot of opportunity to collect a lot of anecdotal information from people on the ground who actually experienced the floods last year. That will be useful for experts and departmental officers across a number of departments to be able to take on board that on-the-ground information. I happen to agree with you, member for Lockyer and Mr Chairman, that nothing can beat actual on-the-ground experience of someone who has witnessed a flood event or who has been in the middle of a flood event. Certainly, I would expect that that local information would enhance the input into the development of the datasets and the information that we can eventually provide to the department of state development for the completion of the plan.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for that, Minister. The next question is by the member for Whitsunday.

Mr COSTIGAN: Thank you, Mr Chairman and good morning, Minister. I refer to page 5 of the Department of Natural Resources and Mines Service Delivery Statements, which outlines the amount of fuel reduction burns undertaken by the department in 2011-12. The last wet season has left a huge fuel load across Queensland and the suggestions are that this upcoming fire season could be particularly intense. Could the minister please outline how his department is preparing for the possibility of an intense fire season and how this differs from the previous financial year?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for the question. I think it is particularly pertinent at the moment, given the high fire risk that the public has been made aware of. Our emergency services—Minister Dempsey's Department of Community Safety—has done a marvellous job of making the community well aware of the significant risks for fire this season. The 2012-13 unallocated state land fire and pest management program has an estimated budget of \$3.4 million. That is just for risk management on unallocated land, which is the responsibility of my department. The money is to be used to fund bushfire and land management activities on that land, on freehold land owned by the Department of Natural Resources and Mines and reserves that do not have a trustee.

The department has responsibility for over 20,000 land parcels comprising about one million hectares across the state. The department undertakes an ongoing risk assessment of those land parcels to assign a level of risk based on factors such as proximity to homes, proximity to critical assets, such as power substations, hospitals, vegetation type and the fire history in that area. Approximately 4½ thousand parcels have been assessed as high risk. Almost all high-risk blocks are within the urban interface where a bushfire could have a direct impact on local communities. Planned burns and other fire-risk management activities on the department's land focus primarily on these high-risk areas to protect human life and public and private infrastructure.

The department has well established strategies to address the risks of bushfire. We have undertaken controlled burns of strategic high-risk areas over the winter period to reduce fuel loads. In the previous financial year, the department undertook 148 fuel-reduction burns to reduce bushfire risk to neighbouring land and infrastructure. As of 26 September this year, 174 burns had been completed, with work ongoing until fire restrictions are declared.

The department is continuing the maintenance of 5,900 kilometres of crucial roads and firebreaks, which is a significant undertaking. Currently, maintenance works are approximately 85 per cent complete and works are ongoing. We have allocated resources to assist in bushfire emergency responses. The department monitors the weather to adjust the level of stand-by firefighting resources as the fire risk fluctuates. We employ well trained and mobile firefighting crews that can respond rapidly to suppress fire outbreaks in cooperation with the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and the department of natural parks. There are 23 trained firefighters employed full time and an additional four auxiliary officers who can be called on when required.

Mr COSTIGAN: Thank you.

CHAIR: I call on the member for Bundamba.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, I refer to page 1 of the SDS and your responsibility for natural water resource management and allocation. Minister, I also refer to page 61 of budget paper No. 2, where it says that you will be part of a cabinet committee that will—

... work with industry to develop a package of agreed measures within 100 days—

which will have enhancements to productivity for the mining industry. Minister, can you rule out that this package will involve the pumping of untreated mine water into crucial water basins and river systems as a trade-off for royalty increases?

Mr CRIPPS: Obviously, the SDS documents confirm that I am a member of the Cabinet Resources Committee that has been established after the budget has been handed down. I am certainly not going to talk about the proceedings of this cabinet committee. I do not think you really expect me to, member for Bundamba. What I can say about the initiative that the Cabinet Resources Committee has been established to achieve is to recognise that the resources sector is one of the pillars of the Queensland economy along with agriculture, tourism and construction, and, consistent with the commitments that the LNP took to the people of Queensland during the election campaign, we consider that we have to take action to ensure that there is a strong, sustainable future for the resources sector in Queensland. It underpins employment for many Queenslanders and, importantly for me, it underpins employment for many regional and rural Queenslanders across the state.

The Cabinet Resources Committee's objective is to methodically go through the regulatory framework that the resources sector is subjected to and, similarly, the regulatory framework that the previous government erected for rural landowners in relation to land management, water management, vegetation management and other environmental management issues. We have seen an incremental increase in the regulatory environment for the resources sector. We believe that new science and technology, that innovative people, can achieve better ways of doing things in the resources sector and we are taking on board advice from the resources industry through representative bodies and the companies themselves about how to do things better.

I might also say that the membership of the committee includes other ministers, including the Minister for the Environment, who has responsibilities for the Environmental Protection Act. They, in fact, have responsibility for the discharge of water from mine sites. So it is actually not my responsibility to answer the question that you refer to, but I think that the committee should understand, given its portfolio responsibilities, that the work of the Cabinet Resources Committee will be designed to provide for a sustainable growth future of the resources sector in Queensland so that it continues to significantly support economic growth in the state of Queensland.

Mrs MILLER: As a follow-up question and to, I suppose, assist the minister in his comprehension of my question, could the minister please outline the secret deal that was done by your LNP government and the mining companies with regard to pumping untreated mine water into water basins and river systems as a trade-off for royalty increases?

Mr CRIPPS: It is an allegation that the member for Bundamba can make. The member for Bundamba does not have anything to substantiate the allegation. In relation to her original question, I will just go over that again. I will point out to her that my responsibilities in relation to water in the state of

Queensland pertain to the planning and the allocation of water for non-commercial purposes. So I deal with the development and implementation of water resource planning across the state. I am also involved in the allocation and management of water as part of COAG, in the Murray-Darling Basin councils, in Lake Eyre, in the Great Artesian Basin. Those are my responsibilities in relation to the management of water in the state of Queensland.

I have already pointed out to the member for Bundamba that, in relation to the discharge of water from mine sites, those are monitored and managed and regulated by the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection. The member for Bundamba can continue to make allegations and to ask me questions for which I do not have responsibility, but I do not think that that is a very effective use of the committee's time today.

Mrs MILLER: I have a question for the Director-General. Director-General, further to my last question and the inane response from the minister, I refer to page 1 of the SDS where it states 'land and water resources without compromising sustainability'. Director-General, are you aware of any mining companies that have requested that the department allow the release of untreated water from flooded mine sites and, if so, can you list these companies, please; and also, if so, did you request any advice on this from your department?

CHAIR: Member for Bundamba, are you asking the questions to the right portfolio?

Mrs MILLER: Yes, I am. It is to do with untreated mine water.

CHAIR: Is it not the environment minister who approves the release of water?

Mrs MILLER: It is also the natural resources minister. I am trying to get to the bottom of the secret deal done.

CHAIR: This is an aspersion that you have made.

Mrs MILLER: No, I am asking questions in relation to the secret deal that was done between this LNP government and mining companies in relation to pumping untreated mine water which is a natural resource.

CHAIR: Would that not go to the environment minister?

Mrs MILLER: The environment minister will get his turn later on. I am asking this in relation to the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines and particularly the Director-General. Director-General, I will repeat the question: are you aware of any mining companies—any mining companies at all—that have come to your department to allow for the release of untreated water into water basins and river systems?

Mr CRIPPS: Point of order, Mr Chairman. I think I have already made it clear on two occasions for the benefit of the member for Bundamba that the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection is responsible for the management of the discharge of any water from mine sites. The question being posed by the member for Bundamba to me previously and to the Director-General on this occasion is totally out of order because it is not the responsibility of myself or my department to consider any requests from any mining company for that particular purpose. Posing such a question to myself or the Director-General, whilst a waste of time of this committee, is also out of order under the standing orders.

CHAIR: I do agree with the minister on that, member for Bundamba, unless you can re-word that question so it is of more relevance to the department

Mrs MILLER: For the benefit of the committee, you have just muzzled your Director-General in relation to a direct question.

Mr CRIPPS: I am happy to point out your mistake. The Director-General can do it too.

Mrs MILLER: I am asking the Director-General a specific question in relation to—

CHAIR: This question has been ruled out of order. Do you have another question or are you going to re-word that?

Mrs MILLER: Director-General, in relation to untreated mine water going out into water basins and river systems, which are the responsibility of the minister, has there been any discussions with mining companies?

Mr Hunt: I am happy to confirm that discharge of water from mines is an issue covered by the environmental authority issued for each mine by the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection so it would be that agency that mining companies would approach to discuss requests for further discharge.

Ms TRAD: Following on from that, can you advise whether the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection has advised you that they intend to give approval to a mining company for the release of untreated mine water into river systems or waterways?

Mr Hunt: No, they have not.

Ms TRAD: They have not. I would like to turn to vegetation management, Minister. I refer to vegetation management activities of the department and reference SDS pages 4 and 10. I table for the benefit of the committee a copy of an article in *Queensland Country Life* on 23 April 2012.

Queensland Country Life reported that the Director-General had been issued instructions to place on hold all current investigations, withdraw an existing appeal and provide you as minister with a review of penalties imposed since the act started. Can you confirm that you issued instructions to your Director-General to undertake these three actions, Minister?

CHAIR: I will give the minister a copy of that tabling. It is the opposition's Bible, *Queensland Country Life*

Ms TRAD: Thank you for your unbiased chairing.

Mr CRIPPS: Thank you, Mr Chairman. In relation to the matters referred to by the member for South Brisbane, what I can confirm for the benefit of the committee is that upon becoming the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines I met with the Director-General for the first time and I outlined a number of the views that I had and a number of concerns I had that I wanted following up on. Certainly I can confirm for the benefit of the committee that one of the concerns that I had was a perception that I had built up, and many Queenslanders I believe had built up over time, about the inconsistencies in the way that the regulations in the Vegetation Management Act had been applied to Queenslanders. Far from directing the Director-General of my department to undertake certain activities, I clearly outlined my concerns about what I perceived to be inconsistencies in relation to the application of the provisions of the Vegetation Management Act on people in the state of Queensland.

I can certainly reassure the member that this government is committed to ensuring that we maintain an appropriate protection framework for native vegetation in Queensland, but we want to do this in partnership with landowners. We want to do it in more streamlined ways as well. There have been concerns about the way that vegetation management laws have been enforced in Queensland. In particular these concerns relate to a perceived escalation in the penalties handed down by the courts since 2009. For this reason I did, as the minister, announce earlier this year, as you have pointed out, a review of the way that the penalty provisions in the act have been applied. I will be considering the outcomes of this review and implementing an appropriate action in that regard.

But to go to the heart of your question, the suggestion that I directed the Director-General to undertake a particular course of action is not true. That I expressed to him my concerns about how the provisions of the legislation were being applied would be accurate and from there the Director-General took on board my concerns and acted appropriately as the CEO of the department.

Ms TRAD: It is interesting that *Queensland Country Life* claimed that you had said to them that you had issued instructions to your Director-General.

Mr CRIPPS: To pursue and investigate my concerns, absolutely.

Ms TRAD: No, as I said and quoted from the article.

CHAIR: Let the minister answer the question.

Ms TRAD: I think he is misrepresenting the question.

Mr CRIPPS: It is the responsibility of the Director-General to take on board the instructions that I gave to him, even the direction that I gave to him, to follow through on the concerns that I had about the perceived inconsistencies in the application of the Vegetation Management Act.

Ms TRAD: So he had to follow through on your concerns, your perceptions, not science, not reports, not data? He had to follow through on your perceptions to cease enforcing the Vegetation Management Act?

Mr CRIPPS: No. That is where you are trying to manipulate the situation.

Ms TRAD: No. That is what *Queensland Country Life* reported.

Mr CRIPPS: Yes, member for South Brisbane. That is where you are trying to manipulate what I am saying and that is that I have concerns, not about the science or the data in this particular respect, but about the application of the provisions of the legislation and the outcomes it has had on prosecutions of people. That is quite apart from the scientific basis on which the Vegetation Management Act is based. That is quite another debate, which has been had on many occasions since the Vegetation Management Act was implemented. The particular issue with which we are dealing with in this question is my concerns that I expressed to the Director-General about the application of the penalty provisions in the act. We followed through on that with a review of those provisions. Compounding the inequitable situations that I believe have come out as a result of the review is that maximum penalties that are being applied to Queenslanders are situations where they are split between co-defendants and that they may drive up the relative penalties for individuals involved in these prosecutions. There appears to be a disconnection between the way that penalties are being applied on a per hectare basis where there is a small amount of clearing that has occurred as opposed to a situation where broadscale clearing has occurred. Those inconsistencies are the types of things that I

expressed my concern about. I certainly directed, or instructed or whatever other word you choose to use, the Director-General to follow up on those concerns. But the way in which he followed through on those concerns is up to him. I am satisfied that he has done that correctly.

Ms TRAD: Director-General, how did you come to suddenly decide to cease enforcing the Vegetation Management Act?

Mr CRIPPS: That is not true.

Mr Hunt: Ms Trad, to start with, we have not ceased enforcing the Vegetation Management Act. What occurred early in the course of this government is that the minister asked me questions about his perceptions that there had been significant increases in the level of fines imposed under the Vegetation Management Act for prosecutions. I went away and asked for data from the department. The data that I was given indicated that from when the act started until the start of 2009 there were 91 finalised prosecutions that resulted in total fines of \$484,000. From 2009 until 2012 there were a further 27 prosecutions that resulted in fines of \$1.227 million. I looked for explanations. There is nothing in the act that has changed in that time that would increase the levels of fines to be imposed, so what I asked for was advice from the department on why the average fines had increased by such a large amount. I was not able to get a satisfactory answer to that.

Following that I requested Crown Law to undertake a review of the cases that had been prosecuted, both pre and post 2009, to look for answers as to what has changed in the conduct of the cases that would explain that very significant increase. It is, in reality, roughly a ten-fold increase in the average level of fines over that decade.

Ms TRAD: Did you place a hold on all the investigations?

Mr Hunt: I suspended investigations that were underway. That suspension has now been lifted and those investigations have resumed. What happened is that the minister had asked some serious questions about the process that the department undertook in terms of undertaking these prosecutions. We have investigated that. There was a valid question to be answered in terms of the legislation has not changed but the outcomes coming out of the court process has changed very significantly. That has been investigated. There is still a review that the minister has yet to consider in terms of possible policy options.

Ms TRAD: Has the review been finalised?

Mr CRIPPS: As the Director-General said, the review has been put in front of me. I am considering how I am going to respond to that review.

Ms TRAD: Is this the Crown Law review that was due three months ago?

Mr CRIPPS: Yes, it is the same review. As you say, initially we indicated it would be a six- to eight-week investigation, that is true. I am not going to deny that. But the issues that have been raised are complicated. We are trying to find out why there has been, as the Director-General has been pointing out, a significant escalation in the outcomes of prosecutions when there has not been corresponding amendments to the Vegetation Management Act that would provide for those escalating outcomes in terms of prosecutions. That is the reason why I expressed the concerns that I did. But just to reassure yourself, member for South Brisbane, and the committee, the department has not stopped monitoring for illegal clearing of vegetation. They will continue to monitor that process into the future. We are working with landowners to consider alternative compliance solutions. We are certainly doing that. We are trying to improve their education by engagement with individuals and groups about that. We are trying to improve the options so that we can achieve rehabilitation agreements with people who undertake infringements and we will be proceeding with prosecutions in the future where it is in the public interest to do so. I just want to make sure you are absolutely clear on what occurred there. We had significant and what we believed to be legitimate questions to ask. Those are being addressed through the review process. I will be advising the parliament and the people of Queensland in due course when I have—

Ms TRAD: So you will be making the review and the outcomes public?

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

Mr KNUTH: My question is to the minister. Further to the response to the government question relating to the release of water for tender in the Flinders and Gilbert rivers, can the minister advise how his department arrived at the 80,000 megalitres of water allocation from the Flinders River? Does the minister acknowledge that this is only a small drop compared to what is required to make the Flinders River Agricultural Precinct viable in the long-term?

Mr CRIPPS: In relation to the specific question from the member for Dalrymple which is how did we arrive at the 80,000 megalitres that we released in the Flinders River catchment. To that end, I can also answer, for the benefit of the member for Dalrymple, how we arrived at the 15,000 megalitre release in the Gilbert River catchment. I am sure he would be interested in that issue as well. The answer to that question is that the 80,000 megalitres in the Flinders and the 15,000 megalitres in the

Gilbert were the allocations of water that were available in the Gulf Resource Operations Plan immediately. They were the allocations that were available to me immediately for release under the plan.

Indeed I could have taken on board a view that I could undertake a review of the Gulf Resource Operations Plan and go through the full consultation process over the next 18-month to two-year period, which can often be the period of time that reviews of resource operations plans and water resource plans take to complete, but I chose instead to immediately make the water that was available in the existing resource operations plan available to these landowners and other interested parties in those gulf communities so that they could get on with the job of realising the opportunities for an irrigated agriculture industry in North-West Queensland as soon as possible.

The previous government had been asked on many, many occasions by the communities and the landowners in that area to support them to pursue a new economic string to their bow in the north west of this state. Until the dying days of the former government they gave them no support whatsoever. There was a brief flutter of excitement when the previous government woke up to the fact that this could happen and that there was significant interest in that area. They did very little to support the outcome. In fact, when I became the Minister for Natural Resources and the minister responsible for water resource planning I commenced the process for the release of this water.

People in North-West Queensland—landowners, industry groups and civic leaders—have said to me that they feel that the current allocation for release will not necessarily meet the needs of everyone in that area, and I am happy to acknowledge that. I acknowledged that publicly at the forum in Hughenden in late July when I announced the release of this water. I acknowledged that when I met with a number of these groups and civic leaders to discuss this issue.

Member for Dalrymple, the amount of water that I have released is what I had available to me at this point in time and I was not prepared to wait and delay the opportunities for the communities in the north west of Queensland any longer. I have already indicated that I am perfectly willing, if there is a strong take-up of the water from this release and if the research being done by the CSIRO indicates that there is more sustainable potential and we can find that water on a sustainable basis, to bring forward the review of the Gulf Resource Operations Plan from 2018 and try to find more water on a sustainable basis as soon as possible.

The reason we released those volumes is because they were immediately available and I was not willing to muck around any longer, like the previous government did. I want to give the people and the industries of North-West Queensland an opportunity to grow on a sustainable basis as soon as possible.

Mr KNUTH: I accept the answer. I believe that the question has been well answered. Likewise, I do not think there can be a perception that you are doing something for irrigation development in the area. The irrigators—

CHAIR: Do you have a question? That is starting to become a statement.

Mr KNUTH: Irrigators know that this is only a drop in the ocean. We are looking at a river system that produces nearly 400,000 megalitres and 80,000 megalitres have been granted to be provided. It is nowhere near enough to provide that opportunity.

Mr CRIPPS: I am happy to respond. I think the negative attitude of the member for Dalrymple towards what is being achieved at the moment is very unfortunate for the communities of North-West Queensland. He would know, or at least he should know, that there are already people undertaking irrigated agriculture activities in North-West Queensland. So there are the foundations for an irrigated agriculture industry in those areas. They have been pioneers of these initiatives and I fully support them and congratulate them on the work that they have been doing. The opportunity for an additional 80,000 megalitres of water in the Flinders and 15,000 in the Gilbert will support, enhance and augment the efforts of these pioneers further.

It is really unfortunately that we have such a negative attitude from the member for Dalrymple and others about the current release of water.

Mr KNUTH: There is no negative attitude. I find that offensive and I ask the minister to withdraw. I just commended the minister for his response before.

CHAIR: It is not a point of order.

Mr KNUTH: I am not making a negative remark, Minister. I am just saying we need certainty and opportunity. Irrigators acknowledge this is not enough. It is a step in the right direction.

Mr CRIPPS: I am glad that he has raised the issue of certainty because there is a very serious issue to deal with in this regard. When we have a release of allocated water during this process we must have certainty and sustainability in the allocation of the resource otherwise we will end up in a situation where all sorts of complications can happen. The remedial efforts of the Commonwealth in relation to the Murray-Darling system is an example of what happens when water allocations are given to entitlement holders on an unsustainable basis.

The reason we chose to release the existing 80,000 and 15,000 megalitres in the Flinders and Gilbert respectively is because that is what is available in the resource operations plan now. To identify more water takes a review of the resource operations plan and perhaps even the water resource plan. We need to do that in a thorough, consultative and scientific way, but that would take time. So I am getting on with the job in terms of what I can do now.

I have already indicated publicly on a number of occasions that I am willing to bring forward the review in the future to deal with those issues if we have a strong take-up and if we can establish that more water can be located sustainably. But I am not willing to compromise or jeopardise the sustainable allocation of the resource to the people who already have an allocation in that area, who are already pursuing opportunities to have irrigated agriculture opportunities in the north west by rushing into a poorly informed release of additional water in that area. I am very enthusiastic about the future of irrigated agriculture in North-West Queensland, but I am not going to do so on an unsustainable basis because I would be negligent in my responsibilities as minister.

CHAIR: I have a supplementary to that, Minister. Has the department had any firm interest in the 80,000 megalitres allocation?

Mr CRIPPS: A very strong response. The tenders are closing, as I indicated in my earlier answer—I think to the member for Whitsunday—on 26 October. We will be assessing those applications as soon as we can and announcing the results as soon as we can because we would like to give people an opportunity to perhaps commence construction of infrastructure associated with irrigated agriculture in the north west during the existing dry season. I want to give them an opportunity to pursue the development of any necessary infrastructure that they need during the dry season. There has been a very strong response.

Mr COX: On a positive note regarding water, the Great Artesian Basin represents an important resource for inland Australia. The service delivery statement of the Department of Natural Resources and Mines at page 5 refers to significant savings of water through sustainable management of the basin's water resource by supporting agriculture and the resource sector. What programs are being supported by the Queensland government to ensure the sustainability of the basin? How is the water in the Great Artesian Basin allocated?

Mr CRIPPS: These are one of those responsibilities for water management in Queensland that I do have so I thank the member for Thuringowa for his question. In addition to the allocation of water from the basin in Queensland, the department also supports and delivers a number of initiatives under the Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative and takes advice from the Great Artesian Basin Advisory Council.

Queensland is cooperating with the Commonwealth and other Great Artesian Basin jurisdictions to ensure that there is a whole-of-basin management approach, including implementation of the sustainability initiative to reduce losses from uncapped bores and open drains. That is one of the initiatives that has really been a great success story in the Great Artesian Basin. In the 2011-12 financial year the sustainability initiative delivered in the GAB water savings in the vicinity of 3,548 megalitres. Some 22 bores were capped and piped as part of that process, representing some 4,888 kilometres of inefficient and land degrading flowing bore drains. That is a great outcome for the sustainable management of resources in the GAB.

There are some additional benefits for the management of grazing and environmental benefits from participating in the scheme. Whereas previously water flowed uncontrolled across the landscape, the piping and capping of these abandoned bores means that livestock can be supported more effectively for grazing operations in that area but also native wildlife can take advantage of the effective management of that resource.

The water resource plan in the GAB identified 23,400 megalitres of general reserve and 10,000 megalitres of state reserve as unallocated water for future water needs in the area. There is demand for unallocated water in the basin from the resources sector, the agricultural sector and the urban and other commercial sectors. Some of the demand from new water users is already being met by the trading of existing water licences in the area.

In 2010 the department deferred the release of unallocated water from several general reserve resources due to uncertainty about the impact of the coal seam gas industry in the area. I think that is a prudent approach in the terms of the management of the Great Artesian Basin and its impact on the Murray-Darling Basin.

I think it is very important for everyone to understand the size of the Great Artesian Basin. It covers a very significant part of Queensland. Accordingly, the department will soon commence the process for the release of unallocated water from the general reserve by a competitive market based approach. The department is currently preparing a minor amendment to the GAB Resource Operations Plan which implements the water resource plan and simplifies and streamlines administrative processes for the release of unallocated water. The GAB Water Resource Plan commenced in 2006 and provides for the allocation, management and use of water in the artesian aquifers. Some of them are unallocated

water reservations for future demands as I have outlined previously. Those licences, when they are issued, will be tradable as with all mature water resource plans and resource operations plans in Queensland.

CHAIR: Has the pressure in the Great Artesian Basin built up at all since the capping of some of those bores?

Mr CRIPPS: I think what is important to understand in relation to the initiatives of the capping of abandoned bores in the Great Artesian Basin is that the magnitude of the resource and the size of the basin is so big. It is a rather difficult process to identify consistent improvements in pressure over time because of the size of the resource. What we do know is that by capping those bores that have been abandoned we have saved an awful lot of water—3,548 megalitres of water is a significant amount of water in anyone's consideration.

The real benefits I think will be seen from the ongoing efforts of this sustainability initiative over time where we see the opportunity for this basin to recover from use so far. That is not to say that the Great Artesian Basin is under all sorts of pressure at the moment, because I do think that there are opportunities for that unallocated water to be allocated for those uses that I outlined earlier—the resources sector, agriculture, further urban and community uses. If we can take the opportunity to cap those bores where they are not being used, that will obviously have positive outcomes for everybody concerned in the future.

CHAIR: I call the member for Beaudesert.

Mr KRAUSE: I refer to page 4 of the Department of Natural Resources and Mines Service Delivery Statement which outlines the pilot study into the potential for coordinated surveys in a greenfield development. Could the minister please highlight what benefit this study will be to Queenslanders?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for Beaudesert for the question. Although he represents a regional and rural electorate, he also represents an electorate where there is a lot of growth in residential areas at the moment. So I can understand why he is interested in this particular issue.

The department is conducting a pilot study to address the potential for coordinated surveys in greenfield development sites for extending the survey model to other greenfield sites across the state. A number of greenfield sites in South-East Queensland have been declared urban development areas. Examples include the Ripley Valley, Yarrabilba and Greater Flagstone, which will be of interest to the chairman of the committee.

CHAIR: That is in my area.

Mr CRIPPS: Yes. When fully developed, it is expected that those areas, those greenfield sites, can accommodate up to 50,000, 120,000 and 120,000 residents respectively. So they are not insignificant developments on these greenfield sites. The establishment of accurate and robust spatial information will be very important for the success of these developments as they roll out over the next 20 years.

In recent years the spatial information division within the department has been working on initiatives to streamline the land development process and modernise Queensland's land boundary system, also known as the cadastre. Fundamentally, before construction work can begin on greenfield sites we would like to see a high-accuracy, well-coordinated framework established, with cadastral boundaries, engineering works and services all connected together. I think that is getting ahead of the game in terms of what we were talking earlier regarding the flood planning that has to occur. If we can get it right in the first instance when we commence work on these greenfield sites, it will give peace of mind for the people who are able to invest in these greenfield sites.

The framework would also be connected to the cadastre which would give more certainty in planning road services, infrastructure footprints and allotment configurations on these greenfield sites. The department believes that by doing so many steps in the development process indeed can be simplified and expedited. Planning has commenced to undertake a highly accurate survey across these greenfield sites, with the survey to serve as a pilot for these ideas.

Industry is also working with and supporting this initiative of the survey, and approaches have been made to local governments to inform them about this initiative and to invite them to be involved. The resulting survey will benefit industry in the spatial data area that underpins these developments because they are involved and, if we can have a state-of-the-art system in place at the commencement of these developments, then all the better for planning and certainty in the future.

The government, my department and certainly councils will benefit from much improved data being available to update their spatial data sets. Importantly, it is projected that the survey and associated activities will reduce development costs and that should flow through to a reduction in costs of the land for the general public.

CHAIR: Minister, as a supplementary to that—the member for Beaudesert and I were just having a discussion—are these desktop studies or are they on-the-ground cadastral studies as well?

Mr CRIPPS: They will be both. You cannot undertake the development of a sophisticated cadastral program without getting raw data from the sites that we are dealing with. I think one of the points that I would like to make in answering your supplementary question is that the project could lead to significant cadastral and spatial reform and improve systems overall for the state in the future. Should this pilot project be successful, if there are cost savings and regulatory improvements identified, changes could be made to the cadastral survey standards outside of these greenfield pilot areas to enable new schemes to be applied to other greenfield sites as well.

It fits in with other departmental projects that are going on at the time—electronic exchange of land related information and upgrading departmental data sets. There is a possibility that could be simpler and easier to do if we can get good results out of these particular trials.

CHAIR: I call the member for Whitsunday.

Mr COSTIGAN: Minister, I refer to page 5 of the Service Delivery Statement which makes reference to the amount of water Queensland has returned to the Murray-Darling system. How is the Queensland government involved in the Murray-Darling Basin Plan and what commitments are being made to contribute to targets for environmental flow?

CHAIR: This is another one that is actually yours, Minister.

Mr CRIPPS: Yes. This is one of the water management responsibilities that I do have under my portfolio, Mr Chairman. Queensland has been participating in good faith with the current development of the draft Murray-Darling Basin Plan. I have provided comments on the Murray-Darling Basin Plan as drafted by the Commonwealth. On numerous occasions our concerns relating to the science supporting the contribution expected from Queensland has been communicated to basin officials and the federal minister for the environment, Tony Burke.

The concerns of irrigators have been heard by me in particular. They relate to the compounding economic impacts on regional communities in the basin in Queensland that are reliant on irrigated agriculture to support jobs. It is very disappointing that the plan has not progressed to deliver certainty for irrigators in Queensland and the communities they support. So far Queensland has committed some 5,165 megalitres to the Murray-Darling system from Queensland. Members of the committee may have observed the controversy in New South Wales communities from the release of the draft plan. We have become also very frustrated since the previous government committed Queensland through a referral of its powers to the Commonwealth under the Water Act. The Newman government, as you would be aware, has sought legal advice about our options in relation to that referral of power.

We have been providing feedback in good faith through this process to the Murray-Darling Basin Authority to assist with the development of the plan. But it is very important that the plan strikes a balance between the competing water interests in the basin, that it takes account not only of the environmental objectives but also of the economic and social impact that it may have on communities in the basin. The authority released the altered proposed plan on 6 August this year for comment by the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council. As I said before, I have provided comments on specific issues pertaining to Queensland to Minister Burke on 27 August this year, along with the agreed comments of the ministerial council.

We are pleased with some aspects of the altered proposed basin plan. Some of the concerns that Queensland had have been addressed in that process. In particular, we note that the authority now plans to undertake a scientific work program, which we have been asking for, in the northern shared area of the basin between Queensland and New South Wales to investigate the basis for the proposed local and shared reduction amounts in the northern shared basin.

I will continue to work with the authority and the Commonwealth government. It will be difficult for Queensland however, I must point out to the committee, to continue to support the basin planning process if our concerns are not addressed, particularly in relation to the inadequate attention paid to the key issues of implementation of the basin plan recommendations for recovering water out of the basin for environmental purposes. If we do not have a satisfactory answer to the concerns that Queensland has expressed consistently to the basin authority and to the federal minister, it will be very difficult for us to continue to support this process.

I cannot underline seriously enough the impact that a poorly implemented withdrawal of water entitlements from these communities could do to the communities in that area that are dependent on irrigated agriculture for jobs. I think Queensland communities in the Murray-Darling Basin really should be commended for the proactive way that they have sought efficiencies in water use, particularly in the last two decades. They are very responsible managers of this water resource. They know how important it is. It underpins the viability of their businesses every year. They are proactive about sustainable allocations of water in the Murray-Darling Basin. They believe that they really need to be listened to in terms of the implementation of this current plan.

CHAIR: I call the member for Thuringowa. This is an important question.

Mr COX: Being a regional MP, this question is important to me. I refer to page 5 of the Department of Natural Resources and Mines Service Delivery Statement where the work to deliver a new address management system is outlined. The state government was recently made aware that the township of Mutchilba in North Queensland was not listed as a locality. Would the minister please outline his response to this issue and highlight how the local residents of Mutchilba will benefit from the delivery of this new address management system?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for Thuringowa, a fellow North Queenslander, for the question. Certainly he would know that the concerns of the position of the people of Mutchilba have captured the attention of many people not just in Mutchilba but across the state and beyond the state. The plight of the people of Mutchilba has been highlighted regularly, particularly by Tom and Alex on Triple J. They have read out the weather in Mutchilba every day since July in support of the endeavours of the people of Mutchilba to have their locality re-established.

CHAIR: They sound like great supporters of Mutchilba.

Mr CRIPPS: They are. It is a strange relationship between Tom and Alex from Triple J and the people of Mutchilba but it has been mutually beneficial.

In July my department and I received a request to recreate the locality of Mutchilba in North Queensland. The township unfortunately over a decade ago was placed within the locality of Dimbulah, both wonderful places in North Queensland. The people of Mutchilba have always believed and understood their locality was on the map, but unfortunately it had not appeared on the place names database for some time. This caused concern not only for the people of Mutchilba in terms of their identity but because particular circumstances have arisen in recent times about the ability of emergency services to respond to call-outs in that community.

I requested my department to commence the process after I read a small article in the *Cairns Post* back in July. Subsequently, we were contacted by other people who became aware of the situation and I reassured them that the process had already commenced. We have undertaken a two-month consultation period. We have sought and interacted with and requested advice from the Tablelands Regional Council about the boundaries of the proposed locality of Mutchilba. This morning I actually had the opportunity to sign the brief, which will now be published in the *Queensland Government Gazette*, to officially name Mutchilba as a locality under the Place Names Act.

So the committee can be reassured in terms of that process that Mutchilba has been officially added to the state government's place names database. The council is supportive of this. The community of Mutchilba is supportive of this. I spoke yesterday with one of the leading proponents of getting Mutchilba back on the map. They are very pleased. They are having quite a party up there at Mutchilba today, celebrating their new-found identity. But in their hearts I do not think it ever left the people of Mutchilba. They are stoic people. Certainly they can be reassured on a serious note that, for the purposes of emergency service responses and for the purpose of interacting with organisations such as Telstra and Australia Post, Mutchilba will be officially recognised.

CHAIR: Minister, it is a serious issue. On a less serious note—

Mr KNUTH: Mr Chairman, I just want to advise people that Mutchilba is 30 kilometres west of Mareeba and it is the furthest northernmost town in my electorate.

CHAIR: I was going to highlight that the Mutchilba mardi gras has apparently got quite a name. I am sure I can see the member for Dalrymple in a grass skirt in one of these photos here.

Mr CRIPPS: I think it is the Mango Mardi Gras. That is the annual community event held in Mutchilba—a very prestigious event celebrating the importance of the mango industry to that area of the state of Queensland. I think it is a really good outcome. Certainly I wanted to make sure at the start of this process that the community of Mutchilba was not burdened with the onerous paperwork and the difficult process that can often be associated with changes to place names. I took a personal interest to make sure that they were not burdened with that paperwork, and we have a good outcome for them today.

CHAIR: I will encourage the member for Dalrymple to invite Tom and Alex from Triple J to the mardi gras. I am sure they will enjoy it.

Mr GIBSON: Minister, I would like to ask a question with regard to NRM funding. The reference is page 4 of the SDS. The current natural resource management funding programs were negotiated by the previous government with the Commonwealth. What has this government done to ensure the ongoing commitment to natural resource management bodies across Queensland? As the Commonwealth funding is set to expire next June, can you advise the committee what your department has done to secure the next tranche of funding from the Commonwealth?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for Gympie for his question. He would be aware, as would many members, of the ongoing work of the community based natural resource management groups in their electorates. They are very important for a number of outcomes that are achieved regularly in NRM in local communities. Natural resource bodies in Queensland maintain an important link between

grassroots landholders and support community actions on the ground in terms of natural resource management. Unfortunately, the previous government often sought to leg-roped, if I can put it this way, these regional NRM groups into delivering programs that were closely tied to political agendas. Unfortunately, these groups found themselves being Trojan horses on many occasions for policies that were closely aligned in some cases with election commitments designed to attract Green preferences around election time. That is unfortunate because it compromised those strong relationships with those community based groups which I believe know best in terms of pursuing natural resource management outcomes in those local areas. They were in the unenviable position of conflict between some of the practical and proactive work on the ground that they did in conjunction with landholders that actually improved natural resource management outcomes in streams, watercourses, improving water quality and bank stability in those watercourses and other worthwhile outcomes delivered on the ground.

Rather than seeing those community based groups bound with endless cycles of reporting, planning and seeking to ensure that they get next year's funding grant, this government is committed to providing funding that has been directed to projects that will bring about practical, on-the-ground outcomes. The messages that continually come to me across the state is that more action is needed on pest weed control and the management of feral animals such as feral pigs, feral cats and wild dogs.

In Cape York the feral pig control program has been found to significantly increase the survival rate of turtles. Initially some people may ask, 'What is the link between feral pig control and providing sustainable outcomes for turtles?' The answer is simple: feral pigs prey on turtle eggs in nests, and thousands upon thousands of potential turtle hatchlings unfortunately do lose their lives to feral pigs because of the uncontrolled nature of those feral animals in North Queensland, particularly on Cape York. But right across North Queensland they cause all sorts of problems in different ways.

In many instances, NRM is simple. It is about getting people out and actively working on the ground to plant trees in appropriate areas, to stabilise watercourses in appropriate areas and to do work on places like foreshores where they actually see an outcome. As we move into the next round of funding from the Commonwealth, the state will be seeking greater coordination with on-the-ground groups through existing NRM bodies and groups such as Landcare, catchment groups, other community based organisations where there is a lot of manpower on the ground—a lot of dedicated people. I think we will benefit from creating closer relationships between our regional NRM bodies and those volunteer groups.

As I mentioned earlier today, the state government is delivering on its commitment to provide \$11 million of funding to Queensland's 14 regional NRM groups to protect our natural resources. The Queensland regional NRM investment program funding is for on-the-ground projects and programs that are aligned with the government's NRM priorities, and they will be delivered by these community based NRM groups in the state's regions. Those on-the-ground projects will focus particularly, as I have mentioned, on pest and weed control, on improving water quality and enhancing sustainable agricultural activities. We are really committed to working with those NRM groups to get the best outcome for Queensland's natural resource management. Queensland's regional NRM bodies are the custodians of a significant amount of local knowledge, as I mentioned before, and they can make a real difference to the health of our local environment.

Ms TRAD: Mr Hunt, can you tell me how long the suspension or the hold on investigations was for tree-clearing breaches?

Mr Hunt: I do not have an exact date for you, Ms Trad. It would have been for about three months I think.

Ms TRAD: Can you take that on notice and come back to me with exact dates?

Mr Hunt: I will take that on notice, yes.

Ms TRAD: Mr Hunt, in your response to my earlier question you confirmed that your operational decision to place on hold all current investigations, withdraw an existing appeal and also review all penalties imposed since the Vegetation Management Act started was based on an interaction with the minister where his perceptions of the system had influenced your decision to take action. Can you confirm whether or not you kept a record of this interaction and the rationale for your operational decisions as per the Public Records Act 2002 and as per the Premier's protocols for communication engagement between the ministerial office and the Public Service? I table a copy for the benefit of the committee.

Mr Hunt: I think I should be clear that any decisions I made were not based on the perceptions the minister had. Decisions that I made were based on the data I obtained from the department in relation to the actual level of prosecutions and the fines that had been imposed over those periods. My decisions were based on data; they were not based on perceptions.

Ms TRAD: Mr Hunt, with all due respect, you did say earlier in your answer to my question that the genesis of your action was initially an engagement with the minister—an interaction with the minister. The minister, I see, is nodding his head.

Mr Hunt: Absolutely. I interact with the minister every day. That is the nature of the role of a director-general. The minister asked me a question. I think I made that clear before. He made clear to me that he had a perception that fines had increased. I went away and obtained data which actually confirmed that there was a valid question to be asked in relation to that. Then I acted in relation to that data.

Ms TRAD: Why could you not conduct the review in parallel with the actual investigations ongoing? Why did you feel the need to suspend the investigations, to place them on hold?

Mr Hunt: I needed to understand what was happening in the whole process. This whole area of the agency was new to me. I had been responsible for the Vegetation Management Act at that stage for a matter of weeks. I needed to understand the entire process that was underway before I could satisfactorily allow it to continue.

Ms TRAD: Mr Hunt, as an experienced public servant can I ask whether or not you think it is appropriate for a public servant to change operational actions based on questioning from the minister?

Mr Hunt: As I stated, I made the decisions that I made on the basis of data that I received from the department. I see nothing inappropriate in that. Can I also be clear that there were a number of prosecutions that were already on foot which also continued. The one appeal that was dropped was the department appealing for a more severe fine to be imposed than the court had imposed.

Ms TRAD: What is the status of that, Mr Hunt?

Mr Hunt: The instruction that I gave was that we were to abide by the decision of the court.

Ms TRAD: And it is currently before the court?

Mr Hunt: No, that one has finished now.

Ms TRAD: Let us interrogate this data that you keep talking about. I will ask this question of the minister. Minister, in relation to your press release of 19 April, you say that since July 2009, 23 prosecutions have been finalised for offences totalling over 15,000 hectares of illegally cleared vegetation resulting in approximately \$1.3 million in fines. Sorry, I have rounded up. The statement made it clear that you considered this to reflect an increased rate of prosecution—in fact, an overly aggressive rate of prosecution. Minister, in response to your question on notice No. 1 you identify only three breaches of illegal clearing determined by the courts, not the 23 prosecutions finalised which you reflect in your press release. Why does the same response identify only 33 hectares and approximately \$100,000 in penalties compared with your press release of 15,000 hectares and approximately \$1.3 million in fines?

CHAIR: Can I get some clarity? Is that over the same time period?

Ms TRAD: Yes.

Mr CRIPPS: It is a fair question and it is a matter of interpretation of the data that is coming through. If I can explain, there appears to be a lag time in terms of the times at which the particular infringement of the Vegetation Management Act took place and the process of investigating, prosecuting and imposing the infringement notice. My advice from the director-general is that the differences in the data that I provided in the press release I think that you are referring to—

Ms TRAD: 19 April.

Mr CRIPPS:—and the answer in the question on notice relates to the delays in the lag times and my making public the data that I had at the time you are referring to and the information we have provided to you in the question on notice. So we have updated data to provide to you in the question.

Ms TRAD: Minister, taking on board your answer now, what you are saying is that from April until the time when you answered this question, in October of this year—a matter of months—there has been a decrease in the prosecutions? In April you are saying there are 23. Now you are saying there are three. Where did 20 go? That is not about satellite data and following up investigations.

CHAIR: Let the minister think about this. It is a complex question. I am having trouble understanding it.

Mrs MILLER: Does anyone in the department know the answer?

CHAIR: Would you like to take that question on notice, Minister?

Ms TRAD: Perhaps I can ask the director-general a follow-up question.

CHAIR: Do you want that taken on notice?

Ms TRAD: Yes, I do, of course.

Mr CRIPPS: I am happy to take that question on notice, but can I reassure the member for South Brisbane that my understanding is that the differences in the figures relate to some delays in data coming through. There can often be delays in finalising court proceedings and prosecution decisions. The data that I may have provided in my public comment from the reference you are making—

Ms TRAD: 19 April.

Mr CRIPPS:—in the media release or the public comment in April may be different from the material that we are able to provide to you in response to a question on notice because of the updating of the data.

Ms TRAD: Well, I would appreciate it if you could table that information.

Mr CRIPPS: I am happy to do that, member for South Brisbane.

CHAIR: For clarity for me and other members of the committee—

Ms TRAD: I am sorry, Mr Chair, I think it is the allotted opposition time for questions.

CHAIR: There is no allotted time.

Ms TRAD: Oh, okay, I will take note.

CHAIR: Just for clarity, are you saying that some of those fines were not finalised for the actual official parliamentary records that you have put out; is that what you are saying?

Mr CRIPPS: The information that we will provide in the answer to a question on notice will be the most up-to-date information we have at the time the question is asked. What I am saying to the member for South Brisbane is that, if there is an inconsistency in the information that I have provided when publicly commenting on the issue in April, and the information we are providing now with a response to a question on notice, it could be that the data has been updated since that time and we will provide some clarity through the question that we have taken on notice.

Ms TRAD: Thank you, Minister. Director-General, could it potentially be the case that the 20 missing prosecutions between the minister's press release from April this year and the response to question on notice No. 1 have actually been finalised because they have involved voluntary admissions of guilt by the prosecuted party and they did not proceed to a court determination? Is that highly likely?

Mr Hunt: That is possible. I suspect the answer to the question is that it relates to the year in which the breaches occur and these things take several years to get to court at times. A breach in 2009-10 may have been determined by now. A breach in 2011-12 is very, very unlikely to have reached court by now.

Ms TRAD: I do not dispute your answer but it does—

CHAIR: Member for South Brisbane, they are going to answer this question on notice. Why are we still—

Ms TRAD: No. I am entitled to ask some questions. We talk about the data and I am interrogating the methodology. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR: It sounds like—

Ms TRAD: Just—

CHAIR: Excuse me, member for South Brisbane, haven't you asked that question on notice? Isn't that data going to be provided with a question on notice?

Ms TRAD: In reference to the way the department finalises penalties and manages the Vegetation Management Act, I am entitled to ask some questions which will give further information—

CHAIR: But it is not much use wasting the time.

Ms TRAD: Thank you, Chair. I will continue on with my questioning.

CHAIR: Are you sure?

Ms TRAD: Yes. I just find it very interesting that 20 prosecutions may have been finalised in a matter of months when it takes several years for investigations to be completed and data to be collected. I am just saying that there seems to be a lot of traffic between the minister's press release and the actual response to the questions on notice. I guess it just does not seem overly aggressive to me.

Minister, in your answer to question on notice No. 5, I think it is, in relation to the staffing positions within your department—sorry, it is question No. 6—there seems to be a lot who have now been sacked or made redundant from the vegetation management area. Can you quantify how many positions have been made redundant from all areas involved in vegetation management in Queensland and how that reflects as a percentage of the entire number of people who were employed at the time the LNP came into government?

Mr CRIPPS: Mr Chairman, in relation to my response to question on notice No. 6, we have provided a significant amount of data on positions as they relate to classifications as per the request of the question on notice. In relation to the specific question the member for South Brisbane has posed today, there is not any direct individual data for positions with job titles allocated to them, so I will have to take the specific question on notice in relation to those job titles relating to vegetation management, if the member does not mind.

Ms TRAD: Thank you.

Mr CRIPPS: What I will say in relation to the process of the restructuring of the Department of Natural Resources and Mines is that that process was undertaken very carefully by my department in consultation with me and the director-general and senior managers of the department and it was based on three principles. The first principle was that I was not willing to entertain any reduction in front-line positions in the mine safety area of my department in the Mines Inspectorate. The second principle was that I wanted to minimise the number of positions that would be discontinued in regional and rural areas of the state. I put that cap at 25 per cent—so no more than 25 per cent of the positions were to be discontinued in regional and rural areas of the state. That was done primarily in recognition that many of the services the department provides are in regional and rural areas in the resources sector and the management of natural resources. Many of our clients, our stakeholders, our customers of the department are located in regional areas.

The third one is the one that I wanted to touch on in relation to the member for South Brisbane's question. One of the rationales for the way that we identified positions to be discontinued was that they would be related specifically to the agenda of the government for regulatory reform. It is no secret that we are seeking to reduce the red-tape and green-tape burden on business and communities throughout the state. Therefore, the positions that we identified outside those two other criteria were ones that were going to be associated with significant policy reform.

In relation to the Vegetation Management Act, I have indicated that we will be looking to streamline and provide opportunities for less paperwork and bureaucracy in terms of the interaction between my department and our customers. I have announced initiatives such as reducing the number of permits that will be required for simple things, like the management of fence lines. The member for Dalrymple will know that after the Cyclone Yasi event in North Queensland in the hinterland areas and the wooded country a lot of large vegetation fell on fence lines, so I want to simply provide opportunities for regulatory relief in relation to the management of fence lines.

I also want to provide relief for the management of fire risk in terms of managing vegetation, for the management of woody weeds, for encroachment in areas and, importantly, for fodder harvesting for a lot of pastoralists, which is an extremely important practice for the maintenance of those stock. Those processes are currently tied up in significant regulatory interactions between my department and the customer or the client. I think they are basic, everyday land management practices that almost all Queenslanders would consider should not be the subject of overly burdensome regulatory arrangements, so I want to simplify and streamline the permitting system—not abandon it—for simple land management activities like the ones I have outlined today.

Mr Chairman, in terms of taking the question from the member for South Brisbane on notice, I want to thank my departmental staff for bringing me those figures. In relation to staff who are engaged in vegetation management activities in the department, of the positions that were discontinued in relation to vegetation management, there was one permanent officer and two temporary officers who had their positions discontinued.

CHAIR: So there is no need to take that on notice now?

Mr CRIPPS: Not any more.

Ms TRAD: And as a proportion of the unit that was there?

Mr Hunt: There are staff all over the state in vegetation management. We have them both in head office and in regional areas and now in the department of science as well.

Ms TRAD: So how many are there?

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

Mr CRIPPS: Those are the raw numbers.

Ms TRAD: So you are saying only three?

Mr CRIPPS: They are the raw numbers. There were three—one permanent and two temporary. To answer the member for South Brisbane's question exactly in terms of a percentage, we will take that on notice, if you do not mind.

Ms TRAD: Thank you. Minister, you raised front-line staffing before and talked about needing to maintain front-line staff in regional communities. I would actually say that we need to maintain front-line staff all throughout Queensland, but I refer to your response to question on notice No. 7 in which you indicate that 413 staff, or 14 per cent of your department's staff, were made redundant since your government took office. Can you advise me how many of these positions were classified as front-line in the MOHRI data under (a) the definitions applied as at 28 March and (b) the definitions now applied by your government?

Mr CRIPPS: In relation to the question that has been asked, I think I will give my chief financial officer the opportunity to provide a response to that, given it is a rather technical question. I have outlined the principles on which we were able to undertake the restructure of the Department of Natural

Resources and Mines. I want to reiterate how grateful I am to all of the staff in the department, particularly my senior officers, for how we did that. I think we did a good job in difficult circumstances. I am pleased with the outcome in that it was a difficult process. Because the question in relation to the MOHRI data is of a technical nature, I will get my chief financial officer to provide an answer to that question.

CHAIR: Minister, can either the chief financial officer or yourself explain what MOHRI data is for the benefit of the committee?

Ms TRAD: Would you like me to explain?

CHAIR: You can.

Ms TRAD: The MOHRI data is the Public Service data system that actually collects—

CHAIR: So it is a name of a system?

Ms TRAD: It is the name of a system that has been used by the Public Service Commission for quite a number of years. It actually categorises every single public servant as per their position—so whether they are front line, whether they are administrative, whether they are professional officers, et cetera. So it gives you a data snapshot.

CHAIR: Is it across all departments?

Ms TRAD: Absolutely—every single one of the public servants who works in Queensland.

Mr CRIPPS: I am going to ask Ms Brenda Parker, our head of human resources, to come up and answer the question.

Ms Parker: If I am right, I think your question was what percentage of our front line is within—

Ms TRAD: As per the MOHRI definition.

Ms Parker: Yes. We have not actually changed the definition. We still use MOHRI as we have done for the last four or five years. We have not actually changed the definition. We are at the moment in this department at 21.54 per cent. Of the workforce that we are letting go, it is two per cent of front line.

Ms TRAD: Is that front-line definition as per the recent Public Service directive?

Ms Parker: Yes.

Ms TRAD: Issued by the Public Service Commission?

Ms Parker: Absolutely.

Ms TRAD: That is a different definition than the one—

Ms Parker: Yes.

Ms TRAD: So do you have the percentage of those through positions—

CHAIR: Can you ask your question through the minister.

Ms TRAD: Through you, Minister, can you advise what percentage of staff made redundant since 24 March in your department were actually front line, as per the definition which was in place at the time the LNP came into government?

CHAIR: That would be hypothetical, wouldn't it?

Ms TRAD: No, it is very real.

CHAIR: But you are asking for previous data that they will not have for the fact that the system—

Ms TRAD: I can assure you, Chair, they have it.

CHAIR: Are you sure?

Ms TRAD: I can assure you.

CHAIR: Minister, are you happy to take that question?

Mr CRIPPS: I am happy for our human resources manager to answer the question.

Ms Parker: We would probably have to take that on notice because obviously there has been a big change in position titling et cetera around that sort of stuff. We could take that on notice.

Ms TRAD: Thank you.

Mr CRIPPS: Just to point out for the benefit of the committee, the member for South Brisbane has asked a couple of questions about how the MOHRI data was calculated under the MOHRI system that has been implemented for a series of years. She then asked the question about the most recent definition of the positions from the Public Service Commission. So that is the reason why—

Mrs MILLER: Front line.

Mr CRIPPS: That is why we will have to take that on notice.

CHAIR: That is where it was verging on the point of hypothetical.

Ms TRAD: Chair, there was nothing hypothetical about that.

Mr CRIPPS: It is just two different ways of calculating the data.

Ms TRAD: Absolutely. Thank you, Minister, for protecting me from the chair.

Mr CRIPPS: That was not my intention. To be quite frank, I do not think the member for South Brisbane needs protection from anyone. The point I wanted to make for the benefit of the committee is that the question the member for South Brisbane asked related to MOHRI data numbers and then she asked for numbers under the most recent changes to the definition by the Public Service Commission. That is why there is a difference between the two figures she has been referring so. Certainly, we are more than happy to follow up by taking that question on notice.

Ms TRAD: Thank you.

Mr KNUTH: My question is to the minister. In reference to the government's answer to question on notice No. 6, will the minister advise if the Paddock to Reef Program will increase the regulatory burden on landowners in any of the reef catchment areas?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for Dalrymple for his question. I can assure the member for Dalrymple that none of the initiatives in my department under the Paddock to Reef Program will provide any additional regulatory burden placed on landowners in the catchments in which that program is undertaken. The member for Dalrymple will be more than aware of my views in relation to the additional unjustified regulation on landowners in reef catchments in this state by the previous government. The Paddock to Reef Program, in contrast, is not about additional regulation; it is about working in a voluntary way with landowners to improve land management practices.

One of the great disconnects between the previous government and regional and rural areas was a fundamental lack of understanding by the previous government that our landowners are the best people we have on the ground to manage our natural resources, being land, water and, I believe, vegetation. For that reason, in relation to the Paddock to Reef initiatives that will be implemented through the department, we will always be working with them to try to seek better outcomes in practical ways for the management of those resources.

The thing that the previous government always had in their mind was a lack of confidence and faith in landowners in regional and rural areas that they knew what to do. I can assure you that, in so many of the agricultural industries that I and the chairman are familiar with, landowners—farmers—take every opportunity to adopt new practices, new technologies and more efficient ways of doing things to improve the bottom line of their business. If you adopt a cooperative working relationship with those people, with those industries and with those landowners across the state, you will inherently come out with better outcomes than the blunt instrument that is regulation, which was the modus operandi of the previous government. The Paddock to Reef Program will not result in any additional regulatory burden on landowners. It will be focused on providing practical outcomes for landowners to improve their land management practices.

Mr KNUTH: Will Paddock to Reef supersede the Great Barrier Reef protection legislation? I am using the words of the environmental risk management plan. Will there still be a \$35,000 fine for not filling out the forms properly and a jail sentence for not filling out the forms at all? Will that go?

Mr CRIPPS: Mr Chairman, in the same way that the member for Bundamba earlier today failed to comprehend that the basis of her question did not relate to my responsibilities as the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines, so too has the member for Dalrymple failed in this respect. Whilst the implementation and the funding for the Paddock to Reef Program does come through the Department of Natural Resources and Mines through our natural resource management initiatives, the member for Dalrymple would know that the environmental risk management plans put in place by the former Labor government were implemented through amendments to the Environmental Protection Act, which is the responsibility of the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection.

Mr KNUTH: That is why I asked the question, because we had one but now we have two. You can understand why I have put that question to you.

Mr CRIPPS: No, I do not understand. If you had read the answer to question on notice No. 6, which you referred to in your question, we do not now have two of the same. We have a regulatory instrument through the Environmental Protection Act that is administered by a department that I am not responsible for. The Paddock to Reef Program is \$2 million worth of funding to provide assistance to landowners in evaluating the effectiveness of agricultural land management practices that have benefits for producers in these reef catchments as well as water quality outcomes. \$1 million of the funding is provided to the regional NRM bodies that we discussed before to coordinate the paddock scale component of the program and the remaining \$1 million is allocated to conducting water quality monitoring and evaluation. None of it is of a regulatory nature. There is no increase in the regulatory burden on landowners in the reef catchments as a result of the implementation of the Paddock to Reef Program. The program is not regulatory. The program provides information and support to encourage sustainable agricultural practices and planning and to improve land management practices. It is involved in extension and education, not regulation.

CHAIR: As a supplementary, there is no compliance involved in this? It is actually a voluntary program that landholders get involved with? Is that right?

Mr CRIPPS: It is an entirely voluntary program. It is a program that offers support to landowners. It is a program that offers additional information and encouragement for sustainable agricultural practices, land management practices, in these reef catchments. It will prove to be very beneficial, I am sure, to have this additional data to help us make informed decisions. It is not a regulatory instrument. I do not know how many more times I have to say it for the benefit of the member for Dalrymple. We do not have two systems now in Queensland regulating these land management practices. That is the responsibility of the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection under the Environmental Protection Act. I am supporting the landowners through the Paddock to Reef Program.

Mr KNUTH: When landowners ask you to put their concerns about the regulatory side of it, you say that it has nothing to do with you?

Mr CRIPPS: No, I take on board their concerns. Those landowners are some of my constituents. My electorate is wholly contained within the area for which the environmental risk management plans apply in both the sugar industry and the beef industry. I am more than aware of their concerns. I must say that I have much more confidence in the administration of the legislation under the current Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection than I did under the previous government. The previous government demonstrated a total lack of understanding of the operations of rural landowners, of farmers, in the areas where they implemented this legislation—a fundamental and total lack of understanding.

Ms TRAD: Then why did we achieve a 14 per cent decrease in the run-off into the reef?

CHAIR: Excuse me, is that a question or is that a statement?

Ms TRAD: I am just addressing his misinformation.

Mr CRIPPS: I am happy to take the interjection. You might be surprised, Mr Chairman, that the member for South Brisbane will not be able to provide a skerrick of information or data that justifies her statement. She may be referring to a series of reports that indicates that suspended sediment and dissolved nutrients from catchment areas into the Great Barrier Reef lagoon are declining. That data is being collected under programs like the Paddock to Reef Program and the Reef Plan program that was signed between the state government and the Commonwealth government several years ago which the previous Bligh Labor government usurped by introducing an additional regulatory burden several years earlier than was agreed under the Reef Plan. That agreement was signed in 2003 and was supposed to go through to 2013 to achieve the quality of data that was required to make an informed decision about how to protect the environmental values of the Great Barrier Reef.

Mrs MILLER: As the minister would obviously fail a school based NAPLAN test on reading, comprehension and numeracy because he cannot answer any detailed questions in relation to the operation of his department, I now ask the director-general a question. Director-General, I refer to page 5 of Budget Paper No. 4—and I table this—where it details an increased efficiency dividend on your department from \$22.268 million this financial year to \$43.27 million from 2013-14 onwards. Director-general, do these mandated savings lock in further redundancies in your department? How do you plan to achieve these performance targets with less resourcing?

Mr Hunt: Thank you for the question. The savings targets that are in place there, or the staff losses that we have announced for the Department of Natural Resources and Mines, total 413. That is the full amount required to realise the full year savings in those forward projections. Everything that Treasury has asked for in relation to the Department of Natural Resources and Mines in terms of the current budget has been met in terms of the planned staff losses that we have in place.

Mrs MILLER: As a follow-up question, can you advise me how many sick days have been taken from 26 March to date in your department? How many officers have taken stress leave and also how many officers have accessed the Employment Assistance Service?

CHAIR: I assume, member for Bundamba, that you are happy to take these questions on notice. It is a fairly detailed question.

Mrs MILLER: I would think—

Mr Hunt: I will ask Ms Brenda Parker to come up again. She will be able to answer some of those questions straight away. We may as well get that answer.

Ms Parker: I can answer the second part of that question in relation to stress leave. We have had one person in July on stress leave, which has gone to WorkCover. It has not been substantiated. I would need to take the absenteeism and the EAS parts of the question on notice and get back to you.

Mrs MILLER: Director-general, for those whom this government takes great joy in sacking throughout your Public Service—

CHAIR: There is no need for that, member for Bundamba. I do not think anyone would take any joy.

Mrs MILLER: In relation to page 10 of SDS can you advise me about whether any of your officers have been quite distraught in hearing that their employment is being terminated which would result in their houses being sold and would have incredible impacts on their family?

Mr CRIPPS: Point of order—

CHAIR: Member for Bundamba—

Mrs MILLER: I am asking the director-general.

Mr CRIPPS: Point of order, I have reflected on that. I am not willing to tolerate the allegation from the member for Bundamba that I or any member of this government take any joy from the restructuring of our departments. I will not tolerate that. It is a very difficult process to have been involved in—

Mrs MILLER: Poor petal.

Mr CRIPPS:—as minister. I am happy for the legitimacy of the question, other than the allegation at the start of the question, to stand. I am going to have to ask the member for Bundamba to withdraw and to rephrase the question so as not to make an allegation in that regard. It was just intolerable.

Mrs MILLER: You do not like it, do you? You just do not like it. Director-general, I ask you, please, have you heard—

Mr CRIPPS: Point of order, I asked for the member for Bundamba to withdraw the allegation at the start of her question.

CHAIR: Restate that question.

Mrs MILLER: I will restate the question.

Mr CRIPPS: Point of order, Mr Chairman—

CHAIR: Make sure it is not a hypothetical question.

Mr CRIPPS: Point of order, I asked the member for Bundamba to withdraw and then rephrase the question. I will not tolerate the allegation—

Mrs MILLER: You can carry on as much as you like, Minister. The chair is in charge of this proceeding.

CHAIR: Withdraw the statement and we will move on.

Mr CRIPPS: It is a very simple process that you are aware of and that you are abusing.

Mrs MILLER: Chair, you are chairing this session. I am asking you: would you like me to withdraw? If you ask me—

CHAIR: I would like you to withdraw the unparliamentary statement.

Mrs MILLER: I will withdraw. Director-general, have you heard through your officers, through any other means in your department or through the unions of distraught officers in your department who have been told that they are to be retrenched and their services are no longer required—in other words, they have been sacked—and the impact that will have on their families: that their houses are being sold and that that would have an extraordinary impact on their families? Are you aware of these personal stories, or is the HR director aware? This is in relation to page 10 of the SDS.

CHAIR: Member for Bundamba, there are imputations here. There is a lot of second-hand information and imputations that you are trying to extract. Is it really about the budget?

Mrs MILLER: It is about page 10 of the SDS.

Mr Hunt: I am aware that it is a very difficult process for everybody who is involved in it. For all people who have been impacted by this it has been very difficult, and there is no denying that. We have worked through a process with our staff and with the unions, and we have done it in as caring a way as possible. We have looked for people who are prepared to go voluntarily. We cannot fill the whole quota through voluntary processes. So we will have some people who will go in the employee redeployment pool. It is a very, very difficult time for everybody who is involved in this whole process. We have a task in terms of the budget resources that we have available to us in the future and we have to cut our costs to meet that task.

CHAIR: There is one minute left. I will call the minister to sum up for the last minute of the session.

Mr CRIPPS: I thank you for the opportunity to conclude this session by thanking all members of the committee for their participation in today's estimates hearings for my budget portfolio. I certainly want to acknowledge and thank my director-general and the departmental staff who have supported me through this process. This opportunity for all members of the committee to scrutinise the expenditure and the budget papers for the department is an opportunity that should be a robust exchange. Certainly at times this morning it has been. In addition, I think it is a good thing to note that we have touched on a number of issues that are very important for communities throughout Queensland not only in an economic sense, but also in a social and environmental sense. They are certainly responsibilities that

the government has over a broad range of interests in the community—not just in terms of the economy but also in terms of the social interests and the environmental interests that the department has in terms of conducting its programs.

CHAIR: That brings to a conclusion the consideration of estimates for Land Services and Water Services. Thank you, Minister and advisers.

Proceedings suspended from 11.00 am to 11.28 am

CHAIR: Minister and staff, welcome back. This is the consideration of estimates for Mining and Petroleum Services, and Mine Safety and Health Services.

Mr GIBSON: Minister, as you are aware, the electorate of Gympie has many abandoned mines dating back to its heyday of goldmining in the 1800s. But there are many sites across Queensland that also have a great many abandoned mines. On page 10 of the Service Delivery Statements you make some reference to this. What is Queensland doing to manage Queensland's abandoned mines and to ensure that the relevant recommendations of the floods inquiry are implemented?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for Gympie for his question and appreciate that he would be interested in the management of abandoned mines, given the history of the Gympie electorate. I know that he has spoken in parliament in this regard before. Issues on abandoned mine sites are addressed through the Abandoned Mine Lands program, for which the mine safety and health inspectorate within my department is the lead agency. This includes the management of a number of sites around the state of Queensland.

The program is also responsible for delivery of the government's election commitment, as we discussed this morning, for recommendations that have been handed down as part of the Floods Commission of Inquiry. There is a recommendation in relation to the management of abandoned mines. Key rehabilitation actions include works to address health and safety risks, contaminated seepage inception and pumpback, water treatment, diversion works and historic mining infrastructure management, which is the matter that is most significant for the Gympie electorate.

The government is committed to the long-term rehabilitation of abandoned mine sites throughout Queensland. In fact, the Assistant Minister for Natural Resources and Mines, the member for Pumicestone, has taken a particular interest in the abandoned mines program. She has been specifically requested to ensure that these programs are given a priority in this government. It is a task that she is taking very seriously, and I am grateful for that.

A four-year works program has been developed by the department, prioritising works for implementation, with a number of projects now underway including additional water treatment at Mount Morgan and water surveys at Herberton. The cost of implementing the recommendations of the Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry that are the responsibility of my department is expected to be in the order of half a million dollars for two years as a dedicated abandoned mines database is developed and landholder information on abandoned mines on their property is sought. This will be funded through the priority projects allocation.

Historic coalmining subsidence in Collingwood Park is managed through the Collingwood Park State Guarantee, which is legislated for under the Mineral Resources Act. Approximately \$18 million has been expended as part of the government's response to Collingwood Park through a combination of special funding allocations over recent years.

Mr GIBSON: Minister, will the current program that you have with mine capping be within that four-year works program or will that still sit separately?

Mr CRIPPS: With the abandoned mines program we do prioritise projects in accordance with risk. So the risk to the public on public land is the area we prioritise as far as the forward projects are concerned. We do have units, based at Charters Towers and at Gympie, that respond to matters in relation to abandoned mines as they arise. Just to give you some more specifics on that issue in relation to how we respond to abandoned mine issues, I might hand over to the commissioner for mine safety.

Mr Bell: The minister is correct: we maintain staffing in Gympie and in Charters Towers on an ongoing basis and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. If a member of the public reports to us a problem with a shaft or some hole that has appeared in their property, we address that as a matter of urgency, particularly if there is a high risk to the public. The database the minister mentioned is about risk-assessing the abandoned mines where we need to focus our efforts. That will be completed over the next two years. We will have three staff dedicated to putting that database together. That will give us a scientific basis on which to start dealing with the large number of abandoned mine sites around the state.

Mr COSTIGAN: Minister, I refer to forecasts for revenue raised from the introduction of a cash-bidding system for petroleum and gas tenements. Can you explain the motivation behind this cash-bidding process?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for Whitsunday for his question. Earlier this week I did outline, at a conference of the Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association, an initiative of the government to introduce a new competitive cash-bidding process that will apply to companies seeking

the right to explore on highly prospective coal, petroleum and gas resource tenements in Queensland. This new approach will result, we believe, in better stewardship of our resources, more certainty for industry and the community and a better economic return for all Queenslanders who have an interest in the resources in the ground in this state.

The new framework will involve both the controlled and competitive release of land for coal, petroleum and gas exploration and includes a cash-bidding process that reflects the potential inground value of the resource for certain areas that are released. Through competitive cash bidding, companies will bid for the right to explore highly prospective land made available through tender, and the preferred tenderer will be identified through a rigorous assessment process. Preferred tenderers will still have to meet the same stringent environmental and tenure approval requirements for exploration tenure that is granted—the same as if it was granted under the previous system, which does not include a cash competition basis. Importantly from our perspective, landholder rights will not be impinged on by the new cash-bidding framework. All current requirements associated with land access, conduct and compensation agreements will still apply.

I anticipate that the first round of the petroleum and gas areas available under the new competitive cash-bidding process will be released in the near future. By the move to a competitive process, we are seeking to maximise the benefits associated with the resources industry for all Queenslanders. It ensures that the most appropriate explorer, with a high commitment to resource development on these prospective tenements, is awarded the opportunity to explore. It will discourage exploration permits from being acquired and warehoused simply so they can be marketed or onsold to other buyers with little or no geological data to support the asking price.

Non-cash land releases in greenfield and underexplored areas that promote Queensland's attractiveness for junior explorers will continue, similar to the process before we have introduced this new initiative. The Newman government recognises the importance of all players in the industry, and a range of cash-bidding and non-cash land releases will continue to foster a strong exploration industry in Queensland. There will be ample opportunity for junior explorers to enter into joint venture opportunities with other companies to participate in the cash-bidding process or participate in the non-cash-bidding process for the discovery of new resource areas.

CHAIR: Minister, through the week I did hear some criticism in the media about the smaller miners not getting a fair go. Do you feel they will get a fair go under this new system?

Mr CRIPPS: Yes. I have just outlined some of the reasons for that. There will continue to be non-cash-bidding processes for land that will continue to be released as it has been previously. As I have also mentioned, there is nothing to stop the junior exploring companies entering into joint ventures with larger companies with capital to be able to competitively bid for these highly prospective tenements. The point of it really is—it has been lost, unfortunately, on some of the resource companies and some of the industry groups with the implementation of this policy—that a significant amount of work has been done by this department via the Geological Survey of Queensland to identify these tenements as highly prospective. If they are highly prospective, it is only fitting that the people of Queensland realise the full value of the resource that is coming out of the ground there. It will be limited to these highly prospective blocks and it will be transparent. There is no regulatory change in how the application process is occurring; it is just that there will be an additional criteria incorporating cash bidding into the authority-to-prospect process.

CHAIR: So there will be less speculation about these blocks? They are more serious blocks?

Mr CRIPPS: That is right. It acknowledges the investment and the work GSQ has done to identify these blocks as highly prospective. And the cash-bidding component reflects the potential value of the production of the resource that will come out of those tenements.

Mr KRAUSE: Minister, I refer to dot point 5 on page 5 of the Service Delivery Statements. Can you explain how the Queensland Renewable Energy Fund is being used to investigate potential sources of clean energy in Queensland?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for Beaudesert for the question. The Coastal Geothermal Energy Initiative is the initiative I would like to draw to his attention to answer his question. It is a \$5 million program funded by the Queensland Renewable Energy Fund to investigate additional sources of hot rocks for geothermal energy close to existing transmission lines and potential markets. That is the strategic approach to this process, because it is all about the economics of securing a renewable energy source that makes sense to implement and pursue. So if those sources or those resources are available next to existing infrastructure, it makes sense that they would be the most likely to be developed to realise the value of the renewable energy source. It is the economics of development of geothermal energy which will be substantially improved if hot rocks can be identified close to existing infrastructure.

A critical part of this initiative was the collection of background data through regional test drilling to identify potential targets for geothermal energy for industry. So the drilling program for this initiative commenced in November 2010 and concluded in July this year. A total of 10 holes, fully cored to depths of between 320 and 500 metres, were completed under the program, and thermal conductivity analysis

of the core samples was undertaken and temperature measurements were taken for each hole. Interpretation of the results of that indicate at the moment that rock temperatures at five kilometres depth may be sufficient to support geothermal energy development across five areas of the state including the Millungera, Hillsborough, Surat and Maryborough basins. Although the temperatures at the depths that these holes have been drilled to are encouraging at this time, identifying rocks from which heat could possibly be extracted at reasonable cost at five kilometres was beyond the scope of the program.

A detailed report is being prepared, assessed and interpreted by departmental officers. These reports are anticipated to be ready by the end of this year. A final report on the full results of the Coastal Geothermal Energy Initiative is scheduled to be completed by the middle of next year. After a reasonable period of time, I expect that technological advances may realise opportunities in this area, but it is very important that this work at the moment is done to see if it is a viable alternative renewable energy source.

Mr COX: Noting that resources are one of the four pillars of the Queensland economy and the importance of the regions, I refer to the Service Delivery Statements' reference to the department's work on a load-out facility for Cloncurry. What progress has been made to support industry with this unique infrastructure project?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for Thuringowa for the question. Once again, this is a positive initiative in North Queensland that he would be very interested in, being a fellow North Queensland. The new load-out facility at Cloncurry is a good example of the cultural change that is already occurring in the Department of Natural Resources and Mines—a change that focuses on providing proactive assistance that supports, rather than hampers, the development of the resources sector.

When I visited North-West Queensland earlier this year, I indicated the government's support for a new multiuser rail load-out facility to service mining projects in that region. The reason I indicated my support is that it really is a wonderful outcome for the local community as well as a viable outcome for a number of resource companies who were seeking a solution to the issue they have in front of them at the moment.

The facility will be funded by a joint venture between Xstrata Copper, MMG and Cudoco. The government has been actively working with these three mining companies to deliver the rail load-out facility for the region. The former government had really refused to come to the party to try to deliver a solution to the issue that Cloncurry and these companies faced, but a memorandum of understanding has been signed by these three parties. They intend to enter a joint venture partnership for the development and construction of a load-out facility just outside of Cloncurry.

For the last 18 months there has been some terrible uncertainty about how a solution would be identified at this location to try to centralise and rationalise the footprint of load-out facilities in the area to service those three projects of those three companies. I am very pleased to see that it has now been rationalised into one location.

The facility will be funded by the industry, but it will also be capable of expansion to accommodate additional load-out requirements in the future. The design and the planning for the project is underway. With our government's determination to try to facilitate, where possible, roadblocks, it is anticipated that we could have that load-out facility operational by mid-2014.

Once all projects are operating, the facility will handle around 2.2 million tonnes per annum of mineral concentrate for export and will reduce the number of train movements and rail load-out activities that currently operate within the Cloncurry township. So when you are talking about 2.2 million tonnes of material, you can see why the Cloncurry community was so keen to see a resolution to this particular situation. When you are also talking about that volume of product, you can understand why the companies were so keen to make sure there was a viable alternative for them to pursue when their projects are coming online. So the local community will benefit from the new facility and it will also benefit from a community fund that is planned to be established as a result of those three projects moving into production.

Mrs MADDERN: Minister, I refer to the department's responsibility to deliver an effective regulatory framework for safety and health compliance in the mining industry and refer to page 4 of the Service Delivery Statements. Can the minister provide an update to the committee on the state's mining safety and health performance and outline measures to ensure that Queensland's mine safety regime is not impacted upon under the state government's latest cost-saving measures?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for Maryborough for the question, and it is an important question. For the information of the committee, this morning I tabled the Queensland Mines Inspectorate annual performance report for the year 2011-12. The report from Queensland's mine safety commissioner, who is with us today, outlined a number of improvements in mine safety in this state, and I can reassure committee members that I am absolutely committed to ensuring that we implement them. The report shows a decrease in the number of fatal injuries in the state's mines from three in 2010-11 to one in 2011-12. The report also shows a decrease in the severity rate and duration of lost time injuries and disabling injuries. These figures are an improvement on previous years. However, we must continue to have a goal of zero fatalities and zero injuries.

Unfortunately, I must say to the committee that the report also shows the number and frequency of injuries to mining industry workers had increased over the past 12 months to 30 June 2012. This clearly highlights the need for us to remain focused on safety and health in the state's resources sector. I have asked the Commissioner for Mine Safety and Health and the Queensland Mines Inspectorate to speak with mining companies operating in Queensland about how they plan to address this particular matter in the report in terms of increases in mine safety incidents. Mine safety standards in Queensland have long been considered to be some of the best in the world, but the industry needs to be diligent as the number of untrained employees entering the industry increases. Certainly, members of the committee would know that the turnover in employees in the resources sector can sometimes be quite considerable. I strongly support the work of the mine safety inspectorate and its commissioner, Stewart Bell. I might give the commissioner an opportunity to make some of his own remarks about the report that has been tabled today.

Mr Bell: Thank you, Minister. It is important to say that the lost time injury frequency rate, which is a measure of the injury, particularly for underground coalmines, increased from 4.2 to 6.8, and that is a big increase. Up until this year we had been on a downward trend with this data. Unfortunately now all of our mining sectors, except for quarries, where there was a slight improvement—so that is open-cut coalmines, underground coalmines, open-cut metalliferous and underground metalliferous—have all recorded small or large increases in this particular parameter. This is a real concern for the inspectorate and last Friday, as the minister indicated, myself and the Chief Inspector of Coal Mines met with industry leaders and told them about our dissatisfaction with these numbers. We also talked to them about high-potential incidents. This is another area of major concern to the Mines Inspectorate.

Companies report these events and are required to report these events, and the number of reports has gone up, and that is a good thing. But unfortunately the sorts of things we are seeing are worrying us, and by that I mean people defeating the purpose of methane monitors on underground equipment by either turning them off or by putting plastic bags over them. We caught a person smoking underground in a coalmine, which I found to be almost unbelievable, but he was caught smoking underground. We had a person drive a vehicle into a high-methane area. These are all the sort of A, B, C, if you like, of mining. These are things that you never ever do. The concern that I have is that these things could be precursors to a mine explosion. Any one of these things could have caused an explosion.

Having said that, we talked to the companies last Friday. We are talking to the unions as well, because we want a concerted effort from both the unions and the companies to change this behaviour. As the minister intimated, there is no doubt that the increase in new miners, or 'greenskins' as they are known, is a factor here. A lot of these people do not know what they do not know. They do not realise the risk. 1994 was the last time we had an explosion in Queensland at Moura No. 2 when 11 people died. These people do not understand that. They do not realise that if you have an explosion in an underground coalmine there are generally very few survivors, as was evidenced by Pike River in New Zealand when on 19 November 2010 29 people died. I have just finished work on the Pike River inquiry and the report will be released on the 29th of this month. When you have a chance to look at that report, unfortunately you will see that some of these things were occurring at that mine before it blew up. So we are very focused on making sure that Queensland does not suffer one of these events.

In terms of inspectorate numbers, currently we have 46 mines inspectors. We are allowed 50. The problem we have is finding people to fill the role. A new inspector started last week and I have to say, supporting what the minister said, there are no restrictions on us appointing people as inspectors, there are no restrictions on travel or any other matter that they need to do to undertake their tasks. We have another inspector starting next week or the week after which will take us to 47. Unfortunately, the age profile—and I include myself in that category—is not getting any younger, so we are losing inspectors almost as fast as we can recruit them. We pay them pretty well I think from a Public Service point of view, but we are still a long way behind what the industry pays.

Overall I have to say that Queensland stats are still some of the best in the world, but we are not satisfied with a situation where we still hurt people. The one fatality we had last year was a 21-year-old guy who was killed in a conveyor system at a quarry near Moranbah. Unfortunately, we have already had a fatality this financial year where a person was injured at Mount Moss near Townsville, and I extend my deepest sympathies to the families and friends of those people. The inspectorate can never afford to become complacent. We cannot rest on our laurels while people are being hurt. As far as we are concerned, everyone is entitled to come home safe and healthy every day from work.

CHAIR: As a supplementary question to that, was there an increase in the number of miners working in Queensland last year?

Mr Bell: Yes, there was. We run a census every three months to give us the numbers to work out the levy which we use to fund the Mines Inspectorate. The last one was up to 58,000 people. That is a big increase on what we have had over the previous few years where we started off around about the 38,000 or 39,000 mark.

CHAIR: And that is taking in gas and petroleum as well?

Mr Bell: That is everyone in the mining industry, yes.

CHAIR: So that is gas and petroleum as well. Does coalmining have a higher rate of injuries than the gas and petroleum industry at the moment?

Mr Bell: Petroleum and gas have not had a fatality for three years. We are still having injuries in petroleum and gas for the same sorts of reasons we are having in the mining industry—unskilled, if you like, people on drill rigs are getting caught up in moving machinery. We had a fatality three years ago when pipes fell off a truck and landed on a person and unfortunately that person—

CHAIR: Yes, he was from the Lockyer actually.

Mr Bell: That is right, Mr Rickuss; you are aware of that. That was the last fatality we have had. We have 23 petroleum and gas inspectors and they are based out towards where the action is. We have the same problem there. The moment we train someone up to be a good P&G inspector, the gas companies come along and pay them more money. It is an ongoing problem.

Mr CRIPPS: So you can see, Mr Chairman, there are some substantial challenges still for mine safety in Queensland. In terms of the report that has been handed down and tabled in the parliament today prepared by the commissioner, I just want to reiterate the fact that the performance of the resources sector for last year was that there were less fatalities and that there was a decrease in the severity rate and duration of lost time injuries and disabling injuries. So those are the positive figures that came out of this report. As the commissioner has outlined, there are also a couple of indicators which are of concern, the first being that the number of injuries overall has increased and that the number of reported incidents is increasing. I suppose we should take heart from the fact that there is an improving culture of reporting incidents in the resources sector, because if you have a culture of reporting incidents on a site that will inform and drive improvements in workplace health and safety standards in the resources sector.

So whilst there were more incidents reported by employees on site, I think we could almost take some heart that people are being more conscious and more aware of potential safety incidents and maybe that is resulting in these fewer lost time injuries and the severity of injuries that may take place. But I agree with the commissioner: we need to continue our vigilance and certainly I as the minister and my department are very committed to that.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, I refer to the 2011-12 mine safety and health report which was tabled at eight minutes to nine this morning just prior to the hearing commencing. Pages 17 and 18, which I will now table, detail that there are now 85 positions in mine safety and health.

Minister, if you look at the 2010-11 report, it details a staffing level of 91.5 positions in mine safety and health. In the first session, Minister, you said that there have been no cuts to mine safety and health—that is what you said—but now in documents released at the eleventh hour this morning the truth comes out. It has been revealed that staffing levels have been cut by seven per cent. Minister, can you please reconcile these figures, or have you been caught out telling porkies to this committee?

Mr CRIPPS: I can reconcile the figures for you absolutely. I can say emphatically that there has been absolutely no positions cut from the Mines Inspectorate that undertakes the enforcement of workplace health and safety legislation on mine sites in Queensland.

Mrs MILLER: But 6.5 full-time positions—

CHAIR: Let the minister answer.

Mr CRIPPS: Member for Bundamba, the reporting that you are referring to relates to the mine health and safety division within the department. But in terms of the inspectorate that actually enforces the legislation on site in Queensland, there has been absolutely no loss of those inspectors on the ground enforcing the legislation. Indeed, I think I heard the commissioner just say only moments ago that we have recruited an additional inspector, taking our inspector numbers in Queensland to 47. So I can reconcile the two figures for you. There has been no loss of positions enforcing mines health and safety regulation and legislation in this state. My understanding is that those figures relate to administrative and business support positions in the department that are associated with the mines safety division of the department. There has been no loss of inspectors.

Mrs MILLER: So, Minister, the Premier said earlier this year that there would be no cuts to any front-line positions. Surely this division on mine safety and health is a front-line division and no positions should have been lost from that division, whether it be administrative, business services or whatever. So you are defying the Premier in relation to the front-line positions.

CHAIR: Member for Bundamba, you have asked the question.

Mr CRIPPS: No. I am telling—

Mrs MILLER: Yes, you are.

Mr CRIPPS: No. I am telling you that I have not. I can reassure you, and consistent with the evidence that was given by the commissioner only moments ago, that we have actually recruited an additional inspector to enforce mine health and safety legislation recently in Queensland. We are increasing the number of inspectors responsible for the enforcement of legislation on mine sites in Queensland. The reconciling of the numbers that you have referred to relate to, as I understand it, administrative and business support positions in the department associated with that division of the department. If the commissioner wants to add any clarifying information for the benefit of the member, I am happy for him to do so.

Mrs MILLER: Mr Chair, I have a supplementary question to the director-general. Through the minister, director-general, could you advise me in relation to this division, please, the titles and the levels of the positions that have been abolished within this division and also the position descriptions of all of these positions, please—the 6.5 that have gone?

Mr Hunt: Mrs Miller, I think in trying to reconcile figures from two separate years there will be some attrition of staff in there, there will be some turnover. As the commissioner indicated—

Mrs MILLER: The positions stay. I am talking about the positions. There has been 6.5 full-time equivalent positions cut. What I am asking you for is to outline which positions have been cut, the position descriptions for those positions and the level of those positions.

CHAIR: Excuse me, just let me interrupt for a second. Member for Bundamba, did I not hear the mines inspector say that there were three positions unfilled.

Mrs MILLER: I am asking the director-general.

CHAIR: Did he not say that? They were not actually cut; there were three positions unfilled. You will—

Ms TRAD: Chair, I am not sure that you should be answering the questions. You are facilitating the meeting.

CHAIR: No, I was just trying to get my head around the question.

Mrs MILLER: Chair, I think my question to the director-general is quite clear. He should understand the particular levels in his department, what these positions are, whether they are AO2s, or AO5s or AO8s and the position descriptions.

Mr Hunt: I understand absolutely, Mrs Miller. I can tell you that across the safety and health division, there were in total nine positions that went into the voluntary redundancy process. They all related to administration. One of them was marketing. There were a couple of technical officers at SIMTARS—safety and research. There were no mines inspectorate positions. I might ask Stewart Bell to fill in some of the detail on that, but the minister's statements about the inspectorate are absolutely true. There are no cuts to any of the safety inspectorates. Mr Bell?

Mr Bell: Thank you. There was one SES position in policy. There was a second SO position in policy. We contracted the number of people in policy, because we actually had too many, to be quite honest. There were some AO3, AO4 positions from an administrative band—a couple of people. I might add that all of these people put up their hand. No-one was forcibly made redundant. At SIMTARS, there were two technical officers who wanted to go and what we did there was we picked up someone from the pool of people who had been dropped from other departments. That person started at SIMTARS last week. So two people left and one person came back into SIMTARS. So the actual numbers, as Dan said, is right—is nine—but it is actually really eight in terms of the total decrease. As the minister and Dan have both said, inspectorate numbers have actually slightly increased and will increase again next week to 48. We have never been able to get close to 50. We had 45 for a while, as you know, Mrs Miller, and for a while we had 45. We were given approval from the Public Service Commissioner to go to 50. We have never quite got to 50 because we have been unable to recruit people in the current market we are in. Even though there is a decrease, if you like, in mining activity, it is still very, very hard to get people with first-class coal tickets, which are the sort of people who we are after for mines inspectors.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you very much. Minister, commissioner and director-general, you spoke before about the fact that you were alerted to the fact that there was a miner smoking underground and there was a vehicle being driven underground. Why would you get rid of a marketing person within the division when it would appear to me that there should be more marketing in relation to the division's activities so that we never, ever have anyone smoking underground, so that miners know that they should not be driving those types of vehicles, so that we do not have explosions, which is what you are talking about. We should have more marketing people rather than fewer. So how did you reconcile that you sack a marketing person and other administrative officers at the same time that you are saying that you have issues with safety practices in mines, particularly underground mines?

Mr CRIPPS: Mr Chairman, the member for Bundamba mentioned myself, the director-general and the commissioner in her question. I do not know which one she was referring the question to, but I am happy to start and let the director-general go from there. Can I just correct the assumptions in the member for Bundamba's question in the first instance. I agree with her insofar as the incidents that were

referred to by the commissioner for mine safety were scary, concerning and something that I certainly take very seriously, as does the commissioner. But might I also point to some information that I gave to you in my previous answer to the previous question about the increased incidence of reporting by employees on mine sites themselves. That is a statistic and an indicator which we should take notice of, because it means that there is an improving culture of self-reporting of incidents on sites.

Mrs MILLER: And you can thank the union for that.

Mr CRIPPS: To go to the core of your question about whether or not a marketing person will be able to contribute to that, I think the messages and the increasing culture of safety that has been passed down as part of an initiative on both the part of mining companies and, I agree, the unions as well, results in more awareness by people who are employed on site. The fact of the matter is that these incidents are still a concern. The commissioner spoke about the challenges that we face when we have new employees coming into the industry all the time. But the raw data—the reporting data that we have seen tabled today in the commissioner's report—indicates that there is a growing awareness of the issues of safety in the workforce at large. But member for Bundamba, you cannot account for stupidity on some occasions and we need to try to eliminate as much as possible the incidents such as those referred to by the commissioner.

Mr Hunt: In regard to the marketing position that I referred to, SIMTARS is an internationally recognised expert centre in terms of gas monitoring. Part of SIMTARS' business is selling those gas monitoring systems overseas. The marketing position—that role—was totally related to selling systems overseas, mainly in China and India. He had been employed in relation to a significant project that we had undertaken with the federal government in setting up a demonstration mine in China for the past couple of years. That project had finished and we did not need to keep that role continuing.

Mrs MILLER: Director-general, I am very well aware of what happens at SIMTARS, because it is in my electorate. Can I also ask in relation to the employee reporting—and I would ask this to the commissioner, please, through the minister. Commissioner, is it not true that the CFMEU Mining and Energy Division has always had a very strong focus on workplace health and safety and that the inspectorate works very closely with the CFMEU mining division to ensure that our mines in Queensland are as safe as possible?

Mr Bell: Mrs Miller, that is true. The mines inspectorate works with the industry safety and health representatives that are appointed by the CFMEU. We also work with district workers' representatives and they are appointed by the AWU. I might add a little bit more to what the director-general was saying. We market, if you like, our safety business to the mines through safety bulletins and safety alerts. Last year, as you will see from the report, we put out over 20 of those on a variety of topics. We continue to put them out when we come across things like people turning off the methane monitor on particular equipment. So for me, that would be a more focused marketing tool rather than having a marketing person.

We have not left SIMTARS in the lurch without anyone to drive their business. There is a person who has been appointed to fill a slightly lower role than that—doing the same sort of duties as the previous person.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. Minister, I refer to page 10 of the SDS and your role to facilitate.

... more efficient permit approval and licensing processes.

Minister, are you able to release a table of mines listed separately that currently have flooding from untreated water, with the amount of water at each mine, with a like-for-like comparison of flooded mines prior to March 2006? Can you detail what releases have taken place of treated and untreated water, listed separately, from that date until now with the locations and volumes of these releases? I am happy for you to take that on notice.

Mr CRIPPS: Mr Chairman, I do not need to take that question on notice. I am quite flabbergasted, given the direction and the guidance that I was able to provide to the member for Bundamba this morning—

Mrs MILLER: You are the mines minister.

Mr CRIPPS: That matters pertaining to the release of water from mine sites is the responsibility of the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection.

Mrs MILLER: That is the release bit. I am asking what water is actually at the mines now and you are the mines minister—not the release.

Mr CRIPPS: Indeed, I am the mines minister. Mr Chairman, if there were a situation where there was water in a mine site, then the regulation of the water on that mine site would be part of their environmental authority, which would be issued as part of the conditions for the approval of the operation of that mine. The environmental authority would not be issued by my department; it would be issued by the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection. So, no, I cannot produce a table with a list of mines that have water in them presently. The regulation of that matter and how they manage the water sitting in a mine site relates to their environmental authority, which is the responsibility of the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection.

Ms TRAD: Minister, I accept your explanation, but I find it extraordinary that, as mines minister, you would not be informed where there has been flooding in mines.

CHAIR: I think he has explained the issue about the water. This is not about flooding in mines; this is about water in the mines.

Ms TRAD: Yes.

Mrs MILLER: No, it is about water in open-cuts, in any underground mine.

CHAIR: That is right. So it is water in the mines.

Mrs MILLER: He is the mines minister.

CHAIR: It is water in the mines. It is not flooding. In 2010 there was water. That was flooding. What are we trying to get at here? Most underground mines have water in them.

Ms TRAD: Chair, I am actually trying to ask a question. That is what I am trying to do. I do not want you to moderate my question; I want you to chair the session.

CHAIR: Member for South Brisbane, the minister has just explained to you that the question does not relate to his portfolio.

Ms TRAD: And my question—

Mrs MILLER: He is the mines minister.

Ms TRAD: My question to the minister is: what is the reporting relationship between the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection and the Department of Natural Resources and Mines when it comes to the accumulation of contaminated water on mine sites? What is the reporting relationship? There is no reporting relationship? Minister, are you telling me that there is no reporting relationship between the two agencies of government—one that controls mines and the other one that controls contaminated water in mines—in terms of reporting critical incidents or incidents that may become critical should there be a flooding event, should there be a particular weather event that could contaminate natural resources, water bodies, riparian vegetation? Is that what you are saying? There is no reporting relationship?

CHAIR: Let us let the minister answer this now, thank you.

Mr CRIPPS: What I can say in relation to the question from the member for South Brisbane is that, in the first instance, the member for South Brisbane has failed to reference anything in the budget papers that relate to her question. So if the member for South Brisbane would like to clarify for me—

Ms TRAD: SDS 10.

Mr CRIPPS: And draw to my attention how that relates to my responsibilities for mines and how you can draw a very tenuous bow—a very tenuous link in my opinion—as to the management of water in mines that is derived from environmental authorities issued by another department.

Ms TRAD: Minister, I find that for you to assume that you have any tenuous association with what we are talking about is absolutely ridiculous. But my reference to the SDS is on page 1 where it states that your department is responsible for 'working to ensure regulatory certainty for the resource sector in return for world's best practice social and environmental outcomes will also be critical for the department.' Okay?

Mr CRIPPS: Okay. In relation to water, as you have mentioned, that may be on a mine site as a result of a weather event—

CHAIR: We are starting to get a bit hypothetical.

Mr CRIPPS: It is getting very hypothetical. In respect to workplace health and safety and any threat that water on a mine site may have for a potential workplace health and safety incident to occur, that is something that the Mines Inspectorate I am sure would be interested in and be liaising with the mining company itself about and whether or not there are any actions that they can negotiate with the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection about what may need to occur to make sure that people working on site were safe. During the previous wet season the previous government allowed discharges consistent with those environmental regulations as approved by the department of environment and resource management at the time. In terms of the management of that water on site and when they discharge it to avoid any incidents on the site, those discharges and the management of that water will still be done under the environmental authorities issued by the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection.

I am not for one moment saying that I am not taking an interest in what may occur on a mine site as the minister for mines, but what I am saying is that in terms of the management of the water on the site, that will occur under an authority issued by a different department and for that reason it is inappropriate to ask me a question during the course of estimates for the expenditure in the budget papers for this department.

CHAIR: Can you move on with a line of questioning that is relevant to this department.

Mr CRIPPS: I am sorry to spoil your day, member for South Brisbane, but you have got to ask questions that are relevant.

Mr RICKUSS: We have the environmental minister coming this afternoon.

Mrs MILLER: You are the 'Claytons' mines minister, that is what you are.

Mr CRIPPS: You are the 'Claytons' shadow minister for mines.

CHAIR: Order!

Ms TRAD: Maybe if you actually adhered to order, chair.

Mr GIBSON: Point of order, Mr Chair. That is a reflection.

CHAIR: If you are going to keep reflecting on the chair there are standing orders to deal with those sorts of issues, Jackie.

Ms TRAD: Member for South Brisbane, thank you.

CHAIR: Member for South Brisbane. Could we please have questions relevant to the portfolio that we are examining. I am sure that the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection will be more than happy to look at those questions this afternoon.

Ms TRAD: Absolutely. I want to digress back to vegetation management for a moment. Minister, I refer you to your responsibilities in relation to vegetation management in Queensland as detailed in the SDS, page 10 in particular. Given the perilous state of the koala population in Queensland and the success of the vegetation management legislation in slowing down illegal tree clearing of koala habitat, mainly eucalypt dry woodlands and eastern eucalypt woodlands, can the minister guarantee that the new government's relaxed approach to enforcing tree clearing laws will not have a detrimental effect on our endangered koala species?

Mr CRIPPS: Mr Chairman, I wish to advise the committee that the Koala Habitat Protection Strategy is a strategy that is implemented under the responsibilities of the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection. This department does not have responsibility for that particular strategy in relation to koala habitat. It is a concern to me that the member for South Brisbane is the shadow minister for the environment and she ought to know that that particular habitat strategy for koalas is the responsibility of Minister Powell.

Ms TRAD: It is a concern to me that the Vegetation Management Act lists species protection as one of its aims and objectives and as the minister responsible for the Vegetation Management Act you actually do not seem to understand that that is one of the principles and objectives.

Mr CRIPPS: I am aware of that, but you nominated, member for South Brisbane, the particular koala habitat strategy in your question.

Ms TRAD: No, I did not.

Mr CRIPPS: Yes, you did.

Ms TRAD: Point of order. I did not.

CHAIR: Could you repeat the question with some clarity?

Ms TRAD: I would like to, thank you, Mr Chair. Given the perilous state of koalas in Queensland and the success of the vegetation management legislation in slowing down illegal tree clearing of koala habitat—

Mr CRIPPS: Go back to the start of your question and read the whole question that you asked before, because I was listening to your question.

Ms TRAD: Okay. Minister, I refer you to your responsibilities in relation to vegetation management in Queensland as detailed in your SDS page 10. Given the perilous state of the koala population in Queensland and the success of the vegetation management legislation in slowing down illegal tree clearing, particularly eucalypt dry woodlands and eastern eucalypt woodlands, can the minister guarantee that the new government's relaxed approach to enforcing tree clearing laws will not have a detrimental effect on our endangered koala species?

CHAIR: Is that an imputation where you are assuming that there is a relaxed approach to their tree clearing laws?

Ms TRAD: With all due respect, the reference that the minister said that I had in my question in relation to the koala protection strategy was not there.

Mr CRIPPS: Those particular habitats are part of the koala habitat protection policy and that policy is the responsibility of the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection.

Ms TRAD: And those particular woodlands are those woodlands that have been identified through your department's tree clearing reports that have been saved. So there is overlap there. There is an issue in relation to overlap in terms of those woodland vegetation communities and their impact on native species, particularly koalas. That is the point.

CHAIR: This does sound more like a statement than an actual question. What is the question? The minister is saying it is for the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection.

Ms TRAD: My question is, with the new government's approach to vegetation management laws in Queensland—the minister was at lengths to describe his perceptions earlier this morning around the workings of the vegetation management laws—can he guarantee they will not have a detrimental impact on koala habitat?

Mr CRIPPS: Mr Chairman, the other question that I have is that the budget papers and expenditure for the Department of Natural Resources and Mines as they related to land and water services was the subject of scrutiny in this morning's session. In the current session we are supposed to be scrutinising the expenditure in relation to mines and mine safety.

Ms TRAD: So you will not give a guarantee. That is okay.

CHAIR: Can I draw the opposition's attention to the fact that it is a consideration of estimates for mining and petroleum services, mine safety and health services.

Ms TRAD: I will draw your attention to standing order 181 which actually does say that I can ask a question within whatever appropriation section we are debating now.

CHAIR: That is the mining and petroleum services, mine safety and health services section. Koalas are not really relevant.

Ms TRAD: Vegetation management, Ian.

CHAIR: You are drawing a long bow, I think.

Mrs MILLER: I have another couple of questions.

CHAIR: I would like to ask the member for Dalrymple if he would like to ask a question.

Mr KNUTH: With reference to SDS page 3, what guarantee can the minister give to mining communities that local governments will have influence on the distances of mining activities and operations from residential areas?

Mr CRIPPS: Thank you to the member for Dalrymple for the question. In the first instance, I would like to draw his attention back to an initiative that was implemented by the department earlier this year in relation to the LAMP program, the local area mine permit program. That is available through the department's website. That particular instrument allows anyone, individuals and councils, to access a map for their locality to give them an opportunity to be aware of any mining projects of any tenure that are proposed for their area. This is an initiative that has been welcomed widely and gives the community, the public, much more visibility of proposed mining sector operations in their local area. That has been welcomed.

In relation to the restricted area policy, you will be aware that the restricted area policy of the previous government remains in place throughout Queensland but it is the subject of a particular part of the development of statutory regional planning processes that this government is currently pursuing. Under that process, which is currently being pursued in the Darling Downs region and in Central Queensland, consultation with local councils, the community and industry groups will be subject to a range of issues. Particularly and predominantly statutory regional planning processes are the development of a land use program for that land. One of the issues that will be dealt with under that planning process is the restricted area.

I envisage that the statutory regional planning process will involve consideration and consultation of how that applies to different communities in different regions. Instead of having a one-size-fits-all approach to the restricted area policy, there will be regionally appropriate restricted areas to protect communities that need protection as far as their amenity is concerned or impact on the liveability of their community is concerned and that should be operated on a regionally appropriate basis. Mining operations have occurred inside and around local communities. I could give you an example of the city of Mount Isa, or, for example, other places such as the city of Charters Towers which has been growing up with mining operations occurring in and around the town for some time. Those communities might decide that they do not need significant buffer zones around their communities because they have been living with mining activities quite successfully. Those towns have been prospering for some time. But in other areas there may be real concerns for communities. They may need a buffer zone, a restricted area, to protect their lifestyle or the amenity of that community and I think it should be pursued on a regionally appropriate basis through the statutory regional planning process. At the moment the restricted area policy remains in place until they are replaced with a more appropriate vehicle.

Mr KNUTH: Commissioner Bell, with regard to the importance of the Mines Inspectorate, you said before that there had been no job shedding in that area and that the difficulty has been in attracting mine safety inspectors. Have you looked at lobbying the minister for greater incentive packages to be put in place to attract mine safety inspectors?

Mr Bell: We have done a few things in that area. We have talked about paying a bit more money. We have the flexibility to do that with the current arrangements through the Public Service Commission. We are also trying to make the jobs more attractive. Most of our inspectors are based on the coast

except for the Mount Isa people and the person we have based in Atherton. We try to make the job more attractive. What happens is we tend to get people towards the end of their careers, people in their mid to late fifties. That is not a bad thing because they are very experienced and useful in that role. I think we have the best inspectorate that I have seen anywhere in Australia in terms of the spread of people we have and the spread of skills. It is something we are working at all the time. We constantly recruit overseas. We have brought in two South Africans in the last short period of time. We have recruited people from India, from the UK and from New Zealand. So we are out trying to get people into the system.

CHAIR: Member for Maryborough?

Mrs MADDERN: Can I take you back again to mine safety. I refer to dot point 2 in the Service Delivery Statement in relation to mine safety outcomes. Can the minister inform us of government funded projects that ensure mine workers return home from their workplace healthy and safe?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for Maryborough for her question. A number of organisations across the state actually seek assistance from the Department of Natural Resources and Mines in mine safety activities. In particular an organisation that has already been referred to today by the member for Bundamba and the Commissioner for Mine Safety and Health, the Safety in Mines Testing and Research Station, which is located in the member for Bundamba's electorate, is very highly regarded. It is known in the industry as Simtars and it delivers a range of scientific, engineering, training and certification services and has undertaken mine safety and health research aimed at preventing accidents, fatalities, disasters and occupational illnesses on behalf of industry.

It provides its expertise on a fee-for-service basis to industry, with a growing proportion of its revenue coming from international clients reflecting its reputation as a world-class provider of R&D. The department is engaged in a number of research projects which have the potential to enhance health and safety outcomes for mine workers.

QUT's Institute of Health and Biomedical Innovation has considerable experience as well in the mining industry, with a major focus on health enhancement, prevention of musculoskeletal injury and disorders and associated conditions such as obesity and mental health. The institute is collaborating with SIMTARS to progress the development and implementation of non-invasive sensor technology to quantify a number of risk factors for musculoskeletal injury and exposure to task demands. High job risk categories will be evaluated with an emphasis initially on maintenance and other workers exposed to a high risk of upper limb injury. These are some of the particular issues that come about as a result of working in the mining sector.

The outcomes of this research will be used to develop a suite of innovative monitoring, clinical screening and decision support tools to reduce workplace exposure designed to target health promotion in the industry—prevention is always better than cure—and rehabilitation programs. The project that is being undertaken is worth about \$150,000.

The issue of the commissioner's involvement in the Pike River mine disaster was mentioned before. I might just touch on a project which has some links to that particular event. The mine investigation robot known as Minezepp is another example of mine safety investment that the state government is currently making. The Pike River disaster in New Zealand was an example of where terrestrial robots moving into the site were ineffective because of the collapse of the structures of the mine. That was an underground coalmine. That would also be the case if there was an explosion in a mine.

It was realised that a different approach was required—not just terrestrial robots—to undertake that sort of information recovery from a mine site incident. So the concept of a helium filled Zeppelin device was developed. The device will utilise the mine ventilation network to move through the mine which will hopefully overcome issues like blocked terrestrial access to a mine in that sort of disaster scenario.

We are only able to peruse this type of technology at this point in time because electronics are always improving and progressing and there is miniaturisation of this sort of technology. You can communicate with this device being trialled at the moment through a normal wi-fi internet connection. We can do the navigation and gas monitoring underground in those sorts of scenarios through this particular device. That sort of platform for future responses to disasters will soon be available.

Mr GIBSON: My question is to the minister and is with regard to the North Stradbroke Island mining leases. I refer to dot point 6 at the bottom of page 3 in the SDS regarding North Stradbroke Island sandmining. How is the government planning to deliver a framework for appropriate management of mining leases on North Stradbroke Island?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for Gympie for his question. The issue of the North Stradbroke Island mining leases is interesting because it was one of those events that caused a lot of concern for the local community on North Stradbroke Island when the previous government pulled the rug out from under the sandmining operation on that island. The LNP has always made it clear that there will be an end to sandmining on North Stradbroke Island.

The community in South-East Queensland has a great affection for North Stradbroke Island. The protection of the natural environment on the island is a sensible and worthy goal, but the LNP supports doing so in a well planned and practical way. This government wants an orderly conclusion to mining operations on North Stradbroke Island which requires the mining company to remediate mining sites to a very high standard indeed.

The government believes we need a plan for Stradbroke Island that creates jobs and builds businesses rather than pulling the rug out from underneath them. That is why my department is working with the mining company on North Stradbroke Island to map out a plan to continue that operation within a certain time frame, to allow them the opportunity to go through an orderly process of realise the value of the resource on the island, to maintain jobs for people living on the island and the community, to maintain prosperity—it provides an economy for that community—and to provide an opportunity to develop an orderly process for winding down that mining operation and bring it to a conclusion and at the conclusion for them to have undertaken very high-quality remediation works on the island so that the conversion of those areas into protected area estates, if that is necessary and possible, can occur.

In relation to your question, member for Gympie, I am absolutely committed to trying to provide that orderly process and for the community to benefit from an ongoing, sustainable mining operation but the quid pro-quo for the mining company involved is that they will remediate the land. They will have an orderly process to phase out their operations which benefits the community in the long term.

They are going to need an opportunity to transition their economy from one based on that resource activity to say one based on tourism. They need an opportunity to do that. The shortened time frames for the operation of the mining leases that were enforced on the mining company by the former government do not allow for that. They do not allow for a well-considered transition process to ensure that the community has access to jobs and an opportunity for that community to continue to be prosperous in the future.

Mr COX: My question relates to red tape, which I guess I could aim towards any minister in the Newman government, and the reduction of it. This is specific for you in your portfolio. With regard to the reference to encouraging exploration and investment in the mining and petroleum industries on page 10 of the Service Delivery Statement, what has the government done to reduce red tape and bureaucracy to encourage investment in the mining sector?

Mr CRIPPS: I thank the member for Thuringowa for the question. You are quite right, that question could be directed to almost any minister in the government. It is no secret whatsoever that there is a standing desire of all ministers and all departments to try to reduce the regulatory burden, the red and green tape burden, on industry and individuals in Queensland.

Within the first six months of coming to government we have successfully delivered on a number of election commitments to reduce red tape for the resources sector in recognition of the critical role the sector will play in rebuilding Queensland's finances. Two pieces of legislation have already been passed through the House. One by the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection which dealt with a number of issues in relation to environmental authorities which will be of assistance to the resources sector and the mines streamlining bill. The amendments contained in that bill will reduce red tape and bring greater clarity to the approvals processes, in particular making it easier for resource companies to do business in Queensland.

While the bill streamlines the approvals processes for resource projects, it does not water down any of the rigorous assessment mechanisms in the legislation that are important for the integrity of the process. The centrepiece of the legislation that went through the House was the new online tenure management system called MyMinesOnline. Mining applications, including exploration applications, can now be lodged electronically through MyMinesOnline, which takes the tenure management system in Queensland from a manual, paper based system to a faster and more transparent online environment.

The bill also clarifies legislation so that resource activities, such as exploration and development activities and transport and infrastructure development on the sites, can coexist. Importantly, the bill streamlines the rules applying to the management and transportation of water and brine produced by the CSG and LNG industries.

Ms TRAD: Point of order, Mr Chair. Is the minister talking about the environment protection streamlining bill?

Mr CRIPPS: No, the mines streamlining amendment bill. The aim of the bill is to deliver a modernised and more effective regulatory framework, which was the issue that you asked me about in your question, for the state's resources sector. We certainly want to try to maintain an environment in Queensland that encourages investment from the resources sector. It is one of the pillars of our economy in Queensland. It underpins many jobs—as I mentioned today and which is particularly important for me—in regional and rural areas of the state.

Mr COSTIGAN: Minister, as you would be acutely aware, the resources sector has transformed the economy of the Mackay-Whitsunday region in recent years. Hence we have some of the world's biggest miners operating in our backyard—that is, in the Bowen Basin. But that said, and to take the

previous question to another level, I refer to the final dot point on page 3 of the SDS. What I would like to know is what the Department of Natural Resources and Mines has done to cut red tape for those engaged in the small mining sector?

Mr CRIPPS: In relation to the small mining sector, the government has had some interaction with these people who are engaged in small scale mining operations across the state. I think they are affectionately known in the department as gemmies—people who are undertaking that sort of small scale, low-impact resource activity in places like Central Queensland and Far North Queensland that really are a very important part of the resources sector in Queensland.

The small scale mining sector has made and continues to make an important contribution to regional economies. You might not realise that a lot of people travel into region and rural areas at various stages throughout the year and populations can increase significantly which is good for local businesses. It drives income—direct and indirect—through tourism to those regional areas. All too often the mining sector does not pay much attention to small scale miners. But unfortunately the legislative arrangements in Queensland do. We seem to impose a significant administrative and financial burden on small companies—the same ones that we impose on companies of a much larger scale.

The department is currently preparing legislation to be introduced into parliament by the end of 2012. This legislation will provide regulatory relief and red tape reduction to the small scale mining industry in Queensland through lowering the fees and administrative burden associated with small scale mining activities. The reforms will help rejuvenate the small scale mining sector so it can continue to make that valuable contribution to regional economies that I spoke about before. The reforms will better align the administrative processes required to hold and operate a small scale mining tenure with the limited risk that it poses to the public, to the environment and to the state financially.

Consultation with industry representatives of small scale miners was undertaken in August and into September and we are progressing those arrangements as quickly as we can given its a commitment that we have made to try to encourage small scale mining into the future. The proposed reform will extend financial and administrative relief to a broader proportion of small scale mining activities. Small mining operations that fit within this package of reforms will be able to take advantage of a reduced financial burden and administrative burden in recognition of their limited impact.

CHAIR: A lot of rare earth mining is done on a small scale but by larger companies. Is the regulatory burden going to reduce for the larger companies who are doing the small mining? Do you understand what I am getting at?

Mr CRIPPS: Yes. The wherewithal of small miners and the overheads that they encounter is what we are focusing in on in terms of these reforms for small scale miners. In terms of assessing the risks of those sorts of operations we will be looking at the area that they have under a tenement and the types of operations that they are looking to undertake.

There is a distinction that I would like to make between well-understood small scale mining activities and emerging or new types of resource operations. So the rare earth operations that you are referring to are a new type or an emerging type of operation. It is not necessarily well compared with well-understood operations such as people going out and looking for opals or gems in the gem fields. We need to make a distinction between the small scale well-understood technologies and pursuits by small scale miners and larger companies pursuing the development of new technologies or new resource opportunities in Queensland. We are focusing on those well-understood small scale miners.

CHAIR: I call the member for Bundamba.

Mrs MILLER: Through the minister, this is a question for the director-general. Director-General, I am just wondering whether you have ever been involved in discussions with mining companies, the union or any other departmental officers in relation to water stored in either underground mines or open-cut mines in Queensland? Have you ever seen documents or are there any documents within your agency in relation to water stored at these mines?

Mr Hunt: Naturally I have been involved in discussions. It is an issue that industry raises from time to time and it is an issue on which we refer them to the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection. It is an issue of significant concern for industry but the data in relation to those issues is held by the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection.

Mrs MILLER: So you basically just give them the flick to the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection.

CHAIR: That is a comment.

Mrs MILLER: It is a question.

CHAIR: Is this a question or is this a statement?

Mrs MILLER: I am asking: do you give them the flick to the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection?

Mr Hunt: I can recall times when I have been to meetings with them with the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you for confirming that.

Mr Hunt: But the point I would like to make is that the environmental provisions were taken out of the Mineral Resources Act in 2000 and they were put in the Environmental Protection Act to keep those issues separate. So there was a very clear decision under an earlier government to make those things separate and independent so there were separate streams managing those two activities. That continues to be the case.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you for your confirmation of the fact that there have been discussions underway. Minister, I refer to page 10 of the SDS. I particularly want to refer to the Collingwood Park mine subsidence. I have to let the committee know that I do live in Collingwood Park. As the minister is no doubt aware, hundreds of people have been affected by this Collingwood Park mine subsidence, yet I can find no funding committed by this new LNP government to filling up underneath Collingwood Park in relation to I think Westfalen No. 3. Minister, in reference to that, Main Roads successfully filled up underneath the Ipswich Motorway before they built the Ipswich Motorway, which also had mining issues there. Are you telling the committee here that this LNP government does not consider—

CHAIR: Do you have a question?

Mrs MILLER: This is my question—does not consider the people of Collingwood Park, their families and their homes important enough for you to find the money to fill these mines up underneath Collingwood Park, that area that is affected?

Mr CRIPPS: Mr Chairman, the Queensland government has received a report earlier this year into the long-term options for mine subsidence issues in Collingwood Park. The department received the report in September and we are currently reviewing the report and its findings. The department is preparing a submission to government on the long-term remediation options identified in the report which range from the continuing operation of the state guarantee, implemented under the previous government, to backfilling options of the voids that have been created as a result of the subsidence incidents underneath the affected residential areas of Collingwood Park.

As well as any prospective long-term remediation, the department is committed to continuing projects in Collingwood Park in the current financial year. These projects include the demolition of eight severely affected properties, repairs to St Luke's Anglican Church, refurbishment of purchased properties ahead of their placement on the open rental market where it is possible and safe to do so, ongoing monitoring and analysis of ground stability in the Collingwood Park area, and inspections and possible repairs of other places under the terms of the state guarantee.

The 2011-12 deficit of \$1.43 million related mainly to the depreciation and the write-down of assets of \$1.06 million in increased costs associated with the investigations into the development of long-term remediation options. In relation to Collingwood Park, I know that the Commissioner for Mine Safety and Health has a particular interest in this. I might ask him if he would like to make any additional comments to answer the member's question.

Mr Bell: Thank you, Minister. CSIRO continues to monitor Collingwood Park for subsidence. Over the last period of 24 months at least there have been no significant movements. That is not to say there will not be another one. But at the moment it is stable there. As the minister said, we are still considering the report from the Coordinator-General which will take into account the work done by CSIRO in working out the options going forward. So we have not made a decision at this point in time. We are still maintaining the little office that we have there in Collingwood Park where Damian Lewis spent some time, and we are still dealing with inquiries from various members of the community when things go wrong with their homes that may be in an area of concern.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you, Commissioner. I have another question to the minister in relation to this issue.

CHAIR: Can I just ask a quick supplementary question. Did the CSIRO report—I realise it is still early days. Would the wet conditions have made any difference? It has been wet and dry. It has been very wet for the last couple of years.

Mr Bell: The flooding that happened in that area a couple of years ago would definitely have had an affect in terms of the stability of the underground workings.

CHAIR: So it would have made it more stable, would it?

Mr Bell: Probably not. It would probably be less stable. But interestingly we have not detected any surface movement at this point in time from the ongoing CSIRO monitoring.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, given that Main Roads and their officers found a very stable technique to filling in the mines under the Ipswich Motorway and that that technology is there—they actually built curtain walls underneath the motorway to hold it up in relation to the mines—will your government commit to using the same or similar type of filling in of the mines under Collingwood Park no matter what cost it is to government, bearing in mind that these people are workers in our community and that their homes are their castles and also the fact that this has caused extreme distress to these residents in Collingwood Park?

Mr CRIPPS: Mr Chairman, in response to the member for Bundamba's question I would make the following points. As I mentioned earlier, we have received the report from the CSIRO which canvasses a number of options in how we may move forward to address the subsidence issues at Collingwood Park. I am certain that the people of Collingwood Park, and I would assume the member for Bundamba, would like the department and the government to make a fully informed decision about a range of options that are going to be successful in terms of the remediation of that site.

Mrs MILLER: And I have given you the answer: Main Roads have the successful option.

CHAIR: Let the minister answer the question.

Mr CRIPPS: If the department of main roads had identified and implemented a suitable option for the full remediation of the Collingwood Park site, then why didn't the government of which the member for Bundamba was a part of take that technology forward and implement it in Collingwood Park, in her words, regardless of the cost that was going to be incurred by the state of Queensland?

Mrs MILLER: I am asking you, Minister, will you commit the funding that—

CHAIR: Yes, I am sure we know what the question is.

Mrs MILLER: Yes, but he has not answered it. You were talking about having a successful resolution to the issue at Collingwood Park. What I am saying to you is that Main Roads have found that successful resolution and they have been talking to people within your department about that successful resolution. What I want to know, in accordance with SDS page 10, is will you support and will you take to government a proposal to fill up underneath Collingwood Park those areas affected with what is a successful solution? Will you support the people of Collingwood Park?

Mr CRIPPS: As I mentioned before, if Main Roads had developed a technology or had identified a solution to the same type of issue that we are experiencing at Collingwood Park, then I am at a loss to understand why the previous government did not take that technology and immediately implement it at the Collingwood Park location.

Mrs MILLER: You do not want to do it. You do not support the people of Collingwood Park, do you?

CHAIR: Let the minister answer the question. You have asked the question. Let the minister answer it.

Mr CRIPPS: I will tell the member for Bundamba what I think about this. I think it is a positive thing that if the department of main roads has suggestions to make to my department about opportunities—

Mrs MILLER: And they have.

Mr CRIPPS:—or identified technology then that is great. I am sure that the Mines Inspectorate is considering the advice that it has received from Main Roads. What I can tell the committee today is that, now that we have the benefit of the opinion of the department of main roads and we have the benefit of the report from the CSIRO, we are considering the options available to us to address the issues at Collingwood Park. I want to make a well-informed decision about any strategies that we do implement to address the issues at Collingwood Park.

CHAIR: As a supplementary question, are the Main Roads issues mentioned in the CSIRO report, Minister?

Mr CRIPPS: No. The CSIRO report would have undertaken an analysis of the site at Collingwood Park. I am not sure if the CSIRO report has incorporated the experience of Main Roads in terms of the subsidence issues under the motorway. But the CSIRO report does present a number of possibilities. And, sure, the report from the CSIRO provides different options. That report is being considered by my department at the moment.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, you can consider all you like but you need money to fix the problem. Therefore, will you go forward to government with what you think might be the appropriate option but will you also fund it for the benefit of the people of Collingwood Park?

Mr CRIPPS: This is an amazing question from a member who was a member of the government that absolutely destroyed the finances of the state of Queensland—

Mrs MILLER: You're a joke.

Mr CRIPPS:—and has compromised the opportunities for the state government to be able to pursue a range of options, not just at Collingwood Park but in terms of legacy issues in my portfolio across the state. If I go back to other abandoned mine sites, we have difficult issues and limited resources available to us to remediate a whole range of former mine sites across the whole of the state, some of which pose a risk to the public and I include in that the difficulties that we face at Collingwood Park.

The government is not unsympathetic to the issues at Collingwood Park. In fact when the current government was in opposition we supported the legislation that went through the House to provide the state government guarantee to the community at Collingwood Park. I think it is entirely appropriate for

me to say to the committee today that I want, and the department wants, to make a fully informed decision about what options are available to us in the future at Collingwood Park, and we are doing that at the moment.

Mrs MILLER: As a supplementary question, how long will that take you, Minister? Is it months, is it years, is it days? How long will it take you to consider this?

Mr CRIPPS: Consistent with what I said before, when you receive a report you need to have the opportunity to discuss the issues that are in it. I am certain that the community at Collingwood Park wants me to make a fully informed decision about what options we may take forward. We need to give careful consideration to this so that it is the successful into the future and so that we do not have to deal with any further legacy issue because we made a rushed or poorly informed decision to try to remediate the site.

Mr Chairman, in relation to an earlier answer that I gave during this morning's session, I wanted to take the opportunity to correct a detail. In relation to the Great Artesian Basin, I mentioned that the 22 bores that were capped and piped represented a distance of inefficient and land degrading flowing water from those bores. It actually is 488 kilometres of unregulated water that has been addressed as a result of capping those bores, not 4,888 kilometres. I said 4,888 this morning; 488 is the correct figure.

CHAIR: You have about a minute left, Minister.

Mr Hunt: Can I just give a couple of answers to questions that we took on notice earlier. First of all, in relation to when we stopped suspending investigations into vegetation management issues, that was 16 July—that the first I was given the go ahead. Field investigations have continued from that date.

Ms TRAD: Sorry, what was the date?

Mr Hunt: 16 July.

Ms TRAD: Was when you commenced suspension.

Mr Hunt: No. It was when it finished.

Ms TRAD: And when did it start?

Mr Hunt: I think it was 19 April. I said three months earlier and that was very close. The member for Bundamba asked about the number of sick leave days taken during this year. In the months from April to August of this year there were a total of 12,163.33 sick leave days, which represents a sick leave rate of 4.18 per cent across the department. We looked at data for the last three years for DEEDI and DERM, the predecessor departments, and the average sick leave rate has been between three and four per cent in a normal month.

CHAIR: Would you like to give a brief summary, Minister?

Mr CRIPPS: In relation to the proceedings today, I want to thank all of the members of the committee who have participated. I certainly want to thank the director-general and his departmental officers and the staff who have supported me in the preparation for estimates today. I thank the parliamentary staff who, regardless of which committee is sitting in here, always have to conduct themselves professionally. I have always found them to do so both when I was on that side of the table and now that I am on this side of the table. I am also grateful for the work the parliamentary staff put into this estimates process.

Mr Hunt: Sorry, I said days; that should have been hours of sick leave. So it was 12,163 hours. That is an important detail.

Mrs MILLER: I thought you had it wrong, Director-General. But I was going to leave it to you.

Mr Hunt: I thank my head of HR for correcting me on that in time.

CHAIR: That concludes the consideration of the estimates for the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines. Thank you very much to the minister and his advisers. I remind you of the timetable that we have set for answers to questions taken on notice to assist with the deadlines. You have 48 hours. It is 5 pm Tuesday. We will take a short break and resume at 2 pm.

Proceedings suspended from 1.02 pm to 1.57 pm

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

In Attendance

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

Mr B Mills, Chief of Staff

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry


Mr J Noye, Director-General

Dr B Woods, Deputy Director-General

Mr L Brown, Executive Director, Finance and Asset Management (Acting)

Mr P McKay, Deputy Director-General, Corporate Services (Acting)

Dr J Thompson, Chief Biosecurity Officer, Biosecurity Queensland

 **CHAIR:** It being almost two o'clock, I declare the Agriculture, Resources and Environment Committee open. I am Ian Rickuss, the member for Lockyer and chair of the committee. Joining me today is Tim Mulherin, the member for Mackay, who will stand in for the member for South Brisbane this afternoon; Sam Cox, the member for Thuringowa; Jason Costigan, the member for Whitsunday; David Gibson, the member for Gympie; Shane Knuth, the member for Dalrymple, Jon Krause, the member for Beaudesert; and Anne Maddern, the member for Maryborough.

The proceedings today are lawful proceedings subject to the standing rules and orders of the parliament. As such, I remind all visitors that any person admitted to the hearing may be excluded in accordance with standing order 208. In relation to the media coverage of today's hearing, we have adopted the guidelines prepared by the Committee of the Legislative Assembly for committee hearings. These guidelines have been distributed to the parliamentary press gallery, and copies are available here this afternoon.

The hearing is being broadcast live via the parliamentary website. We extend a warm welcome to everyone who is picking up these broadcasts. 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 and anyone who is unable or unwilling to provide answers should be prepared to state the reason. I am also reminded 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 turn off their mobile phones or switch them to silent? For the next three hours we will be examining the estimates for the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry dealing with the estimates of the service areas of agriculture, biosecurity and agriscience in Queensland. I welcome the minister and his advisers. We will examine the estimates for these areas until 3.30 pm. I also welcome Mr Tony O'Dea, who is the acting chief executive of QRAA on behalf of the CEO, Mr Colin Holden, who is on leave. For the benefit of Hansard, I have asked advisers if you are called to give an answer to please state your name before speaking.

Minister, the committee has granted leave to the member for Bundamba to participate in this section of the hearing. I now declare the proposed expenditure open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

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

Mr McVEIGH: Thank you, Mr Chairman, and thanks to your committee for attending today's hearing of portfolio budget estimates for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. I am pleased to be here today with my senior staff for this, the first of two sessions for my portfolio. I will be happy to outline our program for 2012-13.

Before taking questions on agriculture, I wish to make an opening statement including an overview of the major changes, savings and restructure and refocus of services in the department. As you know, agriculture is one of the four pillars of the Queensland economy. As you also know, the LNP went to the election with a clear policy to double food production by 2040. That is the basis of our restructure of the department so that it is focused on front-line services that primary producers deserve and need to increase production. The previous Labor government was far less focused on primary production and did not even see fit to have a dedicated department focused on helping farmers. Turning that around has been a key achievement of the LNP Newman government and something that I, as a former employee of the department, am very proud of.

DAFF is now truly a stand-alone department—a department and staff not buried, as Labor had them, in a superdepartment lacking support and certainly lacking leadership. Given the appalling state of Queensland's finances left by the Bligh-Fraser regime—the waste, the mismanagement, the loss of our AAA credit rating and the totally unsustainable \$65 billion debt—my department, like every other, has been forced to find significant savings. Those savings have resulted in 450 staff redundancies. That is 450 staff redundancies, not the 550 or the more recently suggested 682 that the former minister and the Labor Party have tried to claim in recent times. They know better than anyone that the figure of 682 includes the 230-odd positions that were either made redundant or left unfilled by Labor under the former minister. Yes, we have had to make savings. Those savings have amounted to, as I have said, 450 redundancies. So far 236 offers of redundancy have been made and of those 95 per cent have taken the voluntary packages.

When I worked in the department some years ago, there were 6,200 staff—4,000 more than now. The vast majority of those were made redundant under successive Labor governments, and last year 230 further positions were effectively cut through staff being made redundant and/or positions being left vacant. The LNP Newman government is cutting Labor's waste and reigning in Labor's out-of-control spending including the unsustainable borrowing to pay public servants. We have had to make tough decisions such as closing the Toowoomba vet lab and not proceeding with an unfunded proposal for a new lab in Townsville. In Townsville Labor sold the land including the old vet lab at Oonoonba for housing. It had promised \$18 million to relocate a lab to James Cook University but not only had the budget blown out; the promise was unfunded. There was simply no money.

Instead we have made the right decision to consolidate animal testing at the state-of-the-art laboratory at Coopers Plains—a decision based on the best advice available. I am assured there will be no additional risks to our vital animal industries. Yes, as I have said, we have made savings. We have had to make redundancies, but they have been in non-core areas. We have cut spin doctors and PR roles that Labor was so very fond of. We have consolidated services, as I have said, in relation to the vet labs and we have reoriented our focus and service delivery to best suit the needs that have been so clearly put to me by producers, fishers, foresters and their organisations around our vast state over the last six months.

Front-line services in the stand-alone department are being refocused to better assist Queensland primary producers increase their production as part of our policy for agriculture, and I am very pleased to say we are expanding in key areas. We have delivered 15 new front-line officers to help beef up the fight against various biosecurity threats. We are delivering on our commitments to fishing and forestry industries. We are advancing a \$10 million package for commercial fishers which includes \$9 million for buyback of net fishing licences on the east coast. We are advancing with our Queensland timber industry plan, because we have a plan to revitalise the local industry that has suffered under nearly 20 years of mismanagement and neglect under the previous government.

Let me be very clear: I as minister will do all in my power to foster a prosperous, well-managed local forest and timber industry, an industry recognised for world's best practice. The LNP Newman government has in all provided \$442.35 million for the department in 2012-13. I and my team will be managing the spending of those funds very carefully to deliver on the services to help us achieve our production goals.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. I will start off the questioning with an issue that I am quite interested in. Can the minister outline the significance of the new barley breeding program agreement struck with the grains research corporation? How does this compare with the approach of the previous government?

Mr McVEIGH: The previous government I think was not focused on the development of grains research. It was apparent through a lack of support and direction to the industry. Through our stand-alone department I can state that barley breeding will remain in Queensland. This decision ensures the development of barley genetics for industry and for growers. The department will concentrate on the early stages of the breeding process with the commercial sector breeding finished varieties for growers. It involves a collaboration with the University of Queensland under the Queensland Alliance for Agriculture and Food Innovation. That will help deliver the science, the traits and the parental germ plasm needed by the industry. This new genetics platform will be partially supported with nearly \$500,000 from the Queensland government's election commitment of an additional \$3 million over four years for agriculture and horticultural research and development. That brings our barley breeding investment close to \$5 million over seven years.

Private sector investment in barley breeding for the northern region is vital for the future delivery of improved varieties to growers and the industry. So we are establishing an exclusive arrangement and agreement with InterGrain Pty Ltd to progress that germ plasm and ensure growers quickly reap the benefits of previous breeding work done by the Queensland program. Those initiatives will deliver on other high-priority grains in research and development that is aligned with our role within the auspices of the National Grains Research, Development and Extension Strategy. We will be focusing on summer crop agronomy, farming systems, crop protection and production research. The GRDC will co-invest in those activities with us.

The investment on our part in the genetics platform of some \$1.4 million and a total of \$11.2 million over seven years represents a total investment across all of those programs. It involves 11 positions, and this capacity will service high-priority areas that are being and will be identified by growers. So retaining future capability in barley breeding and grains research and development in Queensland will support continued profitability in our vital grains industry, and industry has confirmed with me that that is indeed very good news.

Mrs MADDERN: Minister, I refer to page 5-4 of the Service Delivery Statement and the government ensuring a productive, successful agricultural sector. Can the minister advise how the 30-year strategic plan for agriculture will boost farm output to meet soaring world demand for food?

Mr McVEIGH: I thank the member for Maryborough for the question. The LNP government has a plan to ensure that we grow a four-pillar economy. As we know, agriculture is one of those pillars. The former Labor government, I fear, had no plan. Agriculture, fisheries and forestry was simply lost within a megastructure of a large department, and it was well known that these particular industry areas were indeed a very low priority. A 30-year strategic plan for agriculture is therefore being developed with peak bodies, with farmers and with regional communities throughout the state.

I am committed to the ambitious target of doubling agricultural production by 2040 to supply the growing demand for food from a global population that is expected to reach some \$8.8 billion in the year 2040. To achieve that objective we will build a sector that leads Australia in agricultural excellence. The strategic plan will outline the government's philosophy in terms of growing our farming, fishing and forestry industries. It will identify strengths, opportunities and challenges which will provide the context for that sector-wide 2040 vision. Initial industry consultation will be finalised by the end of this calendar year and a final 30-year strategic plan for agriculture will be released early next year. Efficient and effective front-line services to industry on the ground will be a focus for implementing that vision for agriculture in particular.

Mr COX: Minister, the beef industry is important to this state. I think it is a \$3 billion industry. There is an abattoir proposed for Cloncurry. Can the minister please update the committee on progress with the proposed meatworks to serve the vast region of north-west Queensland that has been hit hard by ongoing disruption to the live trade to Indonesia?

Mr McVEIGH: I thank the member for his question. I know this is a topic he and many others across the north of our state are particularly interested in. At the outset let me say that I support very strongly the establishment of a meatworks in north-west Queensland. The cattle are there. The demand is there. Local producers want it, and we as a government are determined to do all we can to help make that happen. As members may be aware, my department has recently released a feasibility study and, in particular, an investment report and an investment prospectus for a meatworks at Cloncurry. The study clearly shows that a meatworks could provide cattle producers with more options for getting their product from paddock to plate. Queensland, as we know, is the biggest cattle-producing state and, as the member said, worth over \$3 billion per year. But the challenges remain distance to market, southern feedlots and the meatworks, as we know, are largely concentrated in the south-east corner and that has long been a problem for north-west cattlemen.

Producers in the gulf, Savannah and Mount Isa to Townsville regions of Queensland face huge trucking costs to southern feedlots or south-east works or to truck their cattle to Karumba or Darwin for the live export trade. Having a local abattoir would lower costs significantly, but any meatworks proposal of course has to stack up and make commercial sense. There are a number of advantages that we need to consider in relation to a location such as Cloncurry. It has good road access in North-West Queensland and through obviously to the Northern Territory, it is located in a labour catchment with Mount Isa some 120 kilometres away, and of course the region has suitable finishing areas and future irrigated fodder production areas that are being proposed and promoted nearby.

So the Newman government is committed to making agriculture one of the four pillars, as I have said. A meatworks at Cloncurry would be an asset that would underpin the northern beef industry's future. It is now up to commercial operators to work with us or joint venture capitalists to turn that opportunity into a reality.

Mr KRAUSE: Minister, can you advise of any research being conducted in relation to transport and logistics, an issue that has long plagued the beef industry?

Mr McVEIGH: I thank the member for the question and it flows on somewhat from the previous question. The Queensland government has certainly been working on a collaborative transport project with a collective of Commonwealth and state governments covering Northern Australia and the CSIRO. The project goal is to optimise capital investment and operations for the livestock industry across Northern Australia. Under that project, which has been underway for some time, for the first time real-time data utilising stock movement information from the NLIS—the National Livestock Identification System—will be used to actually pinpoint stock movements and assist in the design of a dynamic model of industry logistics along the entire supply chain. That examination will highlight how changes in logistics in infrastructure could result in improved transport efficiency and of course productivity as well. It should suggest further possible changes in infrastructure investments and logistical solutions given different market scenarios.

The Northern Australian beef industry is typified by long transport distances—as I mentioned in response to the previous question—and that is almost exclusively by road. It is particularly isolated from processing and the markets in the south, as I mentioned earlier, as well as having limited options to take up export opportunities. The development of the northern beef industry is highly dependent on maximising long-term productivity through identification of supply chain flows and the various stresses therein and careful examination of where future investment might support growth areas.

The project will profile production regions and the supply chain characteristics throughout. It will outline the current constraints—pinch points, if you like—and the various opportunities to quantify all of those parts of the chain. Scenarios will therefore be developed to assist new beef industry development, investments in transport infrastructure, optimisation of existing transport infrastructure and utilisation, and it will outline the impact of transport regulation on Northern Australia.

Project results will be designed to suit existing transport and logistic systems, most importantly, that are used by the Queensland Department of Transport and Main Roads. Importantly, the project analysis will give industry and governments in the north information that will allow them to better plan and prepare for industry growth. The ability to pinpoint those areas for immediate and future attention that I mentioned earlier and those which regularly suffer problems now will allow for efficiencies and savings in the long term.

Can I mention that the state government provides a subsidy for cattle train services to QR National to provide a minimum of 264 services. The current contract ends in December 2015 and, if that service is to be continued, industry and government will need to work together to develop options between now and that time, including the future of subsidy arrangements. So those discussions are underway now. Through this project and collaborative effort with industry, it is planned that rail will continue to fill a very important role in the cattle industry, particularly for long-haul transport tasks.

Mr COSTIGAN: Minister, could you inform us how your stand-alone department will be involved in the north Australia irrigated agriculture strategy?

Mr McVEIGH: I thank the member for the question. By way of background, I just confirm that the north Australia irrigated agriculture strategy is a joint Australian and Queensland government commitment to realising the potential of agricultural development in Northern Australia with a particular focus on the Flinders and Gilbert river catchments. It has been a pleasure to work with my ministerial colleagues interstate and of course the federal minister in relation to the north Australian ministerial forum, the Hon. Simon Crean, on this project and others that the forum is focused on.

The Queensland government is investing some \$3 million into practical, on-ground support for commercial agricultural development in those river catchments that I mentioned. We are working with the CSIRO to ensure the latest science and information is available to proponents to maximise the prospects for success in that irrigation development and to avoid I guess some of the mistakes that all of us have seen from the southern catchments over many, many decades in their southern irrigation schemes.

Can I emphasise that the approach that we have taken to this project in collaboration with my ministerial colleague, the Hon. Andrew Cripps, Minister for Natural Resources and Mines, is to ensure that we have a whole-of-government approach to getting that project underway and ensuring that we are supporting development in the north. Therefore, the focus has been to review the approach under the former government, which was very much focused on field trials, as good as that might be, but ramp that up into an industry development focus. I have been pleased to get the support of the relevant federal minister, Simon Crean, in that regard and that has been further supported by a better engagement with CSIRO in relation to their research and making sure it is industry focused rather than running the risk of being somewhat academic, as was the previous risk.

As part of the strategy, landholders in both catchments are now developing a submission for tender for water allocations. I understand the committee may have had a briefing on that from Andrew Cripps, my ministerial colleague. If so, he would have told you that 80,000 megalitres of water in the Flinders catchment and 15,000 megalitres of water in the Gilbert River catchment are available. Our staff in the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry are supporting producers through the tender process and the development of their submissions. Again, it has been a pleasure to ensure my staff are joining with the Department of Natural Resources and Mines staff in that regard.

The majority of those proponents we have observed thus far are experienced pastoralists, but often they have limited knowledge or experience quite obviously in cropping given their livestock experience. Therefore, DAFF will continue to support proponents by helping them source the appropriate expertise during the development of their irrigation infrastructure, make decisions on the appropriate crops to plant and provide agronomic advice. DAFF will also participate in regional development planning that may arise from the development of irrigation on those rivers.

Can I further explain that, as many observers have seen in recent times, there are a number of pastoralists who have had the initiative to develop their own irrigation schemes up there on the limited water available. I mention Corbett Tritton amongst others—a visionary in his own right—and it has been

a pleasure to see him get the support of the local community. His development is very much focused on cotton, as has been visited in that area a decade or more ago. I guess the key point I have shared with the federal minister, Simon Crean, in relation to that is that it is proposals such as cotton and some horticultural proposals in the Gilbert River catchment that I think provide the greatest chance to see development in the shortest time period.

I have emphasised with the federal minister that I do not see it being exclusively cotton development up there by any means, but given the initiative being shown in the local community and the industry development that they have taken on under the auspices of that particular industry, I think it is an excellent example for us to follow at least initially. In that regard, I have had discussions with Cotton Australia and various cotton processing companies, ginning companies, et cetera, about their interest, given that the closest processing facilities to that part of the world are down at Emerald in Central Queensland. We need to ensure that we are pursuing that particular opportunity and at the same time pursuing other practical and obvious opportunities in livestock itself. So producing the means by which crops can be grown to assist the finishing of cattle in the north-west—and of course that then links in potentially with the abattoir development that we discussed in response to a previous question—enables further development of the livestock cattle industry, the beef industry in particular, in North-West Queensland at the same time.

Our focus in collaboration with the federal government is very much on those practical initiatives, those initiatives that are already community led and industry led. As I said earlier, under the LNP government we are focused on industry development rather than field work that producers are either doing themselves or can get assistance from industry to do in any case.

Mr GIBSON: Minister, can you inform us how your department is cutting red tape and perhaps provide the committee with an example?

Mr McVEIGH: Through you, Mr Chair, I thank the member for the question. As he would know, the Newman government is very much committed to cutting red tape right throughout the economy, and we are committed to cutting that red tape and regulation by some 20 per cent. That requires all of us to ensure that there is a change in culture in government from one that promotes red tape to one that actively reduces red tape. Can I assure you in relation to Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry that I am very seriously personally committed to that process.

As one example, we consider the fact that wild dogs throughout particularly the south-west and the west of the state are costing our sheep and cattle industries some millions of dollars a year in lost production. That has become obvious to me and many producers in that part of the world, including a large group at the Tambo hall some weeks ago who said to me very clearly, 'Minister, we have suffered from drought, we have suffered from more recent flooding conditions, but more particularly we are seeing this third natural disaster being imposed on us—these wild dogs.' How do we assist there from a red-tape cutting perspective? One of the first measures I introduced as minister to remove or cut red tape was to remove the requirement that baits for wild dogs be of a human-grade food-grade consumption and allow bait meat simply to be sourced from animals destroyed on the property. I engaged very seriously with Safe Food Queensland to do just that. It took us some weeks to move through that process but with Safe Food Queensland's backing and professional advice we were able to ensure that we could reduce that requirement, reduce that red tape and of course ensure the comprehensive continuing review of the food chains for meat.

We have implemented, further to that example, an ongoing process of proactively identifying opportunities to reduce the burden associated with the various regulatory frameworks that impact on the industries that I serve. I have also asked that attention be given to rationalising and simplifying the plethora of forms and paperwork required to be completed by the public at the same time. Whilst I am considering a number of specific initiatives at the moment, prior to seeking all of government consideration of those initiatives, I would add that a significant body of regulation that impacts on the agriculture, fisheries and forestry sectors is in fact administered by other departments so it is a pleasure to join with those other departments and my fellow ministers in our joint pursuit of red-tape reduction.

In this regard I refer to legislation such as wild rivers, reef regulations, strategic cropping lands, water supply and pricing, land tenure, vegetation management, road and rail transport, and the list goes on. As I said, I am actively working with my ministerial colleagues to ensure that existing regulatory burdens on the rural sector are identified and are subject to a proper detailed process of scrutiny including an analysis of the benefit and cost of any program that is in place at present to ensure that we are focused on unnecessary burdens being rationalised.

Mr MULHERIN: Welcome, Minister, to estimates and also to your advisers and departmental staff. I am pleased to see the continuation of the work commenced by the former government in relation to the beef industry and also the finalisation of the partnership with InterGrain Pty Ltd, GRDC and the New South Wales DPI. I refer to page 18 of the SDS and footnote 46 concerning fire ants. How many employees will be lost through the government's cuts in the area of fire ant management? How many have already gone? Are there other aspects of the fire ant program being slashed such as the use of baits that have expired or the sale of equipment?

Mr McVEIGH: I thank the member for his question. I join with him in commenting on areas of interest that he mentioned in his preamble, in particular the grains research. It has been good—I agree with the member—to proceed with the InterGrain agreement. However, I make the observation that we had to tweak that agreement quite significantly to ensure that we were not losing grains research capability and capacity in the state. Under the former government we saw the state wheat research program slip interstate and we are in danger of seeing the barley program go the same way. It has been good to continue that work and ensure that we have a barley program that suits the future of the state. Obviously, it is in the south at present but could possibly extend into other areas of the state that experience quite uniquely Queensland conditions.

I return to the member's eventual question on fire ants and the eradication program and his specific reference to staff in the program—and I think there may have been mention of other initiatives in the program as well including cost-saving measures. By way of context, I mention that the Fire Ant Eradication Program has been subject to a significant amount of scrutiny by the Queensland government over the last 10 years or so and, of course, other governments under national partnership agreements. In fact, the eradication program for this invasive pest has been subject to some \$257 million worth of investment since early 2001 up until June 2012. Queensland's investment has been obviously quite significant and quite important given that this is where the initial incursions were noted in Queensland but interstate members as well—

Mr MULHERIN: Minister, I know all that background. Could you get to the guts of the question, which is in relation to cuts?

CHAIR: Let the minister answer the question. You have asked the question.

Mr McVEIGH: I will continue to answer the question because it is very important to have this context. At the first SCoPI meeting—the Standing Council on Primary Industries meeting—that I attended as a new minister back in April of this year, in reference to the national program and national partnership agreement, ministers from other states did express to me, particularly the federal minister, a growing sense of frustration about how the program was managed under the former Queensland government. So everything is under scrutiny by not only our Queensland state government but also, I can assure you, other states and most particularly the federal minister, who met with me in my electorate office on this and a number of other matters just two weeks ago. We will see 126.1 FTEs employed under the fire ant program in 2012-13. That is as a result of some 45 staff having been retrenched. That addresses the query that the member raised.

CHAIR: A supplementary to that—

Mr MULHERIN: Hold on—

CHAIR: I have just had an outbreak in my area.

Mr MULHERIN: With all due respect, it is non-government question time.

CHAIR: No, there is no specific question time now. It is a new millennium.

Mr MULHERIN: With all due respect, I asked also if there is to be any sale of plant and equipment, if there is a reduction in the purchase of chemicals and if chemicals that are past their expiry date are still being used.

Mr McVEIGH: Mr Chairman, I am happy to answer questions in whatever order you wish.

CHAIR: Answer that one and then I will ask a supplementary.

Mr McVEIGH: Again, I make the point that the whole program is under an increased level of scrutiny not only because we need to review these sorts of efforts on a regular basis—on an annual basis certainly—but because of the increased level of scrutiny from interstate governments, as I mentioned, particularly from the federal minister. That includes the services, the plant and equipment and, of course, the efficacy of all of the materials being supplied, particularly chemicals, as the member refers to. To give some detail on that I would like to call upon Jim Thompson to address some specific details on where chemical stocks are up to.

Dr Thompson: Obviously the program has changed in some way, but in relation to baits and chemicals that are used, we order them as we need them. So there is no excess bait that is there and out of date. We are still using equipment. We are not in the business of selling off the equipment.

Mr MULHERIN: Thanks, Dr Thompson.

CHAIR: As a supplementary, there has been an outbreak in the Lockyer Valley and I spoke to some of the fire ant people when I was up there. Could Jim explain to the committee the use of the heat-seeking helicopter and if that is labour saving at all?

Mr McVEIGH: No problem. You are referring there to the remote sensing program. As you requested, I will hand over to Dr Thompson.

Dr Thompson: There has been a real shift in operational strategy in the fire ant program, and remote sensing is a critical component of that. In the past we have done field surveys to actually determine where the fire ants are, but we are now using remote sensing as our major tool to determine

the extent of the fire ant infestation. To give an example of the sorts of savings that can be made using remote sensing, it will cover more surveillance in 4½ days than a field team of 12 people can cover over the whole year.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for that response. Do you have another question, member for Mackay?

Mr MULHERIN: I refer to page 18 of the SDS and footnote 46 concerning fire ants. I note the recent discovery of fire ants in the Lockyer Valley about 12 kilometres outside the current infestation area. I know that the chair, the member for Lockyer, would be concerned about this as one of his biggest fears is that fire ants will infest the Lockyer food bowl. Considering the reduction in staff, can the minister guarantee that these job losses will not result in fire ants marching through the Lockyer Valley and beyond, devastating our multimillion dollar agricultural industry? As the minister would know, part of the fire ant program is the inspection of soil movements. Twelve kilometres seems a long way outside the infestation area. Can you give a guarantee that these job losses will not result in the fire ants marching through the Lockyer Valley?

Mr McVEIGH: I thank the member for his question. First of all, I make the point that in terms of guaranteeing the spread of this biosecurity threat or any other, any observer would conclude that if there were guarantees that there would be no problems in the future you would not have an eradication supported under a national partnership agreement. So it is a high priority for us as a government and, as I mentioned earlier under that partnership agreement, all other state governments and the federal government. The suggestion that anyone might be able to guarantee that a biosecurity threat is either not going to spread or not going to develop in the future is perhaps, in my view, a little unrealistic.

Nonetheless, I take the point that the member is alluding to in terms of staff to monitor and inspect any reportings. I suspect the member would be aware of the program in terms of the focus on identification. The member would certainly be aware of the success of training and promotion programs prior to my time that many staff in the fire ant program have gained in terms of encouraging community members to identify fire ants. In fact, the latest incursion was, as I understand it, a result of just that. So inspection and monitoring is a very important part of any biosecurity effort, and I think that is a very important part that we need to remember. It is not all about reactionary activities: reacting when there is an identification program; it is about being proactive, and that is what the eradication program is all about.

The national cost shared program determines what is needed. We look at the resources and the overall approach to continue the eradication program. We are certainly guided by that program, but this year we are investing over and above our cost share expectation under that program—more than \$1 million. So we are investing more than \$1 million than we are expected to under our cost share. I would also make the point, as I mentioned earlier, that national review of the program is underway, and late this year we will see some updates on that. In order to provide an up-to-date report on that process I might call again on our chief biosecurity officer, Jim Thompson, in relation to that review.

Dr Thompson: The program will be reviewed at the end of this year. We are in the first year of a three-year phase which will look very much at whether remote sensing can greatly reduce the field effort that we need to address the extent of the spread of fire ants in the last few years. Obviously every event such as the ones we have had recently are ones that we take very seriously. We get to those very quickly and we treat them very quickly. Movement restriction is another thing that is still in place. There is no reduction in any of that. Assuming that remote sensing works as we expect it to do, we expect to be able to cover far more distance and be able to limit or determine the range of the infestation over the next year or so. Very much related to this is the review that is going to happen at the national level over the end of this year and early next year. That will be a national decision about the future of the program.

Mr MULHERIN: In relation to infrared remote sensing, the trials were conducted through the winter months. When do you expect to have that data?

Dr Thompson: The data is being continually worked on and improved. At the moment we are doing the field testing of the results that we got over the winter months. We are going out to validate those results at the moment. We did 100,000 hectares this year and we are validating that at the moment. The results to date suggest that we have 80 per cent accuracy from those results, but they are very preliminary at this point.

Mr MULHERIN: I refer to Budget Paper No. 4, page 27 and the funding of the national Fire Ant Eradication Program. I note that Queensland has contributed \$1.4 million as part of the \$15 million national cost-sharing arrangements and an additional \$2.5 million in funding to bring the total cost to \$17.5 million.

I understand that the national cost-sharing arrangement is predicated on the Queensland government contributing \$6 million in total, which would take the overall program up to \$21 million. If you do the sums based on the figures contained in the Budget Measures paper, there appears to be a shortfall of \$2.1 million in meeting your obligations under the national program. By not allocating this

funding, are you putting the entire fire ant program at risk of being scrapped or letting fire ants march all over Queensland and across the border into other states? Where is the additional funding that will take it up to the \$21 million program?

Mr McVEIGH: I thank the member for his question. It is good to see that the member retains quite a keen interest in the fire ant program, as I certainly do. Again I must refer, to put the response in context, to the national feedback I have received from our partners. At the first SCoPI meeting that I attended in April of this year in Adelaide—I suspect it will continue to be on the agenda at the next SCoPI meeting in just a few weeks time—our national partners, and particularly our federal minister—

Mr MULHERIN: And the Victorian government. Their opposition would not have changed.

Mr McVEIGH: Our national partners are continuing to scrutinise the program, as the member would have seen ramp up in recent years, no doubt. I am, amongst other things, very focused, in the interests of Queenslanders and those affected potentially by fire ants, on maintaining relationship with those national partners for as long as we can. Again, I stress the fact that the federal minister in particular expressed to me his concern about the way in which the program has been managed and whether it has been value for money from an eradication perspective. So I am conscious of that ramping national concern.

I make the point again that we have invested more than our national partnership share requirement. I am proud of that at a time when we have had to rein in resources right across our budget, given the budgetary position we were left in. Although the budget papers indicate that the extra \$2.5 million has been allocated to the fire ant budget, the government has considered this issue and determined, just to be precise, that the additional allocation for 2012-13 will be some \$1.125 million. So I think, in the context we are in and based on the professional advice that I am receiving from within the department, and in the context of budgetary savings we have had to pursue in this state and a look in the medium term to where our national partners might be, that is a very responsible approach to the program.

I reflect upon the fact that our national partners—interstate ministers and the federal minister—in their review of the way in which the program has been managed previously have raised concerns. As my research has shown me, we have seen over the years of the program all sorts of engagements, if you like, that I fear at times may well have been more about some simple employment programs rather than those experienced and capable of dealing with the fire ant problem in particular. I think we have a very balanced approach and quite a responsible approach given the mixture of those factors.

Mr MULHERIN: So, Minister, what you are saying is that you will not find the additional shortfall of \$2.1 million? This year it is \$21 million, for 2012-13. The national cost-sharing arrangements were based on Queensland not only making its contribution as part of the national cost-sharing arrangements, arrived at via a percentage formula, but also contributing additional money. You have come up short. Does this put the whole program at risk? You have mentioned that the program has been reviewed quite extensively. I can assure you that it was not a simple employment program for people who were unemployed. What will win the war, I think, will be technology. Minister, there is a shortfall under the national arrangement that you agreed to at SCoPI. Can you assure us that the program is not going to fall over because you cannot stump up the additional \$2.1 million?

Mr McVEIGH: Again, I thank the member for his question and appreciate his ongoing interest, but I fear we just need to provide him with some real clarity here, because it is not a \$21 million program; it is a \$15 million program. We have met our national partnership contribution and we are increasing our contribution over and above that. I think, just to provide the clarity that the member appears to be lacking, I will again call upon Jim Thompson to just explain how that program breaks down.

Dr Thompson: Within the national cost shared \$15 million program the focus is very much on delimiting the extent of the infestation and treating all outliers and all new nests that are found. The additional funding from Queensland in the past has been used principally to do preventative treatment within the zones that have been checked. That work is not being conducted at the moment because the focus is very much on making sure that we understand the outlying boundaries of the infestation and treat all new infestations. So the work is meeting the obligations under the national cost shared program and will be reported on and assessed in the review that will take place in the next couple of months.

Mr MULHERIN: My understanding when it was agreed to at the SCoPI meeting was that there was \$15 million—that was the cost-sharing component—but it was predicated on additional funding from the Queensland government to take the program up to \$21 million. Could you confirm that?

Mr McVEIGH: The question is directed to Dr Thompson. I am happy for him to answer.

Dr Thompson: My understanding is that the \$15 million is the agreed program. There was always an expectation that Queensland in the last few years would put in extra dollars to treat those areas within the control area because that was work that was being done for the benefit of Queenslanders as opposed to preventing the spread of the fire ants on the outside of the infestation. My understanding was that it was a \$15 million program.

Mr MULHERIN: That is the national cost-sharing agreement, but the agreement that was reached at SCoPI was for the national cost-sharing table to be \$15 million but, in order for that agreement, we have to put in another \$6 million.

Mr McVEIGH: Mr Chairman, can I assist the discussion, if I may, by just confirming that it is my understanding and my advice from all of the officers present that the national cost shared funding of \$15 million has been approved by the Australian government and all the relevant states and territories. Queensland's portion of that national cost shared funding arrangement is \$1.41 million.

Mr MULHERIN: I have no disagreement on that.

Mr McVEIGH: The Queensland government is also providing \$1.9 million, in addition to that national cost shared obligation.

CHAIR: I think we will move on.

Mr MULHERIN: Page 1 of the SDS talks about biosecurity pests and diseases threatening agriculture. In answer to non-government question on notice No. 8 concerning your scrapping of the biosecurity laboratory at JCU you state that there was no money to build the JCU laboratory. I also draw your attention to your ministerial briefing notes dated 19 April and 28 May released under right to information. These documents state that the total budget approved by the former Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation on 27 April for the TBSL project was \$17,031,670 plus GST. That statement directly contradicts the information given in answer to the question on notice which was that there was no budget allocation for the project under the former Labor government. Can you clarify the discrepancy?

Mr McVEIGH: I thank the member for his question. I will again attempt to put into perspective some information in relation to my response to this important question. I guess at the outset I would emphasise the process that we went through in my office and that I went through as incoming minister to look at this initiative suggested by the former government, together with a comparison of the current situation we are in.

What I was concerned about at the time I began to look at the issue was obviously our budgetary position and in particular the fact that the former government had sold off the site of the Oonoonba lab in Townsville to the Urban Land Development Authority. As incoming minister I was presented with the situation where I was not closing any lab; I was not shutting any lab down. I was presented with the situation that the old lab at Oonoonba and other departmental facilities on that site had in fact been sold off by the former government. So the old lab was destined to go.

I was then in a position to review the suggestion of the former government that it would invest in a proposed new lab at the James Cook University campus in Townsville. I am informed that the project to invest in a new lab at James Cook University was originally costed at some \$13 million in December 2008, when it was announced as a plan by the former government. Funding for that was to be from the department's capital works budget, including sale of some beef properties, which I can go into the detail of if you wish, Mr Chairman, and the possible sale of the Oonoonba site I am referring to. With the exception of the Oonoonba site which, as I said, the former government had sold to the ULDA, under payment terms that I will mention in a few moments, the other properties proposed for sale are still yet to be sold.

I understand that in early 2010 the project budget was approved at the schematic design stage at \$15.91 million. So we saw the cost start to blow out from the original costing of \$13 million. Prior to a tender under the former government in late 2011 the approved budget again increased, this time to \$17.031 million. The blow-out in costings continues. Subsequently, I am advised that tenders came in above that approved budget amount and that at least \$20.4 million would have been required to complete the project on the basis that the project costs did not increase during construction, so it may well have blown out yet again. We then saw another \$3.4 million being required to complete the project. And that funding had not been approved before the last election. So the costing I was presented with of some \$20.4 million, as I have said on a number of occasions publicly, was not fully funded.

I mentioned a few moments ago that I would refer to the terms under which the Oonoonba land sales were conducted or proposed, and that was a staged payment program. What we have seen is the Oonoonba land sales delayed because of floods in what is essentially a flood plain and, as such, the latest approximately \$7 million of the last payment schedule planned to the department were funds that would have had to be loaned from Treasury. So in terms of a whole-of-government approach given that our department was asked to focus on its front-line services—and I will come back to that in just a moment as well—and to find necessary savings and to review capital expenditure, because, based on that explanation I have just provided, the proposal under the former government was not fully funded, I decided that it was inappropriate to proceed with the proposal.

I believe the member referred to some briefings released under RTI that I certainly acknowledge as part of the information process that provided me with input up until making that decision. That reference to the briefings released under RTI include a number of things which I will just put into some historical or chronological context if I may. In terms of the overall process that we went through, that is

myself, my advisers, my director-general, to making that decision not to proceed with a new lab contribution at JCU—and again I make the point that that was a tough decision—I reflect upon the fact, as I said earlier, that the old lab in effect and that land had been sold off already by the former government before we came to power. So the old lab was gone and I confirmed through my research that the proposal for the new lab was not fully funded. So there we are caught between a rock and a hard place in relation to the former government's proposals.

What did I do? My research included a visit to the Coopers Plains laboratory and the precinct there, which I will detail, again, in just a few moments, on 12 April. On 19 April I visited the vet lab in Toowoomba, my home town and a vet lab that I certainly am familiar with. It was on that date that one of the briefs referred to and released under RTI was also written to me—that is, on 19 April—and that was the brief that advised me that the construction approval for Townsville was heading towards that \$20.4 million figure—as I said, significantly greater than a project that was originally costed at \$13 million. To continue the chronology for the benefit of the committee this afternoon, on 15 May I received a brief on the Townsville lab again in relation to legal and financial matters and two options were presented to me as alternatives—obviously to find some way of remaining at Oonoonba, which would have involved quite an interesting transaction in that the previous government had already sold it to the ULDA, or relocating those services to Coopers Plains to the state-of-the-art facility that I had visited just over a month before the particular date of that brief.

On 22 May I visited the James Cook University in Townsville and caught up with Professor Sandra Harding and other leaders at the JCU campus. On 13 July I received a brief to provide me with further detail for a follow-up meeting that I wanted to have with Professor Harding and some of her people from James Cook University and on 23 July Professor Harding visited me in my office in Brisbane, at which time I explained to her the reasons for my decision that we could not proceed with unfunded proposals put forward originally by the former government. That meeting was significant of course because Professor Sandra Harding was a member of the Commission of Audit led by the Hon. Peter Costello that informed our LNP government of the dire financial position that we had inherited from the former Labor government.

In September I can further confirm that I opened up discussions for options to transfer equipment and staff perhaps to JCU to maintain a presence, if JCU wanted to have that with our assistance, in North Queensland. I am yet to receive any substantive response to that. I might just ask Jim Thompson again, head of Biosecurity Queensland, to continue the explanation in detail of the features of the Coopers Plains laboratory from a biosecurity management perspective and why I reached the decision based on advice to consolidate our laboratory services at Coopers Plains. As an introduction to that, can I just emphasise that my focus is on biosecurity management across the state and I am sure, as Dr Thompson will explain, laboratory services or testing, if we want to refer to it as that, is but one aspect of biosecurity management. I will call upon Dr Thompson.

Mr KNUTH: Mr Chairman, I have a question relating to this matter. I would like to ask this question in the hope that the minister and the adviser do not have to repeat themselves.

CHAIR: All right. If you feel it is relevant.

Mr KNUTH: I do.

Mr McVEIGH: I will just seek some clarity: you do want me to repeat myself if it is the same question?

Mr KNUTH: It may or may not. It might save you repeating yourselves.

Mr McVEIGH: Okay. I am in your hands, Mr Chairman.

Mr KNUTH: Can the minister advise the risk assessment mechanism used to determine the cost benefit of moving Townsville's biosecurity department to Coopers Plains compared to the potential impacts of disease outbreaks on primary industries that could result in increased response times and surveillance, diseases such as foot-and-mouth disease, in the Gulf of Carpentaria and Cape York Peninsula?

Mr McVEIGH: I thank the member for his question and his obvious interest, as we would all expect, as a member from North Queensland, so I appreciate just that. I will get, as I was proposing in the former question, Dr Thompson to just explain the process that led us to come to a decision on my part to consolidate our laboratory services at Coopers Plains because I think that will go a way to answering the question that you have posed. But again I make the point that biosecurity management includes a range of services in terms of surveillance right through to testing, which is very much a reaction to a threat being suspected. So I will, in that context, hand over to Dr Thompson.

Dr Thompson: The cost to maintain laboratories is very high. We have obviously had three laboratories for a while. The decision to consolidate the laboratories at Coopers Plains provides a real opportunity, I guess, for us to really make sure that we have the correct staffing, the correct equipment and the correct capacity in a laboratory to meet all of the needs of Queensland. It is true that the prevention of disease threats in Queensland is not just related to a single laboratory; it is very much

related to the surveillance programs you have in place, the field staff you have in place and the research that is done. Moving the diagnostic capacity to the state-of-the-art facility in Coopers Plains will not present any further risk to Queensland. It does mean we have to get samples there. Many samples already go there from all over the state now. Admittedly, there are facilities at Toowoomba and Townsville that get them from closer areas, but a lot of the samples and a lot of the major testing is already done at Coopers Plains, particularly for Hendra virus. The laboratory at Coopers Plains is a physical containment level 3. It is a higher level facility than we have got anywhere else. It is needed for testing of diseases such as Hendra virus and perhaps future diseases such as foot-and-mouth disease. It really makes sense for us to consolidate our abilities and our capacity in that area to provide the best staffing and best equipment resources that we can for the state.

CHAIR: Are the other laboratories level 3 too?

Dr Thompson: No, they are physical containment level 2. In terms of level 3 and level 2, it is not the whole laboratory; it is suites within the laboratory. But the other two are physical containment level 2.

Mr KNUTH: Minister, I refer to question on notice No. 10 regarding the Tropical Weeds Research Centre cutbacks in Charters Towers. The minister states here that in total five staff from Charters Towers have been offered voluntary redundancies and are likely to be leaving in the coming months. Two of the officers are officers who provided research support, two are weed scientists and one is a pest scientist. Minister, the tropical research centre is an icon in Charters Towers and the greater region. The Charters Towers region is also well known for high numbers of feral animals, noxious weeds, exotic weeds, you name it. The termination of these leading scientists and support staff questions the security and the viability of the centre. Was this decision in relation to these cutbacks well researched, or was it just frivolous advice regarding picking a number? Can you ensure that region that this centre will not be closed?

Mr McVEIGH: I thank the member for his question. As the local member in that part of the world, I appreciate his interest. Given that Charters Towers is my wife's home town and I spent much time there courting her some 20-odd years ago, it is of personal interest to me as well and to her extended family. Specifically in answer to the question raised as to whether or not I can confirm that the centre will not close, yes, I can. There has been no decision to close the centre. As the member quite rightly refers to, we have made a decision—a tough decision—to offer voluntary redundancies to in total five staff from the Tropical Weeds Research Centre. Two of those are support staff, as the member may be aware, and three are pest scientists.

The research that went into that decision—and, can I say, any other decision that I have made as minister during the last six months—has, I can assure you, been quite extensive. I guess to put some balance into the context of this response and the decision I made, it is important to recognise that, I guess as I mentioned earlier, biosecurity management has a number of facets to it. There is certainly research. There is certainly testing. But I think most particularly there needs to be a real focus on the proactive aspects of investigations of field work inspections as well. That is why I have decided, as was outlined at the time of the budget and I outlined it before that given the biosecurity positions that I have announced across the state, that a new pest and weed officer is being employed at Charters Towers for that very purpose—in other words, to get out into the field. So I think that that is further evidence that I am not closing that centre down. Far from it; I am actually beginning the resourcing of it in a different way. That position was one of a number of positions that I have announced in parliament and publicly in recent months from a biosecurity management perspective right across the state. I can confirm that I have asked the director-general, as funds allow, to look at the possibility of employing more biosecurity positions in the field—in the front line—across regional Queensland going forward. So I am anxious to see outcomes of that effort in the future as we look at our abilities.

I just wanted to complete the answer by referring to the fact that, as I think the member would certainly be aware, the Charters Towers Tropical Weeds Research Centre has also seen a focus on feral pig impacts, so it has not been just weeds obviously.

The findings of research in relation to that have been published in several scientific papers and a dry tropics feral pig best practice manual was compiled in 2011. So those sorts of efforts continue right across the state. Again, to consolidate some of the technology, but more particularly the knowledge base—the intellectual property behind those efforts right across the state—I will be seeing those efforts from a research and research publication perspective being very much coordinated from the Robert Wicks Pest Animal Research Centre in Toowoomba.

Mr KNUTH: I appreciate the minister's response and I believe what the minister is saying is definitely in good faith. The Mareeba agricultural college is also in the northern part of Queensland—just outside my electorate but it services my constituents. Can you guarantee the future of that facility?

Mr McVEIGH: I thank the member for his question and compliment him on focusing on issues that mean something in his electorate, even though they might be just outside the boundary. In relation to the Mareeba facility, I can certainly confirm that there are no plans to close that facility. As the Deputy Leader of the Opposition would know full well, given his experience, it is a centre that has been focused on industry training and, as a centre focused on industry training—that is, not a traditional residential

agricultural college that the former government closed down across the state—my advice and my observations, given my own visit to Mareeba during the last six months, is that that centre is doing a good job, as are the other industry training centres across the state, including that in the Deputy Leader of the Opposition's home town of Mackay.

Mr MULHERIN: In answer to question on notice No. 8, you stated the cost of relocating biosecurity functions from the Oonoonba laboratory in Townsville to Coopers Plains at \$200,000. However, the ministerial briefing note states that the consequences for DAFF to re-equip Coopers Plains to accommodate additional biosecurity diagnosis and research activities are estimated at more than \$10 million and that there will be a loss of \$2.3 million already spent on the Townsville JCU lab and a liability for restoration of the JCU site for up to \$1 million. Those costs add up to over \$13 million. Do you stand by your answer to the question on notice that it cost only \$200,000?

Mr McVEIGH: I thank the member for his question. I went to some effort, I thought, in answer to an earlier question about the chronology behind the decision-making process that led me to make the decision to consolidate our veterinary laboratory services to Coopers Plains. Again, whilst the member and the member for Dalrymple have mentioned the Townsville example, I make the point that that has also involved the Toowoomba laboratory back in my home town. That chronology certainly—

Mr MULHERIN: So it is going to cost more to relocate Toowoomba.

Mr McVEIGH: The chronology certainly included the briefing papers that the member has referred to, obtained through RTI. But as I explained very clearly—and I am happy to run through it again—the chronology includes a process of visits, a process of briefings and a process of consulting with James Cook University that extended from early April—before any of the briefings obtained under RTI were written to me—right through until late July. So those are the reasons that I explained earlier—and, again, I am happy to run through them—that we reached the decision we did.

Mr MULHERIN: But you were saying the cost was only going to be \$200,000 and in the briefing note it says \$13 million.

Mr McVEIGH: Information in relation to the cost of relocation is not drawn from any one briefing that the member wants to refer to; it is drawn from the chronology of research that I conducted from early April through to 23 July, when I shared my decision with Professor Sandra Harding. So, yes, I do stand behind the answer that was given—

Mr MULHERIN: So it is an outrageous grab by your department for money.

Mr McVEIGH: I do stand behind that, because the progressive advice that came through over that process finetuned certain elements of information including, as I am sure the member would be aware—and if he forgets I am happy to remind him—that our Coopers Plains laboratory facility is co-located with Queensland Health. So in consolidating our services to that, we look at over a progressive period of time the economics of consolidating and, of course, we look at what our neighbour is doing in Queensland Health at the same time and the efficiencies that the whole of government can employ by making that move.

So one briefing paper in early April mentioned information at that point in time. As we continued the research process, we got to a figure, which I confirmed in an answer to that question on notice, quite some time later. I think that is a sensible process and, as minister, I am sure I am expected to put a lot of research, a lot of effort, in any decision that I make and, Mr Chairman, that is exactly what I did on this occasion.

Mr MULHERIN: So it was an outrageous grab for money by your director-general.

CHAIR: That is a statement.

Mr McVEIGH: I do not note any question in that, but again, I will run back through the chronology if you wish.

CHAIR: That was a statement. No. I will ask the member for Beaudesert to ask a question.

Mr KRAUSE: Minister, you spoke briefly just before about an agricultural college in North Queensland. Could you please provide us with an update on the status of AACC and its agricultural colleges, including current student numbers, plans for next year and how those numbers of students for next year compare with previous years?

Mr McVEIGH: I thank the member for the question. It is an important question and it shows that the member is as interested in the future of agricultural education as I am and, I note from an earlier question, as is the member for Dalrymple. Just to put the answer into some context, what we had under the former regime was, I found out based on further research, a significant level of economic mismanagement that continues to be revealed to me through the ongoing information being provided by the current Ernst and Young review. That Ernst and Young review I had to bring into play in August of this year when the director-general and I were advised for the first time of the financial results for the Australian Agricultural College Corporation—AACC—for the 2011-12 year. It appears that the colleges were losing money hand over fist, that there is no strategy to limit financial losses and that we were seeing losses predicted by Ernst and Young to head towards some \$7 million yet again this year.

In terms of the status, therefore, I was conscious of the fact, based on that, that that was coming on the heels of a loss in excess of \$19 million over some seven years. That is simply unsustainable regardless of the enterprise, the institution and, in this case, the admirable objective of pursuing agricultural education. The current residential student numbers, based on that context that I have provided, are at 104 in the agricultural colleges. We see, at present, 55 students at the Emerald agricultural college and 49 at the Longreach pastoral college and that includes students from Beyond Billabong at Longreach—an external education provider that works with the college at Longreach—and it includes a secondary school program being conducted at both colleges as well. I will admit that I am not including in that the huge number of students being run through the college on a very short-term, non-traditional agricultural college basis or various work for the dole projects that were there boosting numbers under the former government.

Can I explain to the member that, in terms of plans for next year, I made it very clear when I had to make the sobering announcement both to parliament and to stakeholders in the agricultural colleges, particularly the students and their families, staff and the local communities most especially around Emerald and Longreach, that we would nonetheless maintain the commitment to ensuring education at Longreach and Emerald for the coming calendar year—2013, in other words. The reason I made that statement, and I made this point very clear in response to an earlier question from the member for Dalrymple, is that the industry training outlets elsewhere that make up part of the Australian Agricultural College Corporation—Mareeba, Bundaberg, Mackay et cetera—are I think of far less concern to us, given that were not targeted by Ernst and Young as presenting significant financial concerns, workplace health and safety concerns, environmental management concerns and, in one case, quality of education concerns, given that the AACC was quite seriously threatened with a significant fine by the authorities for not conducting its educational program record-keeping processes properly.

So with all of that in context, I have, as the member may have noticed, ensured that we have commenced advertising and making it very clear that we are taking expressions of interest for next year. Advertising has begun, for example, in recent weeks in *Queensland Country Life*, among other places. Thus far, I am pleased to advise that we have received 70 expressions of interest for the Longreach pastoral college and 50 expressions of interest for the Emerald agricultural college.

Our government is working very closely and very comprehensively with industry stakeholders to ensure that training meets industry needs. How am I doing that? By working very closely with the Queensland Farmers' Federation, with AgForce Queensland, certainly with Growcom from a horticultural perspective, but most particularly working with local industry advisory committees attached to the Emerald and Longreach campuses. I will admit that the former government had advisory committees there in place, but what was made very clear to me by both of those committees, currently headed by Mike McCosker in Emerald and Mr Donald Brown in Longreach, was that they were quite frustrated by the lack of say that they claimed that they had with the former government in terms of the type of education required by industry. Both of those gentlemen are significant representatives of both the grazing and the irrigation industries from Emerald and Longreach and also from the perspective of how those facilities were run, if you like, from a production perspective.

So input from those committees is critical in aligning with the input that I am getting from Ernst and Young at present. We are getting significant progress there. The director-general and I are receiving updates in the coming weeks. As I have explained to both of those committees, I expect to be back in front of them with some plans on the table for their full input, for their full critique, such that I can move on and make some decisions with their input and critique, all going well, within the next six weeks or so.


So I am embracing those boards. They were, they claim to me, abandoned by the former government and I am currently, as I said, awaiting further information from Ernst and Young to address the immediate financial position to get on with those plans. But the numbers of expressions of interest thus far are quite promising for next year.

CHAIR: That has almost brought us to the conclusion, Minister. Would you like to sum up at all with just a brief summary of the agricultural part?

Mr McVEIGH: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I would just sum up that I appreciate the committee's opportunity afforded to me to address the budget estimates in relation specifically to agriculture, biosecurity and Agri-Science Queensland in my department. Given that we have a session commencing, I believe, at four o'clock on the remaining components of my department, I will hold off any comments until later in the afternoon. But thank you, Mr Chair, and thank you for the input and the querying from the committee thus far.

CHAIR: Thank you. Time for questions has closed. I thank the minister and his advisers. We will now take a short break until four o'clock.

Proceedings suspended from 3.29 pm to 3.58 pm

 **CHAIR:** The committee will now examine the expenditure of the service areas of fisheries and forestry. The committee has granted leave for the member for Bundamba to appear and the member for Mackay is replacing the member for South Brisbane to participate in this section of the hearing. Minister, would you like to make a brief opening statement.

Mr McVEIGH: I would like to start the second session by again thanking the committee for their attendance today. I want to state the LNP government's wholehearted support for the Queensland forestry and timber and fishing industries which are the subject of this session. Our forest and timber industries generate some \$3.8 billion of sales each year across the value chain, of which about \$500 million could be attributed to the forest growing, logging and milling industries. It supports 18,000 jobs and they are therefore vital industries across Queensland for Queensland workers and their families. About 70 per cent of timber sold in Queensland is used in home construction. With housing starts at 25,000 per annum, an historically low level of activity, demand is somewhat depressed and the sector is facing some significant challenges. I just want to state that our high dollar has made imported timber more competitive at a time when the industry has faced uncertainty about access to supplies.

Under the previous government the Labor regime had conducted a fire sale of assets; desperate for fast cash, I fear, to cover for years of overspending. When they hit the panic button, the previously state owned Forestry Plantations Queensland was sold off along with everything else, an act that did little to bolster confidence in our timber industry. What we have been doing since taking office therefore is to work cooperatively to get our timber industry back on track. That is focused very much at the moment through the development of a timber industry plan. That is being led by industry in cooperation with officers from my department. It is all about properly identifying the state of the industry and about setting a long-term plan to ensure the industry's future.

In terms of commercial fishing, I would just like to mention briefly that there are approximately 1,500 licensed commercial fishing boats in Queensland which account for more than 10 per cent of the nation's seafood catch. We have a number of significant commercial fisheries and I am only too happy to discuss those in more detail should the committee wish.

The Newman government is committed to best practice management in our fisheries and to sustainable catches. That applies both to the commercial sector, the recreational sector and, of course, the Indigenous sector as well. To that end we have committed to a full review of all major fisheries and for the east coast net fishery we have committed to deliver a \$9 million net buyback program to help ensure the sustainability of the fishery. That is in response to industry requests. Mr Chairman, thank you, and I am now happy to take questions from the committee.

Mrs MADDERN: Minister, as you are aware, the timber industry is a very, very big component of the electorate of Maryborough so can I ask you to detail what steps you are taking to assist with the long-term sustainable development of our timber industry in Queensland and in particular with regard to the western cypress timber industry?

Mr McVEIGH: I thank the member for the question. It is an important question because I know how important, as the member just said, the timber industry is in her electorate. It has been pleasing to have a number of meetings with her in that regard right up until recent days. As I mentioned in my opening statement, the LNP government wholeheartedly supports the Queensland timber industry. As I mentioned, under the previous regime the industry suffered badly by an approach that was at best to demonise the industry, shut it down and, it appears, lock it out. When it sent us broke as a state in a boom, as I mentioned earlier, desperate for fast cash to cover for years of overspending, it did hold a fire sale of assets which included our state forest plantations. The act, as I mentioned earlier, has done little to ensure confidence in the industry. That is why we are working on the timber industry plan that I mentioned briefly a few moments ago. I stress that that plan is being developed in cooperation between my department, the industry through Timber Queensland and also HQPlantations who the former government brought into the industry in recent years. It is all about a long-term plan and dealing with current challenges. I am pleased to advise that that timber industry planning steering committee is well underway and I am expecting significant updates on their approach in the coming weeks. It is a job that we got on with very early in this government in alignment with many of our commitments.

In terms of sustainability, what we have, both from an environmental and I will just start from an economic perspective as well, is little influence over externalities, for example, at present, from an economic perspective, exchange rates. Despite the fact that we do not control those, we are taking action, as members would have seen in our budget, to assist the local home building industry and the construction industry through the first homeowner \$15,000 home construction grants. The industry has welcomed that and acknowledged that as something that will bolster demand for timber from local millers so that is a significant initiative. The Newman government has introduced amendments from an environmental perspective to the Sustainable Planning Act. They were introduced into parliament, as the member may recall, on 13 September specifically to cut red tape, reduce complexity and the inefficiencies in the planning system which have plagued development, hampered housing supply and, of course, housing affordability for some years. Whilst we are cutting that complex and costly red tape which has been hampering the industry, as I mentioned a few moments ago, we are very optimistic about the impact of that first home owners grant.

As well my department is working very closely with the timber industry to work out re-opening previously logged state forests that had been locked up by the former government. We are doing this because many of those forests have been logged sustainably for a century or more. They are not high-value conservation forests and across government we will ensure that any areas of conservation value will be protected.

Over the longer term, the 25 year agreements for the western cypress pine hardwood areas will ensure vital regional jobs and, I guess, again from an industry sustainability perspective myself as minister and many members in this House from Western Queensland have been terribly concerned about the impact on small mills, about the impact on small towns therefore, and the economic impact that that engenders throughout Western Queensland in particular.

Our focus, to answer your question on the long-term sustainable development of the industry, is very much immediate with the timber plan very much focused on sustainable access to state forests and over the long-term those 25 year agreements that I spoke of. Thank you.

Mr GIBSON: Like my colleague from Maryborough, Gympie has a strong connection with the forestry industry, both plantation and state forests, as well as having a strong agricultural base. Can you outline the government's new forestry management and how that compares with that of the previous government, not just in accessing logs for millers but also other key areas of primary production such as honey production and beef grazing on leasehold forestry country?

Mr McVEIGH: I thank the member for his question. Again he raises that all-important issue of sustainable access. It is a key question that goes to the heart of the management approach of some of our resources that I, as Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, take; an approach I must stress that I share with my colleague ministers, particularly the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection, the Minister for National Parks and, of course, the Minister for Natural Resources. Rather than continue a process, as had been instituted by the previous Labor regime, to shut up our robust state forests from any commercial and many recreational uses, we are working with industry and with stakeholders to re-open our forests. That was one of the key commitments of the election campaign leading up to our election as a government in March of this year.

Our robust state forests will be available for a range of uses, such as timber production and harvesting obviously, quarry material production, grazing, beekeeping, as you mentioned, recreation, watershed protection and, of course, conservation as well. Under the previous government vast areas of our state forests, some with very little, if any, conservation value at all were set aside to become national park which would limit access to the resources that they contain. Our government's vision for state forests, in contrast to that, with the cooperation of the other departments that I mentioned and my colleague ministers, is to bring back the balance, to recognise those areas of state land that should not be locked up, but used for a broad variety of purposes, whether they are commercial, recreational and again I say conservation. A first key task for our government was for the respective ministers that I mentioned before, particularly the Minister for National Parks, Minister for Environment and myself, to establish a sustainable and sensible framework that allows for prudent access to our native forests by apiarists and by the timber industry itself. A key step in meeting that expectation is the proposal that all state forest areas be available for timber and other forest production on an ongoing and responsible basis.

My department will continue to manage timber and other forest production in accordance with the Code of Practice for Native Forest Timber Production on State Lands to ensure that the long-term integrity of the forests and the independent certification of its management system to the Australian Forestry Standard is maintained. We will also be opening up forests to beekeepers and looking at opportunities for re-opening areas to leasehold grazing that used to be a widespread activity in many regions, and an activity that reduced dangerous fuel loads in high-risk fire areas. The LNP sees far greater benefit from sensible forest grazing to reduce fuel loads rather than locking up forests as Labor did but then failing, as it did, to do anything about controlling weed growth and feral pests across our state forests.

In summary, Mr Chairman, we are not leaving state forests locked up, we are not locking beekeepers and sensible grazing operators out of our state forests and we are certainly not locking out sustainable logging activity. We are, in fact, opening it up to those activities in accordance with the Australian Forestry Standard because we believe that is the best way to manage the forests to prevent the build-up of weeds, feral pests and, of course, bushfire threats.

Mr KRAUSE: Just to supplement that question from the member, I refer to page 4 of the SDS which notes that beekeepers will have access to native forests. You have touched on that briefly. There are a number of amateur and I think one or two professional apiarists who live in my electorate. Would you be able to go into a bit more detail about how allowing beekeepers into native forest will benefit beekeepers and farmers?

Mr McVEIGH: I thank the member for his question. It does flow on from the previous question, I agree. I mentioned that in my view the former Labor government had a total disregard for, let us face it, what are non-detrimental practices of beekeepers in our state forests. There is absolutely no reason why access cannot be granted to beekeepers, and under an LNP government that is exactly what we are providing: access to beekeepers to our state forests. We know that beekeepers and their hives assist the horticultural industry and, of course, without hives our almonds, our avocados, apples and many other fruit and vegetable crops would not be pollinated. How the former government could agree to such limiting of quite sensible access for non-detrimental and, in fact, beneficial purposes such as this

still puzzles me to this day. Our government's vision for state forests is to bring back the balance, to recognise that these areas of state lands should not be locked up, but they should be used for a variety of broad purposes, again as I said before, be that commercial, recreational or conservation.

I mentioned the work that I am doing with the other key ministers in ensuring prudent access and, as I mentioned, beekeepers—apiarists, if you like—are very much front and centre in that consideration. It is all about getting the balance right, as I said earlier. In this particular case, to come back to assisting both beekeepers and farmers, I trust I provided a couple of examples of the absolute commonsense of allowing prudent access back into our state forests.

Mr KNUTH: The figures you gave in relation to 1,500 licensed commercial fishing boats relate to 10 per cent across the state. Now that you have this \$9 billion buyback, what does that reduce it to in terms of the percentage across the state and by reducing that is it sustainable to fresh fish in all fish shops right across Queensland?

Mr McVEIGH: I thank the member for his question. He quite rightly refers to the entire seafood or fish supply chain. So it does have an impact right throughout the whole supply chain. Just for the member's benefit and to add a bit of context to my response, the fishery net buyback refers specifically to the east coast fishery. The investment which I will detail in just a few seconds has a number of objectives. I make the point that it is specifically that fishery that we focused on, keeping in mind that we have a line fishery, a crab fishery, a harvest fishery and a couple of other fisheries in the state when we look at seafood in total.

What we did in terms of the commitment that we took to the election campaign—and again this was in response to industry approaches to us—was pledge to invest a total of \$10 million to help restore the health and wellbeing of fisheries and the sustainability of the commercial sector. Yes, \$9 million of that is voluntary buyback as you quite rightly referred to. Can I just mention that the other \$1 million that I can talk about in some detail should you wish is about some other initiatives to look at the sustainability of the whole fishery including an assessment of some recreational activity as well.

To get back to the buyback, the buyback has a focus on the overall reduction in the number of licences in the fishery. It will do that by, as I just alluded to a second ago, improving recreational fishing, particularly reducing impacts of netting on species of conservation interest; improving the economic viability of commercial fishers that are left in the fishery; minimising the community's loss of access to local fish in stores and restaurants, as you referred to in your question; and, given the input of environmental interests in our stakeholder group, ensuring positive environmental outcomes at the same time.

Delivery of the scheme will be through QRAA, the Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority. They will administer the scheme. The stakeholder working group has been formed by me to advise me on the best process to achieve maximum benefit from the buyback program. For the member's interest, that working group comprises members of the commercial and recreational fishing sectors, the conservation sector, tourism operators and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, GBRMPA. The group is focused on getting the best outcome, a genuine reduction in the number of netting licences in the east coast inshore finfish fishery.

The scheme is based on a voluntary competitive tender process. Any unspent moneys at the beginning of that first phase will be available in the following stages of the buyback. You should be aware that an investment warning has been released to advise all fishers that that process is underway and that further investment in the net fishery may not be recognised or advisable until that is completed and obviously management changes will result after the buyback is completed given that we will be dealing with a different total effort and impact in the fishery.

So that first round is starting very soon. I expect it to be completed by June 2013. The first round focuses very much on licence packages containing a commercial fishing boat licence with either an N1 or an N2 netting symbol. If you wish, I can go into the detail of that. Together with the C1 or the crabbing symbol it is all about ensuring we have a focus on removing as many licences as are voluntarily offered by the industry within our budget. Our focus is the sustainability of the industry, the economic sustainability of the fishers who are left in the industry and the input of environmental interests. We want the best environmental outcome from this effort as well. Yes, you are right, it is about ensuring that we maximise the resulting benefit, the sustainable benefit from a supply perspective to the entire seafood supply chain right through to the seafood shops that I am sure you, like me, would enjoy.

Mr KNUTH: I have a supplementary question. I refer to the Service Delivery Statements where you talk about the \$9 million buyback. You say that it will improve the economic viability of commercial fishers and improve recreational fishing, which is a good point. In relation to the recreational side, a lot of us live in rural and regional Queensland and do not necessarily have access to the coast. I know that there is a program for fish stocking groups to access grants. When 25,000 barra were put into the Charters Towers weir all of a sudden we had boats, we had people buying fishing rods, we had people buying lures, we had people fuelling up, we had people going camping. So the flow-on effect in those areas is astronomical. Will these grants to fish stocking groups continue to be provided?

Mr McVEIGH: I thank the member for his question. It is an important question. I know that it is a question that has been raised by a number of stakeholders right across the state. I acknowledge the significance of that.

As you mentioned, we are talking here specifically about freshwater fishing opportunities. Can I just talk about the programs and explain and open up on those programs that I think you are referring to in your question. The freshwater fish stocking program as a whole is delivered in partnership between the Queensland government and community based fish stocking groups, with which I assume you are familiar in your part of the world. There are currently 65 active stocking groups that release more than three million fingerlings annually into 150 dams and weirs across Queensland. An example of that is the reference that the member makes.

The first scheme that I wish to refer to is the Stocked Impoundment Permit Scheme. I will refer to that as SIPS for brevity in this answer. SIPS currently covers 32 of those 150 dams. The scheme provides recreational fishing opportunities in areas which would otherwise be lacking in those opportunities and therefore supports regional communities. You mentioned again some of the supply chain impacts of active fishing activities.

So what happens is that anglers wishing to fish at a SIPS dam that is under the Stocked Impoundment Permit Scheme will do so after purchasing a permit prior to fishing. A minimum of 75 per cent of revenue raised through the scheme, through those permits, if you like, is used to purchase fingerlings for stocking. In 2011-12 we saw the provision of some \$723,000 for the purchase of fingerlings for SIPS dams. As of 1 November 2012, just to highlight this fact, SIPS fees will increase by 3.5 per cent which is simply in line with CPI. What we will see therefore is weekly permits costing \$7.45 and yearly permits costing \$37. There will be no increase in what we see as concessional permits. They currently cost \$32.40. That CPI increase will produce or raise additional revenue for those SIPS dams and the stocking thereof of some \$28,000. To be more precise, of that \$21,000 will go back directly to those community stocking groups. So that is how that particular scheme works.

There has been a fair bit of confusion about the recreational use fee which applies to recreational fishers across-the-board. That recreational use fee is a fee that is collected along with recreational boat registration. Whilst it is a slightly different topic—and I am happy to go into the detail of it—I just wanted to mention for the member's benefit that there has been some confusion between that and specifically SIPS dams. Those community stocking groups that wish to participate in the Stocked Impoundment Permit Scheme are welcome to investigate that and that allows them to participate in this process by which we are able to collect access fees for direct input back to them for stocking purposes.

Mr MULHERIN: I refer to page 6 of the SDS and the funding allocation for Fisheries Queensland and in particular the \$9.9 million under the pleasure vessel levy where boat users pay a levy towards the implementation of a number of recreational fishing programs. Now that these programs have been scrapped, what is this money being used for?

Mr McVEIGH: I thank the member for his question. Again it is a question I know that relates to some interest that has been generated across our community. It gives me a good opportunity to provide some clarity to those who are interested.

The recreational use fee—and I mentioned that briefly in my answer to the member for Dalrymple's question previously—provides a means for boat owners to contribute to the cost of recreational fisheries management. That process has been in place since 1 November 1994. I must say that I think we would all recognise that whilst not all recreational fishers own boats and not all boat owners are recreational fishers, the mechanism since 1994 has largely been in place to capture recreational fishers who derive significant benefits from fisheries right across the state. The fact that recreational use fees are collected through a dedicated levy means that all of the funds are expended on recreational fishing.

In relation to some of the comments that the member made about some of the fishing programs or support for recreational fishers, I too would just like to provide some clarity, particularly given some recent false claims that have been made about what does and does not happen with such funding. We have, for example, funding support that has been previously provided to the likes of some recreational fishing groups such as Sunfish. It is through that process that we have been able to provide support for fishing clinics. Separately through another process we have funded the Suntag program.

I will admit that we have certainly had to review some of our contributions to those activities. But can I make the point that we have been seeking consultation with recreational fishing representative bodies, in particular Sunfish, and explaining to them that we are willing to continue to provide specific funding for specific purposes as long as we do have an explanation of the specific purposes.

We have previously seen under the former Labor government what I think was funding provided for such purposes that simply were not being governed or measured or did not have specific objectives in place. Can I confirm that, despite that, Fisheries Queensland monitoring programs will continue. We will continue to undertake extensive monitoring with recreational fishers through a range of programs. We have already conducted a state-wide recreational fishing survey. We have a biological data

collection program which provides information on recreational fishing and for recreational fishers at key fishing locations. We have a keen angler program and an online diary program which recreational fishers can provide information about their catch history so as to assist the whole state in measuring our activities.

We will also be undertaking a new enhanced regional monitoring program as part of our \$10 million election commitment. So the funding that is raised through the recreational fee that I mentioned a few moments ago does not meet by any means our total investment in assistance to recreational fishers in the state. The program that I mentioned raises some \$4 million and as a department we spend some \$12 million, as I have just alluded to a few moments ago. So that is an effort that we will continue and I remain committed to.

Mr MULHERIN: Minister, you said that it would also contribute to part of the \$10 million fishing initiative. Did you say that?

Mr McVEIGH: That is correct.

Mr MULHERIN: In Budget Paper No. 4 it says the government will provide additional funding. Is additional funding new funding?

Mr McVEIGH: I—

Mr MULHERIN: It says—

The Government will provide additional funding of \$10 million over two years to improve the sustainability of the commercial fishing industry by restoring the health and wellbeing of Queensland's fisheries.

So in other words are you using this money that was set aside for the—

Mr McVEIGH: I am happy to answer the member's question if he gives me an opportunity.

Mr MULHERIN:—recreational sector for the commercial sector?

CHAIR: Member for Mackay, let the minister answer the question.

Mr McVEIGH: I seek some clarification on the member's question because I fear he is overlapping two issues and that is the way in which I have answered the question.

Mr MULHERIN: To clarify, you said—

Mr McVEIGH: In answer to the question from the member for Dalrymple a few moments ago, I talked about the \$10 million fishing package that we have put in place, some \$9 million of which is for a commercial fishing buyback. I specifically said, and I am very keen to remind the member, that some \$1 million of that \$10 million program—so \$9 million for commercial—is partly devoted towards concentrating on recreational fishing efforts. So my apologies if I have been confused by your question, but that is the overlap that I was referring to with the recreational investment in respect of our \$10 million fishing commitment that we took to the last election in some of our specific recreational investment programs that I have just mentioned.

Mr MULHERIN: Minister, will you give a detailed breakdown to the committee—I do not expect you to give it now—of how that fishing pleasure vessel levy will be allocated this financial year?

Mr McVEIGH: I am more than happy to take that question on notice—no problems at all.

Mr MULHERIN: Again on fisheries, what is the minister's view on creating a new fishery that is based around pilchards or sardines or whatever you like to call them in the south-east corner, taking into account that if you establish a pilchard fishery in Queensland it amounts to a reallocation of the resource from the environment which does benefit both the recreational and the commercial sector? What is your view? Have you been approached at all in relation to this matter? Do you support the creation of such a fishery?

Mr McVEIGH: I thank the member for the question. Most certainly I have been approached on this issue. I have been in the process of engaging with a number of people who have opposing views on that proposal. Those who are opposed refer me to the experience some years ago of such a fishery in Western Australia which I am advised collapsed. Those who are supportive suggest very much that it could be quite a sustainable fishery of benefit to both commercial and recreational sectors, as you said. So I am not about to pre-empt an outcome or my view on that as yet because we are involved in that consultation and research process. I note, however, that such a proposal I think was rejected under your government—

Mr MULHERIN: That is right.

Mr McVEIGH:—and, as I said, I am in the research process based on approaches that have been made to me.

Mr MULHERIN: So when will that body of work be completed so that you will be in a position to advise the community whether you will allow this fishery to be created or not?

Mr McVEIGH: From recollection—and I am happy to provide this detail later on should the member wish—

Mr MULHERIN: It would be good if you could supply it to the committee. I would appreciate that.

Mr McVEIGH: I am happy to do that. I will just explain what I was offering to provide—that is, a confirmation of the date on which I received the last piece of correspondence to me on this issue. I think from recollection I have received that in the last week or two. In fairness to that individual and others who have approached me, I am conducting a review at present in my office and of course seeking guidance from my officers about the pros and cons. I have not formed a view on the date of that yet. The point I make is that the last piece of correspondence was received just in the last couple of weeks.

Mr MULHERIN: Would it be fair to say that you will make a decision in the near future on that fishery, whether or not to proceed?

Mr McVEIGH: I am not going to set a date because I am still in consultation with people who have every right to do that with me.

Mr MULHERIN: When you say you will consider with your office, are you referring to your ministerial office or are you referring to the fisheries part of DAFF?

Mr McVEIGH: Can I just confirm for the member—and it is akin to my response to a number of questions in the previous session—that what I look at an issue I do significant research and I seek input most definitely from within the department, from within my office, from stakeholders in the community and from stakeholders in the industry. That is how I approach things. For me to pre-empt when I might make a decision I think would be unfair given that all of those stakeholders are in the process of providing me with their input.

Mr MULHERIN: You said you have been lobbied by an individual but also by other interests around this particular fishery or potential new fishery. Would you be able to provide the committee with a list of lobbyists who have contacted you in the course of your duties?

Mr McVEIGH: I am a little unsure as to where the member's question is going here. I will take the opportunity to confirm that no lobbyists as per a lobby register have approached me. Individuals have approached me. I will seek advice, but I think it would be most inappropriate for me to reveal the personal details of individuals—

Mr MULHERIN: Of lobbyists.

Mr McVEIGH:—either for or against such a proposal who are people in the community, people who are recreational fishers themselves and people who are commercial fishers themselves. They are not lobbyists.

Mr MULHERIN: The question related to lobbyists.

Mr McVEIGH: No lobbyists have approached me at all.

Mr MULHERIN: Have lobbyists approached you during your term as minister?

Mr McVEIGH: I have had a lobby register presented in accordance with processes required under the Integrity Commissioner. He has confirmed that my report in that regard is fine—no issues there.

Mr MULHERIN: Could you table that register?

Mr McVEIGH: I am happy to table that register if that is appropriate. I will seek advice on whether that is appropriate.

Mr MULHERIN: The Attorney-General is.

Mr McVEIGH: I am happy to do that. But I just confirm: no lobbyists whatsoever in the fishing industry at all.

CHAIR: I call the member for Whitsunday.

Mr COSTIGAN: Minister, you have touched on the \$9 million east coast fishery net buyback package this afternoon. For the benefit of the committee, could you advise us on the progress in terms of the delivery of that package please?

Mr McVEIGH: I thank the member for his question. I touched earlier on some of the detail of that buyback program. Can I just confirm that the steering group that I mentioned is in place. That steering group has provided me with an initial report on their first meeting, and they are in the process of providing me with more detail.

The steering group has sought my advice from time to time in recent months since their first meeting. As I mentioned earlier, I think that is quite a robust and quite informative process because we are very much focused on those goals that I mentioned earlier. I mentioned improving as an outcome of this process, for example, the recreational fishing experience. I mentioned reducing impact of netting on the species of conservation interest. We are talking about the improvement of the economic viability of commercial fishers, minimising the community's loss of access to local fish in stores and restaurants, as the member for Dalrymple asked me about earlier, and of course environmental outcomes being maximised throughout.

The scheme—again just to remind the member that I mentioned earlier—will I think begin its staged buyback process such that we will receive results from the first stage by June 2013. That is my first objective. It is a voluntary scheme and what I have explained very clearly is that we are focused on value for money licences being targeted. We will then see in further iterations unspent money at any stage of the process being rolled into the following stages of the buyback. Again, I look forward to the results of that first round by June 2013 and I will remain in contact and consultation with that steering group in the meantime.

CHAIR: I call the member for Gympie.

Mr GIBSON: Minister, within my electorate and particularly Tin Can Bay there are a lot of recreational fishermen. Could you update the committee on the results of the latest fishing survey conducted by your department?

Mr McVEIGH: The latest fishing survey revealed a number of interesting details which inform us all about the total stock across the state. The survey showed that recreational fishers caught almost 1.7 million yellowfin bream, 1.3 million sand whiting, one million trumpeter whiting and all three were amongst the most commonly caught species in Queensland. The survey, which ended in December last year, found that recreational fishers, including those that I have just mentioned in relation to those species, caught approximately 13.3 million fish. It was pleasing indeed to see that catch-and-release fishing was also very popular, which proves to me that Queensland recreational fishers have got and are heeding the message that we need to be as sustainable as possible in our activities. That, amongst other things, provides very important information to my department in terms of fisheries management because at the end of the day under the act we are looking at the safeguarding of marine resources as a whole.

We found that almost all recreational fishers prefer to throw in a fishing line—so they are using a fishing line—and nearly half of them choose to fish from the shore. That was fairly consistent throughout the year as well, other than peaks in school holidays, in terms of uniform effort throughout the year. Recreational fishers we are seeing through the survey are certainly adopting new technology. Those with boats have you name it—echo sounders, GPS and all sorts of things—and most of that boat fishing actually happens in waters shallower than 40 metres.

One of the interesting facts for me, and I trust it is of interest to the member as well, is that the survey showed that nearly 97 per cent of the recreational fishermen surveyed do not belong to any fishing club or group—a fascinating result I thought. So that all goes together with other data that we monitor and collect in relation to commercial fishing and charter fishing, which is an industry sector in its own right, and of course scientific research data that my departmental officers continue to collect—to bring it all together to ensure that we are managing our fisheries in Queensland in an ecologically and economically way and, for both recreational fishing and commercial fishing, from a socially sustainable perspective as well. It was a very informative survey. It is good to see the results of that come through and inform our total fisheries management effort.

CHAIR: Just as a supplementary to that, what sort of representation would Sunfish have of those members? Do people become a member of Sunfish or is it the fishing clubs? I am not a fisherman myself. Do people become members of Sunfish or is it fishing clubs that are members of Sunfish? What sort of representation would they have?

Mr McVEIGH: There are two aspects in response to that question. The survey itself simply found that 97 per cent of those surveyed are not a member of a club. My understanding of the Sunfish structure is that it is largely made up of affiliate groups—in other words, fishing clubs that affiliate themselves under the Sunfish banner. I think it is interesting to note as well that our survey suggests there are about 700,000 recreational fishers in the state, where Sunfish I believe suggests there are about 750,000 recreational fishers in the state.

CHAIR: But Sunfish do not represent 97 per cent of them?

Mr McVEIGH: I cannot draw that correlation, if you like, between those two pieces of information because the recreational fishing survey was targeted at recreational fishers, and 97 per cent of them said they were not a member of a club. There is no correlation between that and my understanding of the Sunfish structure, but perhaps any observer can draw their own conclusions.

Mr MULHERIN: I note you have been saying that 450 jobs are being slashed from the department in budget paper No. 2. How many of these positions were classified as front line in the MOHRI data under (a) the definition applied as at 28 March 2012 and (b) the definition now applied by the LNP government? I know you probably have not got that data, but could you provide that to the committee?

Mr McVEIGH: I can. I would just seek some clarification from the chairman, first, if I could. Are there any other fisheries and forestry questions because I understood that is what this session was about?

Mr MULHERIN: I will lead on to that.

CHAIR: That is okay. I will give him a bit of leeway.

Mr McVEIGH: In view of this being a fisheries and forestry session, I am happy to take that on notice and treat it that way and proceed with that session. I understand that is what the committee wants to do in this session.

Mr MULHERIN: I also note it has been reported that 155 jobs are going in Biosecurity, and Biosecurity also supports fisheries. Are these 155 jobs front-line jobs or are they technical in nature? Do they provide technical support to the chief vet or the senior officials who are involved in plant health? If so, are you putting at risk national programs like the Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement, the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed and the National Environmental Biosecurity Response Agreement, which covers the marine environment? Could you tell me if these agreements are at risk because these people in Biosecurity are no longer required in your agency?

Mr McVEIGH: I again seek your guidance, Mr Chairman. I am happy to address that question. It just seems a strange question within a fisheries and forestry section.

CHAIR: We will give him a bit of leeway here. It is drawing a long bow.

Mr MULHERIN: We are talking about the marine environment under the National Environmental Biosecurity Response Agreement.

Mr McVEIGH: I acknowledge that it is partly Biosecurity and it partly covers that, but I am just seeking clarity from the chairman who specifically outlined as per the agenda this was fisheries and forestry. Nonetheless, I am happy to address the question. The question therefore draws me into an answer that is not specifically fisheries and forestry. It is broader than that, so if you are happy for me to go there, Mr Chairman, that is exactly where I will go. In terms of savings in Biosecurity, it is interesting to note that the member's question is almost an exact copy of a recent piece of correspondence I received from the federal minister for agriculture, Senator Joe Ludwig, so I note that coincidence.

Mr Chairman, the 115 positions in Biosecurity Queensland that will be directly impacted by the savings measures in Biosecurity we have had to pursue are focused—as with all of our functions—primarily in the areas of head office functions that do not have a direct interaction with clients. Of those 115 positions, we see 75 of them coming from the greater Brisbane area. Those areas that are impacted include biosecurity policy and legislative support, community engagement and administrative support, licensing and business systems, for example. We have discussed already the veterinary laboratory officers. The remaining area, the fourth area, is science and management of endemic pests. What we have done by limiting our cuts to those four areas is ensure, if you like, a better focus to our front-line services. How? Let me explain—by coordinating the government's efforts to prevent, respond to and recover from pests and diseases that threaten the economy and the environment.

The key point I make in that regard, as I said to the committee in the earlier session this afternoon when we were talking about biosecurity issues, is to remember that biosecurity management is about a range of activities. It is about prevention, and it is about reactive activities as well. Monitoring and field investigations are at one end of the spectrum to prevent, and then it goes through to the other end of the spectrum with the responsive and reactionary activities that are necessary if we are presented with any form of sample to test. We are ensuring continued market access for Queensland's products. Again, this is a very important role of our Biosecurity officers and not one of the policy, legislative support or administrative support roles that I have elected we have had to do away with as part of our cost-saving strategy.

In doing all of this, we are maintaining our reputation for high standards of animal care and keeping. We are very much focused on reducing the risks that chemicals and contaminants pose to agricultural food production systems and the environment—again, front-line type roles that support that sort of activity. It is all about ensuring we have a sector that is healthy and resilient in terms of our environmental impacts.

In short, all of those efforts by no means prevent our ability to prevent in the first place or respond to any significant biosecurity threats. In fact in a number of areas, we are seeing a refocus, which has been my intent since the start, such that the department is providing those front-line sorts of services. Again, I refer to the 15 front-line biosecurity officers I have already announced and my direction to the director-general to find capability to employ more in those roles as funds permit.

Mr MULHERIN: Didn't the science and management of endemic pests area provide support to people who were tasked with the jobs of developing these agreements and continually updating the agreements with the other jurisdictions, including the Commonwealth government?

Mr McVEIGH: They did. We are having a different approach to that such that those commitments are maintained. I had a discussion with Senator Joe Ludwig, as I mentioned earlier, in my electorate office in Toowoomba within the last couple of weeks about those sorts of issues. That discussion very much prepared him and me for our input into national partnership and national program discussions at the next SCoPI meeting in just a couple of weeks.

Mr MULHERIN: Finally, Minister, you said earlier that you were involved in cross-agency discussions with other ministers to grow the sector. In relation to the regional statutory planning process and the competition for land, particularly agricultural land, how will forestry be treated in relation to other industries such as sugarcane production? Will you allow market forces to determine the land use, or will you recommend to the planning minister that cane production areas be locked up and protected from other agricultural interests such as forestry? I recognise that both generate significant jobs in regional areas. I think the forestry industry on the value chain is probably worth about \$3 billion and sugar is worth about \$1.2 billion or something like that.

Mr McVEIGH: It is approaching \$1.5 billion. Again, I thank the member for his question. It is good to have a question back to a forestry issue in the forestry section, so I do thank you for the question. I will make a couple of points in response, if I may. The statutory regional planning process that the member refers to, as he would be aware, is a process being led by the Deputy Premier and his portfolio. The priority efforts are initially in the Darling Downs area and at the same time the Central Queensland area known as the golden triangle region. The member may or may not be aware—so I will just cover it very quickly—that the advisory committees for the statutory regional planning process in any part of the world are made up quite importantly of those who can provide some serious community input, as you would expect. That includes both the relevant state members in any particular area and, most particularly, all of the local government mayors in any particular area. That provides advice on the way in which we bring together a statutory regional plan for any particular area. The member is correct in that the focus there is very much on land use. It is about agricultural pursuits, it is about mining pursuits, it is about of course residential town planning type issues at the same time, and all of those issues come together.

In terms of suggesting that one would take a view into that as a minister, I again stress that I am not a member of a regional planning committee in the capacity as a minister in the Darling Downs area. I am a member in my capacity as a local member, just as, for example, the member for Rockhampton is in the Central Queensland planning process. As minister or member, I certainly would not be suggesting any, if you like, rules around the pursuit of any farming enterprise versus any other—

Mr MULHERIN: So you would allow market forces to dictate the use of the land for agricultural production?

Mr McVEIGH: I guess ultimately the approach taken is one that is dictated and agreed to by the overall committee, hence the make-up of that—

Mr MULHERIN: So it could happen that in a particular area—

Mr McVEIGH: A local committee might say that it wants to emphasise that market forces would take place. A local committee might say in any particular area they want to see encouragement of particular activities and work with local government perhaps. But, again, that is up to the local committees and that is why they have been structured as such to take that function.

Mr MULHERIN: Could you see a situation where, if a local region decided they would back one industry over another industry, rather than letting market forces determine the outcome, your targets to grow the timber industry could be impacted by such a decision?

CHAIR: That is very hypothetical.

Mr MULHERIN: It is not hypothetical.

Mr McVEIGH: It is very hypothetical.

Mr MULHERIN: There have been interventions in the market in the cane production areas of the east coast of Queensland, particularly around forestry.

Mr McVEIGH: Again, I think the member for Mackay and Deputy Leader of the Opposition wants me to pre-empt the outcome of local community decisions through committees—

Mr MULHERIN: No, you were saying—

Mr McVEIGH: They have not been able to reach a position yet, so I find the question quite puzzling and it is very hypothetical.

CHAIR: I will rule it out of order.

Mr MULHERIN: It is not out of order. It is a question around land use.

Mr McVEIGH: I am not going to pre-empt the thoughts of local mayors, local communities or local governments in Southern Queensland, Central Queensland, Northern Queensland or Far North Queensland. We want to work with industry. I am fearful that we have a lot of work to do to catch up right across Queensland, given the former Labor government did not work with industry. I instance, for example, plantations that were sold off by the former Labor government. If there was market intervention, I would think that was it. I instance locking up state forests to particular land use practices. If there was market intervention, I would think that is it. So our approach is to work with community and work with local government, and that is the process that is underway.

Mr MULHERIN: There was a lot of agrarian socialist intervention before it was privatised to let the market determine the outcome—

CHAIR: I do not think that is relevant. I think you are just making a statement. We have come to the conclusion on fisheries and forestry. Minister, would you like to make a brief summing-up?

Mr McVEIGH: Thank you. I will do just that. I thank all members of the committee for their input. It has been a most enjoyable discussion this afternoon. I therefore put on record my acknowledgement to all committee members for the opportunity I have had here today to appear before you in my first estimates hearing. I just want to acknowledge as well that today I am 192 days into my ministry position and today is the first day that I have received a question from the opposition at all. So six months down the track, 192 days in, and I have received my first question and it has been most enjoyable. My thanks go to my senior officers: the director-general, Jack Noye; the deputy director-general, Beth Wood; the acting director-general, corporate, Peter McKay; the chief financial officer, Leith Brown; my chief of staff, Bruce Mills; staff of my ministerial office; and all of my departmental staff for their help in this estimates preparation.

CHAIR: Minister, I thank you and your advisers for attending today. It was a pleasure.

Proceedings suspended from 5.02 pm to 5.27 pm

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

In Attendance

Hon. AC Powell, Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection

Mr T Collings, Chief of Staff

Department of Environment and Heritage Protection

Mr A Chesterman, Director-General


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

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

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

Ms D Anderson, Deputy Director-General, Corporate Services

Mr P Philipson, Chief Financial Officer

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

The proceedings today are lawful proceedings subject to the standing rules and orders of the parliament. As such, I remind all visitors that any person admitted to this hearing may be excluded in accordance with standing order 208. In relation to media coverage of today's hearing, we have adopted the guidelines prepared by the Committee of the Legislative Assembly for committee hearings. These guidelines have been distributed to the parliamentary press gallery, and copies are also available here.

The hearing is being broadcast live via the Parliamentary Service's website. We extend a warm welcome to everyone who is picking up these broadcasts. As laid out in schedule 8 at the back of the standing orders, we expect all departmental officers appearing today to provide full and honest answers to our questions. Anyone who is unable or unwilling to provide an answer should be prepared to state their reasons. I also remind members that departmental officers are not here today to give expert opinions on the merits or otherwise of the policies of the government. That is the role of ministers.

Finally, before we begin, can everyone switch their mobile phones off or on to silent? For the next 2½ hours we will examine the estimates of the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection. Welcome, Minister and advisors. For the benefit of Hansard, I ask advisors if you are called to give an answer to please state your name before speaking. I now declare the proposed expenditure open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

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

Mr POWELL: I would, thank you very much, Mr Chairman. Thank you, committee, for this opportunity to provide some opening comments for this final part of today's estimates hearing and for the opportunity to brief members on this year's budget as it applies to the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection. Before we get started and to assist the committee, I would like to introduce my executive management team, who are here with me this evening. To my immediate right is my Director-General, Andrew Chesterman. To my immediate left is my Chief of Staff, Mr Troy Collings. To his left is Mr Dean Ellwood, our Deputy Director-General of Environmental Services and Regulation. To the immediate right of the director-general is Mr Tony Roberts, Deputy Director-General of Environmental Policy and Planning and to his right is Ms Tamara O'Shea, acting Deputy Director-General of Conservation and Sustainability Services. Immediately behind her is Ms Danielle Anderson, our Deputy Director-General for Corporate Services and to her left is Mr Peter Philipson, the department's Chief Financial Officer. Also behind me are Mr Brad Lang and Dr David Mills.

First of all, I would like to take the opportunity to unequivocally state what I have said many times in parliament, in my electorate and in my role as Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection, and that is that the government is in the business of protecting the environment in the most efficient and effective way possible and my department's focus is on being a strong environmental regulator that supports long-term sustainable economic development in this state. This budget sets the direction for the state's future and our four-pillar economy and it tackles the fiscal challenges we now face in making Queensland a better place for Queenslanders to live.

Tough decisions such as the budget and staff reductions are not taken lightly and are challenging at every level. I do not shy away from the fact that significant change can be difficult for many parts of our organisation. As part of this change process, an extensive budgetary review of my portfolio was completed. We will be contributing to the Newman government's strategy to reduce the state's massive debt. Priority areas for service delivery have been identified. At the same time savings were needed to be made in order to deliver the policy agenda we outlined to the people of Queensland prior to the state election.

We immediately broke up the former monolith of DERM into more responsive stand-alone agencies. The new Department of Environment and Heritage Protection was created and I am proud to say as its inaugural minister that we have commenced the process of ensuring we better protect the environment while balancing the need for appropriate development to get this state back on track. My department has contributed to the government's fiscal repair strategy in this budget by investigating the internal workings of its structures and services, looking at its role in delivering the priorities of the government of the day and deciding where it can cease, trim and reshape its functions to deliver efficient, customer focused and strong environmental and built heritage protection.

I should state upfront for the benefit of the committee that there have been many change processes happening at once—concurrently—over the past six months in this portfolio. In addition to our contribution to the government's fiscal repair strategy, the department has been reshaping itself to better deliver its services. To put that in context, after this government came to power earlier this year the organisation formerly known as the department of environment and resource management was split into six different organisations to reflect this government's priorities. DERM was a vastly different organisation to that which is currently known as the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection, or EHP, with my department being a fraction of the size with many ex-DERM functions transferred to those five other agencies. However, good things come in small packages and my department has a clear focus, a clear mandate on being a strong environmental regulator and also identifying and conserving the state's built heritage places.

As well as having a clear focus, this department has looked at better ways to do its business through streamlining and reform. For example, the budget papers show that the department aims to achieve savings of \$1.9 million this financial year and \$2.6 million ongoing by reducing contractors, consultants, advertising and travel costs by 20 per cent. There is a number of initiatives underway within the department that will lead to improvement in the department's regulatory services for our external customers. The first is the green-tape reduction reforms to amend the Environmental Protection Act 1994 and other legislation which is to commence on 31 March next year. This reform will bring significant time and cost savings through streamlining the process of applying for an environmental authority. Authorities for low-risk approvals will be able to be obtained in days rather than months and all of the officer time that would have been spent behind a desk assessing those low-risk activities will be redirected to managing their actual performance in meeting environmental standards. Once the Environmental Protection (Greentape Reduction) and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2012 is fully implemented, the changes will save business and government an estimated \$12½ million annually of which \$11.7 million will be saved by business. This is achieved by changing administrative processes without reducing or removing any environmental standards that businesses are required to meet. Where businesses are no longer regulated as environmentally relevant activities, they are still obliged to comply with the general environmental duty and the Environmental Protection Act. The full range of tools in the act are available to address any non-compliance.

Additionally, the Queensland government has committed to improving service to the mining sector through timely, robust assessment of mining related activities and applications and through strong compliance and regulation to ensure the Queensland mining sector meets and exceeds industry standards. The department is also developing a new regulatory strategy which will serve as a road map for improving its effectiveness as an environmental regulator. Assessment will focus on seeing outcomes rather than prescribing how outcomes are achieved. If companies do not meet the environmental standards the community expect, then the full force of the law will be used as a strong deterrent. The government's initiatives will see the department establish itself as a firm but fair regulator that is the envy of other Australian jurisdictions.

Targeting our compliance efforts does not mean that we stop working productively with our customers—quite the opposite. For example, I recently travelled to Gladstone to meet with representatives from industry, Gladstone Regional Council, the Australian government and research organisations to seek agreement from prospective partners to the Gladstone Healthy Harbour Partnership. The partnership, working together with the Gladstone community and an independent science panel will better understand how the health of the Gladstone Harbour can be maintained and improved. The department is also working in collaboration with smaller industries to deliver the government's priorities.

As many members of this committee would be aware, the government made an election commitment to reintroduce damage mitigation permits for the shooting of flying foxes to protect crops and it has not shied away from this commitment. Representatives from crop-growing industries have

been working with the department to establish the framework and input has also been incorporated from animal welfare groups. The department has delivered an effective new framework that will meet the needs of industry while ensuring that strong conservation and animal welfare requirements are in place.

Whilst I believe that the government has a responsibility to work with communities and industry to help them thrive in their chosen pursuits in their local area, I also believe that Queenslanders have a right to expect that its natural and built heritage is protected for future generations. That is why the Queensland government is committed to expanding the area of private land management for conservation, specifically through continuing the successful Nature Assist and the Koala Nature Refuges Program, both of which will have significant and assured funding.

The department also works to protect our built heritage, and I am very proud that heritage forms part of the department's nomenclature. Certain proposed changes to places listed in the Queensland Heritage Register require a development application which is assessed by the department to ensure that the heritage values are retained as part of the development. I am confident that the department will maintain strong protection of our unique environment, protect Queensland's most valuable environment and built heritage assets while allowing the economy to grow to support current and future generations of Queenslanders. I thank the committee for the opportunity of setting the scene regarding the operation and future direction of my department as a prelude to tonight's estimates hearing.

Mr KRAUSE: Could you please outline for the committee how in tight fiscal times the government will continue to protect Queensland's environment?

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for his question. As I explained in my introductory comments, all of the work that we have done in terms of preparing our department throughout the fiscal repair strategy has also been focused on ensuring that we continue to maintain the highest level of service delivery around the environment and continue to provide the best environmental protection. I am happy to convey that some of the steps we are taking will ensure we can deliver each and every one of our election commitments as they pertain to the government and to what we said we would do before the election. The aim of the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection is to provide strong environmental management supporting sustainable economic development. Since the machinery-of-government changes in April 2012, department-wide savings measures have been identified in order to support the government's fiscal repair strategy. The 2012-13 budget outlined a number of these department-wide savings measures including undertaking an establishment review aimed to save \$2.6 million in 2012-13 and \$5.3 million per year ongoing. The review will rationalise administrative support and backroom operations to achieve greater efficiencies across business units and identify any surplus positions or any unnecessary or duplicated functions. As I mentioned, we are also reducing by 20 per cent our costs as they relate to contractors, consultants, advertising and travel costs.

As I mentioned before, we are also endeavouring to ensure that what we deliver is efficient and timely. The best way we can do that is to regulate our clients in an efficient and effective way. I mentioned the green-tape reduction reforms to amend the Environmental Protection Act 1994 and other legislation, which is to commence next year. That reform will bring in significant timely cost savings through streamlining the process of applying for an environmental authority. As I said, low-risk approvals will be obtained in days, not months. This work is significant. It will save us significant time and energy which will allow our officers to focus their attention on compliance activities and on monitoring the performance of industry, of mining companies or of any development application to ensure that they meet those high environmental conditions. I am very confident that, despite the adjustments that we have made through the budget, we will continue to protect Queensland's environment now and into the future.

Mr KRAUSE: Can you please outline how the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection will be different to the previous DERM. In particular, stakeholders in my electorate have mentioned issues relating to efficiency and timeliness with the previous DERM. Can you outline how your department will be different in that respect?

Mr POWELL: I certainly can. As I said, one of our focuses is on ensuring that we are drawing our attention primarily to those activities that are of highest risk to the environment. By getting out of the game of having to assess copious amounts of low-risk environmentally relevant activities, we can focus our attention on those that deliver the highest risk to our state. For example, it may not be known by committee members, but our state regulates some 14,000 small, medium and large industries. For comparison's sake, New South Wales and Victoria are more like 3,000 to 4½ thousand. There is currently a program in place where we will remove and make standard assessable codes for some 29 types of industry. That will allow us again to focus our attention, as I said, on those high-risk activities. It means we can improve our time frames. It means we can improve the standard of assessment that we give those high-risk activities. It means that we can ensure we have a regulatory framework that allows us to seek out and ensure compliance and be proactive in that—not reactive, not waiting for things to happen, but ensure that industry are meeting the conditions that we set.

I am very confident that the new Department of Environment and Heritage Protection will deliver vastly improved time frames of assessment approval and will also give the community greater confidence in our ability to hold organisations and industries that are conditioned to those conditions.

Mr COSTIGAN: Minister, in your opening remarks you touched on savings. You also touched on that in answer to the first question, asked by the member for Beaudesert. That said, could you provide details on the number of staff that have been made redundant and what work units have been reduced? Could you perhaps expand on those departmental savings?

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for Whitsunday and welcome him to his first estimates hearing. The Department of Environment and Heritage Protection has established an organisational structure that will support strong, responsive environmental and heritage protection and deliver more streamlined and effective services. This has meant the scaling back or ceasing of some of our functions so that the department can concentrate on dealing directly with front-line issues and delivering on government priorities.

The department aims to reduce its full-time equivalent positions by 220 during this financial year. This will be achieved through voluntary redundancies and natural attrition. As at 5 October this year, 201 employees in EHP have been offered voluntary redundancies. This count of 201 includes offers made to former office of climate change employees. Of the 201, 157 employees—or 78 per cent—have accepted, 21 responses are still pending and 23 employees—or 12 per cent—have rejected the offer. Of the 23 rejections, 19 employees—or 83 per cent—have been placed in alternative positions.

The offers have been made across the department. Of the 201 offers that have been made, 29 were to employees in Environmental Policy and Planning, 70 were to employees in Conservation and Sustainability Services and employees of the now closed office of climate change, 38 were to employees from Corporate Services and 64 were to employees from Environmental Services and Regulation. The officers have been spread across business units. I am happy to provide more detail. We can break that right down to the individual units.

The reduction of 220 FTE positions is anticipated to deliver budget savings of \$9.7 million in employee expenses this financial year. \$9.7 million represents the part-year savings only, as employees progressively separate from the department part way through the year. In outyears, 220 FTEs will deliver around \$18½ million in savings.

The department aims to provide strong environmental management, supporting sustainable economic development. As evidenced from what I have said, all parts of the department have contributed to the fiscal recovery of the state. A clear, prioritised path for regulatory reform and policy review is underway to deliver the government's objectives for Environment and Heritage Protection. The restructure of programs to realign with government direction will not impact on the delivery of the division's front-line services; nor will it impact on key programs or deliverables.

For the Environmental Policy and Planning division, the primary role is to develop and coordinate the policy planning and legislative frameworks to deliver the government's key policy objectives for Environment and Heritage Protection. Most notably, the division also drives the delivery of the government's regulatory reform agenda through repositioning of the department's legislation, policy priorities and business practices to achieve efficiency dividends and strip away green tape.

For the Conservation and Sustainability Services division, there will be a refocus of priorities of existing programs, as in the case of the government's Nature Refuges Program. The program will focus all new recruitment of nature refuges on the NatureAssist and the Koala Nature Refuges programs in line with government priorities and deliver other supporting work more efficiently, with targeted approaches to auditing and compliance and other support services. The restructured delivery model has allowed for staff cost-saving measures by merging related functions and reducing administrative burden.

The Environmental Services and Regulation division is well placed to ensure Queensland businesses maintain the highest level of environmental performance, despite the belt tightening that has happened across all government departments. The green-tape reduction reforms I have mentioned previously. To complement those reforms, the Environmental Services and Regulation division is developing a regulatory strategy which will serve as a road map for improving the department's effectiveness as an environmental regulator. The regulatory strategy will make clear to clients, staff and the Queensland community how the department will deliver effective, efficient environmental regulation. The strategy will ensure our environmental assessments focus on setting outcomes, not prescribing how outcomes are achieved. And where companies do not meet the environmental standards the community expects from them, the full force of the law will be used as a strong deterrent. These important reforms ensure that, even in these tight fiscal times, the Environmental Services and Regulation division's capacity to regulate its clients will increase. As I mentioned before, the Corporate Services division's functions and staffing have been adjusted accordingly, with a reduction in total staff and a changed focus of the department.

Mr COSTIGAN: Minister, in terms of the savings measures that you have outlined, how will you ensure regulatory services will not be affected? Particularly given the nature of the electorate I represent, that is something that many of my constituents would like to know.

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for his question. It is a very good question. Throughout this fiscal repair strategy—throughout the budget discussions, debate and ultimately the solution that we have provided—we have quarantined as much as possible the front-line environmental officers, the people out there in the regions doing the work to ensure the assessments and the compliance work are done to the highest level possible. We have done so to ensure we can continue to provide the level of environmental protection that our communities expect—that should be expected, that we as a government expect—while also supporting sustainable economic development. We have done that by making savings across a range of areas.

Particularly in the area of Environmental Services and Regulation there are savings of \$3.2 million, and \$17.2 million over four years will result from the finalisation of the Binary chemicals land remediation project and discontinuing the compliance response fund, to be replaced by alternative funding arrangements. Further initiatives include a revised approach to the regulatory skills training program and the regional planning and assessment function, as well as increased efficiencies in the delivery of environmental services and regulation.

The division is well placed to ensure Queensland businesses maintain the highest level of environmental performance, despite the belt tightening. One of the key ways, as I have mentioned in a number of answers already, is that we are focusing our attention on removing unnecessary green tape. By removing that unnecessary green tape we can truly target those officers on the work that needs to be done on the ground in electorates like yours.

Mr GIBSON: Minister, can you provide highlights for the committee of the actions taken to protect koalas, particularly in South-East Queensland?

Mr POWELL: I certainly can. I know that the member for Gympie has a few of them up in his electorate. There are a range of things that this government is doing to continue to protect koalas. It is a piece of work that I am very keen to see implemented, because it was one of the strongest policies that we had prepared in the lead-up to the election. The previous government put all of its eggs in one basket in koala habitat acquisition. We are continuing that important program of ensuring we do protect koala habitat. We are investing \$22½ million over the next three years but in an expanded area in the hope we can provide properties for koala habitat.

Just to give you some indication of where we are now looking, unfortunately it does not include the member's own regional council but it does include Sunshine Coast, Moreton Bay, Brisbane, Redland, Logan, Gold Coast, Lockyer Valley, Scenic Rim, Ipswich and Somerset. We have opened that process already. We are looking for properties of 10 hectares or more. Since that program has opened we have been inundated with applications. That process will remain open for a little longer. We will see \$7½ million invested this year in that program. Expressions of interest will close on 31 October.

The second new initiative—this is a truly new initiative and it was my privilege to announce it today—is the Koala Rescue and Rehabilitation Grants program, which will allocate \$800,000 over four years to build the capacity of organisations delivering koala rescue and rehabilitation services. This is an important area of koala conservation neglected by the previous government. It is worth pointing out—it is very rare for me to get a commendation from the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland—that Wildlife Queensland today applauded the funding boost announced. A press release from them states—

"This \$800,000, part of a \$26.5 million funding package over 4 years satisfies a pre election commitment ...

'Wildlife Queensland gives credit when credit is due.

'It is pleasing that a Government at long last has recognised the caring and welfare work the volunteers do in struggling to rehabilitate sick and injured koalas,' stated Boyland."

I thank Mr Des Boyland for his comments. It is pleasing to see this new investment recognised for what it is: an attempt to help those on the front line caring for our wildlife, particularly koalas, who do it on a voluntary basis but really could do with a helping hand. It is my intention to see that \$800,000 spread as far as possible to ensure we get the best outcomes for sick and injured koalas.

The third element of the Investing to Protect Our Koalas policy is also new. That is, \$3.2 million will be provided over four years in grants for research into koala diseases and other preventable causes of death, injury and illness. In this financial year \$800,000 will be made available for research programs and program administration. It is designed to build capacity and help fill a gap in the koala research field by supporting research into preventable causes of koala mortality, injury or illness. Research projects will provide tangible outcomes that can better inform koala management.

We are currently working with the Koala Research Network—a network of over 60 researchers from universities, private organisations and government that research the characteristics of koalas, their habitat and ecology—to determine where funding is best directed to gain the best possible outcome for koala populations. Assessment will be on a competitive basis, with applications being addressed by a panel external to EHP. That panel will comprise expert koala researchers, who will assess applications against criteria developed in close consultation with the Koala Research Network. That program is expected to get underway later this year.

These three programs I have outlined under the government's new koala policy are in addition to existing regulatory measures designed to protect habitat. For instance, regulatory measures are in place to protect koala habitat during land development in South-East Queensland. These measures under the Sustainable Planning Act 2009 include the South-East Queensland koala conservation state planning regulatory provisions and the state planning policy for koala conservation in South-East Queensland. Together these instruments protect priority koala habitat from new development as well as ensure that land-use planning decisions take koala conservation needs into account.

These program elements are all in addition to the day-to-day work of EHP in conserving Queensland's koalas. EHP is caring for sick, injured and orphaned koalas through its existing initiative in koala care and rehabilitation including the Moggill Koala Hospital and the Daisy Hill koala ambulance. The Moggill Koala Hospital opened in 1991 in response to public concern about the increasing number of injured and diseased koalas found in South-East Queensland. It is owned and operated by EHP with significant support from volunteers. It operates every day of the year and specialises in the rehabilitation of sick and injured and orphaned koalas. Koalas are commonly admitted for treatment and/or rehabilitation for disease including chlamydia, with traumatic injuries caused particularly by cars and dogs and as orphaned joeys. Once rehabilitated, koalas are returned to the natural habitat at or close to their point of rescue. Queensland is leading the nation on koala conservation through legislation, through funding programs and through care and research initiatives and existing efforts will now be boosted by an unprecedented commitment to koala conservation through the government's new koala policy.

Mr GIBSON: Minister, thank you for that detail, because it is quite interesting that in the media today I noticed that you have copped some criticism from the Australian Koala Foundation and yet you have provided us with some significant detail about what the government is doing. Are there any other breakdown of investments or activities that are further protecting koalas, because it seems incredulous that, given what you have explained to us, you would get any criticism based on what is occurring?

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for the supplementary question. It is my understanding that \$26.5 million over four years is the largest commitment of any government that we are making to any fauna in this state. It is significant. As I said, it covers all of the reasons of decline that we understand within the koala population—whether it be habitat, and we do that through the acquisition program and also through the regulatory and planning processes, whether it be disease through research, whether it be through car strikes or injuries. There are levels of protection for koalas that are also delivered through the Nature Conservation Act in terms of assessing any development that comes before us. We are very focused on ensuring that we get the best outcome when it comes to the koala and indeed any native flora and fauna in this state. We often cop criticism from the Australian Koala Foundation, but rest assured that the previous government equally copped a lot of criticism from the Australian Koala Foundation. I am confident that the unprecedented boost, as I said, in koala investment will ensure that we deliver a great outcome for the koala population over the coming years.

Mr GIBSON: Thanks.

Mrs MADDERN: Minister, you have been referred to as the 'Minister for Critters' and in my electorate I have the very unique Mary River turtle. I also have, courtesy of my friends from North Queensland, a very large critter that is laying on the banks of the Mary River sunning himself—with no indication that he wants to go home! Can you please provide a broad overview of the budget measures to protect Queensland's wildlife?

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for the question. I know her community, like some other communities in Queensland, is frustrated with the crocodile presence at the moment. I can assure the member that we are doing everything we can to entice that crocodile into the trap we have set for it. Unfortunately, the critter in this instance does not seem to be hungry. He is quite happy to be lazing around on the banks of the Mary River, and I do not blame him as the river transects my electorate, your electorate and the member for Gympie's electorate. We all know that it is a beautiful part of the world, but we will continue to ensure that we take the action necessary to remove that crocodile.

I am very happy to take the question with regard to our protection of wildlife. It builds on what I was just saying regarding koalas in particular, and we do have a range of programs that we will be putting in place to ensure that. I am sure I will be getting questions throughout this sitting on flying foxes, so I might leave those alone for the time being and address some of the other investments we are making. For example, we are continuing our work around dugongs and turtles. My parliamentary colleague the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, who I understand was just before the committee, introduced the animal care and protection bill and this parliament passed that. My role as the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection is to ensure that we come up with sustainable hunting practices in Indigenous communities working with our Queensland land and sea Indigenous rangers to ensure that we can work with communities to develop those and then, as I said, looking at compliance under the Nature Conservation Act where that is necessary.

We are also investing significantly in a new crocodile management policy, but I again suspect we might delve into that a little bit later on from members seated at the estimates table. So I might talk about that a bit further later on if the opportunity allows it. We are also investing in an independent scientific peer review of the Fraser Island dingo management strategy. I know, as the member for Maryborough would appreciate, that many of the tourists who come through the Fraser Coast Regional Council area end up on Fraser Island, and rightly so. It is a wonderful part of the world and an opportunity to experience a great part of our environment while also treading carefully when it comes to dingoes. So we are reviewing that through an independent agency known as Ecosure. A final report on the strategy review will be delivered by 31 December and it will be evaluated by an external expert review steering committee that will provide recommendations regarding a revised strategy to me as minister in February 2013.

We are also doing work around marine mammals. We are doing work around bilbies, including our ongoing partnership with Save the Bilby Fund. Significant predator pressure from feral cats is impacting on our bilby colonies. Almost 2,000 cats have been removed from the Astrebla Downs National Park, but at the end of August for every one bilby there were two cats and 74 rats. In 2012-13 EHP will spend some \$150,000 on bilby management and will grant Save the Bilby Fund \$45,000. Captive populations on Currawinya began at 30, with an estimated 100 in 2010 and currently estimated at less than 10. So we still have a lot of work to do there. We are also doing a lot of work around the northern hairy-nosed wombat. As I said, we are doing work around koalas. So as you can see, we have a very broad approach to our work around protecting wildlife in Queensland and I look forward to continuing it in this coming financial year.

Mr COX: Minister, your first bill introduced to the House was the green-tape reduction bill, which I supported. I am interested if you can outline any plans the government has to reduce green tape in 2012-13?

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for his question and I also thank him for his support of the bill that passed through the House. It was a long time coming and it was good for us as a government to see that one continued through the House and be delivered. It will deliver significant wins for the industry sector and it is an instrumental part of our broader green-tape reduction project that we will continue. We have acted on getting the resource sector approvals back on track by supporting that green-tape reduction program. We have expedited the passage of the legislation, as we have just discussed, and these will streamline the processing of approvals without undermining the obligations of business to protect our environment. We all know what an important role the resources and energy sector is to the economic drivers in this state. It is one of our largest exporters and contributes significantly to our government coffers in Queensland.

We are continuing to do a range of work flowing on from that green-tape legislation. We are, as I mentioned before, looking at removing a range of environmentally relevant activities from needing to be assessed by the department. They will become assessed by standard conditions, and that is self-assessed. We are also doing significant work with the Department of Natural Resources and Mines around streamlining approval processes more specifically for the mining sector. If I can just delve into that a little bit further, as part of the streamlining resource approval project, my department is working with DNRM testing the MyMinesOnline electronic application system which combines application processes for both environmental authorities and tenures to provide a seamless, paperless and faster approval system for our mining industry clients.

I have outlined a range of substantive legislative and administrative changes that are testing the culture of regulatory reform already. This is a culture that I fully support and that will continue through the term of this government. We will not stop at the changes that I have already outlined. We are consulting on a discussion paper that proposes to remove the requirement, as I said, for a number of activities to hold environmental authorities. We are also working with other mining regulators to identify further opportunities to reduce the regulatory burden on the resources sector. We will continue to do this in every way possible to ensure that we not only reduce the impact on my team's ability to assess and check compliance but also get great outcomes for the industry and for the environment. As I come back to my earlier statement, we are very much setting this department up to be a strong environmental regulator that works with sustainable economic development in this state.

Mr KNUTH: Minister, I refer to the Service Delivery Statements at page 10 relating to the department's objective to remove red tape. Considering that the government's Paddock to Reef Program is aimed at protecting the reef plus comments by the Premier that filling out paperwork will not save the reef, will the minister advise if environmental regulation management plans, ERMPs, required by the former government that threatened landowners with \$30,000 fines or imprisonment will be wiped out?

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for his question, and I just need to clarify something. I was listening to some of the estimates discussion earlier. With regard to Paddock to Reef, that part of the equation sits clearly with the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines. I understand that he addressed that very clearly in his answer but he also outlined—rightly—that the question you have asked around

the environmentally relevant management plans sits with my department. With the change in government, the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection has moved quickly to start work with the cattle grazing and sugarcane industries to accelerate a transition from broad regulatory coverage to best management practice. This again was one of our election commitments. The approach is similar to that in the cotton and grains industry.

Mr KNUTH: Sorry, but was that broad management—

Mr POWELL: Best management practice, BMP, and it is consistent with a best management practice program that operates in the cotton and grain industries already. It is industry led and it will be supported by strong science and extension programs, with best management practice and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry ably assisting industry in the development and the implementation of the program. As you would have heard from the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines, we are a government that strongly believes that we should work alongside agricultural producers, not work against them by having them filling in onerous paperwork. So we very much are returning to an extension based approach and an industry-driven based approach. So substantial work on best management practice schemes have already been undertaken in both the cane growing and the cattle grazing industries. Canegrowers and AgForce have both indicated willingness to draw on the government support being offered so that practical, sensible, best management practice schemes can be finalised and made widely available to their industries. General consensus is that cattle graziers or sugarcane farmers who have completed their ERMPs or other approved management plans will easily transition to this. In fact, they basically meet the best management practice program.

I need to be clear that we are basically taking what was the money previously spent on regulation and compliance and turning it into extension through our focus on best management practice. We are currently finalising negotiations with Canegrowers for the delivery of its program and we are a couple of weeks behind with the grazing industry, AgForce and the Fitzroy Basin Association to achieve the same for the cattle industry. Unashamedly, my focus is ensuring that we get those industry-driven BMPs ready so that the industry—cattle grazing or sugar cane—can adopt those practices in a voluntary industry-driven way. We will be there to work with them, as will the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

Mr KNUTH: So the big-stick approach will be removed?

Mr POWELL: We are working progressively. As I said, unashamedly my focus is on getting the BMP up at this stage. Unlike the previous government for a period, we are not imposing strict conditioning on the delivery of the regulation. We are preferring to work with the industries and with the individual farmers around getting on board with this voluntary BMP. It has worked for the cotton and grain industries. That is my focus. As I have said in previous answers, we are working on a broader green-tape reduction project. In due course we will be addressing the matters that you have raised.

CHAIR: Have you been working with Growcom for some of the larger vegetable growers up around Burdekin and that sort of thing too?

Mr POWELL: We certainly have been working with Growcom and Burdekin fruit and vegetable growers, but more so on the flying fox damage mitigation permit work. Our focus when it comes to BMPs is specifically on the cane and cattle grazing industries. It is part of our investment in protecting the reef but doing it in a way that works with the industries and works with the farmers, not against them. We want to work with them in terms of that old extension approach. I was listening to some of the hearing of the estimates for the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. It is pleasing to see that we are working hand in hand with his department to deliver that.

CHAIR: Of course, the fruit and vegetable growers are ahead of the game in many ways.

Mr POWELL: Yes.

Mr KNUTH: This is a question that I have asked many times. I do not think that it is grandstanding or anything like that. It is something that I am very passionate about and want to see resolved. In relation to your response to question on notice No. 4 regarding the department's work with the communities of Charters Towers and Mount Isa—and I just want to add that the Charters Towers Regional Council has spent possibly hundreds of thousands of dollars chasing bats from one roof to another—the permit systems that are put in place by the previous government have been very useless and ineffective. We have heard all about the strategies of a flying fox roost, which may take years. I was aware that the minister did visit Charters Towers and promised to remove the bats by any means possible. We want a resolution. We do not want to keep coming here and talking about flying foxes. The mayor came out the other day and said that the present permit system—and I will table that at the next session—that is in place must be stronger. Minister, as of here today, can we do something to resolve this?

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for the question and the way in which he has also approached it by not choosing to take a grandstanding approach to it. It is a very serious issue. The member needs to realise that, whilst the government has changed, we are still operating under similar legislative requirements, particularly federal legislative requirements. There is scope for us to deliver outcomes for

communities and I would like to share a couple of examples with you so that you can hear the kind of collaborative work that we have been doing with the regional councils and even private companies to give relief to communities.

Two examples spring to mind and one is one that I have referred to previously and I think I have made reference to it in response to your question on notice, and that is Mount Isa. Officers from my department were in Mount Isa to work with the council officers in particular and Xstrata, I will also inform you, to come up with a long-term solution for that city when it comes to flying fox roosts. We are doing damage mitigation permit work. In fact, it has been done. It was approved and done very quickly and, again, we had officers on the ground to assist the council in that work to ensure that the damage of flying foxes coming into the town is minimised as much as possible. To go alongside that, Xstrata has offered to do some work with the council to develop a flying fox roost on their land outside the city and to encourage the flying foxes to head in that direction.

Similarly, the member for Gregory approached my office recently regarding some work that was needed to be done in Duaringa. Again, we sat down with the Central Highlands Regional Council, agreed on a damage mitigation permit and took the necessary action that was required to move on the flying foxes. We have received extraordinarily good feedback from the Central Highlands Regional Council on the responsiveness of my department in achieving that outcome.

These are the kinds of solutions that we are happy to sit down and work with the Charters Towers Regional Council to deliver. I will add again—and I know that I have said it before to the member—that the Charters Towers Regional Council has applied for two damage mitigation permits since I have become minister and both have been given approval. Now, I take on board your comments that they may not be happy with those permits, but those were the permits that were given to us. If you want to sit down and come up with a solution with us, then I am more than happy for you and for the Charters Towers Regional Council and my department to try to achieve that.

Mr KNUTH: Thank you very much, Minister. I have to also mention Oleander Drive at Yungaburra, in the northern part of my electorate. The residents there have been putting up with them for five years and were threatened by departmental staff of fines as a result of disturbing the flying foxes. It is just so important. I think it is very difficult to understand, when you do not live among this year in, year out, the frustrations of the residents. Will the minister direct his department to resolve these problems in Oleander Drive and have those flying foxes removed so that they do not have to be threatened with hundred thousand dollar fines?

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for the question. There are specific instances in the area that you are talking about at—

Mr KNUTH: Oleander Drive, Yungaburra.

Mr POWELL: I need to be clear that the communications sent to the residents in the area was not a threat. We have certainly taken on board how it was received and we will in future endeavour to ensure that it is conveyed to the community in a tone that is more understanding. What we were trying to alert the community to, as I said before, is that under existing legislation there are penalties for people who take matters into their own hands, as there are for a range of issues relating to wildlife across-the-board. The last thing we would want to do as a department is to have to penalise someone because they have done it. So the intent of that letter that was received by residents was to inform them of that so that they are aware of the situation. As I have said on a number of occasions here, I have legislation and I will have to act on it if we are given instances of it.

To come back to the basis of the question, again, my department is happy to work with the relevant council to come up with a solution. My understanding is that, in this particular instance, there is also some sensitive vegetation management issues that need to be looked at. But again, by working in partnership, let us see if we cannot come up with a solution.

Mr KNUTH: That would be wonderful, Minister. I just want to add that I appreciate what you are saying. We have seen a lot of legislation fast-tracked through this House, yet we have seen four deaths and 70 to 80 horse deaths as a result and unpleasant living. That has been totally ignored.

Mr POWELL: I would just correct the record. It has not been totally ignored. I come back to the fact that there is range of legislation that needs to be complied with and that is not only state legislation. We have a role here also to ensure that communities are not being litigated under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act at the federal level. So whilst it may not appear that we are doing a lot, we are actually doing a lot behind the scenes to work with our federal counterparts to come up with a better solution for communities and we will continue to do that work to ensure that we can continue to get outcomes like we have in Mount Isa and Duaringa and elsewhere around the state. As I said, it has to come from the council, though, member for Dalrymple. We need the council to come to us and offer to sit down and work with us to get solutions for their communities.

Mr KNUTH: Thanks, Minister.

Ms TRAD: Thank you, Chair. Can I say that I cannot think of a better way to spend a Friday night than interrogating your Service Delivery Statements, Minister. Welcome to your first estimates. Unfortunately, my first question is not of you but of the chair of the committee. Mr Rickuss, it seems that the government questions on notice were submitted a day later than the non-government questions on notice. Could you confirm whether or not that is the case?

CHAIR: Yes, that was the case.

Ms TRAD: It is the case. Okay. That is interesting. Minister, given that you were commissioned by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II to administer laws protecting Queensland's environment, can you confirm if you are the lead minister in charge of overseeing the protection of Queensland's most valuable and unique environmental asset, the Great Barrier Reef?

Mr POWELL: I certainly have a role to play in protecting the Great Barrier Reef. There is a range of legislation that is relevant to that role. I will also outline the fact that there are federal responsibilities around the protection of the Great Barrier Reef.

Ms TRAD: I understand that.

Mr POWELL: Included in that is a partnership arrangement between the state and the federal government around the management of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and associated areas.

Ms TRAD: Okay. You have a part to play. Considering that the Great Barrier Reef is probably Queensland's most important environmental asset at this point, who is the lead minister responsible for the protection of the Great Barrier Reef? Who is the Queensland minister responsible for it?

Mr POWELL: As I have said, I have a significant role to play, but I sit around a cabinet table where the government as a whole has a responsibility, as does the federal government, because of the World Heritage listing to do this.

Ms TRAD: I understand the arrangement, but I want to know who the point person is in Queensland.

Mr POWELL: It depends on what element of the protection you are referring to, member for South Brisbane.

Ms TRAD: Okay, Minister. Can you then detail the allocation of the \$35 million that you and the Premier have repeatedly said is there in the budget this year for the protection of the Great Barrier Reef?

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for the question. I can certainly outline the component of it that is delivered by DEHP. In fact, I can outline the whole amount and break it down for you as to where it comes from.

Ms TRAD: Thank you.

Mr POWELL: Of the \$35 million, \$13.6 million of it is administered by my department; \$17.4 million by the Department of Natural Resources and Mines; \$2 million by DSITIA; \$3.5 million by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry; \$800,000 by the Premier's department. If the member would like a breakdown—

CHAIR: Just for clarity, I missed one of those.

Mr POWELL: DSITIA—Minister Bates' Department of Science, Information Technology, Innovation and the Arts. Of the \$13.6 million that my department has responsibility for, the reef protection program that I have just spent an amount of time speaking to the member for Dalrymple about, is \$10 million; Gladstone Harbour, half a million dollars; coastal planning, \$820,000; the wetlands program in conjunction with DNRM is half a million dollars; environmental values and water quality objectives for the Townsville, Mackay, Whitsunday, Wet Tropics and Capricorn Coast areas, \$330,000; nature refuges, \$1.4 million; and organisational oversight and governance, that is reef plan coordination, is \$50,000, totalling \$13.6 million.

Ms TRAD: Thank you. In relation to the coastal planning aspect of it, you would be aware that a draft coastal protection state planning regulatory provision has been administered this week, which suspends the previous coastal plan state planning policy. Did your department have a role in the new SPRP?

Mr POWELL: The member is well aware that the document was gazetted by the Deputy Premier's department. I am happy to explain to the member for South Brisbane my department's role in the ongoing work around coastal protection.

Ms TRAD: No, no, just in terms of the introduction of this new policy. You have a coastal policy unit. What was your engagement in terms of the new policy?

Mr POWELL: We have been working with the Deputy Premier's department and a range of other agencies over the course of the government and will continue to do so in the lead-up to the single state planning policy. If you would like some more detail on what we are specifically doing around the coastal plan review, I am happy to provide that.

Ms TRAD: So the new policy went to cabinet, did it? It is a decision of cabinet?

Mr POWELL: The decision—it was gazetted by the Deputy Premier on Monday.

Ms TRAD: So did it go to cabinet?

Mr POWELL: The decision was gazetted by the Deputy Premier on Monday.

Ms TRAD: So I am taking it as a no that it did not go to cabinet?

Mr POWELL: I think the member needs to direct the question to the correct minister if she has concerns of that nature.

CHAIR: Do you want that referred as a question on notice as the minister offered to you?

Mr POWELL: The question on notice needs to go to the Deputy Premier as the responsible minister.

CHAIR: No, not that one. You offered to give them more—

Mr POWELL: No, I am happy to give the detail now if the member is interested.

CHAIR: Do you want more detail on that?

Ms TRAD: I am not sure why it needs to be directed to the minister. The minister has coastal planning responsibilities, which he has articulated in an answer to me previously. He is a minister of the Campbell Newman can-do cabinet. It seems to me that he cannot answer a simple question about whether a particular policy, that his department has a significant interest in, went to cabinet, was a decision of cabinet.

CHAIR: This was introduced by the Deputy Premier.

Ms TRAD: I understand that.

Mr POWELL: Without going into the full details of what is discussed at cabinet, I am happy to inform you—

Ms TRAD: I do not want the details; I just want a yes or no, Minister.

Mr POWELL: Coastal planning has been discussed at cabinet.

Ms TRAD: It is a decision of cabinet?

Mr POWELL: I have said that decisions have been made around coastal planning at cabinet.

Ms TRAD: In relation to page 13 of the SDS, in particular the wild river declarations in Queensland, can you confirm whether or not you have endorsed or provided support for any proposal to amend any of the current wild river declarations in Queensland and, if so, what are the details of the proposed amendment?

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for the question. I might seek some more information from the member in regard to her question. It sounds like she has some specific concerns in mind. We as a government have been very clear since before the election what our policy agenda is when it comes to wild rivers. Since coming to government a number of those tasks have been allocated to various agencies. Whilst the act sits under my responsibilities, a number of ministers are doing work because it is related to work they are doing in areas to develop strategies around the wild river declarations. For example, initially the work in Cape York designed to eventually replace the wild river declarations in Cape York started with my department through the development of a bioregion management plan. One of the questions we put to the community regarding that bioregion management plan was what statutory requirements would be required to deliver this. It was very quickly evident and subsequently ratified by cabinet that a statutory regional plan needed to come into effect in Cape York and therefore the statutory regional plan process is run by the Deputy Premier and his department through his planning division. That work is subsequently being completed by his department with input from my department in terms of the particular conservation values that need to be protected through that statutory regional planning process.

I can also confirm, and the member is most likely very aware, that the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines has been tasked with looking at the declarations in Western Queensland as they pertain to resources in particular. He is consulting, I understand it, broadly with a range of local governments and other stakeholders in the area around that and it is progressing. I will check to confirm, but I have no recollection of seeing any amendments or otherwise to any declarations since forming government.

Ms TRAD: So that is a no?

Mr POWELL: That is a no.

Ms TRAD: You have not endorsed any amendments to any wild river declarations? No proposed changes?

Mr POWELL: There have been no ratified amendments to any wild river declarations.

Ms TRAD: Any proposals to amend wild river declarations?

Mr POWELL: I have just answered that question, Mr Chair, through my answer regarding the statutory regional plan in Cape York and through the work of Minister Cripps in Western Queensland.

Ms TRAD: Let us talk about the Cape York Peninsula Bioregion Management Plan which has subsequently been transferred to the Deputy Premier's portfolio. The submission timeline has closed on the bioregion management plan; is that correct?

Mr POWELL: That is correct.

Ms TRAD: Are the submissions likely to be made public?

Mr POWELL: We are currently collating the submissions that have been received by various stakeholder interest groups and individuals on the cape. It is our intent to provide that summary of submissions to the Deputy Premier and to the Regional Planning Advisory Committee that is responsible for the development of the regional plan and I am sure it will be a decision of the Regional Planning Advisory Committee under the guidance of the Deputy Premier and other ministers whether that information will be made public. We would also have to seek the permission of the submitters to determine whether they are happy for their submissions to be made public as well.

CHAIR: If it has been transferred to another minister's portfolio.

Mr POWELL: I have explained that we will be summarising those submissions and feeding them into the Regional Planning Advisory Committee.

Ms TRAD: I am talking about the component of the work that the minister has responsibility for, Mr Chair.

CHAIR: He has no responsibility over that.

Ms TRAD: With all due respect, he said they were collating the submissions. I am talking about publication of the submissions.

CHAIR: He is not publishing them though.

Ms TRAD: Thank you, Mr Chairman. A subsequent question, please: in the media release at the time that you announced the Cape York Peninsula Bioregion Management Plan there was a commitment to make the plan public by early 2013. Are you still planning to meet that commitment?

Mr POWELL: We need to go back a step here. The original intent was to produce a document for broader public consultation in early 2013 around the bioregion management plan. As I have explained, the process has now been taken over to deliver a legislative outcome through the statutory regional plan. As a result the statutory regional plan will now go through the formal process, as does every other regional plan, as does the SEQ regional plan that you and I operate under here in this part of the state. That plan at various stages will be made public and be open for public consultation, again directed by the RPAC. If you want details on the statutory regional planning process I would encourage you to direct those questions to the Deputy Premier.

Ms TRAD: In relation to Cape York there will not be a stand-alone environmental or conservation statement from this government in relation to this precious part of the Queensland environment.

Mr POWELL: I need to challenge the premise of the question. There was never going to be a stand-alone environmental statement regarding Cape York. The bioregion management plan, as per the election commitment, was going to look at our protection of the natural areas of the cape but also explore the economic development opportunities that arise on the cape. As I have explained in a number of answers to you, the intent subsequently to achieve that, the best legislative framework in which to deliver that, it has been decided should be a regional plan and as such the environmental protection element will be delivered through the statutory regional plan.

Ms TRAD: It does really appear, I guess to a number of people, that the Deputy Premier has put out the new coastal policy. He has now taken over the bioregion management plan.

CHAIR: Is this related to the budget?

Ms TRAD: It is actually about the budget. The bioregion management plan is on page 4 of the SDS.

CHAIR: It sounds like you are talking about pure policy here.

Ms TRAD: In relation to quite a number of areas of responsibility that fall under the SDS and your department and ministerial responsibilities, it appears that the Deputy Premier has now assumed responsibilities for them. What are you actually responsible for in terms of the environment?

Mr POWELL: Through you, Mr Chair, I thank the member for the question. I guess we need to point out the very clear differences, as I did earlier in the piece, between the former department of environment and resource management, that took upon itself, delivered by policy direction from the previous government, a significant role in planning. We have made a decision as a government that planning will rest with a planning minister. If that planning has an environmental role then it still will sit with the relevant planning minister. That does not mean that my department is not having input into the decisions being made by the planning minister.

I mentioned previously that I am happy to elaborate for the member what I am doing and what my department is doing regarding the Coastal Plan and it might be helpful to explain to the member how two government agencies can work in partnership. It is possibly a foreign concept under the previous regime in the sense that the departments were made so huge and monolithic that in essence they did not have to work across agencies but then did not work within agencies necessarily well either. Let me explain. In line with our commitment to reduce the regulatory burden on the broader Queensland community we did make an election promise to review the Queensland Coastal Plan. That election commitment sits with my department and is under my jurisdiction. As part of the government's reform of the planning and development system we have a policy of bringing all state planning interests into a single state planning policy. I will just stress that. Unlike previous regimes where planning policies were developed by various elements across government, we are going to deliver one single state planning policy. That will be delivered ultimately by the relevant minister who is the Deputy Premier. It is intended that the revised planning policies of the Coastal Plan will be included in that single state planning policy of which a working draft will be publicly available in November.

To let you know what my role is in terms of providing input into that, my focus is clearly on the review of the Coastal Plan to have it ready for inclusion in that state planning policy. We set up a working group of industry, local government and conservation group representatives and this group has met on a number of occasions to identify core issues that need to be addressed. Members include Toby Hutcheon of the Queensland Conservation Council, Chris Mountford of the Property Council, Peter Sippel of the Urban Development Institute and many others representing the building, planning, marine, tourism and insurance industries amongst others. The group worked through concerns that the Coastal Plan is overly prescriptive and stifling investment in coastal areas. The working groups' activities were based on a set of principles which aims to reduce regulatory burden, take a more strategic or regional approach, reduce the scope of the original SPP, maintain core matters for coastal protection and provide greater flexibility to empower local governments to make local decisions. I also advised the working group that the coastal policies that support protection of areas of high ecological significance will not be substantially changed, however I would ensure that the process of changing the HES maps would be made simpler where anomalies are found. It is the intent, once we continue to work with this industry working group, to settle on a revised coastal plan component and feed that into the development of a single state planning policy delivered by the Deputy Premier.

Again, it is not inconsistent to have an environment minister giving input into a planning regime, whether it be through state planning policies or through regional planning activities such as the one we are undertaking on Cape York. All it takes is two ministers actually talking to each other and two departments talking to each other.

Ms TRAD: Minister, are you suggesting that the Queensland Conservation Council actually approves of the new coastal protection plan because of their inclusion on the consultation group?

Mr POWELL: I am not suggesting that they approve of the Queensland Coastal Plan, I am suggesting that they are involved in reviewing the work we are doing; being part of the review work that we are doing on the Queensland Coastal Plan to ensure it is incorporated in the state planning policy.

Ms TRAD: Thank you, Minister, that is very interesting.

CHAIR: Just a supplementary, that is along the lines that Flinders Karawatha is under the South East Queensland Regional Plan?

Mr POWELL: That is a very important point to make, Mr Chair. For your landholders in particular, and for those of the member for Beaudesert, it is important to point out that a lot of the concern around the Flinders Karawatha Corridor is actually concern around the planning regime that has existed for many years since 2004 under the SEQ regional plan. It is the planning provisions that dictate where development can and cannot occur.

CHAIR: Member for Maryborough?

Mrs MADDERN: Minister, I note from the budget that a number of climate change programs have ceased. Can you outline the reasons for this savings measure, please?

Mr POWELL: The short answer is that during the election we signalled very clearly that we would end certain state based climate initiatives. Interestingly, since then we have had that ratified by COAG of all people—a COAG led by a federal Labor Party—that has delivered what is called complementarity principles. It has endorsed complementarity principles. These principles are a process by which jurisdictions can review and streamline their existing climate change mitigation measures with the aim of achieving a coherent and streamlined set of climate change measures. Basically what it is saying is that in a carbon tax environment we do not want taxpayers paying twice for climate change mitigation. What it is basically saying is that states need to get out of the role of climate change mitigation and focus their attention on adaptation strategies.

When the Queensland government decided to dismantle the former government's Office of Climate Change and the Climate Change Fund it did so on the basis that the need for most of that body's state based climate change programs had been effectively superseded by the Commonwealth's

introduction of the carbon tax. There is no point in Queenslanders paying twice, as I said, for state based carbon abatement programs. The considerable savings made by ending these programs, and that is some \$65 million by 2014-15, are now helping to restore Queensland's financial position.

Approximately \$5.3 million will be saved this financial year from the closure of the policy and programs branch of the Office of Climate Change. Scaling back the ecoBiz program will save a further \$760,000 this year. Closing the ClimateSmart Home Service will save over \$11 million by the time the program is completely reconciled in 2013-14.

The focus for the future will be on climate adaptation. The Queensland government will investigate cost-effective ways to help communities and industries better manage climate risks as part of an update to Queensland's adaption strategy. I am pleased to say that we have recently finalised a particular adaption strategy piece of work in Townsville around their coastal hazard pilot project work. That is the kind of area that we will focus our attention on—that is, preparing our communities for increased hazards, increased anomalies and adapting to a changing climate.

Mr COX: While it is clearly in your charter to look at things relating to protecting the environment, for the first time in a long time heritage forms part of the portfolio name. I am aware that you are seeking to renew and refresh the Heritage Council. Can you elaborate on the level of interest for nominations for committee member positions on that council?

Mr POWELL: I certainly can. I thank the member for his question. It is worth again highlighting the fact that it has been many a year since the word heritage has been included in a government agency title. It does show this government's commitment to ensuring we protect not only our natural heritage but also our built heritage. Apparently the table in front of us is also heritage listed, Mr Chair, so that is why you will not see any of us put a glass of water on it. The attendants will jump on us if we do that.

We made it very clear early on that this is an opportunity to reinvigorate and refresh a lot of our heritage programs, our legislation and indeed the council. Yes, we have called for nominations for the governor-in-council positions. The council is made up of 12 positions. Seven of those are governor-in-council positions and the other five are nominated by representative bodies such as the National Trust, unions, the planning industry and local government. The seven are basically open to the public. We called for nominations and we were overwhelmed with the feedback.

In the order of more than 70 nominations were received for the Heritage Council. My department is in the process of working through those nominations and progressing something to cabinet. I look forward to making announcements in due course about a renewed, reinvigorated and refreshed Queensland Heritage Council.

CHAIR: How will this government and your department, DEHP, work with business and not against it to implement the industry driven waste strategy?

Mr POWELL: That is a very good question and I thank the member for it. One of the first pieces of work that my department did on forming the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection was to remove the waste levy. Many members at the table would have received from councils, industry and individual business operators during the election campaign a wide range of complaints about the appalling way the previous government imposed what was really a business destroying tax on the population of Queensland and particularly the businesses of Queensland. So we acted decisively to remove that flawed waste levy. That has saved business and industry an estimate \$372 million in costs. That has helped pave the way for a truly collaborative approach to waste management reform in Queensland.

Its removal is a two part process. The first part came into effect on 1 July with the amendment of the Waste Reduction and Recycling Regulation 2011 to provide a nil levy rate for all waste. The second part of its removal will see the Waste Reduction and Recycling Act 2011 amended to remove the head of power for a levy and now redundant levy provisions. Once these amendments are passed this will close the chapter on the waste levy and we can all get on with the job of delivering innovative and proactive waste reforms for Queensland.

By removing the levy the government fully understands the significance of removing one of the key mechanisms to help deliver programs under Queensland's Waste Reduction and Recycling Strategy. However, it has also sent a clear message to business and industry, including the waste sector, and local governments about the extent of our commitment to go back to the table and renegotiate a future waste reform in Queensland that is collaborative and done in partnership with all parties.

I will say first and foremost, without the provisions that provided for the flawed levy, the remainder of the Waste Reduction and Recycling Act is pretty good. I do not want to make wholesale change for the sake of change. I am quite happy to acknowledge that the act provides an important structure and focus for waste management in Queensland. It gives us a strong framework for the development of a coregulatory and product stewardship approach as it allows the government to prioritise further action in a transparent and consultative manner.

One of the key aspects of the act is that it provides the ability to collect better data. As the research director of the committee and previous members of the House would well be aware, one of the key concerns in the delivery of the former waste levy was the data on which it was based and the anecdotal evidence rather than firm evidence around why it was necessary. That absence of good data had been highlighted in recent media about interstate waste transport. We do know if this is a real problem and improving data collection will give us the evidence to come up with the right response.

To complement the legislative framework provided by act, the government has committed to delivering an industry led waste strategy. To give effect to this commitment, over the next two years we have allocated over \$8 million towards strategy development, implementation and support. An industry led strategy is one that includes everyone who has some involvement with waste, whether as a generator, a recycler or landfill operator, in the discussions and development of a new strategy. It is also about ensuring buy in from the relevant industry players to enable appropriate actions to be taken to support the goals and objectives of the strategy.

Development of the new strategy will start with a review of the current strategy. Obviously as this strategy was prepared in an environment where levy revenue provided program funding, the goals, targets and priorities of the strategy need to change. I and the department have already started discussions with interested parties on the process for developing an industry led strategy. On 25 September I hosted a forum of invited key organisations representing the waste and environment sectors. I invited each representative to identify the key priority issues, challenges and opportunities facing waste management in Queensland. The member for Whitsunday is smiling because he kindly delivered a speech on my behalf at a waste management conference recently, and I thank him for that. Several days ago I hosted a similar forum for organisations representing waste generators. What I wanted and got from those forums was open and frank discussions about what has been done well, what we can do better, what we should focus on and how we can encourage industry investment and job creation in Queensland.

I do not want to re-prosecute the policy program of the previous government. What I do want to do is make the most of this opportunity to think beyond the confines of a levy and start to be more creative and innovative in our application of policies, legislation and programs. We need to focus on sustainable outcomes.

For the sake of the committee, I point out that one of the great outcomes we recently achieved was a partnership announced between the Australian Packaging Covenant and Keep Australia Beautiful Queensland. I made this announcement on 23 August. That will see the rollout of the Queensland bin network. Many members may have seen in public places such as stadiums and shopping centres both yellow and general waste bins. We will see them rolled out in key areas around the state.

Furthermore, the packaging industry has committed \$550,000 over three years to help boost iconic programs such as Tidy Towns and the Clean Beach Challenge and to fund a litter and waste education officer within Keep Australia Beautiful to develop a 'do the right thing' waste and litter strategy and awareness program. I do not know how long it has been since we have seen something like the Do the Right Thing campaign. Certainly a generation has gone by. I think I was a child when it was last around. The member for Beaudesert, Mr Krause, may not have been born. They are the kind of innovative and exciting outcomes that you can achieve when you want to work with the broader sector, be it the waste generators, the conservation groups or the key industry groups like Keep Australia Beautiful Queensland.

We are committed to doing everything we can to deliver waste reform in Queensland. It will be one of collaboration and partnership not one of prescription and overregulation. It will not be industry being told what to do and how it do it. It will be about finding the right solutions to achieve the outcomes we as a whole have agreed are the priorities.

Mrs MADDERN: Can you elaborate on the financial commitment to the Gladstone Healthy Harbour Partnership and what this partnership will help achieve?

Mr POWELL: Mr Chair, I need to potentially correct the record with regard to a question raised earlier. I would prefer to do that now while we are still in committee, if that is acceptable. May I come back to the member's question?

CHAIR: Yes.

Mr POWELL: I want to ensure completeness of the record when it comes to an earlier question asked by the member for South Brisbane. The member asked if there were any proposed changes to the wild river declarations. I am advised by my department that Minister Cripps will be writing to me seeking to make some changes to the Lake Eyre Basin declarations to correct some errors. I stress the word errors. I am advised that these amendments do not change the intent. As the minister responsible for wild rivers legislation, I will be working closely with Minister Cripps. No further changes have been proposed at this time. My understanding is that they are minor corrections. If the member would like to ask a supplementary question later on I am happy to field that. Can the member for Maryborough repeat her question?

Mrs MADDERN: Can you elaborate on the financial commitment to the Gladstone Healthy Harbour Partnership and what this funding will help achieve?

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for her question. The Queensland government undertakes significant amounts of water quality monitoring to measure the health of the Gladstone harbour. This is a coordinated effort. On 28 August this year I met with representatives from industry, the Gladstone Regional Council, the Australian government and research organisations to seek agreement from prospective partners to participate in the process of developing the Gladstone Healthy Harbour Partnership for water quality and aquatic ecosystem health.

The monitoring partnership will be informed by a robust and independent scientific panel to build an improved understanding of how the aquatic ecosystem in the harbour functions. The partnership will work together with the Gladstone community and an independent science panel to better understand how the health of Gladstone harbour can be maintained and improved.

Gladstone harbour is one of the most monitored waterways in Australia and requires a coordinated effort. The Gladstone Healthy Harbour Partnership will remove duplication and it will create improved information sharing, transparency and data quality. It assists in leading to a better and shared understanding of a complex environment and a more efficient way of operating.

One of the first things I and director-general did upon our appointments was to travel to Gladstone and meet with industry, community and fishing bodies and individuals. The key message we got was concerns around the data. They knew data was being collected but the community had lost faith in it because of a lack of transparency. We need to regain that faith by having a coordinated approach to collecting the data and then sharing it in a very transparent way.

The first task of the partnership is to map existing water quality and aquatic ecosystem health monitoring and research. The Department of Environment and Heritage Protection has committed \$200,000 towards this as well as providing secretariat support to support the establishment of the partnership. The mapping of existing water quality and aquatic ecosystem health monitoring and research is expected to be completed in next 12 months. A collaborative, integrated monitoring program across industry, government and research will be implemented following this mapping exercise. The integrated monitoring and research program will remove duplication and it will improve information sharing.

It is my view that the Gladstone Healthy Harbour Partnership can support the Gladstone region to function as a major industrial centre and port while maintaining the health of its ecosystems and that of the Great Barrier Reef. Aside from the Gladstone Healthy Harbour Partnership this government will undertake significant amounts of water quality testing. Minister Bates's department has carried out monthly monitoring of water quality in the Boyne and Calliope estuaries since 1994.

Members in South-East Queensland will have seen the healthy waterways report card. It is a very effective way of conveying data in a way that is understood by the broader community. It basically gives a report on each waterway, whether it be fresh water, estuarine or out in the bay itself. We are envisaging a similar report card being developed for Gladstone. That will help convey that data. It is an exciting opportunity and wonderful to be a part of.

CHAIR: I call the member for Beaudesert.

Mr KRAUSE: Minister, you spoke briefly earlier about the Flinders Karawatha Corridor. I would like to ask you a question about that, if I may. We have spoken at length previously about this. Can you please outline generally the benefits to landholders of having their land included within the corridor and also touch on any disadvantages, if there are any, such as loss of development rights or other risks associated with the corridor?

Mr POWELL: I will address the latter part first. I am happy to report that the establishment of the Flinders Karawatha Corridor does not add any additional regulatory burden on landholders in that corridor. As I explained to the member for Lockyer previously, those regulatory burdens are placed as a result of the regional plan. It is that regional plan that determines whether an area can be developed into a high-density urban area or a lower density rural residential area or have to remain as rural production or regional landscape. So I can be very clear and adamant to both you and the member for Lockyer and to your constituents that the intent is not to add any further regulatory burden on landholders. It is, as you suggest, an opportunity though to provide some benefits to those landholders who are in a situation where they cannot develop because of the regional plan.

At this stage I again acknowledge the member for Lockyer and thank him for hosting me in his electorate very recently when I was able to meet with a number of concerned residents about the Flinders Karawatha Corridor. I know we have corresponded with a number of your own constituents, member for Beaudesert. As we progress I hope to again visit the corridor and hopefully this time get down to your neck of the woods and meet with some of the people there. As you appreciate, the corridor is quite lengthy—it stretches from the Karawatha State Forest, Greenbank and Logan in the north all the way down to almost the New South Wales border.

The corridor contains a number of significant infrastructure projects that are going to support a growing community, particularly the communities around Ipswich and Logan. And each of those projects are going to require environmental offset payments. The opportunity that exists for landowners in the corridor is to avail themselves of the ongoing management offset fees that might come into that corridor. What we are suggesting to proponents of that infrastructure is to invest their offsets strategically in that corridor.

What we will see is an opportunity to purchase properties for protection or an opportunity to provide landholders with grants to continue to protect parts of their property that have particular conservation value. I met with one particular constituent of the member for Lockyer who was quite frustrated that they bordered a national park, a conservation area, and were having to spend their own money to maintain the quality of conservation value on their property. It was a grazing property but they had some significant ecosystems on their property that they themselves wanted to protect. One of their frustrations was the constant invasion of pests and weeds coming out of the conservation park that neighboured it.

One of the opportunities that may come from being in the corridor is that money may be provided to the landholder to continue to do the work they are already doing thereby allowing them to focus that money elsewhere. There are real opportunities through the offset strategy by targeting that investment in the corridor itself and in the landholders. As I said, we are not stopping them doing anything that they already can and cannot do. That is achieved through the regional plan. It will actually provide significant opportunity to the landholders in that area to the point that in the years to come we might actually have people outside of the corridor wishing that they were in, rather than the other way around.

CHAIR: I call the member for Whitsunday.

Mr COSTIGAN: Minister, as you would be well aware, the Whitsundays is one of the great departure points to our Great Barrier Reef.

Mr POWELL: Only one, member for Whitsunday.

Mr COSTIGAN: Arguably the best, but each to their own, Minister. You did mention earlier about the \$10 million reef protection component as part of your department's \$13.6 million contribution to protecting the Great Barrier Reef. Would you advise the committee as to where that money will be spent and the measures that will be undertaken in protection of the Great Barrier Reef?

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for the question as it allows me to go into a bit more detail than the answer I previously provided to the member for Dalrymple. The key focus of that \$10 million is on the development of the best management practice programs for the sugarcane and cattle grazing industries. If the member bears with me for one moment, I will make sure I get the right information for him.

I will go through some of the key points again. The government's approach to reef protection is to accelerate the transition from broad regulatory coverage to best management practice. Importantly it relies on industry-led work. It relies on industry-led development of a best management practice program. Peak industry bodies have indicated a willingness—in fact we are in the final stages of negotiations, as I said previously, with Canegrowers around the work they want to do.

There are, more broadly, a couple of elements though to our work around reef water quality. It is our major reef plan project which helps the beef and sugarcane industries, as I said. It will be supported by strong science and extension. There are four major components: industry funding—so that is the funding that is going to be going to Canegrowers, AgForce and so on; staffing costs, the reef water quality science program and the DAFF partnership arrangements.

As part of the government's commitment to support industry in the development and implementation of the BMP program, it is expected that approximately \$5 million to \$5.5 million will be provided to industry over the next two years. Depending on the staging of payments to both the sugarcane and cattle grazing industries, expected payments of approximately \$1.85 million will be budgeted for in 2012-13.

In regard to the science program, research continues to be a hallmark of the reef water quality science program and in 2012-13 that will continue supporting the industry-led BMP program, with around \$3 million in research projects committed to both the sugarcane and grazing industries. As I said, we are also working in partnership with DAFF. Since 2009, the reef water quality program has worked closely with that department, albeit in the former guise of DEEDI, in the delivery of the reef protection program. The investment to date has been significant, with approximately \$4.5 million budgeted under the memorandum of understanding between the two agencies. This includes funding for staff including behind-the-scenes technical advisers for both the cane and cattle grazing industries. Being in an area that has a lot of cane, the member would be pleased to hear that. Further funding has also supported science programs and extension services. So that gives a bit more of a breakdown on the work we are doing around that reef water quality project and particularly the best management practice program.

CHAIR: I call the member for South Brisbane.

Ms TRAD: In relation to some of the questions I was asking earlier, I have a supplementary. Minister, in relation to the new coastal planning and protection policy that your government announced on Tuesday, will you confirm that there will be extensive consultation around the plan to allay fears, particularly those expressed by the Queensland Conservation Council, that such a policy is the kind of approach that has led to the Great Barrier Reef now being considered as a World Heritage site in danger? Minister, given your responsibility in terms of coastal protection, will you ensure that the new plan, which is only 11 pages—down from over 100 pages of the previous state planning policy—will not dilute coastal protection and ensure that endangered species and endangered habitat remain protected under your watch?

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for the question. It would be interesting if the member had read out the same question to, say, the former member for Ashgrove when she was the minister for environment because what in effect the temporary SPRP, gazetted by the Deputy Premier on Monday, has done is return us to a system that was in place for some 10 years under the previous Labor government until it rushed in the Coastal Plan in February of this year. With the criticisms that you have levelled at me, clearly the Labor government did not see it as a priority because in 10 years of government it did nothing about it and instead rushed in a Coastal Plan in the dying days of the government.

Ms TRAD: Minister, I dispute you saying it was rushed in. The Property Council sat down with the government and asked for changes to be driven—

CHAIR: Let the minister answer the question.

Mr POWELL: I think it is fair to say my director-general in a former life was involved in the Brisbane City Council. We were having a conversation the other day that the Coastal Plan was sprung upon local governments in particular with very little consultation. What we have done, what the Deputy Premier has done, is return the system to what it was under the previous Labor regime prior to February. What I outlined to you and to other members of the committee is the work we are doing, including with the Queensland Conservation Council, to look at that 100 pages of the Queensland Coastal Plan to determine how best to deliver coastal protection within one single state planning policy, to be put out for consultation in the coming months.

Ms TRAD: Minister, even if we take on board your assertion that the current SPRP is modelled on the previous coastal management protection plan by the former government, that plan was some 56 pages. You have reduced a planning and protection policy from over 50 pages to 11 pages. Can you confirm that there will be extensive consultation with affected groups and with the community in relation to coastal protection under your watch?

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for the question but I think I have answered it on several occasions now. We are working through a consultation process—and I am happy to list the participants for the member's benefit. We have been working through it since the government was first elected. We will continue to do that and we will feed the end result into a single state planning policy.

Ms TRAD: One of those people whom you refer to in your consultation group actually said that they have not been consulted around the SPRP. I table for the benefit of the committee his comments in relation to the new SPRP.

Mr POWELL: Again, I would suggest that if the member has questions about the specific SPRP they need to be directed to the minister responsible for that and that is the Deputy Premier. I have outlined—

Ms TRAD: Let's go back to something you are responsible for. Let's go back to your clarification in relation to the wild rivers response that you gave earlier. I will ask a supplementary question in relation to that in light of your clarification. Minister, are you advising the estimates committee that the amendments to the Lake Eyre Basin are the only amendments to a wild river declaration that you are aware of?

Mr POWELL: Yes, that is correct. I am advising you that to the best of my knowledge they are the only amendments to wild river declarations.

Ms TRAD: So to the best of your knowledge there are no proposed amendments, no suggested amendments, to any of the wild rivers in the Cape York Peninsula.

Mr POWELL: Correct. I refer to my previous answer to the question. We clearly stipulated—

CHAIR: We are starting to get into the realms of the hypothetical.

Mr POWELL:—that we will actually remove the wild river declarations on Cape York once we have the statutory regional plan in place.

Ms TRAD: I understand. That is on the record. But before then you are not aware of any proposals to amend a declaration.

Mr POWELL: I have said it twice and I am on the record as saying it widely.

Ms TRAD: I just wanted to be absolutely sure, Minister. You refer to your clarification to the Lake Eyre Basin declaration and those amendments that there are some errors in the declaration that need to be fixed up. What are those errors?

Mr POWELL: I am happy to take that on notice. As I said, I am advised that Minister Cripps is writing to me outlining these minor amendments. I am happy to take that on notice and provide the member details of those proposed amendments.

Ms TRAD: So you are not sure in a conceptual way what those are.

Mr POWELL: I can reassure the member that they are minor technical amendments and, if I recall correctly, similar amendments were made to the wild river declarations under the previous government.

Ms TRAD: So they are minor technical amendments to the best of your knowledge at this particular point in time.

Mr POWELL: I have taken the question on notice. I am happy to provide the member the answer.

Ms TRAD: Thank you very much, Minister. Minister, I refer to pages 4 and 5 of your department's SDS which states that the government will deliver \$7.8 million in 2012-13 for coal seam gas regulation. This figure actually represents a cut of some 17 per cent to the former Labor government's 2011-12 budget for CSG regulation of \$9.4 million. I table for the benefit of the House the Budget Highlights document for that particular agency where that figure is detailed. Minister, given the level of community concern around the CSG industry and given that the LNP went to the last election promising more monitoring of the industry and given that the CSG industry is at a very critical moment in regard to regulations, how can the minister justify cutting funding for CSG enforcement?

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for the question. I potentially need to go all the way back to my opening statement and explain that the former DERM is no longer and in its place is six agencies. My agency has specific responsibilities, particularly when it comes to coal seam gas, around the Environmental Protection Act, around the Nature Conservation Act and around chapter 3 of the Water Act. A number of other agencies have monitoring responsibilities through their relevant legislation as well. Straight off the top of my head, I can think of the Department of Natural Resources and Mines which has responsibilities in terms of safety and so on.

Ms TRAD: Minister, are you responsible for environmental enforcement?

Mr POWELL: In terms of environmental enforcement, I am but what I am trying to explain—

Ms TRAD: So this is what I am talking about.

Mr POWELL: I am happy to answer the member's question if she would like to give me an opportunity to answer the question. I am responsible for compliance and enforcement as it pertains to the Environmental Protection Act and chapter 3 of the Water Act. The money that the member is referring to in previous budgets was split across a number of agencies. The LNG Enforcement Unit had responsibilities in terms of tenure and landholder issues. Whilst it was included in the funds that you have just referred to, those services rightly remained with the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines. Similarly, we have undertaken to establish the Gasfields Land and Water Commission, and some of the funds and some of the roles that were previously funded and coined enforcement under the previous government's funding structure will go towards establishing that commission. We have not in any way diluted our investment in ensuring that coal seam gas is conditioned and monitored in the most stringent way.

Ms TRAD: So, Minister, how much has been given to the Department of Natural Resources and Mines?

CHAIR: How can the minister answer that? That is totally unreasonable here.

Ms TRAD: We are talking about an allocation here.

CHAIR: The minister is the Minister for Environment.

Ms TRAD: And the Minister for Mines this morning was saying that he had nothing to do with it. So I am sorry, Chair.

Mr POWELL: If the member wants to give me one moment, I will see if I have the information available.

Ms TRAD: I would like to give you one moment.

Mr POWELL: I will stipulate that the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines was before the estimates committee earlier today and the member had every opportunity to ask the minister that question, but I am happy to outline where that has gone if I have the data.

The short answer to the member's question is that, in addition to the funding that you see dedicated specifically for coal seam gas in the budget in the SDS, we also supplement more broadly our assessment and compliance teams across a range of programs out of our baseline funding. We have not, perhaps as per the previous government, subsumed staff who assess a range of projects across a

range of industries which are not specifically coal seam gas as specifically coal seam gas staff. But I can assure you, and I come back to my statement before, that we have a focus on the coal seam gas industry. We have commitments that we are undertaking as part of our six-month action plan around a reviewed coal seam gas water policy. I can assure the member that it is a key priority of this government.

Ms TRAD: Minister, in relation to your late response to question on notice No. 2, in your division of Environmental Services and Regulation, there seems to be a total of 64 voluntary redundancies or sackings, whichever way you want to look at it. How many of those positions were engaged in coal seam gas enforcement?

Mr POWELL: If the member can give me a moment, I will see if we have that information for the member.

Ms TRAD: That is not a problem.

Mr POWELL: I could not answer the member's question accurately so I am happy to take the question on notice.

Ms TRAD: Okay. Can you take this next question on notice as well, Minister, because I believe you will not be able to answer this one either. I would like the number of staff who were in the LNG Enforcement Unit when you came into government and then as of today.

Mr POWELL: As part of the machinery of government changes, as I explained to the member previously, the LNG Enforcement Unit covered a range of activities. The actual compliance work did not sit in the LNG Enforcement Unit. The LNG Enforcement Unit was a shopfront, I guess, for the community to call in with concerns. They were subsequently passed on to the relevant unit within the relevance agency for response. It was a triage and a complaint mechanism. As such and because the lion's share of the complaints were around landholder access and contractual arrangements with coal seam gas operators, under the machinery of government changes that we undertook upon election, the LNG Enforcement Unit went predominantly to the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines. So if the member would like to direct that question to the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines at a subsequent sitting of parliament, I am sure he will be happy to answer it.

Ms TRAD: So you are saying that the LNG Enforcement Unit—the environmental enforcement unit—has been transferred to the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines?

Mr POWELL: You have added the word 'environmental' in the title of the unit, but the answer to the question is that, with the exception of a number of staff who clearly had an EHP role, the lion's share of the LNG Enforcement Unit was transferred to NRM.

Ms TRAD: Minister, can you please take on notice my request to get the number of environmental compliance and enforcement officers within your department responsible for the CSG industry as of 24 March this year and as of today?

Mr POWELL: What we will do, through you, Mr Chair, is rescind the previous offer to answer the question on notice because clearly the member has provided supplementary information. I believe the previous question on notice we have accepted will be subsumed by what the member has asked. I am happy to take that on notice and provide the number of CSG—

CHAIR: Can I get some clarity here from the member for South Brisbane. You are not actually comparing apples with apples, are you? You are comparing a department that was under a previous government with a non-existent department that is under this government? Is that right? Is that what you are trying to compare?

Ms TRAD: I would like to know how many public servants were responsible within the environment portfolio for CSG environmental—

CHAIR: There never used to be an environment portfolio.

Ms TRAD: There was the department of environment and natural resources.

CHAIR: That is right—

Mr POWELL: Chair, to assist the member, what we will undertake to do is provide a response through taking this on notice that will identify the number of officers within the former DERM who undertook a compliance role—can I be clear with the member on that? So that is compliance under the Environmental Protection Act and chapter 3 of the Water Act which are the responsibilities that I am now responsible for?

Ms TRAD: I think assessment, compliance and enforcement.

Mr POWELL: Okay. We will take on notice a breakdown of the number of officers who were involved in assessment, compliance and enforcement under the previous iteration and as of today. Can I clarify that, member for South Brisbane?

Ms TRAD: Yes.

Mr POWELL: As of today.

Ms TRAD: So two dates.

Mr POWELL: Yes, 24 March and 12 October.

Ms TRAD: That is it. While we are still on the subject of mining and environmental enforcement, earlier today my colleague asked the mines minister questions in relation to the pumping of untreated mine water. I also refer you to page 61 of budget paper No. 2 where it says that you will be part of the cabinet subcommittee that will look into the resources industry to develop a package of agreed measures within 100 days which will have enhancements to productivity for the mining industry. Minister, can you rule out that this package will involve the pumping of untreated mine water into crucial water basins and river systems as a trade-off for the royalty increases?

Mr POWELL: Through you, Mr Chair, I thank the member for the question. The practice of discharging water from mines operated for many years under the previous government but, given the member was not a member of the previous government, I am happy to outline some basic description of our water in mines management. As the Deputy Premier noted yesterday, this government is unashamedly working with the resources sector to examine the impacts of government regulation. Water in mines is an issue that has been raised consistently. As I said in a press conference earlier today, I have mining companies coming to my office, to my director-general's office and to my staff on a daily basis around a number of conditions but particularly around the conditions imposed upon them in terms of discharging of water from the mines. The flooding rains over the past few years resulted in some mines having their production affected by water that has been retained in their pits. There are 16 coalmines with some 280,000 megalitres of water in total that is preventing them from operating at their full capacity. For the member's benefit, I am happy to list them.

Ms TRAD: Could you provide them on notice?

Mr POWELL: I will run them through now and then they will be in *Hansard* for you so you can refer to them. They are: Ensham, 15,000 megalitres; Goonyella Riverside Broadmeadow, a BHP BMA project, 31,000 megalitres; Peak Downs, another BMA project, 37,000 megalitres; Saraji, another BMA project, 21,000 megalitres; Norwich Park, another BMA project, 13,000 megalitres; Gregory Crinum, a BMA project, 21,000 megalitres; Blackwater, BMA, 6,000 megalitres; Oaky Creek, Xstrata Coal, 9,670 megalitres; Newlands, Xstrata Coal, 21,600 megalitres; Collinsville, Xstrata Coal, 16,600 megalitres; Dawson, Anglo American, 25,000 megalitres; German Creek Capcoal, Anglo American, 25,000 megalitres; Hail Creek, Rio Tinto Coal, 1,500 megalitres; Burton, a Peabody mine, 10,000 megalitres; Coppabella, another Peabody mine, 8,000 megalitres; and Curragh, a Wesfarmers mine, 20,000 megalitres.

This so-called legacy water is a cost to industry in lost revenue to the state. A responsible government like this one will explore ways to optimise the controlled release of this water whilst—and I stress 'whilst'—ensuring that the local waterways and public health and safety are not put at risk. I am acutely aware of the public interest in this matter. Mines in the Fitzroy Basin are authorised by conditions of an environmental authority to release mine affected water during times of natural stream flow. As I said, that has been a practice that has been approved for many years including under the previous Labor regime. Conditions for mine water releases from all coal mines in the Fitzroy Basin are based on the 2011 Model Water Conditions for Coal Mines in the Fitzroy Basin. Water in mines has been managed using these existing environmental authorities and transitional environmental programs.

I am disappointed the member for Bundamba is not here because she was suggesting that this is somehow a secret activity. Can I point out the Floods Commission of Inquiry established by the former government recommended that transitional environmental programs not be used for the purpose of managing excess water in mines. That is how secret it is. In response to this, the department has been working with industry to develop a model that will allow this legacy water to be managed within existing environmental authorities for each mine. Affected mines have been actively seeking amendments to their environmental authorities to obtain conditions that will allow them to more effectively manage this problem.

The department will continue to work with mines across the Fitzroy Basin to ensure mine water releases are undertaken in accordance with approved conditions and water quality is not adversely impacted. The government has a website dedicated to keeping the public informed on the Fitzroy River water quality as well as daily updates on mine releases. For *Hansard's* benefit that is www.fitzroyriver.qld.gov.au. A Fitzroy water quality advisory group was established by the former government to provide advice to the government and information to the public about matters relating to water quality in the Fitzroy Basin. This group is made up of community, business, industry and local and state representatives. The most recent figures on this website show that, since February 2012, 6.7 million megalitres of water have flowed past Rockhampton and only 33,500 megalitres of this total was sourced from coalmine releases. In short, mine releases since February have been 0.5 per cent of all water flowing past Rockhampton. As the member rightly pointed out, the resources cabinet committee is currently considering issues around water in mines.

Ms TRAD: Can you confirm that industry, as has been reported in the *Courier-Mail*—and I table the article for the benefit of the committee—has made recommendations or submissions to the resources cabinet subcommittee about trade-offs for contaminated water release in exchange for royalty increases? Minister, can you confirm whether or not communities and environmental scientists will be consulted in relation to the recommendations surrounding the proposed changes to the regulations after the resources cabinet subcommittee has finished?

Mr POWELL: For the sake of other members of the committee, I hesitate to reread the answer I just provided. I think all of the suggestions and the imputations made in the member's question have been more than adequately addressed in the comprehensive answer I just gave. As I have said, mining companies come to us regularly seeking their environmental authorities and the conditions of discharge be amended in line with water quality objectives and drinking water guidelines. That occurs on a daily basis. Unfortunately, as the member may not be aware having not been in government, any considerations by a cabinet committee are in confidence and I cannot share details.

There is nothing secret in this at all. We are very open and transparent. I meet with mining companies. My director-general meets with mining companies. My departmental staff meet with mining companies around these concerns. I have outlined in my previous answer the extensive lengths we go to in order to involve the broader Fitzroy River Basin community in the scientific data that we collect. We work alongside the environmental scientists who sit within Minister Bates's portfolio of Science, Information Technology, Innovation and the Arts. We work alongside researchers and we make sure that that information is conveyed to the community accurately. That is how I can sit here and give you specific details on how many megalitres have flowed past Rockhampton and how 0.5 per cent of that has come from mine releases. There is nothing hidden. This is very transparent.

Ms TRAD: Given your statements about being open and transparent, why is it that the number of SDS performance measures for your department has been reduced from 13 to two? I refer you to page 12 of the SDS.

Mr POWELL: If the member gives me a moment I will get the relevant briefing note. While we are getting the exact detail that you asked in your question, I can say that one of the key reasons for the differences is the change from the former DERM to the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection and then, specifically, a number of measures that are associated with the former office of climate change. Let me go through those in detail. In terms of discontinued SDS performance measures regarding climate change, they are things like average cost to deliver the ClimateSmart Home Service, average tonnes reduction, average percentage savings in greenhouse gas emissions by ecoBiz partners, percentage of premier's council on climate change recommendations adopted by government. I must admit that I understand very well why —

CHAIR: It is comparing apples and oranges again.

Mr POWELL: I am happy to answer the member's question. The reality is that I have largely answered all of it previously. We have closed the ClimateSmart Home Service, hence the need no longer to have measures around the ClimateSmart Home Service. As I explained in my answer around why we have closed the office of climate change, we have done so in line with COAG complementarity principles that were set down by COAG led by the federal Labor government. In relation to the reduction in household measures, we discontinued the Toward Q2 strategy. As to the savings and emissions by ecoBiz partners, we have decided to scale back ecoBiz, the business ecoefficiency program, and to deliver it through collaboration with an industry provider. I put out a media release to that effect when that decision was made. The Queensland government is committed to this successful program which helps businesses save on costs while delivering multiple environmental benefits in reduced energy, waste and water. Funds allocated in 2012-13 will enable the existing program delivery contracts to be finalised while an investment of \$3 million over three years will support the commencement of an industry collaboration early in 2013. The premier's council on climate change was an independent body providing advice on Queensland's response to climate change. Council's tenure expired in December 2011 and a new council was not formed, hence, we have discontinued that measure.

In relation to the Queensland Sustainable Energy Innovation Fund, given that an objective of the Commonwealth government's carbon tax is to promote a clean energy economy, the Queensland government has decided to cease the Queensland sustainable energy and innovation fund, saving \$440,000 in 2012-13 and then \$1.1 million per year ongoing. Funds allocated in 2012-13 will enable the finalisation of current projects, hence, why we have discontinued that performance measure.

In regard to the discontinued SDS performance measures as they pertain to nature conservation, particularly the annual increase of hectares in land for nature conservation and the increase in the area of high conservation quality land gazetted as nature refuge, having arbitrary targets based on how much land you add does not actually inform anyone of whether you are actually producing an environmental outcome. I overheard some of the discussion with previous ministers about the proliferation of feral pests and weeds in land-holders' property but most of them are coming out of our national parks and state forests. What is the point of having a target that says, 'We will add millions and millions of hectares to our protected area of state,' if we are not actually managing those that we do have?

We are undertaking a comprehensive review of the department's service standards and other measures. That will be conducted for the 2013-14 financial year and will include consideration of new measures which are consistent with the government's policy directions for protected area management.

Ms TRAD: I do understand all the discontinued measures. I have been through the SDS. My point is that there are other performances that could be measured by your department that are not being measured. Therefore, the issue around transparency could be disputed. My final question for this particular component is actually to your director-general. Director-general, are you aware of any proposals to amend any wild river declarations?

Mr POWELL: Through you, Chair, we have taken that question on notice already.

Ms TRAD: No, I am asking your director-general.

Mr POWELL: Yes, but I have already offered to provide the response to the member through a question on notice.

Ms TRAD: No, the question on notice that you are taking back are the details for Lake Eyre.

CHAIR: He has responded.

Ms TRAD: No, the question on notice relates to Lake Eyre. This is a general—

Mr POWELL: The director-general just answered your question, if you would pause for a moment.

Ms TRAD: No, you are not aware of any.

Mr KRAUSE: Could you please outline the government's contribution to the Healthy Waterways Program and the outcomes achieved in South-East Queensland through this initiative?

Mr POWELL: I certainly can, and I thank the member for his question.

Mr KRAUSE: I think there might be some in my electorate.

Mr POWELL: Some healthy waterways or some waterways?

Mr KRAUSE: Some healthy waterways and some Healthy Waterways initiatives as well.

Mr POWELL: The member is right; there are a number of waterways. I am looking forward to shortly seeing the latest iteration of the Healthy Waterways report card come out. I hope the outcomes are good for across South-East Queensland, but we will wait and see.

The Queensland government remains committed to protecting South-East Queensland waterways, including Moreton Bay, and being a network member of the Healthy Waterways Partnership. The waterways of South-East Queensland have environmental, social and economic values worth around \$5 billion each year. A number of key sectors are affected by waterway health in South-East Queensland. For example, nature based tourism attracts the highest value from waterway health at almost \$3 billion followed by primary industries—and many of those are in your electorate, member for Beaudesert—local recreation at \$600 million and recreational fishing at \$210 million per year. The environmental and economic arguments for investing in Healthy Waterways outcomes cannot be ignored. Continued investment in waterways' health will result in improved landscape resilience for future floods and cyclones through actions that will result in permanent sediment load reductions and associated nutrient reductions. We need to continue to strengthen partnerships and investments in collaborative programs to reduce water pollution loads and restore degraded waterways. The future of Moreton Bay and the region's waterways and beaches depends on our ability to strengthen partnerships and investments in collaborative programs to reduce water pollution loads and restore degraded waterways.

This financial year the state government will contribute \$4.6 million in cash and in-kind investment to improving South-East Queensland waterways including Moreton Bay. This is in addition to significant in-kind investment by my department in staff and operations. Of the \$4.6 million, my department contributes \$500,000 in cash to Healthy Waterways Limited as our network contribution. A further \$2.6 million is provided by the state as in-kind investment which goes directly towards supporting the Ecosystem Health Monitoring Program including the South-East Queensland Event Monitoring Program. This data is used to generate the program report card that I just mentioned for freshwater catchments and to calibrate and validate catchment source models to better understand the ecological impacts of floods on Moreton Bay, coastal waters and waterways.

The state government is a leading partner in programs to achieve healthy waterways in South-East Queensland. An important contribution to this partnership has been the scientific monitoring of freshwaters and estuarine and marine waters under the regional Ecosystem Health Monitoring Program that culminates in the public release of the report card. The waterways monitoring is also focused on flood events, monitoring the effectiveness of land and waterway restoration and soil erosion, prevention activities to provide the scientific basis for cap and trade licences and offset schemes. That is an exciting new area that we are working towards. I am committed to working together with our partners to implement targeted on-ground action to reduce the risk that development and floods in South-East

Queensland have been placing on the quality of our water, health, quality of life and water supply. We all know that prevention is better than a cure. So reducing erosion risk is more cost effective than treating dirty water to potable standards and restoring degraded seagrass meadows for dugong and turtle in the bay.

Queensland's future growth and liveability need to be secured against negative water quality impacts. Specifically, my department will be investing more than \$1 million in initiatives that will directly respond to priority areas identified by the robust and independent science that the Healthy Waterways Program oversights with the support of its partners. I am proud to advise that some of the initiatives that we will be investing in include measures that reduce urban diffuse pollution. These measures aim to improve stormwater quality management and erosion as well as sediment control compliance and capacity by working with our local government colleagues in industry and priority catchments. Another one is working with local governments in South-East Queensland catchments to remove sediment from waterways in upper catchments, such as in the area of the member for Lockyer, through the use of on-ground activities such as working with land-holders to undertake riparian restoration, stream bank stabilisation—and I know a lot of this sort of work was done after the floods in both the members' areas—and overland flow management to reduce gully erosion, again using robust independent science to inform where action is required and where there is support from other partners to co-invest and maximise environmental and financial returns on investment.

Another project is to work with primary producers to focus on nitrogen reduction in my part of the world, the Pumicestone Passage. By all partners aligning their waterways program, co-investing in joint programs to improve waterway health and setting shared resourcing responsibilities, we can in time improve and protect South-East Queensland waterways and Moreton Bay.

Mr COSTIGAN: Minister, could you outline how the government's crocodile management strategy will balance public safety—especially in North Queensland, where, as you know, tourism is such an important economic driver—with conservation?

Mr POWELL: I certainly can. I thank the member for his interest in this issue. I know that the member for Thuringowa is equally interested in the work we are currently doing. I am very conscious that there is a very fine balancing act between ensuring the conservation of crocodiles and, more importantly, ensuring the safety of individuals in Far North Queensland in particular.

We are committed to improving crocodile management to enhance community safety. To this end, the government has dedicated over \$1½ million over the next four years to implement this commitment through the development of a crocodile management policy consistent with the successful Northern Territory three tiered approach that strikes a balance between community safety and crocodile conservation. We have dedicated half a million dollars this year, followed by \$340,000 per annum in the three years after. A risk based strategic management approach will be used to determine the response required for specific areas, aiming to reduce the likelihood of a fatal crocodile attack. I would stress 'reduce'. Nothing we do can remove the risks in waterways in Far North Queensland around crocodiles.

Implementation of the new crocodile management policy has been initiated through the commencement of a pilot program by the department, and we are looking particularly to work with Cairns, Townsville, Hinchinbrook and the Cassowary Coast. We made it clear that local knowledge is important—it is critical—and that is why we have involved the four local governments. I note today that Townsville have almost finalised their submission. I look forward to receiving that very soon.

While no waterway, as I said, can be entirely risk free, under the pilot program areas will be managed at one of three levels. The first is for exclusion, where the aim is to prevent crocodiles from entering an area so that the level of risk is low enough to recommend safe swimming and water activities. We need to be clear: for exclusion to work it really requires an engineering solution. One example is the lagoon on Cairns Esplanade, where a sea wall is actively preventing crocodiles from getting in. And if they do get in, the water is clear, fresh water where we can quickly see that there is one there and we can get rid of it. Engineering solutions are going to be expensive and may be beyond the scope of the \$1.5 million we currently have allocated, but I am keen to work with councils around how we can deliver that.

The second level is around zero tolerance, where our efforts to significantly reduce the risk of attack will be made by removing any crocodiles of a certain length that enter an area—the agreed length at which a crocodile becomes dangerous is about two metres—such as boat ramps and marinas in risk areas. The consultation with the councils currently is largely around identifying the areas of zero tolerance that they want us as a department to focus on. Then obviously any other area outside of those areas in Far North Queensland we would treat as areas where crocodiles of concern would be removed. That is, if a crocodile is showing aggressive behaviour, we will head in and remove it.

CHAIR: Will it be a similar process to the flying foxes, then?

Mr POWELL: In this instance it will actually be slightly more streamlined in that, by doing this process with local governments, we will establish clear areas. If it is exclusion or zero-tolerance area and a croc of a certain size is identified in those areas, they will be removed immediately.

Again, it is important that we work with the federal government around this. There are EPBC Act issues as they relate to crocodile management. We are working with them on this. Importantly and slightly differently, we are looking to work with zoos and farms as well as part of this solution.

We are also doing a number of other things. We are undertaking a new, independently verified baseline data study on the abundance and distribution of the state's estuarine crocodiles so we can better inform our future crocodile management. Finally, we are consolidating a number of existing crocodile advisory bodies to establish a single, simpler, more efficient crocodile management advisory group. This group will include representatives from scientific institutions, zoos, farms, industry bodies, conservation groups, Indigenous interests and local, state and Commonwealth government. This will provide a key forum for expert dialogue as we continue to develop and roll out our policy over the coming term.

I do need to take this moment, again, to reiterate that all Far North Queenslanders need to be croc wise—and indeed all members of the Maryborough community at the moment! In fact, anyone north of Gladstone, let's just say, needs to be croc wise, with the inclusion of Maryborough. I cannot stress enough that, no matter what we as a government do in terms of getting this balance right, there will always be a risk. I would encourage people to be aware of that risk.

Mr COX: Minister, as you would be aware, some of the biggest employers in my region are the refineries. Could you outline the regulatory approach in managing the Queensland Nickel refinery, which is just outside my electorate but a lot of people who work there live in my electorate.

Mr POWELL: I certainly can. I thank the member for the question. I will just make sure I get the most up-to-date information to provide. I am very aware, as the member has just raised and has been raised by a number of members in the area, the importance of the Yabulu nickel refinery in terms of employment. We continue to work with QN to address significant water management issues at the Yabulu nickel refinery near Townsville. A significant volume of contaminated water has accumulated at the refinery and action is needed to ensure the risk of discharge is appropriately managed through the coming wet season.

The nickel refinery is regulated by a development approval which is administered by my department. I am advised that, in order to comply with the DA, additional capacity is required in the tailings storage facility at the refinery. This additional capacity is required to minimise the risk of discharge if high levels of rainfall are experienced in the coming wet season. Queensland Nickel has proposed the use of the ocean outfall pipeline to discharge effluent from the tailings storage facility in order to create the additional storage capacity required. The ocean outfall pipeline discharges approximately two kilometres offshore in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. Queensland Nickel is also proposing to divert stormwater runoff during the wet season in order to reduce the volume of water that is captured in the tailings storage facility.

The DA requires that a corrective action plan is submitted to the department prior to the use of the ocean outfall. I understand that the corrective action plan has a number of roles, but in particular it needs to be able to demonstrate that the use of the ocean outfall, solely or in combination with other means, is the best means for complying with the DA conditions.

I have been advised that the department has reviewed the corrective action plan as submitted and has provided comment back to Queensland Nickel for their consideration. As I understand it, some of the key departmental comments relate to the lack of consideration of alternatives to the use of the ocean outfall, insufficient assessment of potential impacts and that the plan may not achieve compliance with the spill risk requirements of the DA by 1 November.

I have also been advised that QN must obtain joint approval from the state and the Commonwealth marine park authorities to discharge effluent through the ocean outfall pipeline. This approval is required because the discharge point of the ocean outfall pipeline is located within the state and Commonwealth marine parks. The proposed discharge is therefore subject to the provisions of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975 and the marine park zoning plan.

The department continues to work with Queensland Nickel to address the water management issues on the site, and I can reassure you: we do that not only for Queensland Nickel but also for any industry that has issues like this.

Mr GIBSON: Minister, can you detail any projects committed this financial year with respect to the Biodiversity Offset Policy?

Mr POWELL: I thank the member for the question. I certainly can. The biggest project with regard to the Biodiversity Offset Policy for this government in this next six months is actually to deliver a review of that offset policy. It is not only about that policy; we have subsequently decided to look more broadly at all of the government's environmental offset policies. There are four of them across a number of portfolio agencies. Two sit within my organisation, that is, the Biodiversity Offset Policy and the koala offsets policy; one sits within the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines' portfolio, that is, the vegetation management offsets policy—I will not go any further on that; and one sits within the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry's portfolio, that is, the fish habitat offsets policy.

We have decided to look at all four of them to see if there is a way we can deliver the environmental outcomes that we need to deliver but in a far more streamlined and efficient manner. We are working with a whole range of interest groups and stakeholders. We will put something out for their comment later in the piece, but we are currently fielding input from other government agencies as to how we can improve it.

This will be a significant win, I believe, for the government and for business alike. It will certainly improve the administration of the various policies. It will certainly improve the application of the policies for the relevant infrastructure organisations. I think it will actually, as we were discussing earlier, improve the outcomes in terms of the application of the offset policy in areas like the Flinders Karawatha Corridor.

CHAIR: I do think it has to be consolidated, that is for sure.

Mr KRAUSE: Applications for the Everyone's Environment grants program have now closed. Can you outline the funding arrangements and briefly explain the objectives of the program?

Mr POWELL: I certainly can. Again, this is one of those real programs. I am very excited about having an opportunity to implement an election commitment that I made as shadow minister for the environment. We did get a significant number of applications, as you would expect. This is really the first time that an amount of money of this size has been committed to grassroots environmental activities. We are talking about \$12 million over three years—\$3 million in this first round. Applications closed on the 28th. Two hundred and one applications were received, and we are assessing those at the moment.

The member asked about how we are identifying projects for these grants. They really are about that grassroots environmental work, whether it be cleaning up a waterway or looking at ways to reduce litter. I will not show any preference to a particular project; I do not even know if they actually submitted. I met representatives of a fantastic initiative in the electorate of Whitsunday whereby people get out on boats and collect all the marine rubbish. They are the kinds of projects that this funding is designed for. I do hope that that group took the time to put in an application. We are also looking at the various landcare organisations around the state to give them project money to do the stuff they do best—producing fantastic outcomes for their local communities that often improve agricultural productivity for the landholder but also improve environmental outcomes.

This is a fantastic initiative. I would encourage all members of the committee to make this known to their community groups. If their community groups did not submit applications this time around, another \$4 million will be made available next year and another \$5 million in the final year of the program.

CHAIR: Minister, would you like to give us a summary now? You have done extremely well.

Mr POWELL: I take this opportunity to thank the committee, the research staff, the Hansard staff and the attendants who have assisted in today's proceedings. I would particularly like to thank my staff who have contributed to this estimates hearing. I acknowledge my director-general, Andrew Chesterman; my DDGs, Tony Roberts, Tamara O'Shea, Dean Ellwood and Danielle Anderson. I also acknowledge Peter Philipson, Brad Lang, David Mills and Arnae Burton for all the work they did in preparing the information that you have received this evening. It would also be remiss of me not to thank my ministerial staff for the effort they have put into today. I imagine that the members of the committee must be as exhausted as they look. I thank you for the opportunity to present to you this evening.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister, your advisers and the Hansard and other staff. Minister, I remind you of the time frames for any questions taken on notice. Answers are to be provided by 5 pm on Tuesday, 16 October. I thank committee members for their excellent effort.

Committee adjourned at 7.59 pm